



## EDITORIAL

Dear readers,



Do you prefer movies or TV series? With the rise of streaming platforms, television habits have changed completely. When it comes to volunteering, the ideal image remains that of rural women, volunteer firefighters, or sports clubs. These are commitments for life – or at least for a very long time. This form of volunteering is still very important today and accounts for the majority of volunteer work – but our society is evolving, and with it are the demands and expectations placed on volunteers.

Many new forms of volunteering have emerged, most of which are short-term in nature. This may be a disadvantage for individual organizations that prefer to have long-term, committed employees. At the societal level, however, these commitments are just as important as they are useful. After all, several episodes also build an exciting narrative – as shown by Netflix series.

In this issue, we examine the new forms of volunteering from a scientific and practical perspective!

Wishing you a pleasant read,

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## Episodic volunteering

**The form of volunteering has changed from collective-embedded ongoing commitment to one organisation into individually embedded episodic commitment to volunteering in general. Good news for society but a challenge for non-profit organizations.**

By Prof. Dr. Lucas Meijs

### A new form of volunteering

Volunteering is the materialization of volunteer energy into action. Globally, volunteer energy is not at risk. However, its materialization into volunteering has been changing the last 25 years and is becoming episodic and even spontaneous. Spontaneous volunteering, for example during a natural disaster, takes place outside of non-profit organizations, but episodic volunteering is becoming the new normal for organizations working with volunteers.

### The individual perspective

Episodic volunteering fits a society in which the community agendas are not set collectively anymore. In fact, modern people want and need to write their own individual biography and volunteering opportunities can form meaningful episodes in their life story. For them, episodic volunteering is a chapter with a clear start and end. These episodes can range from long-term commitment to one organization (serving as treasurer for 8 years), a yearly commitment to an activity (organizing the youth camp) but can also come in the form of many short, even one-day, activities. So, the most important effect is that people are no longer part of one organizational story but

they create episodes for themselves involving many organizations. From the perspective of an organization, they seem to drop out of volunteering itself. However, seen from the perspective of lifelong volunteer energy they are just as committed as previous generations. The willingness to help, the availability of volunteer energy seems to be part of human nature.

### The third-party perspective

Episodic volunteering also fits the involvement of third-parties, such as companies, educational institutes and concepts like national-days-of-service, voluntourism, family-volunteering or single-volunteering. This third-party involvement connects an explicit third-party instrumental goal to a specific volunteering episode. Companies do team building by cleaning up parks, educational institutes achieve learning objectives by service-learning, families volunteer together to create quality and educational time and singles have dates with added value. In fact, this is in many countries the most visible factor leading to requests for episodic volunteering opportunities. Third-party involvement is also becoming the new way of nurturing people into volunteering.

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### The non-profit perspective

Non-profit organizations write their own story of influencing society by organizing activities for members, rendering service to people that need them or giving voice to unheard causes. These stories are ongoing but, just like the TV series *Friends*, there are familiar and new faces in every episode. Conceptually, episodic volunteering is linking new actors to the next episode in the story of the organization. It might even involve writing specific special short episodes for third parties which can be very similar. A food bank can organize the boxing as a team activity for companies, for students, for families and even for dating singles. For them it is a unique episode, for the organization it is almost a re-broadcast.

This is also the organizational answer to this change. Episodic volunteering offers an accessible opportunity for people to act on their nature to help and then be nurtured into volunteering. Of course, this comes at higher recruitment and



socialization costs for the non-profit organization, but short-term episodic volunteering is also easier to do for the less privileged. Episodic volunteering creates opportunities for more people to volunteer!

### The society perspective

Episodic volunteering is re-embedding volunteering by accepting changes within society. The idea that people over their life-span volunteer the same amount of hours, although divided over more organizations, does not pose a problem on the level of society. The idea that episodic volunteering in general makes volunteering more accessible for the

less privileged, who cannot afford to be a volunteer every week, might be a great advantage for society.

