

## **BioGrafie – Dr. Walter Rogg**

### **No crystal ball required – just keep your ears open!**

**(Stuttgart) – Dr. Walter Rogg, Founding Managing Director of the Stuttgart Region Economic Development Corporation, will be retiring in July 2023. Over a period of nearly three decades, he has made a lasting impression on the region’s development. He was also involved in the establishment of BioRegio STERN Management GmbH. As a member of the Supervisory Board and a partner, he has made a key contribution to the success of the local life sciences sector.**

Having a background as a newspaper and radio journalist may well give you something of a head start when it comes to interviews. Dr. Walter Rogg, who has been at the helm of the Stuttgart Region Economic Development Corporation (Wirtschaftsförderung Region Stuttgart GmbH, WRS) for 28 years and is now retiring, has made repeated use of this advantage over the past decades. “Based on my observations, politics and journalism don’t have the easiest of relationships. Politicians envy journalists because they are allowed to say and write what they want. These same politicians think they themselves always have to adopt a tactical approach. Also, some journalists who write about economics and politics might well like to try it for themselves sometime. I was doubtless one of these,” he says.

Dr. Rogg had a keen interest in how politics works. Following his degree and doctorate in political sciences in Tübingen, a traineeship with a newspaper and a job with a radio station, he decided to enter the world of politics as head of the department dealing with the press, public relations and location marketing at the Baden-Württemberg Ministry of Economic Affairs. Then, in 1989, came the fall of the Berlin Wall. “In January 1990, when the GDR was still in existence, someone was needed for an information and communication office for the whole of Saxony, based in Dresden. That was the most interesting thing of all, experiencing history at first hand. I watched the citizens’ movement cross the Augustus Bridge demanding reunification while, at the same time, the Free German Youth marched out of Dresden Castle chanting ‘GDR, our fatherland’ and carrying GDR flags,” he recounts. “Saxony’s

Minister President Kurt Biedenkopf then established a dedicated business development agency for Saxony, and I became its Founding Managing Director. That was incredibly exciting. Given Saxony's connections with the east, the former Warsaw Pact countries and the Soviet Union, I was travelling around all the time. We had 30 offices – not just in Saxony, but also in Africa, Canada, Japan and all over – all of which fell under my business development remit," he adds.

### **Breaking totally new ground**

In 1995, Dr. Rogg returned to Baden-Württemberg for personal reasons and became a founder again – this time as Managing Director of Verband Region Stuttgart's new economic development corporation, the WRS. The Stuttgart region is the number one business location in Baden-Württemberg – despite accounting for just 10 percent of this state's land area, it employs 26 percent of the workforce and generates around 30 percent of the gross domestic product. The region comprises the five rural districts of Böblingen, Esslingen, Göppingen, Ludwigsburg and Rems-Murr, along with the urban district of Stuttgart. With a total of 179 towns, cities and municipalities, it has around 2.8 million inhabitants. Dr. Rogg has never regretted his decision to join the WRS. The same applies to giving up journalism for business development.

"Ultimately, just like when I was a journalist, my main task is identifying exciting new topics," he reveals. One of the most fascinating is biotechnology, although many people were originally wary of this sector.

The STERN BioRegion network that was created broke totally new ground in many respects. Collaboration in the field of biotechnology was not confined to the Stuttgart region, but was extended to the Neckar-Alb area, including the cities of Reutlingen and Tübingen. It really was quite something when, in 2001, cities that were more likely to be in competition with the Stuttgart region suddenly became its partners. "It wasn't a completely conflict-free situation to start with. People were eyeing each other rather suspiciously," recalls Dr. Rogg. "The important thing, though, was to bring people together for something new and exciting. Ultimately, that worked wonderfully well. After the initial teething problems, it developed amazingly. Thanks to the cooperation in the STERN BioRegion, the contact between the Stuttgart and Neckar-Alb regions turned into a very trusting, close and active relationship," he explains.

Today, the STERN BioRegion is one of the largest and most successful bioregions in Germany. Its prime unique selling point is a mix of biotech and medtech companies

that is unrivalled in Germany, along with regional clusters in the fields of automation technology and mechanical and plant engineering.

### **No crystal ball required**

The role of a business development specialist involves coming up with ideas and motivating allies, but also acquiring funds and organising political majorities, with the focus not so much on acting *against* someone but on acting *together* – or, as Dr. Rogg puts it: “You have to talk to the right people about the right issue at the right time.” He continues by revealing what is possibly the most important secret behind his success: “You must never think you are smarter than others and, if you do, you should never let it show.”

There was, in any case, no need for Dr. Rogg to pretend when it came to biotechnology: “I hadn’t got a clue to start with,” he admits. That changed completely in the years that followed, during his time on the Supervisory Board – alternating between the roles of Chairman and Vice-Chairman – and as a partner. “I learnt a great deal from Dr. Eichenberg, the Managing Director of BioRegio STERN Management GmbH,” he says. To start with, for example, the biotechnology community is very clearly organised compared to traditional industries such as the automotive and mechanical engineering sectors. Also, it’s an ambitious goal to want to strategically strengthen a sector that is not (yet) especially well developed – one that depends on collaboration with universities, research institutes such as the Fraunhofer Institutes, the Natural and Medical Sciences Institute (NMI) and the Max-Planck Institutes, and emerging start-ups. That is particularly the case when you can seldom report big profits but need to secure investment in potential that is sometimes still hard to grasp. Since the pandemic, if not before, word has spread about how much potential the sector offers, and even the final sceptics have been won over. “There is no longer any doubt that we need to pay attention to biotechnology, including its overlaps with automation, digitalisation, AI, mechanical engineering and medical technology. That is now clear,” emphasises Dr. Rogg. He is keen to play down the fact that he predicted this development over 20 years ago, but he has to admit: “A business development specialist who knows good people, listens to them and talks a lot with scientists has no need for a crystal ball.”

