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A sustainable place of work? Voluntary activism in NGOs

Abstract

The environment is usually the primary consideration within sustainability, but sustainability also needs to consider the social impact of changes in a system. This paper argues that by including considerations about human welfare as a part of sustainability, there is not only a need for ethnographic data to capture what social sustainability looks like at a workplace, but taking the well-being at work seriously also changes reflections on the well-being of people in voluntary work and invites questions on neoliberalism. Looking at paid and unpaid labour in social movements, such as in nongovernmental organization (NGO) fundraising, based on 18 ethnographic interviews and additional fieldnotes from 2016, 2019, and 2022, this paper shows that fundraising for NGOs often has a blurry character when it comes to the division of work and life. How the engagement for the NGOs is evaluated and how sustainable an institutionalised social movement can be, is, however, directly affected by this divide. Thus, this paper reflects on social sustainability in paid fundraising especially during the hours after work. And it shows that problems regarding social sustainability in unpaid volunteering are often countered with a toolbox of neoliberal thought.

Keywords: NGO fundraising, Social sustainability, Workplace ethnography, Voluntary work

Social sustainability – a subjective perspective

The term sustainability typically refers to environmental and economic dimensions. But it can be understood more broadly as how a system should be organised to build a promising future. Therefore, I would like to start by looking at some definitions of sustainability. A common definition is:

> Sustainability is the ability to meet the needs of the current generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. The environment is the primary but not the only consideration within sustainability; it is important to also consider human welfare.[1]

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1 Ricee, Susanne: Social Sustainability – Everything You need to know, posted on July 14, 2022 on the platform Diversity for Social Impact, https://diversity.social/social-sustainability/.

Since human actors play a crucial role in all ecological and economic systems around the globe, it is surprising how often the perspective on sustainability disregards social interactions. Social sustainability should be considered alongside economic and ecological sustainability when evaluating a system that affects people (overview: Shirazi and Keivani 2019: 1–3). A sustainable world is valuable not only for ourselves, but also in terms of the well-being of future generations, and our responsibility towards other creatures.

Some aspects of social sustainability can be analysed only with surveys and quantitative data to enable measurement of improvements, stagnation, or decline (regarding 'the need to quantify' see Widok 2009: 45). However, because social sustainability focuses on how people feel, data is necessarily subjective and methods should reflect this. For instance, the Oxford Institute for Sustainable Development argues:

> At a more operational level, social sustainability stems from actions in key thematic areas, encompassing the social realm of individuals and societies, which ranges from capacity building and skills development to environmental and spatial inequalities. In this sense, social sustainability blends traditional social policy areas and principles, such as equity and health, with emerging issues concerning participation, needs, social capital, the economy, the environment, and more recently, with the notions of happiness, wellbeing, and quality of life.[2]

In fact, 'quality of life' has been subject to debates regarding social sustainability from early on (Shirazi and Keivani 2019: 6). Broadly speaking, 'quality of life' refers to the good and satisfactory character of people's lives (Szalai and Andrews 1980). The World Health Organization (WHO) define 'quality of life' as individual perceptions of their position in life in the context of the culture and value systems in which they live and in relation to their goals, expectations, standards, and concerns (The World Health Organization Quality Of Life Assessment 1995). However, due to the value-laden character and subjective nature of the concept, a universally accepted definition is hard to achieve (Romney et al. 1994). In their anthology 'Alltagsglück' (2010), Ingrid Tomkowiak and Gabriela Muri demonstrate that happiness is about 'popular sensitivities, constructs of meaning

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2 Oxford Institute for Sustainable Development: http://oisd.brookes.ac.uk/.

and practices'³, thus also well-being, and quality of life are subjective concepts. While other aspects can be considered from other perspectives, notions of happiness, wellbeing, and quality of life require a personal, subjective viewpoint, one that involves human actors with their experiences, impressions, and practices of sense-making in everyday life settings. This paper aims to provide such an ethnographic viewpoint.

