Community spirit

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“Ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country.” At a time when there are repeated complaints of disenchantment with politics and about people retreating into the private sphere, John F. Kennedy’s exhortation to show community spirit is of renewed topicality. Our readiness to take active responsibility beyond our own corner of the world and to work for the greater good is a prerequisite for a functioning society.

In this issue of CREDO we present Jim Capraro, whose community initiatives have played a fundamental role in making the problem-ridden district of Southwest Chicago a place worth living in. We also talk to five volunteers from different countries and continents, all of whom devote their free time to worthy causes – whether it’s working for the global Wikipedia platform, establishing better medical provision in Tajikistan or campaigning against food waste in China. The Colombian city of Medellín used to be considered the most dangerous place in the world, and today still remains under the dual threat of violence and poverty. We visited the principal of the German School there, who is actively committed to helping a local partner school. And last but not least we hear from one of the world’s leading scientific experts on biological pest control – an Alternative Nobel Prize Laureate who has made a sustainable improvement to living conditions in Africa.

All these people have one thing in common: they are role models.

I wish you a fascinating reading experience!

H.S.H. Prince Philipp von und zu Liechtenstein
Chairman LGT Group
Jim Capraro was 16 years old when white rioters in his district of Southwest Chicago hurled stones, bottles and insults at the black civil rights campaigner Martin Luther King. That event marked Capraro’s life for good. Since then he has fought to establish a strong community spirit that welcomes everyone and makes Southwest Chicago a worthwhile place to live.

Jim Capraro is a little nervous before driving through his district. “It doesn’t all look so good in Southwest Chicago,” he warns. “The recession and the real estate crisis have hit us hard.” We’ve barely arrived on the main street when Capraro’s face lights up. He holds the wheel with just one hand, and with the other points to homes, churches, shops and people. Now aged 63, this community activist can tell a story about almost every street corner. “At school behind the church the nuns told me that anyone in the USA can become president and that this is the best country in the world.”
He laughs, shaking his head, and drives without saying a word past a row of boarded-up shop windows. In front of a building daubed with gaudy graffiti there stands a street cleaner in a yellow neon jacket. Capraro stops the car and talks briefly with the man. “Jose originally came from Mexico and has worked here for a long time already,” he explains. “He gets up every day before the crack of dawn, come wind or rain.” Capraro points to a jewelry shop. “That’s belonged to the same owner for more than 30 years – he was the first black businessman in the area.”

A few blocks further on, in front of a bank, Capraro tells how he led demonstrations back in the 1970s to combat racism and scaremongering against black incomers.

Building up something together
He parks his car in front of a light-colored brick building several stories high, with big windows. It’s a state-sponsored retirement home. The planning and funding for the project came from the Greater Southwest Development Corporation (GSDC). Jim Capraro ran this charitable organization for 35 years as its founding Executive Director. In 2010 he largely withdrew from grassroots work so that his successors could focus on their own priorities. Since then, Capraro has been acting as a consultant for communities with ethnic and economic problems in the USA and Europe. This means that the expertise he has gained in his native city can now be passed on to others.

“It’s not enough to denounce injustice. We have to build something up together.”
In the retirement home he meets his successor, Ghian Foreman, who leads him through the bright, freshly painted entrance hall, the cafeteria and a community room in which a group of elderly ladies are watching TV together. The new Executive Director of GSDC has exciting news for Capraro: Chicago's Mayor, Rahm Emanuel, and US-Vice President Joe Biden are interested in their project for the victims of domestic violence. They will probably be coming to the groundbreaking ceremony for a shelter that will offer 40 beds for those needing help. It is the first new building for such victims in Chicago in more than a decade. Capraro congratulates him.

He is convinced that working together with high-ranking politicians is just as important as having contact with members of the community. “It’s not enough to denounce injustice. We have to build something up together.” That’s why GSDC is supporting people who set up new businesses, offering courses in

**Becoming good neighbors**

Southwest Chicago, also called Chicago Lawn or Marquette Park, is a working-class district that since the early 20th century has been home primarily to immigrant families from Ireland, Eastern Europe, Germany and Italy. In the 1960s, working-class African-American families arrived there too. Violent race riots ensued. In 1966 Martin Luther King led a demonstration through the neighborhood park, and stones and bottles were thrown at him.

Thanks to the community work of charitable organizations such as the Greater Southwest Development Corporation (GSDC) and the Inner-City Muslim Action Network (IMAN), which offers medical services free of charge, Southwest Chicago has developed into a district that is seen across the country as a flagship for multicultural coexistence.

Of its roughly 55,000 residents, some 53 percent are today African American and 35 percent Hispanic, and there is an increasing number of immigrants from the Middle East. The recession and the real estate crisis have had a severe impact on Southwest Chicago. Poverty and unemployment are the biggest problems that GSDC is battling today.
computing, bookkeeping and credit and financing. And that’s why it maintains contact with banks and politicians, securing investments in real estate and infrastructure, and ensuring power supplies, garbage collection and a free Internet connection for residents and businesspeople alike along 63rd Street in Southwest Chicago. Ghian Foreman says that following in Capraro’s footsteps is both easy and difficult at the same time. “Because of him, the community has high expectations of us; but he also created a really good base to help our district move forward.” The Executive Director has to leave us, as he has an appointment at City Hall.