So, episodic volunteering is here to stay. Non-profit organizations should combine long volunteer commitments for the people who are willing and able to write a long volunteering episode in their life, with many flexible arrangements for the individuals who want to help, but not every week. The latter should also be seen as a collective investment in nurturing people into volunteering!

Lucas Meijs

is professor of Strategic Philanthropy and Volunteering at Rotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University.

## On equal footing, not just bouquets!

**The UN has proclaimed 2026 the Year of Volunteers. It did the same in 2001. The book «Wer sorgt morgen fürs Gemeinwohl? Zivilgesellschaft und Freiwilligenarbeit in der Schweiz» looks back at the 25 years in between and outlines ideas for the future.**



In Switzerland, every second adult does unpaid work for the common good. However, in an increasingly monetized society, no one can rely on unpaid work continuing to be performed to such a high degree in the future. Switzerland therefore needs a sustainable engagement strategy and targeted support measures.

### The state between absence and interference

Unlike Germany and Austria, the federal government and most cantons have neither engagement strategies nor designated contacts for civil society. At the same time, several cantons coordinate volunteer work in the asylum sector, which is clearly the responsibility of civil society. Some politicians have threatened to revoke the tax privileges of civil society organizations (CSOs) as soon as they move beyond chauffeuring the elderly and rescuing animals – and start denouncing corporations for mining precious metals or the state for its discriminatory refugee policies.

Politicians underestimate the importance of an active civil society. No wonder CSOs are mostly referred to negatively as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and as part of the «third sector». City and municipal councils should promote volunteer work together with civil society actors on an equal footing, instead of merely handing out symbolic bouquets of flowers every December 5. More than 100 cities in Germany are already doing this.

### Increase compatibility of activities

Four out of ten volunteers give up their commitments due to work pressures. It is therefore becoming increasingly important to make it easier to balance paid employment and volunteer work. Companies could encourage their employees to volunteer by offering flexible working hours, especially in the years before retirement. At the same time, they could have corporate volunteering programs run by aid organizations so that employees are freer to decide whether or not they want to take part in projects.

### Cultivate charity early

The willingness to do unpaid work is no longer automatically passed down from parents to their children. It would be enriching for teachers to create spaces where children, teenagers, and young adults can gain experience with charitable work in addition to imparting knowledge.

### Promote inclusive assignments

In order for civil society organizations to attract more and new volunteers, they must make their volunteer opportunities not only more flexible in terms of time, but also more accessible. Young adults, foreigners, and people with disabilities or low levels of education and income are rarely asked to volunteer.

Lukas Niederberger

is a philosopher and theologian. From 2013 to 2022, he promoted civic engagement as managing director of the Swiss Society for the Common Good and published the Swiss Volunteer Monitor in 2016 and 2020.

<https://www.nzz-libro.ch/lukas-niederberger-wer-sorgt-morgen-fuers-gemeinwohl-978-3-03980-023-0>

## «Volunteering is the heart and soul of such an event»

### Interview with Sarah Kreis - Head of Volunteer Management at the Eurovision Song Contest 2025

**CEPS:** How did you become Head of Volunteer Management at the ESC?

**S.K.:** It came about during lunch with the head of location marketing. He told me that Basel was applying to be a host city and if accepted, they would need support in the area of volunteer management. Although my company is more involved in communication and organizational development, I knew that volunteer management was both. So I said yes – and off we went.



Sarah Kreis is a freelance communications consultant and runs the agency playzpace. She works on a contract basis for non-profit organizations and companies, focusing on marketing, digital transformation, and live communication. For the ESC, she was Head of Volunteer Management for the canton of Basel-Stadt and worked for SRG on recruiting volunteers.

