

“We need a change of attitude in politics!”

Carolina Müller-Möhl | Founder and President of Müller-Möhl Group and Müller-Möhl Foundation

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Carolina Müller-Möhl on her new commitment in Africa, freedom, and the importance of early childhood development. Furthermore, she explains what universities in Switzerland can learn from those in the US.

You are the founder of the Müller-Möhl Foundation, which is strongly committed to education. To what extent do you believe that education is the key to freedom?

Education is definitely a key to freedom. Economically speaking, a solid education and training leads to employment and financial and social independence. But that is only a part of what I understand by education. Education includes, among other things, criticism, self-criticism, personal development, joy of life, sensitivity, solidarity and an open horizon. These attributions could also apply to freedom. But what I think is striking is one essential commonality between both: Education and freedom are not a status quo, but they are processes. We must constantly educate ourselves, professionally and personally, throughout a lifetime. We must constantly fight for social, political and individual freedoms: for our own and that of others. Education at a standstill is a setback. Freedoms that one does not continuously stand up for are lost freedoms.

The Müller-Möhl Foundation addresses the challenges facing Switzerland and focuses, among other things, on education. One of the biggest problems of the global education system is that many children in developing and emerging countries have no access to education. Why does the Foundation focus primarily on Switzerland?

When establishing the foundation, it was important to me, that we can achieve the best possible impact. I know Switzerland best, I am familiar with the education system and I have good networks in business, politics and society. Under these conditions, we can work most efficiently. We know the problems and we know how to tackle them. And by the way, there are also areas in Switzerland in which the work, know-how, voice and finances of foundations are needed.

Nevertheless, today more than ever, we live in an interconnected world. This is why the Müller-Möhl Foundation has opened an international chapter. We started with the African continent and with two partners: elea Foundation and Space for Giants.

elea Foundation is an active philanthropic impact investor that fights absolute poverty with entrepreneurial means. Space for Giants is a non-profit organization that works to protect wild animals, nature and the environment in Africa, as well as to provide local communities with an income through the peaceful coexistence of humans and animals, especially elephants.

The foundation also focuses on the compatibility of work and family. According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, everyone has the right to a family and the right to work. Today, however, they are not compatible for many people – especially for women. What do you think are potential solutions to this incompatibility?

The difficulty in reconciling work and family life in Switzerland (and even more challenging is the reconciliation of career and family) often leads families to choose to apply the classic family model: The man earns the money, while the woman takes care of the children, housework and other family affairs. It is unfortunately not uncommon for mothers to never again gain a foothold in the labour market.

Studies show that the consequences for these women can be far-reaching:

- Their exposure to health risks is above average.
- They are threatened by poverty in old age.
- In the long term, there is less money in the family coffers.
- There is less productivity and tax revenue for the state.
- The economy has fewer skilled workers at its disposal.

In order to ensure that women stay in or re-enter the labour market after an intensive family time, we need to remove disincentives to work and create positive incentives to work. To achieve this, the OECD has recommended that Switzerland introduces an individ-

ual taxation. In addition, for a better compatibility of work and family we need to make external childcare affordable for everyone and we have to install all-day schools throughout Switzerland.

With your foundation, the Müller-Möhl Foundation, you are also committed to early-childhood education. Why did you choose this niche?

A major shortcoming in Switzerland is the lack of sufficient investment in early-childhood education. At 0.2%, Switzerland is far below the 1% of gross national product recommended by the OECD. We think Switzerland has to significantly increase the volume of investment in this area since studies clearly show that successful early-childhood education leads to more economic growth, less crime and fewer social cases. This in turn means savings for society and the state in the billions. We need a change of attitude in politics! That is why the Müller-Möhl Foundation supports efforts in the area of research and conducts active public relations work.

You represent the motto “You can lose fame, money and names, but not what you have in your head”. To what extent has this principle



influenced your actions and decision-making practices in your career to date?

I had the privilege of growing up in a family that cultivated a lively culture of discussion and in which an attitude of values was and still is an expression of a lived personal conviction. My parents raised me to question things critically. Philosophical, political, ethical or religious attitudes were not predetermined. We cultivated a humanistic ideal of family and education.

From a very early age, I was made aware of the importance of a good education. Also the boarding school "Schule Schloss Salem", which I enter at the age of 12, has made it its business to let the pupils grow up to be critical thinking, socially acting and tolerant people.

An important motto of Salem was "plus est en vous" – more is in you. Therefore, my upbringing on one hand and my experiences on the other led me to the conviction that values such as personal responsibility, independence, courage, tolerance, justice and willingness to perform are important factors for a successful life.

Due to increasing populism, climate change and technological upheaval, liberalism is coming under increasing pressure, and with it the individual freedom that underlies it. At the same time, non-democratic systems appear to be becoming increasingly self-confident, and the question arises as to which aspects of freedom are currently under attack and may require strong defence in the future. Do you currently see a concrete need for action to protect individual freedom in the future?

Individual freedoms must always be protected, they never were, are not and will never be a guaranteed good. We have to make sure that we

1. cultivate our political system and that we all participate in our votes,
2. strengthen the militia system and prevent a purely political class,
3. support liberal teaching and research at universities with access to education for all parts of the population.

Many renowned companies visit the University of St. Gallen and compete for the young talents.

Consequently, students are often confronted with a positive surplus of opportunities. What advice would you give graduates when evaluating the “right” company?

A key question for students should be to companies: “How do you feel about the compatibility of work and family?” Why should you ask this question? Because: In general it has been shown that companies with diverse teams perform better than those whose management team consists only or almost entirely of one gender. The working atmosphere is better and it is easier to start a family. And a good compatibility of work and family makes you happy. This is confirmed by a recently published long-term study by Harvard University.

In short, the best company from my point of view is the one that allows you to combine having a family and an interesting job.

You have an extremely international educational background. What can universities abroad learn from those in Switzerland and where do foreign educational institutions have the edge over those in Switzerland?

Many students at Swiss universities attend a university abroad as part of their studies. This international exchange is extremely beneficial for the students, their language skills and their cultural and personal horizons. Some universities abroad could actively promote international student exchange, as Swiss universities already do.

From the universities in the USA, for example, we can learn how to tap into additional sources of funding. Their Alumni programmes are often exemplary and often ahead of Swiss programmes.



Carolina Müller-Möhl

Carolina Müller-Möhl is founder and president of the Müller-Möhl Group, a Single Family Office. She has served as a board member of Nestlé and currently sits on different boards, i.a. Neue Zürcher Zeitung and Fielmann. Carolina is highly committed to address socio-political causes and brings her efforts under the Müller-Möhl Foundation, which focuses on compatibility of work and family life, education, promotion of a free market in Switzerland and philanthropy. Furthermore she sits on several foundation boards, i.a. Bertelsmann Foundation. In 2007 she was nominated Young Global Leader by the World Economic Forum.