Seeing with the eyes of a state – borrowing a term from political scientist and anthropologist James C. Scott (1999) – it makes sense to take on responsibilities regarding social sustainability, even for organizations and enterprises. Many companies carry out research on their own work environment and promote forms of social entrepreneurship, including increased awareness regarding employee well-being. Unions not only advocate for fair salaries, security, and physical health, but also for sustainable workplaces that prioritize employee mental health. However, some actors in today's economy and politics are likely to be overlooked when talking about social sustainability: those in non-profit and nongovernmental organization (NGOs). People working for NGOs do not usually have their own unions even though they also need a sustainable workforce (see for voluntary work and recognition: Stricker 2006; Gozzer 2022). As this paper will show, reflecting on well-being at work has in fact already been addressed in NGOs. But taking concepts from paid work to optimize volunteering also meant to introduce neoliberal thought in the process. In some parts it led to reducing social sustainability to efficiency.

In recent years, NGOs have become increasingly significant in global politics.[4] Their market sphere has expanded considerably, they have professionalised and formed new alliances with states, regions, local communities, and private companies. Some NGOs have turned into very professional and important actors in the political field, especially in the context of the recent waves of migration that Europe has had to deal with in the last decades, as well as of the economic crises and the war in Ukraine. NGOs still rely heavily on volunteers who often bear significant responsibilities and personal risks yet receive little

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3 "Populäre Befindlichkeiten, Sinnkonstrukte und Praktiken" (Translates from German by the author with the help of DeepL)

4 The rise and rise of NGOs. By Peter Hall-Jones. May 2006, In: GPF (Global Policy Forum), URL: https://archive.globalpolicy.org/component/content/article/176-general/31937.html

recognition or income. While in some countries, such as Switzerland, volunteers are often paid, in others, such as Germany, volunteering is usually unpaid. Looking at activism and professional fundraising organisations for NGOs as well as fundraising within the NGO *Amnesty International Germany*, I would like to discuss in the following the role of social sustainability regarding the work environment of social movements in NGOs.

A short introduction to NGO fundraising

I am interested in professional relationships based on face-to-face interactions to build trust, and one of the areas I have observed is NGO fundraising (Hämmerling 2023a, 2023b, 2023c, 2019). Since 2016, I have conducted 18 semi-structured qualitative interviews about face-to-face fundraising with paid fundraisers and NGOs. I analysed promotional videos and fundraising homepages (Hämmerling 2023a, 2023b). The so-called social promoters are employed by either the NGO directly (e.g., *Amnesty International Germany*) or by a private company that specializes in NGO fundraising and has a contract with the NGO it represents. I also spoke with members of *Amnesty International Germany* who are organizing and discussing fundraising strategies for the NGO, most of whom are unpaid volunteers.

During my fieldwork I regarded interviewees as actors in their fields, as representatives of common narratives about fundraising, employment, and voluntary work. However, my focus shifted over time (Strübing and Schnettler 2004: 223–224). Initially, I was primarily interested in the question how NGO fundraising was organized, later, I analysed the data with a focus on processes of subjectivation and the perspectives on work that my interviewees adopted.

Being paid or not is often a significant factor regarding the question how satisfactory a human life can be. However, there is a common belief that the poorest people were the happiest, disregarding the significance of factors such as access to healthcare, safety, unrestricted mobility, and financial security. When we learn about unhappiness or an imbalance between 'work' and 'life', or a lack of well-being, it is important not only to look at the individual causes, but at systemic inequalities. In this field of research, however, income is not necessarily a reflection of a person's quality of life, since the income stemming

from NGO activities may not be the only income the person receives: A volunteer may earn a full and stable income within the NGO, or they might just see the voluntary aid as a part of their leisure time, while they are employed elsewhere. A lot of young adults who are working as paid social promoters for NGO fundraising companies do so only for a few weeks. They may just be happy with the money they earn, seeing it as a fund for future holidays or travels. However, others see fundraising as a potential career path, with opportunities for advancement and financial stability.

Regarding social sustainability in NGO fundraising, my aim is as follows: The debates about work-life balance (Schönberger and Springer 2003; Herlyn 2009) that we know from labour markets are spilling over into volunteering. Highly institutionalized social movements need to be aware of the needs of their members, paid or unpaid.

Thus, in the first part, I argue that fundraising for NGOs has undergone a process of self-reflection during the last 20 years that has resulted in relying on employees that are fusing work with private lives and leisure time. At the same time, NGO fundraising is regarded as part of the job market, professionalised, and paid social promoters reflect on their work as labour. However, social sustainability in NGOs is not only based on payment and working conditions, but also on the well-being, feelings, conscience, and friendships of the social promoters after working hours. This is why I also discussed living situations and the time after work in my interviews.