**CEPS:** How were 700 suitable volunteers selected from 7,000 applicants?

**S.K.:** Our goal was clear: we wanted to recruit as many volunteers from the region as possible. Their high degree of flexibility is particularly advantageous when assignments come up at short notice or the schedule changes. In this case, there is also no need to organize accommodation. In addition, it was crucial that they were available between April 4 and May 20. We looked for volunteers who spoke German and English. Everything else (age, gender, background) fell into place naturally. The decisive factors were motivation, reliability, and flexibility in terms of time.

**CEPS:** How were the volunteers prepared?

**S.K.:** We developed an e-learning module and created a digital handbook with full-text search – which was really handy, especially for people on the go. We also held two large kick-off events. This gave us the opportunity to meet many people in person for the first time. The first kick-off was particularly emotional for me: I had been working with data and tables for months, and then suddenly there were 300 cheerful, motivated people sitting in front of me. Suddenly, it was all real.

**CEPS:** What motivated people to volunteer their time?

**S.K.:** The reasons varied greatly – and that was precisely what made it so special. Some simply wanted to take a look behind the scenes of such an event. Others have been ESC fans for years, and for them it was a project close to their hearts. Many wanted to represent Basel, be part of something big, and meet new people. What they all had in common was that they wanted to be there and enjoy themselves – you could feel that.

**CEPS:** Is volunteering at a commercial event such as the ESC even acceptable?

**S.K.:** This question is often asked, and rightly so. But an event of this magnitude would simply not be possible without volunteers. In Basel, around 60,000 hours were volunteered. This work is priceless, not only financially, but also on a human level. Volunteers bring enthusiasm, personality, and openness. They are the heart and soul of such an event. It simply makes a difference whether someone is just doing a job at the cloakroom or whether they are there because they really want to be part of something.

**CEPS:** What distinguishes episodic volunteering from other forms?

**S.K.:** There is something magical about episodic volunteering. It is selective, but very intense. The connection to the organization is different from that of long-term volunteer work. And yet, a genuine sense of community often develops – sometimes faster than you might think. Some of our volunteers are already planning their next assignment at the ESC in Austria. We are naturally very pleased about this, as it shows how lasting even short-term volunteering can be.

**CEPS:** Was there a moment with the volunteers that particularly stands out in your memory?

**S.K.:** Yes, definitely the kick-off. After all the preparation, suddenly there was this energy in the room – it was really moving. And there was lots of great feedback during the event too. We had a Happiness Desk in the volunteer lounge, and people kept coming by and just saying: «Thank you». They felt seen.

**CEPS:** And what is your conclusion now, after the event?

**S.K.:** It was a truly «once-in-a-lifetime» experience. Being responsible for 700 people was intense, but we were well prepared. The weather cooperated, there were no incidents, and the city was very supportive. A lot of it was luck, but it was also the result of careful preparation. It was exhausting – and incredibly rewarding at the same time.

**CEPS:** Many thanks for the insights!

### The Eurovision Song Contest 2025

- Europe's biggest music spectacle - turned Basel into a lively stage for music and diversity. It was held from May 10 to 17. Under the motto «United by Music» the city celebrated an international festival that went far beyond the shows. At the heart of the action were over 700 volunteers from 33 countries, many of them from the region. They supported the event in areas such as guest relations, logistics, the media center, and backstage. In return, they received meals, clothing, goodies, free transportation, and, for some, the opportunity to participate in the big ESC parade. Without doubt, the ESC was a powerful example for episodic volunteering. CEPS conducted several surveys among the ESC volunteers in collaboration with researchers from the University of Freiburg. The results will be available in the fall.

### CEPS INSIGHT

#### CEPS Annual Report 2024

CEPS looks back on a successful year in 2024, with important milestones in research, teaching, and practice. Highlights included the appointment of Prof. Dr. Dominik Meier as Assistant Professor of Global Philanthropy, the ARNOVA Award, and the first graduating class of the MAS in Nonprofit Management & Law. Projects such as UPRUN and the use of AI/VR in elder care impressively demonstrate that one of our goals is to build bridges between research and practice. Or as the annual report states: from data to impact. The new annual report provides a concise overview.

