

# Philanthropie Aktuell



Center for Philanthropy Studies (CEPS), University of Basel  
Steingraben 22, CH-4051 Basel  
Tel.: +41 61 207 23 92, E-Mail: [ceps@unibas.ch](mailto:ceps@unibas.ch)  
[www.ceps.unibas.ch](http://www.ceps.unibas.ch)

## EDITORIAL

Dear readers,



The title of the first issue of *Philanthropie Aktuell* in 2009 was «Effective impact». One might reasonably ask whether much has changed since then? After all, there is still no standardised method of measuring impact or universal agreement on the core aspects of impact. On the other hand, however, the NPO sector has developed significantly. Proof of this is the continued success of the «Social Impact Navigator», as reported by Andreas Rickert. First published in 2013, it has helped many NPOs to increase their impact orientation. Many NPOs use the impact ladder to describe the social added value of their activities.

The discussion of impact has also become more commonplace. Terms such as theory of change, logic framework and impact indicator are familiar throughout much of the sector. In times of tight budgets and declining donations, impact is becoming an important fundraising argument.

What remains to be done? On the one hand, there is a need for greater standardisation in order to make impacts more comparable and easier to understand. On the other hand, impact orientation must be firmly embedded at the core of NPOs, from the strategic level through the organisation to service delivery. It will be interesting to look back in another 17 years and see what the sector has achieved.

Wishing you a pleasant read,  
Georg von Schnurbein

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### CONTENT

<b>Convincing Impact</b>	<b>01</b>
<b>What if there is no Impact?</b>	<b>02</b>
<b>Interview with Andreas Rickert</b>	<b>03</b>
<b>Culture with Impact</b>	<b>04</b>
<b>Calendar</b>	<b>04</b>

## Convincing Impact

**In uncertain times, non-profit organisations (NPOs) must demonstrate why their contribution is particularly relevant. A strong focus on impact is a crucial factor in providing structure, building trust and convincing others in an increasingly critical environment.**

By Prof. Dr. Georg von Schnurbein

Times have become more difficult for NPOs. Social challenges are becoming more complex, resources scarcer, while expectations are also growing. At the same time, funding institutions, partner organisations and the public are increasingly demanding to understand what NPOs achieve and why their commitment is relevant. In this context, impact orientation becomes much more than a measuring instrument: it becomes a common language, the basis of trust and a decisive factor in persuasiveness.

### Impact as a common language

Impact orientation unfolds its power where it connects. It creates a common understanding between the board and the operational team, between full-time and volunteer staff, and between the organisation and its supporters. Clearly describing impact answers a central question: Why do we exist – and what concrete changes should our actions bring about?

This clarity has effects both internally and externally. Internally, it helps to break down silos and set priorities. Decisions are no longer based solely on tradition or gut feeling, but on their contribution to the desired impact. That is why impact management

must be considered a cross-functional task, from the board of directors to project staff. Externally, a dialogue on equal footing emerges – not about activities or expenditure, but about social change. Impact thus becomes a common language that brings different perspectives together.

### Trust is built through impact

Trust is a vital resource for NPOs, yet it can no longer be taken for granted. Accountability has often replaced trust. In this situation, it is not enough to point to good intentions or many years of work. NPOs gain trust when they clearly demonstrate the difference they make. Therefore, a focus on impact does not mean glossing over successes or making everything measurable. Instead, NPOs must communicate openly about learning experiences, limitations and conflicting goals. Reflecting on impact signals responsibility and sincerity to the various interest groups. Impact thus becomes a currency of credibility and the basis for stable relationships. Finally, due to new regulations, companies are also reporting more and more on social and environmental goals. This creates competition for NPOs in the public perception, but it also offers new points of contact.

**Proving relevance in a competitive environment**

In general, the environment has changed noticeably: parts of society and politics now view civil society organisations with scepticism, question their legitimacy or demand greater justification for their actions. As a result, NPOs are not only competing for financial resources and attention, but also for political support.

Impact management helps to formulate one's own contribution to social impact in a clear, comprehensible and convincing manner. Members of strategic bodies such as the board of directors in particular need to be aware of impact results and communicate them externally within their networks.

