

New Publication

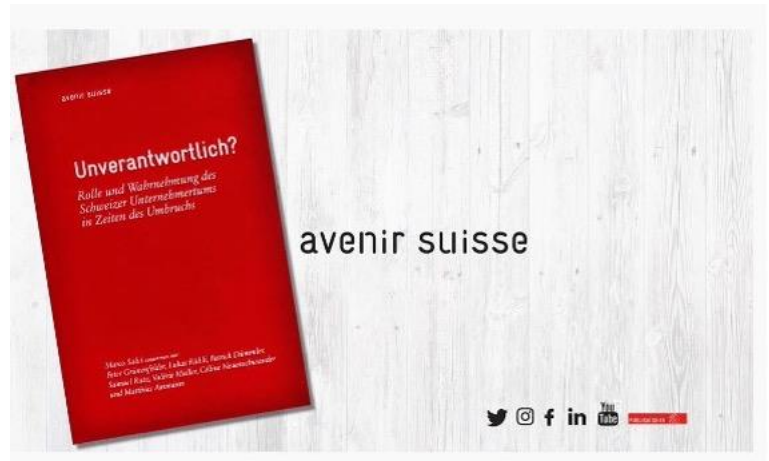
“Irresponsible? The Role and Perception of Swiss Entrepreneurship in Times of Upheaval”

Criticism of capital seems to be in fashion, especially in the run-up to the Responsible Business Initiative. A new publication from Avenir Suisse shows that this is no short-lived phenomenon. Society’s perceptions of large Swiss companies have been steadily deteriorating for years, even though overall these businesses make a significant contribution to the common good as reliable employers, heavyweight taxpayers, and social pioneers. Switzerland again needs more entrepreneurs who can credibly represent these achievements in the public discourse – and politicians who keep a more careful eye on the underlying economic framework.

The economy and the businesses that operate within it are key to social cohesion in Switzerland. They give people work – and security. With a labor force participation rate of over 80%, Switzerland ranks second in the OECD. The OECD’s Job Quality Index shows that companies in this country foster a good working environment, and Switzerland comes an impressive third place in terms of job security. In the last 15 years almost 1.5 million new jobs have been created here, with companies employing more than 250 people disproportionately represented. Large organizations have traditionally been pioneers in social terms. Long before paternity leave was voted through it was a reality for the employees of many Swiss multinationals. These also play an increasingly important role for the state. Not only do they pay around CHF 20 billion a year in taxes on their earnings, but they also gather taxes (such as VAT) themselves on the state’s behalf, and have to implement a growing number of regulations at their own expense.

Despite corporations’ eminently positive track record, their image among members of the public, politicians, and the media is quite different, with distorted views of their achievements widespread. Exchange-listed companies enjoy measurably less public trust than family businesses and cooperatives. The media claim that on balance their contribution to the common good is negative. This suspicion is also evident in political circles: in a survey, 40% of the parliamentarians polled viewed the sentence “In the long term everyone profits from a free-market economy” with skepticism. Even in schools, students learn little about business and Swiss entrepreneurship, despite the contribution they make to the common good by producing goods and services.

As research director Marco Salvi and his co-authors show in their newly-published book, this dissonance between public perceptions and reality poses a threat to Swiss society: as the idea of “good” corporate governance is subjected to growing political regulation, and is increasingly “socialized”, and people no longer trust in corporate self-reliance, corporations will also be less and less able to perform their role as society’s innovators and stabilizers.



The book that Avenir Suisse is publishing to mark its 20-year anniversary sets a counterpoint to the public debate. It’s also a wake-up call to politicians: if they want to assure our long-term prosperity, they’ll have to make people more aware again of the achievements of corporations. In addition, the book is a plea for entrepreneurs to step up their personal involvement in the public and political discourse. After all, those who enjoy the most credibility with voters when it comes to economic matters are those who bear responsibility for a business themselves.



Publication: “Unverantwortlich? Rolle und Wahrnehmung des Schweizer Unternehmertums in Zeiten des Umbruchs” (Irresponsible? Role and Perception of Swiss Entrepreneurship in Times of Upheaval), Marco Salvi et.al., Avenir Suisse, book, 92 pages, [online](#) from 9.30am on 2 November 2020.

Media conference: With Peter Grünenfelder, Marco Salvi, and Verena Parzer-Epp. Livestream from 9.30am on [avenir-suisse.ch](https://www.avenir-suisse.ch)

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