Getting involved as a volunteer

Capraro walks the short distance to a one-story building with a dazzling mosaic on its side wall. It’s the health clinic of the Inner-City Muslim Action Network (IMAN). Here, five days a week, Muslim physicians treat patients from all racial groups and from all cultural and religious backgrounds, free of charge. Capraro has barely entered the building when he is given a big welcome and hugged by doctors. “Jim’s a visionary! He knows what cooperation, responsibility and community spirit can achieve, and he can put that across. That’s the only reason we’re here,” says Rami Nashashibi, Executive Director of the clinic. It was set up nearly ten years ago after a public meeting that Capraro helped organize. The goal back then was to find new leaders and get them involved in working for the community. It was clear to Capraro and his colleagues at GSDC that they no longer represented the ethnic mix of the district. When they had begun their work back in the 1970s, Southwest Chicago was almost completely white. By the beginning of the 21st century, only 20 percent were still white, and they were living alongside some 40 percent Hispanics and 40 percent African Americans. The meeting provided crucial momentum for a sense of neighborhood commitment. Residents from all walks of life came to discuss poverty, violence, overcrowded schools, forced evictions and unemployment. That evening provided the necessary impetus to set up schools, hospitals and vocational training. “We proved that people will invest their time, their talent and their money in projects that are important to them,” says Capraro.

That meeting also found a way to house a mobile clinic of Muslim physicians in a former bank that had been standing empty. “The first examination tables stood next to a safe,” recalls Ahsan Arozulla. He is a general practitioner. One day every week, he comes to the center to work as a volunteer. These days, he says, everything is much better organized. “The patients can
rely on the fact that we’ll be here. That gives stability to lives that are otherwise filled with uncertainties.”

“All opportunities come from relationships. Always!”

Capraro is visibly proud of the retirement home and the clinic, and delighted that people are still working without any regard for the race, religion or age of others. “All opportunities come from relationships. Always!” That’s his mantra and he brings it into every conversation. It sums up many years of experience, and it all started on a summer’s day in 1966 that changed Jim Capraro’s life for good.

A crucial experience
He was 16 years old back then, the son of Italian immigrants, and his interests were baseball and girls. He didn’t follow politics. On that day, he wanted to take a girlfriend out in the family car for the first time. As Jim was about to drive the car to the car wash he saw hundreds of policemen on the street in riot gear. He followed them by foot to the neighborhood park, where a mob of white residents from the district was throwing bottles, bricks and firecrackers at a group of blacks.

Capraro watched, horrified, as youths pounced on a car that had stopped at a red light. Inside there was an African American couple, their faces distorted by fear. Jim turned around and ran back home. He wasn’t allowed out for the whole evening. He saw Martin Luther King on TV, his forehead stained with blood. The district was exclusively white, and he had been demonstrating in the park against racism. He said he had never before experienced such hatred. Jim couldn’t sleep. “It became clear to me that not everyone can become President,” he recalls today. He decided that someone had to do something against this injustice. “I realized that it could be me. I became a hippie.”

Putting visions into practice
Capraro marched against the Vietnam War and against racism. When a black civil rights campaigner called on white protesters to enact change in their own communities, he took it to heart. He broke off his studies, got a job as a bus driver and began working as an activist in Southwest Chicago. People there were
Jim Capraro at home in his living room.

The view on an evening from the Willis Tower towards Southwest Chicago.

Abandoned houses are barricaded to keep looters out.
scared of an “invasion” of blacks who – so they thought – would wreck their area. Banks fueled the panic with a targeted approach to real estate deals and loans.

Together with like-minded people, Capraro organized protests and acts of civil disobedience. When blacks were refused loans, Capraro and co crippled the bank branches by bombarding them with phone calls and opening and closing one account after another. They found out that real estate agents and lending institutions were causing panic among white homeowners, targeting them with phone calls warning that their property values would plummet if African Americans moved in. The agents and banks then bought up houses below market value from frightened whites, only to sell them on to blacks at inflated prices. But soon Capraro found no more satisfaction in just uncovering injustice. He wanted to maintain and improve the quality of life in his district. This became the mission of the Greater Southwest Development Corporation. To the present day, this charitable organization has secured investments of more than 500 million dollars from private businessmen, state programs and tax incentives and has used the money for projects such as preserving a cookie factory with more than 2000 jobs, building up a company for plastic products on a former illegal garbage dump, setting up a supermarket, a movie theater and several retirement homes.

“Much of what Jim has done isn’t visible, but it will continue to shape this district over several generations!” That’s the opinion of Jeff Bartow, Executive Director of the Southwest Organizing Project (SWOP), another local organization to which Capraro belonged for many years and with which he continues to work to this day. It organizes protests and community projects. “We learned from Jim how to develop a vision with the right people and to get the community involved in concrete action.” Here, too, Capraro is greeted with happy cries of welcome. The office manager tells with pride of the successful “Parents as Mentors Program” that was set up after that legendary community meeting, in which parents help out underprivileged schoolchildren on a voluntary basis. Attempts to use one-on-one contact to foster greater trust between the residents of the district and the police, however, have proven to be a more bumpy road. The same words crop up time and again: partnership, vision, responsibility and commitment. Capraro’s eyes gleam. “My heart opens up when I see how people are committed.”

“That I should live to see the day”

Capraro left the district a few years ago. It was a difficult step to take. His wife grew up just a few blocks away, and this was where they raised their two kids together. But just when he was passing on his grassroots work to his successors in Southwest, he and his wife were also busy with another process of separation. Their disabled daughter had lived with them for more than 21 years, but now they were placing her in an assisted living community in the center of Chicago. As parents, Capraro and his wife wanted to stay as close as possible to Betsy, and so they moved.

“I would never have believed a black politician could be President.”