In a second part, I show why unpaid voluntary work is sometimes seen as more sustainable than paid labour regarding people's well-being. But, on the other hand, some voluntary work is still not socially sustainable at all, with unsatisfactory working conditions. Here, I analyse how introducing the concept of sustainability in voluntary work has led to a rise of neoliberal thought in the 2010s. Generally speaking, self-improvement and discipline have long been key, both in voluntary work and neoliberalism. But now the problems of social sustainability in volunteering are being addressed professionally: with incentives, strategic recognition and certification systems.

Therefore, an evaluation of social sustainability needs to take situations and settings into account that were not much reflected upon before: Work was either done voluntarily and there was no need to reflect on its terms and conditions in the eyes of the NGO, or the work was paid, but the time spent after working hours was hardly taken

into consideration when looking at the working conditions. Nowadays, both areas are often considered but only perceived through a lens of neoliberal thought regarding the question: How can we make people work longer and more efficient?

In sum, this paper reflects on social sustainability in paid fundraising especially during the hours after work. It discusses shifts in the discourse surrounding unpaid voluntary work by showing that problems regarding social sustainability in unpaid volunteering are often countered with a toolbox of neoliberal thought: a professional reaction to a professionalised system.

Paid labour in NGO fundraising

When *Amnesty International Germany* built its own company to professionalise the face-to-face fundraising without losing donated money to private companies (who used to do this job for them), they were concerned not only with economic and ecologic but also social sustainability. It seemed especially important that a big non-profit institution should be socially sustainable. There are two main areas of social sustainability that come to mind. Firstly, the social sustainability of the NGO as an institution: A certain amount of work needs to be done here, not just now but also bindingly in the long run. Secondly, on an individual level: Each person who is working for the NGO can also be the object of social sustainability goals. They should feel so good with the work that they have the ability, possibility, and willingness to keep working. Thus, *Amnesty International Germany* overhauled the contracts for their paid workers. A social promoter with a private company had often been paid on a bonus system, meaning that they received hardly any money if they were not successful at getting donations, but earned a substantial amount once they got a lot of donations. On the contrary, the fundraisers employed directly by the NGOs own non-profit company receive a solid income no matter how many donations they bring in that day, but bonus payments are not as high.[5]

Amnesty International Germany is part of the 'Deutscher Fundraising Verband.' This ensures that all their employees are fairly and equally paid:

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5 Interview with three representatives of *Amnesty International*'s fundraising company and their advisory council, November 17, 2016.

14 Payment[:] We ensure that all paid employees are paid in line with their performance and in a non-discriminatory manner, and that payment models are transparent. We do not practice a payment that is predominantly based on a percentage without limitation to the success of donations and acquired contributions. We require service providers acting on our behalf to also comply with these rules vis-à-vis their employees.[6]

Thus, all employees in private companies under contract to *Amnesty International Germany* and within *Amnesty International*'s own fundraising company are well paid. But looking at the more subjective aspects of social sustainability, I realised that not everyone working under these privileged conditions regarding payment was happy with their work.[7] Their well-being and evaluation of their work-life balance depended very much on their feelings of safety and loyalty in their environment. They asked themselves questions of loyalty: whether kindness was bound to their efficiency; if friends would still be there for them when they got sick; and whether their new friends from work would still be in close contact if they dropped out. As it turns out, there are some societal hierarchies at play in deciding about people's feelings that should have been suspected here but had not been addressed: Inequalities concerning responsibilities of feeling, gender differences, differences regarding age or the time in one's life, attractiveness, ethnicity, and race also determined the circumstances of an individual employee's chances of being content at their workplace.

