GOETHEANUM COMMUNICATIONS

Goetheanum, Dornach, Switzerland, 24 January 2020

**A business is not a commodity**

**‘Trustee Ownership’ should be easier to implement**

**More and more businesses want to take a new approach to ownership. Small and large businesses and start-ups have drawn up a draft law on trustee ownership in collaboration with Gerald Häfner, Leader of the Section for Social Sciences at the Goetheanum.**

“Investors who have nothing to do with the employees or the sector of business often buy companies, hospitals, schools and squeeze them out – to accumulate more wealth for themselves”, says Gerald Häfner. That is why a growing number of businesses owners want to set up their company in such a way that it remains independent and cannot be traded like a commodity. “But such legal forms are not yet available”.

Companies today are a thing according to the law. “However a company is a social entity made up of employees, suppliers and customers and not just a random commodity”, says Gerald Häfner. The proposal for a new legal form of ‘trustee ownership’ envisages that property rights should be formulated in such a way that the capital serves the company over the long term as a social asset and to enable it to fulfil its mission. Co-owners as well as shareholders can bring in and withdraw capital, but voting rights and profits remain within the company. Pioneers in this area are companies like Zeiss and Bosch. Companies such as Alnatura, Ecosia, Sonett, Wala and Weleda are also moving in this direction, but often have to use auxiliary structures due to the lack of a suitable legal form.

A proposal for a legal form for ‘trustee ownership’ has been developed with the assistance of Gerald Häfner since 2016. Following the 2018 Conference on Ownership, more than 30 companies established the Stiftung Verantwortungeigentum (‘The Responsibility Ownership Foundation’) in Berlin at the end of 2019. Federal Minister of Economics Peter Altmaier and CDU Chairwoman Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer were also present.

The Stiftung Verantwortungseigentum is working to promote legal and political framework provisions, supports research on this type of company and facilitates networking among companies. According to the foundation, there are over 200 companies in Germany with around 1.2 million employees and a combined sales volume of 270 billion euros that want to restrict the sale of the company and secure its ownership.

(2276 characters/SJ; translation by Bettina Hindes)

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