

Dr. Wilhelm Krull

Address at the International Conference on “A Vision of ‘Europe of the Future’”, marking the ten-year anniversary of the Evens-Foundation, 14 November 2007 in Paris, Musée de l'Homme.

A Foundation in Europe: Partnerships and Means of Action

Dear Ms. Evens,
Distinguished Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It's a great pleasure and honour for me to address you on this occasion, and to congratulate you, Ms. Evens, and your foundation very warmly on its 10th anniversary. As Chairman of the European Foundation Centre (EFC) I should like to express with deeply felt gratitude and respect how glad we are to have you as a member, and how much we admire your commitment to our common cause and the results achieved by your foundation in so short a time. By promoting tolerance, respect and concern for our fellow human beings, by reaching beyond national borders, racial divisions, and cultural as well as religious differences towards a united Europe, your foundation has much earlier and more forcefully than others, e.g. politicians, policy-makers, and also most European foundations, addressed some of the most pressing issues of our collective well-being at the beginning of the 21st Century. Therefore, you clearly deserve to be praised for your foresight, your courage, your competence, your continued commitment, and last, but not least for the persistence you have shown in pursuing your extremely valuable objectives. Congratulations!

Foundations these days are confronted with many challenges. In an increasingly globalizing and rapidly changing world it has become imperative for each one of them to enter into a process of assessing its strengths and weaknesses, reviewing its advisory and decision-making processes, aligning the respective modes of operation, and subsequently adapt to the new environment in a productive and effective manner. First and foremost this requires a forward looking and proactive approach towards the challenges ahead. In many respects, the Evens Foundation has been

demonstrating most impressively what it means to take on such a foresighted role, and that the best way of approaching future challenges is to get involved in actively confronting and in shaping them continuously. Compared to the billions of Euros spent by public authorities it is indeed often not the actual amount of money that makes the difference but rather the creative use of the foundation's autonomy, alertness, and flexibility, in short: the specific approach taken that matters most.

Due to the perpetuity of their endowments, foundations are independent from election periods as well as from shareholders' views. They can act autonomously in supporting the first experiments in new areas, in taking risks when it comes to exploring hitherto unknown territories, and in substantially encouraging frontrunners in institutional reform. Unlike publicly financed agencies which are dependent on political decisions and have to provide equal opportunities for all, private foundations must by necessity be selective, and they do not have to wait for political consensus. They can act much more freely, flexibly, and quickly. For them the objectives to be achieved are always more important than bureaucratic rules and regulations. Therefore, foundations can add value to a variety of areas which require support for change in our societies. Let me illustrate this by focussing on three paradigmatic lines of action:

- the importance of intercultural education for European integration
- youth empowerment, in particular when it comes to providing skills and confidence training to disadvantaged children and youth
- higher education, research, and the capacity to innovate.

2008 will officially be named the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue, and I am sure that it will further enhance the appreciation of ethnic and cultural diversity among the European Union's citizens. In my view it is a long overdue decision by the European authorities to put more emphasis on the need for intercultural communication, in particular with respect to achieving a much higher degree of social cohesion and integration than is currently the case. I think several European foundations including the Evens Foundation and the Volkswagen Foundation, can be proud of the fact that they started to work on these issues already in the 1990s, and that they made it clear quite early on that this whole process is not a matter of imposing the dominant, domestic cultural paradigms on the respective migrants, but that it is much

more a question of mutual learning, of negotiating culture, perhaps even of establishing trading zones of cultures. Thus we are ultimately paying attention to what post-colonial cultural philosophers like Homi Bhabha have been telling us for quite some time: "The colonized peoples of the past, the migrants (or multicultural populations) of the present, - all of these, have no option but to live in a world that lies in-between cultures, creating our identities from contradictory and conflicting traditions. We are, quite simply, both 'one thing and an-other' caught in a process of cultural translation."

Closely related to the issues concerning the creation of a well-integrated, multicultural European society are those that focus on the educational self-empowerment of disadvantaged children and youth. We know from several studies of migrant youth that those children and youth are the worst off who belong to the second generation of migrants, who never learnt the new language properly because they grew up in families who kept on speaking their mother tongue, and subsequently these kids failed dismally in the schools of their new home country. To create islands of hope and success for at least a few of these children is a great achievement, and I do hope that more institutions will follow swiftly in opening up additional opportunities for these disadvantaged children at the fringes of our European societies. Once more the Evens Foundation deserves to be praised for its courage and its achievements in this crucial area when it comes to securing the social coherence and stability of our societies. However, I do think that we as European foundations have not yet fully exploited our potential to cooperate and thus to achieve a much higher impact within each country as well as at the European level. There is certainly room for more partnerships.

Given the current demographic developments in our rapidly ageing societies, it will not at all be straightforward to maintain, or even increase our capacity to innovate. First and foremost the shape our schools, our universities, and our research organisations are in, will be decisive when we are confronting the question whether or not we are able to successfully provide room for new ideas, for cells of creativity, for unconventional ways of thinking, for a climate of risk-taking and innovativeness. Again it is not so much the amount of money that foundations can bring to the table which makes a difference, but rather the spirit and the attitude they display that matter.

There are, of course, many requirements that have to be met if one wants to implement a sustainable culture of creativity, e.g. openness, transparency, a high degree of trust, a lot of interaction, persistence and perseverance, but there is clearly one point that sticks out: courage. Educators and researchers as well as their funders must be courageous and adventurous. Only if you are yourself prepared to share the risks involved, can you encourage other people to enter into new territories and to leave the beaten track. Sharing the risks implies that you must also be prepared to accept failures and to offer those who failed a second, or perhaps even a third chance. So far, most of our assessment schemes and processes are not equipped to deal with these non-linear ways of risk-taking and burden-sharing. But we should try again and again. We will definitely be rewarded for it in the end. I still think the philosopher and physicist Georg Christoph Lichtenberg was right when in the late 18th Century he said: "I cannot tell whether things will get well when we change them, but so much I can tell: things will have to change if they are to get well in the end."

By encouraging change, supporting risky projects, and by enabling the most promising people and ideas to be successful, foundations can create islands of hope and success. But if they want to continue to do so, it takes more than simply to rely on what is currently considered to be good practice. I would like to emphasize just the following five points which indicate the direction in which we will have to move in order to realize our full potential:

- 1) From traditional charity (e.g. offering social services, curing symptoms) towards creative philanthropy constantly adapting to its changing environment and focusing on impact (cf. Anheier/Leat, 2006).
- 2) From distributing grants (e.g., primarily communicating with beneficiaries) towards getting involved in the process of identifying and meeting the needs which no other institution seems to pick up adequately: making a difference.
- 3) From providing insights (e.g., through conferences and publications) towards encouraging and facilitating change by initiating mutually beneficial learning processes.
- 4) From risk-aversion (e.g., investing in „safe bets“) towards risk-taking, and thus trying to achieve the apparently impossible, including the readiness to accept failures.

- 5) From self-congratulatory circles (e.g., between grantmakers, stakeholders, and beneficiaries) towards impact assessment and external evaluation.

In most respects the Evens Foundation is not only moving in this direction, but it is clearly ahead of many of us. Its leadership's visionary powers, its strategic choices, its modes of operation, and last but not least the impact achieved so far, make it one of the leaders among European foundations when it comes to fostering creativity and encouraging change. Therefore, I should like to congratulate you, Ms. Evens, and your foundation once again on your achievements, and in particular I should like to extend my best wishes for the future: "Ad multos annos!"

Thank you very much for your attention.