On the drive back home, Capraro’s face clouds over again when he sees the boarded-up houses under foreclosure and the garbage in the side streets. But soon his optimism shines through again. “We’ve achieved so much! In 1966 I would never have believed that I should live to see the day when a black politician comes to a Chicago park to celebrate his election as President of the USA!” He wants to come back more often to Southwest. Ghian Foreman has invited him to the groundbreaking ceremony for the center for victims of domestic violence. The Mayor and Vice President have meanwhile confirmed that they’ll be coming. “The good thing is, we’ve already been through everything and know how to get out of any crisis: you do it together, with a vision and personal commitment!”

Since the beginning of 2007 Jim has brought his message to 76 neighborhoods in 27 cities across the United States. He has been invited to conduct training for neighborhood quarters in Munich, Germany and the Italian cities of Bergamo and Milan. Working with colleagues in the United States, Maren Schüpphaus and Wolfgang Goede of Munich’s Netzwerk Gemeinsinn, and Francesca Santaniello, PhD, urban thought leader from the Milan organization known as KCity, Jim is establishing an international network dedicated to community transformation.

» More information: www.praxis-international.org

Kerstin Zilm has been reporting from Los Angeles since 2003. She first worked as a correspondent at the ARD radio studio on the West Coast for five years, and since September 2008 has been active as a freelance journalist for radio, print and TV.
Community spirit is not just the preserve of the human race. Animals, too, give without receiving. Might this be a clue to successful evolution?

Text: Mathias Plüss | Illustrations: Markus Wyss

Orcas, also known as killer whales, organize their own “nurseries”: experienced females guard the young whales while the rest of the group hunts for food in deep water.

House mice engage in the kind of close cooperation that is found nowhere else in the animal kingdom: unrelated females will often join forces to bring up their young together. The mothers will even suckle other mice’s young, without giving their own any kind of preferential treatment.

In parts of Europe, the brightly colored Eurasian jay is also known as the “policeman of the forest”: if an unfamiliar creature ventures into his territory, he alerts his fellow forest-dwellers with a rasping screech – much to the annoyance of hunters.

In experiments, chimpanzees have shown themselves willing to help others: if they see a fellow chimp in the adjacent cage unable to get at his food, they will kindly hand him the tool that he needs.

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Among the langur monkeys of India, the older females have a special role to play: they form a kind of strike force, fighting tooth and nail to defend the rest of their group against predators.

Wolves are highly social animals. There is a little-known but interesting example of how the pack cares for its members: if an elderly wolf has lost all his teeth, other members of the pack will chew his food for him, allowing him to survive.

South African meerkats operate proper schools: selfless teachers show the assembled young how to catch live grasshoppers or eat scorpions without being killed by their poisonous sting. 

Ants are thoroughly altruistic when it comes to serving their colony – even to the point of self-sacrifice: worker ants belonging to a certain species found in Southeast Asia will spray attackers with a sticky poisonous substance, blowing themselves up in the process. Meanwhile, a Brazilian ant species protects itself from enemies every night by having a dozen of the creatures seal off the entrances to their underground nests with sand. In so doing, they shut themselves out with no chance of survival.

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“The Swarm never sleeps”

CREDO: Mr. Karolzak, what does Wikipedia want?
Michael Karolzak: Wikipedia wants to collect the world’s knowledge.

That sounds almost like megalomania.
It might well sound like that. When Jimmy Wales began the project in 2001/2002, people sneered at him. Meanwhile, Wikipedia is listed as one of the world’s top five most-often visited websites. More than 1.5 million people have contributed to Wikipedia. Our free online encyclopedia exists in more than 200 languages, including a version in Low German and even one in Rumanish. The German-language version is the third-biggest in the world and almost 6000 authors contribute regularly to it.

How much power does Wikipedia have?
A lot. Quite simply, because everyone uses us. But we’re aware of this power. There are guidelines as to how articles have to be written. And we have our basic principles such as maintaining our neutral point of view, for example, and the fact that information has to be verifiable. Credible, trustworthy sources have to be provided for everything.

Why are you so committed to Wikipedia? And how did it all begin?
I do it, basically, because I’m convinced that Wikipedia does good. And it probably began for me the same way it does for all Wikipedia authors. I kept coming across these entries in the Internet and found some of them good, some of them less good. A lot seemed to me at the beginning to be oddly fragmentary. Then I took a closer look at the whole idea, I read the introductory pages and sort of slid into it. I gradually began to understand why the entries seemed to be so incomplete.

Why?
Because everyone is called on to contribute. It’s not just that...
every Internet user can read Wikipedia: everyone can also participate as an author. That’s the idea behind it: it’s an open process. What’s great about writing Wikipedia articles is precisely that you don’t have to present a finished product. You start your work, you present your sources, and this helps the next users to get into the topic.

Who decides what's right and what isn't?
The swarm. And the sources serve as the basis for their decisions.

Is the swarm always right?
Not always. It’s difficult to use the majority principle to decide about knowledge. That’s also why there are disputes. The entries change as the years go by. And a lot happens in the background that you don’t usually notice as a normal Internet user. But disputes are good because they reflect the world as it is. Even experts dispute things among themselves. Above and beyond this, there is an arbitration committee at Wikipedia that settles conflicts.

So anyone can write for Wikipedia, anonymously. You don’t have to give your name, is that right?
That’s correct.