Instead of presenting long lists of projects or key figures, impact orientation focuses on the desired social change. It makes clear what problem is being addressed, why it is relevant – and why your own NPO can make an effective contribution. This creates powerful narratives that not only provide orientation but also facilitate dialogue: they appeal to people emotionally and rationally and create a solid foundation for countering criticism, building trust and mobilising support.

**Convincing with impact: attitude is key**

A focus on impact is not an additional project or a reporting tool for funding applications. It is an attitude that shapes the thinking and actions of an organisation.

Those who work in an impact-oriented manner do not ask first about activities, but about change. Not about justification, but about learning.

This approach provides guidance, especially in uncertain times. It helps to deploy resources in a targeted manner, build trust and continually reaffirm one's own relevance. NPOs that take impact seriously are convincing not only because of their good intentions, but also because of their clarity, credibility and visible contribution to social change.

Prof. Dr. Georg von Schnurbein  
Director CEPS

**What if there is no impact?**

**Today, impact reports on successful interventions are often included in the annual reports of NPOs. It would be just as interesting to read about approaches that did not work.**

First and foremost, Non-profit organisations are institutions dedicated to specific values and purposes. They are almost always established in response to a social issue. When a situation is perceived as unsatisfactory, people come together to take action. Triggers often include personal involvement, empathy with others and the feeling that something must be done. While the desired end state is often clear, finding the right path to get there is challenging.

History is filled with well-intentioned attempts to find solutions that ultimately turned out to be ineffective or failed to address the problem. A consistent focus on impact can help address this challenge. But what does this mean? In principle, it means addressing the causes of a problem and honestly analysing where an organisation can make a difference with its limited resources. It is then necessary to examine which interventions can help most effectively and to constantly question the assumptions made in the process.

**What is impact?**

Impact means contributing to a real improvement in a given situation. Not everything can be measured. However, if indicators are available to check whether an improvement is taking place, then these should be used consistently to make adjustments to the intervention or to admit honestly that one's own solutions have not worked. But such honesty is rarely found.

Although so-called «failure stories» – that is open discussions about setbacks – were still en vogue 10 years ago with magazines such as the Stanford Social Innovation Review devoting special issues to the topic, the subject has since fallen largely silent. At least today, NPOs rarely talk publicly about revised or disproven impact chains. There is too much at stake. Honesty is rarely rewarded. The risk of losing donors or service contracts and damaging one's own reputation is too high. But the opposite would be desirable.

**Learning from others**

Learning is most successful when it takes place through mutual exchange. This requires safe spaces where it is permissible to talk about failure without being immediately judged. Perhaps this does not have to be done in public, even if it would help prevent «copycats». Transparent communication about the results of impact assessments would be exciting. Not only about what has been successful, but also about what questions remain unanswered.

Organisations could then show how they responded to the results and thus allow others to participate in their learning process. This would be just as desirable as reading the many success stories and impact reports, that will once again be featured in upcoming reports.

Dr. Steffen Bethmann  
Organisational consultant at Con-Sense, with many years of experience in non-profit management and governance.

## «Legitimise good intentions with demonstrable successes.»

### An interview with Andreas Rickert, founder and CEO of PHINEO

**CEPS:** Why are good intentions no longer enough to be credible in the non-profit sector today?

**A.R.:** For two reasons. Firstly, because of our own self-image. If I want to be credible, both to others and to myself, I have to legitimise good intentions with demonstrable successes. Because nothing is more motivating than successes achieved through commitment. And secondly, because the public and sponsors are increasingly paying attention to results. Rightly so, by the way, because charitable work is usually tax-deductible. And when the community spends money on something, it should also be transparently explained what improvements and effects are achieved with that money. However, improvements and effects do not just happen; they require strategic planning.



**Andreas Rickert**

is the founder and CEO of PHINEO gAG. He has been committed to creating an open, social and sustainable world for many years. With his expertise in philanthropy, social impact and private equity, as well as his extensive network, he acts as a bridge builder and impact ambassador.