There are always images in advertisements for the job as an NGO fundraiser showing the social part of the work: the atmosphere and high energy, being young, jumping and dancing on the street while working, and leisure time after work, a picnic in the park with friends chinking glasses or bottles of beer next to a lake (Hämmerling 2023a: 206–207). Many of the fundraisers to whom I talked seemed to enjoy

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6 '14. Vergütung[:] Wir sorgen für eine leistungsgerechte, nicht diskriminierende Vergütung aller entgeltlich tätigen Mitarbeiterinnen und Mitarbeiter und die transparente Handhabung von Vergütungsmodellen. Eine Vergütung überwiegend prozentual ohne Begrenzung zum Spendenerfolg und zu akquirierten Zuwendungen praktizieren wir nicht. Dienstleister, die in unserem Namen auftreten, verpflichten wir, diese Regeln gegenüber ihren Mitarbeiterinnen und Mitarbeitern ebenfalls einzuhalten.' (Translated from German by the author with the help of DeepL). https://helfen.amnesty.de/spenden-und-ethik/.

7 Please note that many other paid positions in NGOs, also within *Amnesty International Germany*, are organised in a different fashion with a varied and often more positive outcome regarding people's well-being at work.

this 'work hard, play hard' (reflecting the discourse: Bockenheimer, Losmann and Siemens 2013) lifestyle with long hours in a small interdependent team living together in an apartment, partying at night, working in the daytime – just as the advertisement for the job promised they would. To my surprise, this image was supported by most of my interviewees.[8] They felt that the advertisement really kept its promises. I was eager to learn more about this lifestyle from an interview with Olivia, a young woman who had unofficially cohabited in an apartment where NGO social promoters were housed while they worked for a fundraising company.[9] She confirmed that social promotion for NGOs lead to blurry boundaries between work and leisure time, especially when the fundraisers were living together as they often do. Living with the fundraisers was part of her past: She had already broken up with the boyfriend with whom she used to share the apartment, and broken up with the lifestyle too. This may have influenced her critical perspective. She told me about the male fundraiser's habit to mix party and work regarding picking up women:

> Another big topic, especially among the male fundraisers, was all the pick-up stuff. They used the working day on the street to pick up women. And it turned into a real competition among them. And then, in the evening, sometimes a woman was invited to come over. Then she was presented and then the guy disappeared with her and then everyone knew: Ok. He is now having fun with her. Afterwards she disappeared again. And then the guys high-fived each other.[10]

This culture of bending skills from work into private sectors and, thereby, living male fantasies as a way of male bonding was frowned upon by the agency, but following my interviewees it seemed typical for men working and living together as social promoters.[11]

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8 Interview with Jan Salter und Chris Weingart, *Amnesty* fundraisers, October 10, 2016; Private conversation with Sandra Behringer, student and former *Amnesty* fundraiser (in a private company), Tübingen, 2018; interview with Kevin Reich, Sven Lust, and Björn Wachmann, *Amnesty International* fundraisers in Hannover, personal conversation, Hannover 2022.

9 Interview with Olivia Zuber, who secretly cohabited in a fundraising company's flat in Zurich, December 8, 2016.

10 Ibid.

11 Interview with Olivia Zuber, who secretly cohabited in a fundraising company's flat in Zurich, December 8, 2016; interview with Jan Salter und Chris Weingart, *Amnesty International* fundraisers, October 10, 2016.

Olivia generally addressed her observation that, apart from the three men who stayed in the apartment and the job for years, most people only remained for a short while: They were in a trial period and failed, or they wanted to stop working for the fundraising company themselves. People who especially wanted to do good (Dürr et.al. 2020) by working in NGO fundraising seemed to have been disappointed by the private company. In Olivia's opinion, only those who put partying before work were able and willing to stay in the job for a longer time:

> I believe that those who have done this over a longer time, over several years or so, that they appreciate the lifestyle of working during the day, without really believing in what they are doing, but putting the focus on the evenings, on parties in the shared apartment. And I don't know what he does today, but I know about two others: They – how should I put it – didn't manage to get into better jobs afterwards. […] That's why people who felt like: "Yeah, I'm working for a non-profit organization now, that fits with my ideals, with my values," left much faster. Because they realized that they just didn't fit in there.[12]

Hence, Olivia argues that fundraisers might have started the job with values and ideals in mind. But the ones who stayed were not the ones with 'good' values, otherwise they would not have been able to keep up with the lifestyle. It is not important for this analysis to know whether people working in NGO fundraising really abide by the values they promote. But this perspective shows that NGO fundraising tends to blurry boundaries between private and professional life.