So how big is the danger of abuse? How do you prevent others from exerting their influence? What happens if a company wants to rewrite its own history in order to position itself better? Or if people want to gloss over things in their own biography? What if the entry on genetically modified corn is written by a food manufacturer?
The swarm helps out here, too, because it never sleeps. If a company wants to give a one-sided view of itself, the others will spot it and notify us. The PR damage would be enormous if a company tried to depict itself as cleaner than it really is. That’s how you can see the power that we have. Whitewashing will be found out. Whoever tries to change passages about themselves won’t go unnoticed. And it frequently catches your attention on account of the language alone. You can spot PR jargon, and if it crops up too often it will be investigated.

But the swarm that decides everything is itself subject to changing fashions.
That’s true. The herd instinct can be a problem. But that’s where the sources are important. Everything has to be verifiable. If someone comes up with a new source that questions everything that has been written before, the article will be rewritten. It’s this that makes Wikipedia stand out: we include everyone and we have no agenda. We want information from critics and supporters alike. If a boss wants to complete the entry for his company, then by all means, let him do it! His knowledge is also part of the total knowledge of the world. He just has to prove everything credibly. He has to uphold our neutral point of view.

When is something relevant enough to warrant an entry on it?
Not every local club has a Wikipedia entry. We have our relevance criteria, and if someone has doubts about the relevance of something, he or she can submit a deletion request. But usually, decisions are made using basic common sense.

What was your first entry?
On Zener barriers. These are safety barriers that are used in potentially explosive atmospheres so that there is no explosion when you switch on electrical equipment. After all, I’m an electrical engineer by trade.

How many hours do you invest in Wikipedia?
I don’t write as much as I used to anymore. I’m busy with other things – at the moment, that includes organizing the conferences. But I’d say: half an hour every evening is devoted to Wikipedia.

Is it worth it? After all, you’re not paid for it.
Is it worth it? Definitely. When I write an article I learn a lot in the process. I collect information, I do research, I familiarize myself with the topic. That enriches me personally. And it’s fun. Yes, however simple it might sound: Wikipedia is fun.

Michael Karolzak: “I’m convinced that Wikipedia does good.”
"I want to share my food. That’s the idea."

CREDO: Mr. Polychronopoulos, why did you decide, two years ago, to cook in public? How did it all begin?

Konstantinos Polychronopoulos: Back then I had no idea that this moment at the marketplace would change my life. I acted without thinking.

Tell us about it.

I went shopping like on any other day. I didn’t have much to do and I saw two children, both Greek kids, about ten years old. They were fighting over an old apple that they’d found in the garbage. For me, that was a metaphor for the state of this country, and I suddenly knew: I have to do something. So I went home, made a few sandwiches, ran back and handed them out.

It was an odd moment, because at first no one took any notice of me. I had difficulty giving away my sandwiches because people thought I was crazy.

But you carried on with it.

Yes. The next day I went there again, and carried on doing it. I asked the market vendors for their leftover produce. At some point someone gave me a gas stove. Since then not a day has gone by when I haven’t cooked on an afternoon. I have modest food stocks: rice, noodles, lentils, bread, vegetables, and very rarely a little meat too. I decide each morning what I’m going to prepare, then I pack everything into my car – the plates, the pots, the tables – and set off on my way.

Meanwhile you’ve got several assistants who help you.

“Assistants” is hardly the right word. It sounds as if I might be employing them. Despite all the pleasure my project brings me, I’m still penniless. I own nothing, I live from hand to mouth, all the donations I’m given go into buying foodstuffs. The people who assist me are unemployed like me. They have fallen through...
the cracks of the system. My project perhaps gives a rhythm to their lives, something to hold on to – I really don’t know. It sometimes happens that complete strangers come up to me and thank me as if I were some kind of social worker, someone who does good and hands out alms. But that’s not me.

So what do you do?
I cook. I heat oil, chop onions, and spread a tablecloth over the tables with the motto “Free food for all” on it. I don’t give money to the homeless, I’m not feeding immigrants who would otherwise starve. I’m not the Church, not the Red Cross. I want to share my food. That’s the idea. I’m a kind of host who sets his table every day for 150 people. The food is only a part of it – to me, talking with each other is just as important, exchanging views with people – people who maybe are not doing so well at the moment. We sit and laugh and sometimes one of them picks up a guitar and sings. Sometimes a restaurant nearby invites us to drink coffee. Time and again the most unbelievable things happen that never happened to me in my former life.

The rotten apple that the children were fighting over was for you a metaphor for your country in 2011. Where does Greece stand today?
At the start, lots of immigrants came to us, along with the homeless and junkies. Meanwhile it’s almost only Greeks who come. There are many families with children – they’re our regulars. They check on the Internet where we’ll be next and then come over to us. They’re all ex-workers or former employees of different companies – they’re the Greek middle classes. It’s devastating what is happening in this country, but it’s also not true that nothing can be done. When all these people sit at my table and start complaining again about the corrupt politicians, saying how hopeless everything is and wallowing in self-pity, then I always tell them: "I’ve not got a cent in my pocket, but every day I cook for 150 people. What are the rest of you doing?" The crisis was debilitating. We were all shocked. But now we have to become active, we have to wake up, we have to support each other. There are more and more small-scale citizen’s projects like mine. People who are doing something for their fellow men. I think that’s great.

Where does your food come from? How do you finance your project?
Just yesterday a farmer got in touch with me who wants to bring me potatoes. Bakers bring me bread, eggs, things they can’t sell. There are also people who give small donations. I naturally accept everything with gratitude. When companies, political parties or churches offer money I turn it down. I don’t want to be involved with any institution that aims to use us as an advertisement. I want people. I recently said to a bank: “I will only accept money from the bank director on a personal basis, not from his bank.” The craziest of all my donors lives in Belgium. He runs a little restaurant, he was never in Greece, I have never met him, and yet once a month he organizes a party and sends the proceeds to me. What a nice guy he must be!