**CEPS:** With the «Social Impact Navigator» (German: «Kursbuch Wirkung») you wanted to make impact orientation tangible. What was the central idea behind this?

**A.R.:** Impact orientation has always been a terribly technocratic term. Our idea was to provide non-profits with practical guidance on how to work in an impact-oriented way, from planning to analysis. With the Social Impact Navigator, organisations can structure their project work step by step in such a way that impact is planned, analysed and enhanced. Methods, checklists and valuable tips for application are provided for this purpose.



Social Impact Navigator – English Version

Download here:  
[https://www.phineo.org/uploads/Downloads/PHINEO\\_Social\\_Impact\\_Navigator.pdf](https://www.phineo.org/uploads/Downloads/PHINEO_Social_Impact_Navigator.pdf)

**CEPS:** The Social Impact Navigator promises to «doing good even better». What specific changes will this bring to everyday project work?

**A.R.:** Organisations are beginning to define goals and target groups precisely, rather than formulating vague intentions. Only those who know their target group and its needs good enough can offer services that are truly effective and, in the best case, have an impact on society. In the course book, users learn how to plan their projects along the logic of impact. They learn to develop measurable indicators to systematically record results. The data is then used to make decisions during the course of the project, for example to adjust activities. This creates reflection loops that enable continuous learning and improvement. The increased focus on data, analysis and reflection changes the internal control and strategic orientation of projects.

Let's assume that an organisation wants to set up a mentoring programme for disadvantaged young people. The starting point is the challenge that these young people have fewer opportunities for education and training. From the beginning, the project defines specific impact goals that build on one another. The programme provides activities for young people to improve their chances in the application process, for example through regular meetings and job application training. In addition, volunteer mentors accompany the young people individually, supporting them in their learning and career orientation. However, the programme does not measure the number of meetings, applications or courses that young people attend, but rather whether their school performance improves, whether their self-confidence grows and whether they successfully transition into vocational training. The focus thus shifts from counting activities to demonstrate real change in the lives of the target group.

**CEPS:** What is the biggest «aha» moment for organisations that use the Social Impact Navigator?

**A.R.:** The most important insight is probably that measurability is not incompatible with social mission. Many organisations realize that transparency

opens up completely new opportunities for fundraising and cooperation, because external communication becomes more fact-based.

**CEPS:** Has the Social Impact Navigator itself had an impact, and how do you measure that?

**A.R.:** There is plenty of evidence of its impact; I mention three examples. First, the course book is now also available in English, Spanish and Italian, as well as in a Swiss version – after receiving requests from the countries. Second, its popularity continues: since its initial release in 2013, more than 175'000 copies were distributed. Third, we receive reports and feedback from organisations that they implement the methods of the Social Impact Navigator, which makes their day-to-day project work much easier.

**CEPS:** «Convincing Impact» – what does this mean for the future of the non-profit sector?

**A.R.:** Non-profit organisations must increasingly demonstrate the added value they create for society in a clear and verifiable way because the expectations of sponsors are shifting away from mere intention towards evidence and transparency. Those who can demonstrate how their work is positively changing the lives of their target group are creating a genuine mark of quality.

**CEPS:** Thank you!

## CEPS INSIGHT

### CEPS Annual Report 2025

CEPS looks back on a successful year in 2025, marked by important milestones in research, teaching and practice. An overview is provided in the new annual report «Evidence for the Common Good».

<https://ceps.unibas.ch/en/about-us/annual-reports/>

### Publications

Through contributions to journals such as the Social Enterprise Journal, the Voluntary Sector Review and Business Strategy & the Environment, CEPS contributes to the advancement of international research.

<https://ceps.unibas.ch/en/research/publications/all-publications/>

**Culture with Impact**

In the «Philanthropie am Mittag» on 10 March 2026, we discussed how impact can be defined in a cultural context and used as a tool for sustainable development and strategic cultural promotion, as well as a tool that ensures the transparent use of funds.