The habitus of many fundraisers, even within *Amnesty International*'s own fundraising company in Germany, oscillates between two different concepts regarding the integration of one's work into one's life outside the working hours: While understanding work as an opposition to one's leisure time or private life is associated with Fordism, having fuzzy boundaries is regarded as typical for neoliberal arrangements. The life of the fundraisers for NGOs stands in between those two concepts: Fundraisers are constantly asked to put all their heart[13] and energy into the job and have their co-workers as roommates and superiors visiting at home. However, they have clear work-life boundaries regarding working hours (Hämmerling 2023a). They are encour-

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12 Ibid.

13 ‚Wir machen unsere Arbeit mit Herzblut.' translates to: 'We put our heart and soul into our work.' Self-presentation of an agency, http://www.corris.ch/ueber-corris/.

aged to celebrate what they do in both areas: to perform a happy life to connect with strangers on the street and party with their colleagues at night. The ones you are working with are also those with whom you are partying, and sometimes even the supervisors were included in the leisure time. Many interviewees felt good about this arrangement:

> It's "work and travel." You work, you travel a lot, you see a lot, it's a trip through Germany. We have seen almost every city in Germany now. Full travel coverage, that's right: up to 50 euros. And you don't have to pay for gas. Working for an agency outside of *Amnesty International's* company, you must pay for gas yourself! The "vacation apartment" is paid for, sure. In any case, you do have a team spirit, any other way it wouldn't work. And you have fun anyway. And super earnings. You could earn worse.[14]

This reflection of the current working conditions of an interviewee who was fundraising for *Amnesty International's* own company in Germany as a paid worker reads like an advertisement, evaluating the payment and costs as positive, as well as the lifetime spent in this situation. Saying that they have a team spirit and that it would not work without it again shows that this is the kind of work that depends on notions of a team that does not only need to function during work. Having a good time, having fun – a kind of social well-being – is seemingly at the root of the whole arrangement. Following this idea, if someone is feeling good it is more about the individual attitude than about the circumstances.

When I talked with female fundraisers about living in an apartment together while working, there were similar stories told: of strong friendships and parties. But other narratives dominated the interviews.[15] Fundraisers asking for donations for *Amnesty International*, hired by a private fundraising company, told me that it was hard to be controlled by their supervisors: 'You are potentially always under observation, permanently. It can always happen; you never know when you are being observed.'[16] During the first weeks at work, so-called 'coordinators' also came to the apartment, the social promoters in-

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14 Interview with Jan Salter und Chris Weingart, *Amnesty* fundraisers, October 10, 2016.

15 Interview with Julia Lachter, former fundraiser with *Amnesty International* (private company), Skype, 2016; Interview with Nataly Jameson, former fundraiser with *Amnesty International* (private company), Rome, 2019.

16 Interview with Julia Lachter, former fundraiser with *Amnesty International* (private company), Skype, 2016.

habited during the work, asking for their donation score.[17] Especially Julia, a fundraiser for a private company, in contract with *Amnesty International Germany*, disliked having to be in a party mood all the time, even after work. She would have liked more privacy, especially when she felt ill but did not want to inform her supervisor.[18]

Discussing the experience of her first week working for *Amnesty International*'s own company, Maria, a young female promoter,[19] said that she felt overwhelmed by the work itself, by being ignored by so many passers-by on the street, but – this was mostly my impression when I subsequently encountered her supervisor – presumably also by being asked in a military style to 'give full energy and 100 percent for the next 20 minutes straight, to get at least one signature right now!'[20] She also feared that her German language skills were not good enough, and still felt very much a foreigner – she had only moved to Germany about a year ago.[21]

A lot of these paid workers fade out during the first few weeks of the probationary period when they experience fundraising on the street as a job that is both mentally and physically very hard.[22] Also, many never intended to be employed for a longer time. For some, the lifestyle did not work out, others felt lonely and could not find real friends who stood by them if work did not go well. Many felt a lot of pressure to get out of their comfort zone, to be efficient and competitive. Numerous workers missed a space and time for themselves. Regarding many employees in NGO face-to-face fundraising, this was only a summer job. If they stayed longer than eight weeks, they felt as if they had been employed for a long time.[23]

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17 Interview with Olivia Zuber, who secretly cohabited in a fundraising company's flat in Zurich, December 8, 2016.

