

# Why The World Needs A 'Women's Davos'



**Carol Hymowitz**, NONE

[FULL BIO](#) 

Opinions expressed by Forbes Contributors are their own.

Aude Zieseniss de Thuin is the founder and president of the [Women's Forum for the Economy and Society](#), an organization that promotes women's visions on economic and social issues.

The group holds an annual forum in Deauville, France, that brings together many influential women--and men--from around the world and is often referred to as the "Women's Davos." It also holds forums in China.

De Thuin, who describes herself as independent-minded and stubborn, spent most of her career as an entrepreneur. She put herself through college by working as a model, but says she hated modeling and quit soon after she earned her degree.

A psychologist by training, she started International Direct Marketing Week in 1981 and sold it in the early 1990s after it had become a well-known event. She then launched L'Art du Jardin, which under her direction became the second-largest garden event

in Europe.

Her experiences running her own companies piqued her interest in women's status in business and society. She talked to ForbesWoman about why she decided to launch the Women's Forum in 2004 and how it has grown.

**De Thuin:** Ten years ago I was running L'Art du Jardin, which was a small company with about 40 employees. I wanted to go to Davos to meet other heads of businesses, and especially women like myself. I made an inquiry, but I never received an answer. I asked someone I knew who'd been to Davos to tell me what it was like and perhaps explain why no one had answered my inquiry. "I quite understand why," this person told me. "Just a small percentage attendees are women, and there are hardly any small companies represented."

So I began thinking about organizing an economic forum for women. It took me more than two years to find a good business model. When I approached banks for a loan, they refused, saying my idea was too risky. But I felt deeply that my idea was good, and my husband said, "listen to your intuition."

I decided to sell L'Art du Jardin and invest money from the sale to launch a women's forum. I knew I was taking a huge risk, but I'm very stubborn. I felt so strongly that if women are to give our opinions, we have to show that we exist.

I wanted a global conference, and so at first I thought about holding it in Brussels. But my husband wanted me to work closer to home (Paris) and said he wouldn't like it if I didn't choose someplace in France.

---

Then I discovered Deauville, which is just a short train ride from Paris and where I could get enough hotel and meeting space at the right price. So I signed a contract, booking 500 rooms for the first year, 600 for the second and 700 for the third. I was anxious about the financial risk I was taking, and had a lot of sleepless nights.

The first forum was held in October 2005, and it was an incredible success.

I knew my idea was affirmed when I saw the pleasure that women expressed in being together and working together, discussing their careers, families and place in the world.

**Like this story? Become a [fan of ForbesWoman](#) on Facebook and find others like it. Or follow us on Twitter [@forbeswoman](#).**