To the CEPS Annual Report: <https://bit.ly/44nhYUr>



## 15 years of CAS on impact management at CEPS

The first CAS on the topic of impact took place in 2010, at that time still under the name «CAS Performance & Communication». Since then, not only has the name changed, but impact management itself has also become increasingly important, even beyond the NPO sector.

Impact orientation – traditionally a domain of the NPO sector – has developed into a guiding principle of modern management. Not only non-profit organizations, but also politics and business now formulate ambitious impact goals and align strategies, programs, and projects with results that are truly meaningful for the target groups.

### Impact orientation as system logic

Social change rarely happens in a linear fashion. It spans years or even decades, during which numerous actors and influences come together. Political decisions, market mechanisms, social movements, and technological innovations can unleash unpredictable dynamics and open windows of opportunity for change. Impact-oriented management is curious about these systems: it observes, learns, and becomes part of the action.

### Cross-sector collaboration

The challenges of our time require alliances along entire value and influence chains. Impact orientation promotes precisely this by defining goals, creating transparency, and enabling mobilization.

A common understanding of impact thus becomes the basis for sustainable cooperation and lays the foundation for management that remains effective, agile, and capable of learning. A clear, impact-oriented logic that takes all stakeholders into account, regardless of sector or type of organization, makes it possible to leverage synergies and make a real contribution to positive change. With this in mind, the CAS Impact Management in NPO is also aimed at participants from the public and private sectors.

Elisabeth Hasse

Find out more about CAS impact management here:  
<https://ceps.unibas.ch/de/cas-wirkungsmanagement-in-npo/>

## NUMBER OF THE QUARTER 6,000,000,000

Swiss charitable foundations provide around CHF 6 billion annually for charitable purposes, twice as much as the previous estimate of CHF 3 billion from 2002. The new estimate comes from the Swiss Foundation Report 2025.

[www.stiftungsreport.ch](http://www.stiftungsreport.ch)

## Generational diversity

The new guide on generational diversity helps foundations attract young people to serve on their boards of trustees.



The «Board for Good»-Foundation was established to promote greater diversity on foundation boards. Its primary aim is to encourage young people to become involved in foundation boards. This requires a certain amount of prior knowledge, but also the right network. That is why the «Board for Good»-Foundation supports young people up to the age of 35 by offering them scholarships for foundation board seminars.

But it is not only young people who need to be prepared; foundations themselves must also change in order to become attractive to young people as volunteers. The guidelines entitled «Generationenvielfalt im Stiftungsrat» summarize the factors that need to be taken into account. The guide is aimed at both existing and new foundation board members. Divided into «Identifying», «Recruiting» and «Integrating», it highlights the key aspects of successfully welcoming new foundation board members, while also pointing out where different expectations between generations may clash.

Georg von Schnurbein

More information about the scholarships and guidelines:  
[www.boardforgood.org](http://www.boardforgood.org)

## CALENDAR

### Executive Education

#### CAS Wirkungsmanagement in NPO

3 Modules – Sarnen & Basel  
Start: 18 August 2025

#### Better Foundation Governance

Basel  
25 - 27 September 2025

#### IL Finanzmanagement in NPO

Günter  
03 - 07 November 2025

#### CAS Nonprofit & Public Management

4 Modules – Günter & Basel  
Start: 5 January 2026

#### MAS/DAS in Nonprofit Management & Law

Start at any time  
[Register Now -> CEPS Executive Education](#)

### FURTHER DATES

#### 14. Basler Stiftungstag

Stiftungsstadt Basel  
26 August 2025

#### Schweizer Stiftungssymposium 2025

SwissFoundations  
03 September 2025

#### NPO Finanzkonferenz

NPO Finanzforum  
04 September 2025

#### Global Philanthropy Workshop 2025

CEPS  
22 - 23 September 2025

#### Schweizer Stiftungstag 2025

proFonds  
18 November 2025

## LEGAL NOTICE

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