18 Interview with Julia Lachter, former fundraiser with *Amnesty International* (private company), Skype, 2016.

19 Interview with Maria Gonzáles, fundraiser with *Amnesty International*, Hannover, 2022.

20 Meeting Maria Gonzáles, fundraiser with *Amnesty International*, Hannover, 2022: Fieldnotes.

21 Interview with Maria Gonzáles, fundraiser with *Amnesty International*, Hannover, 2022.

22 Interview with Julia Lachter, former fundraiser with *Amnesty International* (private company), Skype, 2016.

23 Interview with Jan Salter und Chris Weingart, *Amnesty International* fundraisers, October 10, 2016.

Unpaid labour or volunteering in NGO fundraising

The unpaid volunteers to whom I talked, on the other hand, seemed to be more relaxed toward their work, and appeared to gain so much from it.[24] They could express themselves freely in their work, felt a 'fire'[25] for what they did, happily did a sometimes even boring job for a 'good cause', were fulfilled by their work, and even, at times, felt slightly heroic.[26] This certainly also has a lot to do with the job at hand: 'I don't know anyone who says: "I'm really into fundraising!",'[27] said Luise, the volunteering chairman of the Advisory Board of the service company for *Amnesty International's* fundraising in Germany. Her job, she felt, was closer to the NGO's main goals, therefore, she enjoyed doing her part, even though it meant a lot of work. When she went fundraising on the street, she did it freely. Sometimes she felt forced, and no longer wanted to do it, but, at other times, she had fun gathering donations in bars, and getting to know the people to whom she talked.

Nevertheless, there is also a neoliberal side to voluntary work. I saw in some interviews that the work-life balance seemed substantially out of equilibrium: Volunteers offered to come to see me for an interview in another city; they often have late hours in regular meetings; there is a necessity to be engaged long term; sometimes the work is also hard, not suitable for everyone, sometimes depending, for example, on other jobs and family; but a 'never complain' atmosphere seems to exist: You are volunteering voluntarily, if you disagree, you don't have to do the job. Additionally, volunteers are 'quitting' quietly since there are often no contracts or formal arrangements. This is not surprising, because neoliberal thought is also present in volunteering: Being in your own

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24 Nora Urban, human resources and recruiting at *Amnesty International*'s fundraising company, in an interview with three representatives of *Amnesty International's* fundraising company and their advisory council, November 17, 2016; Focus group on fundraising in South-west-Germany, Tübingen 2016; Interview with Sebastian Tillerweg, speaker of a regional group of *Amnesty International Germany*, October 27, 2016; Interview with Luise Tanner, member of the advisory board of *Amnesty International*'s fundraising company, November 25, 2016; Interview with Simon Wagner, Head of Finance of *Amnesty International Germany*, on the phone, November 19, 2016; Interview with Sandra Neumann-Auerhahn, *Amnesty International* member and regional speaker, October 8, 2016.

25 Interview with Stefan Trautwein, a district spokesman of *Amnesty International Germany*, 29.10.2016, in a café in south Germany.

26 Interview with Luise Tanner, 25.11.2016, on the phone.

27 Interview with Luise Tanner, 25.11.2016, on the phone.

company, governmentality of the self, self-control – all these concepts of the self are typical aspects of volunteering and of a neoliberal work ethic, as Gerald Winter showed in his study on volunteers (2003).

Looking back at my own experiences of volunteering for an NGO as a student, I remember thinking that it was no wonder we were having trouble keeping volunteers in our group. New volunteers were not properly introduced, and a vast amount of work was loaded on them until they found an excuse to leave. It must have felt just like unpaid labour to some of them. They were not making their own decisions, and neither did they experience a social connection. Feeling good about doing good was not enough.

Problems NGOs face regarding the work force of their voluntary members have already been addressed. But they were addressed using a neoliberal perspective: Neoliberal thought and working styles were pushed forward in voluntary work during the 2010s as a pedagogic discourse to help volunteers, as part of the social sustainability discourse. The actors carrying this discourse in the academic realm of social work, as well as in organizational management meant well. Dealing with social sustainability was regarded as a reaction to instabilities, to realities of a neoliberal lifestyle that has all work organized in projects with workers who are supposed to see themselves as entrepreneurs for their companies, even in their leisure time and when they are unemployed. This approach took neoliberal thought as a reality, seeing people's lives as a totality from an everyday perspective that is intertwined with working conditions: as 'alltägliche Lebensführung' (Voß 1991; Holzkamp 1995) which translates to 'everyday lifestyle'.

