

## Dr. Wilhelm Krull

### Foundations - Enabling without influencing the agendas

In a rapidly globalising and interdependent world new challenges and opportunities are arising for Europe. In order to successfully build the future European knowledge-based society it is essential to enhance the quality of the research base, to strengthen the structural dynamics of the respective research and innovation systems, and to support frontier research in carefully selected areas. By combining risk-taking with a high degree of flexibility and a proven track record in quality assurance foundations can inspire, support, and encourage institutions as well as individuals to build or reconfigure their research environment, and to break new ground.

When it comes to identifying future topics for research a certain tension can be observed between the mission or agenda of research funders and the research interests of individual researchers. This is most obvious when it comes to companies sponsoring research at universities. However, (operative) foundations, too, tend to have a more or less hidden agenda. A research foundation can only succeed if it successfully detects new directions in research early on and tries to enable breakthroughs in emerging areas. At the same time foundations need to be responsive to upcoming and already existing developments, especially within the respective research community.

Epistemologically speaking, radically new answers can usually not be phrased in terms of the initial question. The openness for "fresh thinking" is not only required by those who produce new ideas, but also by those who are expected to pick them up. The readiness to listen to independent voices inside and outside of one's own network, to encourage risk taking in "off the beaten track" areas, and to create a climate of mutual learning are prerequisites for successfully creating a "culture of creativity".