Is anyone copying your example?
There are a few “kitchens on wheels” projects, and things are also happening on the islands. There are inquiries from other European countries, from people who want to get something similar off the ground and ask me for advice.

So you’re doing what you used to do in your “former life”: you’re consulting. How are things looking now? Would you be prepared to hold down a conventional job again, with an office, meetings and all that?
Of course. If an offer was right, I’d do it. But from two to five in the afternoon I’d have to be able to leave the office to go and heat oil in the pot and chop my onions. Through cooking I’ve found a meaning in life again, and I’m not going to give that up so easily.
“As a physician, you get right up close to people”

Why Dieter Burkhardt trains general practitioners in the remote villages of Tajikistan

For 30 years Dieter Burkhardt was a family physician in Männedorf by the banks of Lake Zurich. But he was always drawn to faraway places. He worked in a bush hospital in South Africa, he went to the West Sahara with the UN, then later worked as an army doctor in Bosnia and Kosovo, providing medical care to the Swiss KFOR troops. Since 2006 Dieter Burkhardt has been active in Tajikistan, where he runs a mentoring program. As a long-time family physician himself, he now visits general practitioners out in the Tajikistani no-man’s land. He gives training courses, helps wherever he can, and organizes the exchange of information between doctors. Burkhardt is almost 70 years old. He has three children, a lovely house on the hill that slopes down to the lake, and he could lie in a deckchair on his terrace and gaze for hours at the water just like many men of his age do. But the word ”retirement” doesn’t seem to be in his vocabulary.

CREDO: It’s difficult to imagine, Dr. Burkhardt – you’d be treating a retiree for the flu on a regular Friday evening here in Männedorf, and then the next day you’d be traveling to war-torn Bosnia?

Dieter Burkhardt: Yes, more or less. My patients naturally always knew in advance when I was going away. It was never a problem. On the contrary, I like to think that they were perhaps also a little proud of their village doctor who every now and then would go off to faraway countries.

And what was it like for you?

Well, it’s not as if I went away that often. From 1992 onwards I took part in UN peacekeeping operations, but never for longer than a month at a time. In 1997 and 1998 I was an army doctor in Bosnia, then a year after that I was in Kosovo. In 2005 I was in Aceh (Indonesia) after the tsunami, where we helped to get an abandoned infirmary up and running again.

What do you say to people who might accuse you of suffering from a “helper syndrome”?

I like being a general practitioner. However simple this answer might sound, it’s just the truth. Years ago someone asked me why I became a physician: because of people or because of medicine? I answered without hesitation “Because of people,” and I would give the same answer today. And as for being drawn to those faraway places time and again – my father was an elementary school teacher and later studied ethnology. So perhaps I’ve inherited something of his curiosity for everything exotic.
Is there also a little thirst for adventure in all this?
Of course. When I flew to the West Sahara with the UN for the first-ever time, it was in a little plane just a few meters above the ground, and I had to pinch myself – little Didi is now out in the big wide world! That’s what it felt like, and it was a good feeling. The variety of it all was later on also a big motivation. I know lots of family physicians in Switzerland who at the end of their professional career complain about having the same routine, year after year, about always having the same patients with their problems big and small. My trips were a kind of anti-burnout program. It always did me good to go away – and to come back again. I returned with more energy and new ideas – my batteries were recharged again.

What life lessons have you learned from your travels and your deployment abroad?
People are the same everywhere. I know that now. I was in Bosnia in 1997, right after the war, and I saw all the houses that had been burned down after neighbors set each others’ homes on fire. In the years beforehand, they had perhaps been friends with each other, but now they were enemies. That taught me much about life, about being human. Would we also be capable of setting alight the houses of our own neighbors? Questions like that occupied my thoughts. Would we also act like that?

And what is the answer?
The answer is: probably. They’re no different from us.

Your current project is different from your previous deployments. In Tajikistan you’re training general practitioners in little villages. Why? Are there no good doctors out there?
The problem lies in the healthcare system, which is the same as it was in the Soviet era. In Tajikistan, medical students specialize right from the beginning of their studies. Not after six years like with us. So what we’re doing is a kind of retraining. We’re turning specialists into general practitioners. The motto of the project is: “Teaching on the job.” We travel there, we look at the methods the physicians are using to treat their patients, we give advice and we discuss problems. The physicians are not inferior to those over here, but they lack the necessary aids. They can’t even carry out an ECG, and their laboratory measurements of urine and blood are not always reliable. So it’s all the more important to talk to patients – but in this they also lack the basics. We show the doctors how to approach patients, what questions to ask them. It’s about what you can see, hear and smell. These are in part quite simple examination techniques, but they are decisive in regions like that.

What do people suffer from in these outlying places?
As far as health is concerned, it’s no different from here in Switzerland. There are lots of children, so the topic of inoculation is important. In the summer, diarrhea can occur. And so on.

What cultural differences do you come across?
People only think a doctor is any good if he dishes out lots of medicine – injections are best of all. This cliché is stuck in people’s minds and is difficult to get rid of. What else? The role of the nurse is very important. She knows everything about the people in the village – she’s the midwife and psychologist all in one. Corruption is also an issue. Out in the countryside, physicians have always been bribed. That’s why poor people avoid going to the doctor – they think that they won’t be able to find the money for it. We’re getting to grips with all these topics.