The concept 'alltägliche Lebensführung' not only leads to a shift in perception of people's lives. It also allows for a new understanding of sustainability, as Benjamin Görgens pointed out (Görgen and Grundmann 2020; Görgen 2021):

> The social dimension [of sustainability; CH] refers to ethical questions of justice and, ultimately, of the good life for all people. Not only distributive aspects play a central role here, but also questions of social recognition and the procedural design of institutions as well as opportunities and ways of life.[28] (Görgen 2021: 91)

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28 "Die soziale Dimension verweist dabei auf ethische Fragen der Gerechtigkeit und letztendlich des guten Lebens für alle Menschen. Hierbei spielen nicht nur distributive Aspekte, sondern auch Fragen der Anerkennung und der prozeduralen Ausgestaltung von Institutionen sowie Verwirklichungschancen und Lebensweisen

Thus, 'alltägliche Lebensführung' (Voß 1991) is combined with social sustainability (Littig 2020; Görgen 2021):

Everyday living is usually understood [based on Voß 1991; CH] as a process in which individuals balance the impositions imposed on them in their various spheres of life (employment, family, leisure, school, etc.) regarding their behavior within the framework of specific preconditions (living conditions, income, etc.) in relation to their own interests as well as their social environment (family, friends, neighbours, etc.) in specific arrangements. [...]. In this way, the whole breadth of everyday life comes into view. (Görgen 2021: 90)

This combination leads to new hopes and responsibilities, especially for individual subjects who care about sustainability. But it also led to a reversed look at voluntary work. Today, even activities outside of the traditional working sphere are looked at with a neoliberal perspective that stemmed from the working sphere. Ethical questions regarding not only distributive factors of chances but also a good life for all people came into play. 'Social recognition' (Honneth 2003) became key here – as a substitute for payment. It is no surprise that my interviewee Luise Tanner, voluntary head of fundraising within *Amnesty International Germany*, was proud of *Amnesty International*'s idea to hand out a certificate to volunteers who stood out in their work: 'These people receive a certificate that identifies them as "ambassadors for human rights." I thought that was very cool. Because that simply expresses appreciation.'[29] The importance of social recognition of worth outside of the work sphere seemed to give value to an area that is not dominated by the economic field. But neoliberalism works in all spheres of life. The fight for recognition, thus, transformed into the subjects themselves (Honneth 2013: 35), making the divide between work and life (and volunteering) fuzzy, as studies on 'reflexive' work show – also regarding sustainability (Hildebrandt 2000).

In a similar way, new programs promoted the concept of 'lifelong learning' (Hof 2009). In a democratizing approach, actors in NPOs wanted to give value to knowledge outside of traditional educational institutions. You can now receive certificates for tasks outside the workspace, such as volunteering. People are able to have their social engage-

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eine zentrale Rolle." (Translated from German by the author with the help of DeepL).

29 Interview with Luise Tanner, 25.11.2016, on the phone. Translated by the author.

ment recognized in their curriculum vita and start to think about a career in an NGO, just like in a private company. Moreover, volunteers receive professional training and NGOs have to be creative to come up with ways to enthuse and validate unemployed workers, giving them recognition (e.g., with the label 'volunteer of the month') without giving them money. Accordingly, 'recognition,' 'social appreciation,' 'lifelong learning,' and 'alltägliche Lebensführung' were concepts stemming from social work that were, in themselves, critical toward neoliberalism, but turned out to be co-opted by neoliberalism (Röcke 2021: 11) within the field of volunteering. Analysing NGO fundraising today with a sensitivity for social sustainability, therefore, means to analyse a system that has already reflected upon social sustainability but learned to deal with it within a neoliberal perspective. The ethnographic experience does not necessarily contrast with this perspective. Seemingly, volunteers are usually glad to be given a certificate. But looking at what keeps people going in voluntary activism and the longevity of a movement is still bound to questions regarding friendship, freedom in decision-making, options for creativity, overall social involvement, the impression of doing 'good', and making a difference.

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