**No “new normal”**

That did mean, though, that Dr. Rogg required an even greater insight into human nature. “It goes without saying that years of experience help you develop an instinct. When, even after lengthy discussions, people don’t show any sign of having doubts or giving things some thought, I would be inclined to ask myself whether they are talking hot air and are full of their own self-importance. I look for self-doubt, because too much self-confidence prevents you from becoming smarter,” he explains. And he, too, constantly has to adopt combative stances and grapple with conflicts of interests: “Is it still acceptable to turn green space into industrial land? Endangered biodiversity is as much of a problem as climate change. We must not rob future generations of opportunities in life. However, industry is now adopting a more climate-friendly, sustainable, energy-saving and resource-saving approach. And it needs new factories – energy-neutral ones, for instance – while the old factories are still required to earn the money that makes new things possible,” he continues.

Dr. Rogg cites Cellcentric GmbH as a good example. This Weilheim-based company’s fuel cells can replace internal-combustion engines and their extremely high CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. “Yes, the new climate-friendly factory has taken up 15 hectares of agricultural land that we can’t afford to sacrifice just like that. In this case, though, after weighing up the conflicting interests, it was very clear what the decision had to be,” he says.

It’s probably somewhat unusual for a business development specialist to refer so directly to a dilemma of this kind, but for the Stuttgart region, with its high levels of exports, Dr. Rogg always needs to think globally. “After the pandemic, after the globalisation crisis involving China, after the invasion of Ukraine, it’s wrong to believe everything is as it used to be. There’s no ‘new normal’ – it’s a ‘new different’. We have a new situation on this planet, and if we don’t recognise that and think about what it means, we will no longer be able to build on our major economic successes,” he emphasises.

Despite these conflicts of interests, Dr. Rogg has always managed to be seen as a man of communication rather than confrontation. “We wouldn’t have achieved anything at all through conflict. We started with ten people, and there would still just be ten of us if conflict had been the most important thing to us,” he says. The fact he is now calling it a day is by no means a sign of boredom. “When you put such a lot of yourself into something, when you want to be credible and convincing, that really

takes it out of you. I can't leave it all behind at the office. When I'm dropping off to sleep at night, I remember things I haven't done that I need to attend to urgently the next morning, and even when I'm on holiday, barely a day goes by without me sending an e-mail or speaking to my colleagues on the phone. At 66, that means it's time to stop. You can't go on like that forever," he insists.

### **Send-off and a new start**

Nevertheless, it is clear Dr. Rogg is a little worried he will miss it all – the interaction with his team and the discussions. After all, he says that his work is totally reinvigorating whenever something has gone really well. "These successes give me such a boost – nothing can compare," he emphasises.

Naturally, Dr. Rogg also enjoys spending time with his son, who is now studying philosophy. "When I get the chance to spend a few hours talking with him about what he's working on right now, I forget everything else. Because I lost my father at a very early age, time with my son has always been very precious," he reveals. He has mixed feelings about the farewell speeches, the first of which he has already heard – and he's not entirely unmoved. "I'm being described as an outgoing people person who is good at resolving differences. If that's the only thing people remember, it wouldn't be bad at all," he comments.

Dr. Rogg isn't yet sure whether he will still go to the Leuze thermal baths at seven in the morning three times a week and swim his lengths – naturally in the cold pool. And it goes without saying that he won't be retiring altogether and simply enjoying a quiet life. He wants to make use of his mediation experience on a freelance basis. "And if that comes to nothing, I'll study theology. Besides ideas about the afterlife, theology is also about people leading a good life. And that's not the worst thing in the world," he concludes.

### **About BioRegio STERN Management GmbH:**

BioRegio STERN Management GmbH promotes economic development in the life sciences industry, helping to strengthen the region as a business location by supporting innovations and start-up companies in the public interest. It is the main point of contact for company founders and entrepreneurs in the Stuttgart and Neckar-Alb regions, including the cities of Tübingen and Reutlingen.

The STERN BioRegion is one of the largest and most successful bioregions in Germany. Its unique selling points include a mix of biotech and medtech companies that is outstanding in Germany and regional clusters in the fields of automation technology and mechanical and plant engineering.

**Press contact:**

BioRegio STERN Management GmbH  
Dr. Klaus Eichenberg  
Friedrichstrasse 10  
70174 Stuttgart  
Germany  
+49 711-870354-0  
eichenberg@bioregio-stern.de

<https://www.linkedin.com/>  
[www.twitter.com/BioRegioSTERN](http://www.twitter.com/BioRegioSTERN)

**Editorial department:**

Zeeb Kommunikation GmbH  
Anja Pätzold  
Alexanderstrasse 81  
70182 Stuttgart  
Germany  
+49 711-6070719  
info@zeeb.info