

**Peter Fuchs, President of the Viva Trust
"The Best Elements of Capitalism and Marxism"**

Peter Fuchs developed the Viva Trust with Stephan Schmidheiny and now manages and supervises the project. Fuchs lives in Bondo in the Swiss Grisons and frequently travels to South America.

BILANZ spoke to him in Zurich.

BILANZ: Where did you first meet Stephan Schmidheiny?

Peter Fuchs: In 1995, I gave a speech at a banking event on the fear of the business world of getting in touch with civil society. Schmidheiny was also taking part. He found the subject interesting, and we started to talk. The partnership developed from there.

How do you rate him?

Stephan Schmidheiny is a pioneer who has always dared to take new paths, accepting that he would attract criticism. Scepticism and creative shaping skills are inherent in his personality. He maintains a wide network of both like-minded and other people. I know of no other person who approaches a project with so much dialectic consideration and courage.

At the 1992 Rio Conference, Schmidheiny pledged himself to increased eco-efficiency in business. Is the Viva Trust a practical consequence of this commitment?

Ecology can only be practiced in a stable society, thus ecology on its own does not go far enough.

Since the advent of the new phenomenon called "civil society", the old models – where politics and business shaped the world – are no longer up to the task. This is where Schmidheiny's involvement with Viva comes in, pointing the way to more stable and more sustainable social development. If a society is more stable and has fewer tensions, it goes without saying that companies will be better placed, because their markets will also be more stable.

What characterises GrupoNueva?

Each manager of the 40 individual companies is required not only to manage the business profitably, but also to implement the ecological and social values held by the owner – previously Stephan Schmidheiny, now Viva Trust. Such an orientation motivates management and results in above-average achievements. Nueva produces essential products like timber and chipboard as well as water piping for villages and towns. Probably no other concern in South America has such a high number of ISO-certified companies and has been awarded so many prizes.

((Caption))

"Checks and Balances": Peter Fuchs

With whom does the Avina Foundation cooperate?

Avina works with the leaders as project managers, leading figures from society and business who know what their countries and companies need. It is not a matter of telling South Americans how to produce Swiss cheese; it's a question of supporting their own initiatives.

How much money can Viva invest in the form of project sponsorship per annum?

In recent years, Viva has been able to spend USD 50 million a year. If GrupoNueva and the other interests in the trust continue to work well – and we are doing our utmost to ensure that – then sums of this magnitude will be a certainty.

How are you handling the demands of the Mapuche Indians, who are laying claim to the Nueva Group's forestry plantation land?

Our timber companies have undergone a transformation. In days gone by they either suppressed conflict with the Indians or confronted them. A few years ago, with the help of the Avina Foundation, the companies started to talk, took part in projects, abandoned forested areas, or donated timber or tree saplings. Indeed, a cultural and educational centre built by

Nueva for the indigenous population has been placed under the protection of the tribe by the Indian shaman. We were very touched by that.

What vision does Viva nurture?

The huge donation is a further step towards realising Stephan Schmidheiny's vision of forging new alliances between business and civil society in order to promote sustainable development.

What's new about the Viva concept?

The comprehensive, across-the-board view is new. And the fact that an industrialist has donated his entire holding in order to use the profits to support the wide-ranging concerns of the general population. In so doing, he is acting in enlightened self-interest.

Is there a risk that the Trust will fall into the wrong hands?

Viva has been set up according to Anglo-Saxon law and has its registered office in San José. In the trust deeds there are checks and balances in the form of control systems that in effect exclude all abuse.

Is Schmidheiny setting a new trend?

The link between Grupo Nueva and Avina through the Viva Trust goes in the direction of a new – and unprecedented – kind of alliance. It is an attempt to find an improved political framework between business and society, at an equivalent level.

How is the initiative being received in Latin America?

In South America, a commitment of this type is welcomed gladly and with some amazement, as the numerous media reports confirm.

Has Stephan Schmidheiny turned his back on Switzerland?

If that was so, he would never have sponsored Expo 02's "Garden of Violence" in Murten in its entirety. But he is happy in South America and wants to deepen his commitments in a region where it is still possible to set things in motion.

Why is Schmidheiny doing this right now?

Stephan Schmidheiny wanted to see a substantial part of his wealth being transferred into the "right hands" while he is still alive. He will have a role in the project as a consultant and provider of ideas; however, he will no longer be able to make decisions as the owner, or to profit materially. It would have been possible for Schmidheiny to sell everything and form a foundation from the proceeds. He has decided on this unusual path, and combined the best elements of Capitalism and Marxism into a new model, which can benefit both business and society.

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