For weeks on end you leave your family and your warm home behind you. You travel hundreds of miles and live on the spot in simple dwellings. Is it all worth it?
Without a doubt. I really believe that we’re doing something sustainable, even though I can’t really bear to hear that word anymore, it’s so hackneyed. Of course, I can’t prove anything because there are no facts and figures. But I’m convinced that our mission is having an impact that goes beyond the moment. And for me personally it’s worth it just to experience those special moments when we all sit together on the floor after a house call – the patient, his family and the doctors. In Tajikistan it’s normal to drink tea and eat snacks together. You can’t find a quicker or more intense way of establishing contact with the local population. As a physician, you get right up close to people.
“People order much too much to eat”

Why Xu Zhijun uses his blog to battle against wasting food in China

Xu Zhijun’s chopsticks move from his plate to his mouth in a rapid staccato. His brow is furrowed from sheer concentration. Once the final grain of rice has been picked up, he wipes away the last of his sauce with a bread roll. “That’s how it should look,” he says contentedly. He pulls out his cell phone and takes a photograph of his plate, polished clean – just as he does after every meal. Soon, more than two million Chinese will see his plate on the Internet – that’s how many fans he has for his microblog. His pseudonym is “Xia Ke,” a name given to those schooled in martial arts who have also proven themselves to possess a strong sense of justice. Xu’s battle, however, is against wasting food in China. According to official sources, 50 million tons of foodstuffs are thrown away every year in China. That’s equal to ten percent of China’s grain production and would be enough to feed 200 million people for a whole year. What Xu, 43, began on his own in April 2012 has become a full-scale campaign called “empty plate.” President Xi Jinping of China has personally declared war on wasting food – even at the lavish state banquets that swallowed up 48 billion dollars in the year before.

CREDO: Mr. Xu, what set off your “empty plate” campaign?
Xu Zhijun: I remember the day exactly when it all began. It was April 22, 2012, Earth Day. A documentary called “Luxury waste” was shown in China about food that’s wasted in student cafeterias. I work at the Ministry of Land and Resources in Beijing and came up against this topic several times, for wasting food also has a lot to do with environmental pollution. In China water is very scarce and most of it is used for agriculture – in other words for all the foodstuffs that then land in the trash.

What is so unusual about finishing everything on your plate?
For me it was always natural to eat everything that was put on my plate. I grew up in a rural area and once worked out in the fields. I know how arduous it is to plant grain and to harvest it. But people in the cities don’t know that. They order much too much to eat in restaurants. That is how a host proves that money doesn’t matter to him. When I put the first photos of my empty plates into the Internet, people doubted whether it was even possible to eat up everything like that.

How did it turn into such a big campaign that even the President has taken up the subject?
I sent my photos and videos to a few prominent people whose microblogs are read by millions. They circulated them and that attracted a lot of attention. Then the state news agency Xinhua took an interest in it and wrote about me in its internal reports that are only meant for higher-ranking government employees. They gave their blessing, and on January 28, 2012, the state TV company CCTV broadcast a program about the campaign.

Why is the topic politically significant?
Wasting food is also a problem to do with corruption. The
government doesn’t offer a good example, for the state could save ten billion yuan a year (that’s 1.45 billion Swiss francs) if members of the government would spend just one percent less of taxpayers’ money on eating, drinking and official trips. The new party leadership wants to curb these excesses and has started a big anti-corruption campaign. That’s why they started supporting my grassroots campaign publicly at the beginning of this year. But really we ought to get rid of the whole expenses system for functionaries. Whoever pays for his own meal won’t order as much.

You work for the government yourself. Don’t your colleagues see you as a spoilsport? Do they still go out eating with you? I’ve had no trouble so far – in fact, people have tended to be supportive about it. Sometimes we organize dinner parties where we take photos of our empty plates at the end. Just this morning, some people in the cafeteria came across from the neighboring table and wanted to have pictures taken of them together with their empty plates and me. Sometimes, however, I get invitations to banquets. Then I say: “I’d love to come, but I’ll upload photos onto the Internet afterwards.” Then they say: “OK, forget it.”

Do you notice any changes in everyday life? I have the feeling that things are getting better. More and more often you can see people in restaurants having their leftovers packed in doggy bags. The restaurants are also feeling the political pressure and are encouraging people to ask for doggy bags, which previously weren’t even available. Many restaurants are now offering smaller portions. And more and more often, friends eating among themselves tend to split the check, like in Europe. The pressure on people to show how generous they are is getting less intense. As it happens, many government employees aren’t so unhappy at all about this new modesty. A friend said to me recently that he finally has more time for his family because he no longer has to attend official dinners all the time. And people are also drinking less.

Are you a lone warrior in your battle against wasting food? No. I was the first person to photograph my plate before and after eating every day, but now many others are doing it too. Some of them give out flyers in restaurants or hang up posters. I now have two million fans on my personal microblog. And more than four million are following the campaign.
“When children are lost, everything changes”

Why Irina Vorobieva gives up her free time to hunt for missing people in Moscow
“I’ll never get used to this cold,” says Irina Vorobieva. She orders coffee and sits down. Irina is 28 years old and works during the day as a journalist for Radio Moscow, reporting on demonstrations or corrupt politicians. “The usual madness” she calls it, laughing. Like many young women in this city of eleven million people she’s got brightly polished nails. She hurriedly smokes her thin cigarettes. When Irina isn’t working for the radio she’s looking for missing persons – children who haven’t returned from school, or retired people who’ve disappeared. “Right now, in wintertime, it’s tragic,” says Irina, looking all the while at her smartphone that she’s placed on the table in front of her. She never lets it out of her sight. Irina Vorobieva is one of the founders of Liza Alert, an organization that looks for missing persons.