This issue of «Philanthropie Aktuell» clearly shows that the question of impact is central to both strategic management and legitimacy in the NPO sector. But what does impact orientation actually mean for the cultural sector, where the social benefits of projects may be less obvious?

We discussed how both cultural practitioners and organisations that support the arts define impact, and what consequences this has, as part of the online series «Philanthropie am Mittag» with Regula Wolf from Con-Sense Philanthropy Consulting and Andreas Geis from the Foundation for Art, Culture and History (SKKG).

During the discussion, it became clear that cultural processes follow their own dynamics. Their social impact is often indirect and non-linear. It became clear that quantitative measurement methods are largely unable to capture this. Instead of formalised, number-based measurement systems, the importance of oral reporting and dialogue formats was emphasised. A focus on impact should be used less as a control instrument and more as a means of mutual understanding of objectives and values.

In addition, the exchange can help to create a basis of trust despite the existing power imbalance between funding institutions and recipients, enabling both sides to learn and, in the best case scenario, to further develop together. However, it also became clear that this approach poses major challenges for all involved. For those who wish to pursue comprehensive executive education in the field of impact management (not only in the cultural sector), the CAS Wirkungsmanagement in NPO is highly recommended.

Dr. Elisabeth Hasse

Learn more about CAS Wirkungsmanagement in NPO:  
<https://ceps.unibas.ch/de/cas-wirkungsmanagement-in-npo/>

**NUMBER OF THE QUARTER  
72**

At the end of 2025, Switzerland had 13,782 active foundations. According to the latest analysis of the CEPS NPO database, 325 new foundations were established and 253 foundations were dissolved last year. This corresponds to a net increase of 72 foundations.

Further figures will be presented in the Swiss Foundation Report:  
Available from 26 May 2026: [www.stiftungsreport.ch](http://www.stiftungsreport.ch)

**Adventure Finance**

The book addresses financing options that combine financial returns with social impact.



«Adventure Finance» by Aunnie Patton Power was published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2021. The book argues that the traditional venture capital model is often not the best suited form of financing and that there are many alternative approaches.

Using case studies, the book presents various possible financial instruments: for example, revenue-based financing, redeemable equity, convertible grants, steward/distributed ownership, and more. Thereby, it demonstrates how investors and companies have applied these different instruments in practice.

The aim is to broaden the range of funding options for founders and funders, demonstrating how economic viability and social impact can be combined. Particularly in the Swiss context, where social impact investing and impact-oriented investment strategies are gaining importance, the book offers useful guidance.

Milan Weller

Link to the book:

<https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-030-72428-3>

**CALENDAR**

**Executive Education**

**Information event CAS Wirkungsmanagement + MAS/DAS**  
20 May 2026 at 5 p.m. (1 hour online)

**CAS Nonprofit Governance & Leadership**  
3 Modules – Sigriswil & Basel  
Start: 13 April 2026

**Beste Stiftungsratspraxis XIV**  
23 June 2026, Zürich

**NEWLY REVISED!**  
**CAS Wirkungsmanagement in NPO**  
3 Modules – Sarnen & Basel  
Start: 17 August 2026

**MAS/DAS in Nonprofit Management & Law**  
Start at any time  
[Register now-> CEPS Executive Education](#)

**FURTHER DATES**

**Luzerner NPO-Forum 2026 Hochschule Luzern**  
26 March 2026, Lucerne

**Swiss Social Economy Forum SENS**  
7 May 2026, Basel

**Deutscher Stiftungstag 2026 Bundesverband deutscher Stiftungen**  
21 - 22 May 2026, Hamburg

**Forum des Fondations SwissFoundations et al.**  
28 May 2026, Lausanne

**SwissFundraisingDay Swissfundraising**  
11 June 2026, Bern

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University of Basel



Center for Philanthropy Studies,  
Steinengraben 22, 4051 Basel  
[www.ceps.unibas.ch](http://www.ceps.unibas.ch)  
[linkedin.com/company/cepsbasel](https://linkedin.com/company/cepsbasel)

**EDITOR**

Milan Weller  
([milan.weller@unibas.ch](mailto:milan.weller@unibas.ch))

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