Credo: You co-founded the organization Liza Alert. What made you do it?
Irina Vorobieva: It all started in 2010 when the news suddenly came through that a young girl had disappeared in a forest on the edge of Moscow. The kid was out with her aunt, who had a slight mental handicap. Relatives and friends used Facebook to call on people to help with the search, which I then did. We were a completely uncoordinated bunch of people. Totally motivated, but very chaotic all the same. We looked for them for days and found them in the end – but they were already dead. The aunt had probably died first of hunger, thirst and the cold. We found the little girl quite a distance from her. Her name was Liza Fomkina. We then decided to set up an organization, and called it after her.

How many people have you saved since then?
It’s difficult to say. It’s several hundred, without a doubt. Often they’re old, easily confused people who’ve lost their way. Sometimes alcohol plays a role in it. There’s also been the classic case of someone who just wanted to go out and buy cigarettes and then didn’t turn up again for four days afterwards. But when children are lost, everything changes. I notice it in myself and in the other helpers. We get nervous and can think of nothing else. In many cases, it’s a sexual crime and the children have disappeared without a trace. Only very few cases end happily, like it did with Sasha, a seven-year-old boy who was lost in the woods. He walked around in circles for days on his own, drinking rain water and chewing on leaves. We found him trembling with fear in a birch forest.
How is he today?
He’s being treated and can’t go back to school yet. He has difficulty sleeping. His mother told me that he really likes to paint. He paints everything in the whole world, for hours on end – but he doesn’t paint any trees.

Why is Liza Alert necessary? Isn’t it the job of the police to look for missing persons?
Let’s be diplomatic about it: the police have too few people to be able to go on intensive searches for missing persons. Yet it’s odd that so many police are around when there’s a political demonstration, but suddenly no one has any time when old people go missing. But I don’t want to complain. Often we also work together and pass on cases to each other.

How many volunteer helpers work for Liza Alert, and what kind of people spend their free time searching for people they don’t even know?
We organize our searches via the Internet, using Facebook and Twitter – these platforms are of decisive importance to us. (Irina points to her smartphone on the table.) It depends, but there can be some 50 volunteers on a search. Sometimes, over the whole search period, several hundred might take part. Let’s put it like this: throughout the whole country we have maybe 500 permanent members who are trained and experienced and can carry out search campaigns. What kind of people are they? Some come on their bike, others in their luxury Mercedes. Some are unemployed, others have senior management positions. What they all have in common is that they have a sense of community spirit. That’s what marks them out – they’re concerned about the injustice that takes place outside their own four walls. For Russia, that’s rather unusual.

What do you mean by that?
Four years ago Moscow was surrounded by forest fires that could barely be kept under control. The city lay under a cloud of smoke and the rescue services couldn’t make any progress. Then neighbors began to organize themselves via Facebook. Together, hundreds fought against the flames. Something then happened in the minds of the Muscovites, because since that time you notice how more and more people are becoming active themselves. They feel part of something bigger. That never used to be the case. In communism, you just relied on the state and it would never even have occurred to anyone to take things into their own hands.

And later on, in the 1990s?
Lots of people say it took these 20 years for Russians to get over the fear that they’ve felt in their bones since Stalin. Only today are people overcoming their lethargy. Instead of just talking and drinking, people are at last actually doing something. I think that the Internet has changed lots of things, with its swarm principle and the realization that we’re only strong if we stay together. And then there’s something else that’s decisive: we’re the first generation that has grown up in relative prosperity. We’re no longer just concerned about being able to feed our kids, how to get a new TV or a new car or how to afford a vacation in Thailand. We’ve got all that already. Now we want more. We want justice. We want to live in a country in which people look after each other. That’s why our volunteers scour through the forest in the rain to try and find children they don’t even know. They don’t want to just stand idly by and watch nothing happening.

Do more people disappear in Moscow than elsewhere?
I don’t know about that. But there’s no doubt that Moscow is a dangerous city. It’s raw, and less easy to control than cities in the West. Especially at night lots of things happen here, and sometimes we have to call off our searches because it gets too dicey. And what’s more: Moscow is surrounded by giant forests where you can wander around for days without seeing a single soul. Lots of Muscovites go on picnics in the summer and go picking mushrooms in the autumn. Then they drink vodka, lose their sense of direction, and fall asleep – it can happen so easily.

How do you cope emotionally with this work? What happens if you look for someone and don’t find them?
It gets very stressful, of course. We discuss it all. We talk about it. And yet: once you’ve found someone again and they’re alive, you’re never again willing to let yourself get discouraged.
Special interests are superseding the common good

The state has a duty to serve the common interests of its citizens rather than catering to special interests and building up mountains of debt. Sociologist Erich Weede sees the fulfillment of this duty as one of the unsolved problems of representative democracies.

There is a difference between the interests of taxpaying voters and the interests of those elected. Levying taxes is in the interests of those who have made a career out of politics, have been elected to an office and want to help shape society. The same applies even if such interest lies in serving the needs of voter groups. From the taxpayers’ perspective, taxes are an evil that reduces people’s discretionary power to do as they please with the fruits of their own labor, conferring it instead on representatives who are, for the most part, elected by other people.

The state should focus its efforts on the common interests of its citizens or the procurement of public goods, and particularly on the free market economy. This will enable people to work for themselves and for their families, with serving state purposes being only an incidental consideration. The existence of a free market economy can be associated with serving the common good because, in econometric studies, economic freedom is a key determinant of prosperity and growth.

The constitutional state
Economic freedom is linked to the rule of law. If a person belongs to himself, then the fruits of his labor also belong to him. Entrepreneurs must be aware of the legal consequences of their actions. The law is inextricably connected with the limitation of political power and, in the case of legal rule, the freedom of every individual to make decisions is restricted by law. Most constitutional states limit the scope of the democratic principle of majority rule, but the power of the law should not be overestimated. The state can enforce agreements between its citizens. When it comes to the relations between state and citizens, however, compliance with the law is a more problematic issue. In the first instance the state is impartial, but in the second it is not.

In the West, the struggle for freedom and the limits of state power initially led to “the rule of law” and later gave rise to democracy. It is conceivable that, through freedom and law, democracy jeopardizes the foundations of its own existence. Back in 1944, Friedrich August von Hayek – who would later go on to win the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences – was already expressing the fear that western democracies were “on the road to serfdom.” He repeatedly stressed that the restriction of state power was at least as important as the selection of government personnel.

Democracy
A key concept in economic theory on democracy is rational ignorance. In a democracy, an individual’s own vote does not have much influence on election results and politics, so ignorance is rational. Some people overcome this ignorance, however – particularly those with specific interests. Beneficiaries of subsidies and social benefits have much better knowledge of these matters than the rest of the electorate. If only those with particular interests are reasonably well informed, while the majority of citizens who are only affected indirectly as taxpayers or consumers are barely informed at all, then it is worthwhile for politicians who rely on election results to pander largely to the wishes of
the favored, informed minority with every political measure they take and to promote the greatest possible, perceptible benefits for them, at the expense of the poorly informed or completely ignorant majority. In addition to the influence exerted by organized special interest groups or lobbyists, the hubris of politicians who believe they can provide for all eventualities also contributes toward the excessive complexity of laws and economic overregulation, which inhibits growth.

In their normal state, western democracies are characterized by a constant rise in public expenditure ratios. Since the 1960s, the increase in public expenditure in European democracies has been primarily due to the expansion of the welfare state or to serving the particular interests of those who claim poverty and make demands. Redistribution and the tax burden this requires have disastrous consequences, because they weaken the incentives to work, as well as the incentives for parents to instill in their children a willingness to learn and a sense of work discipline. Why should parents of not particularly gifted children worry about their education and their attitude to work when many working people barely earn any more than those who receive social benefits? High and progressive taxes also play a role in slowing down structural change, because they slow down the growth of successful businesses.

Although economic freedom and the prosperity it brings contribute significantly toward democracy, the long-term compatibility between economic freedom and democracy must be called into question. The democratic principle of majority rule implies that governments are reliant on the acceptance of a large number of citizens. By intervening in the property rights and in the freedom of contract of its citizens, a government can redistribute resources, buy itself acceptance and thus build up more and more bureaucracy that could potentially compromise freedom, which paves the way for future interventions and redistributions.

The sovereign debt crisis

Although compulsory levies have been on the rise for a long time in wealthy democracies, the income from this is hardly ever sufficient to cover expenditure. Explicit debt ratios in the region of 90 percent of GDP (gross domestic product) are typical. Since Europe has an aging population, state commitments to civil servants, senior citizens, people who are sick or disabled and those in need of care that are not covered by accumulated capital should be added to the public debt. As a result, all major western democracies have already run up debts totaling GDP several times over. One particularly attractive option, in political terms, is to shift the financial burden to future taxpayers who are not yet able to vote. The euro rescue measures are an attempt to bolster national welfare states by adding a European transfer community and thus hasten the march toward creeping socialism. Now, relatively sound budgetary policies such as those in Germany, Finland or the Netherlands are being punished by the need to help less robust states. Europe’s politicians are acting as if rewarding failure and fiscal instability would be a good principle to follow.

The future of western democracies depends on whether a non-inflationary way out can be found for the overregulated, heavily indebted and aging welfare states. Unless there is a return to the principles of self-responsibility and liability for one’s own mistakes, there can be no future for Europe. Neither a constitutional format nor a democratic decision-making process can save us from the consequences of poor decisions and ubiquitous false incentives. The most important tool for restricting inefficient and useless state activity remains the locational and tax competition between states, which is reduced rather than intensified by a “more Europe” policy.

Throughout Colombia’s history, only a narrow elite has had a hand in the country’s destiny. This is why the famous Colegio Alemán wants to give its students more than just an academic education. They are to develop a community spirit – and help students at their partner school in a district plagued by warring drug gangs to make their way in society.

The driver had said so already: the grounds of the German School were more beautiful than Medellín’s Botanical Gardens. It was located, he said, like a finca in the mountains, at over 5500 feet. Pavilions set in a sea of green. For elementary, junior high and senior high school pupils, for the kindergarten, the sports hall, the concert hall. And then this principal. He came to the hospital when the driver’s son was born, he said. To see him, the taxi driver, of all people!

“Welcome to the Colegio Alemán,” says Dominik Scheuten, a friendly man in his mid-40s wearing a pale pink shirt and rimless glasses. For the last four years, he has been principal of the German School in Medellín, which has over 1100 pupils from
Besides a first-class education, the pupils at the German School should also get a pronounced social conscience. Principal Dominik Scheuten (above right) is keen to make his students aware of the problems griping the country through community service schemes and voluntary work.
kindergarten age through to 18-year-olds taking their final “Abitur” exam. Anyone accepted here has a wealth of opportunities ahead of them in Colombia, because the school’s teaching has an excellent reputation – and because they come from the right families. At EUR 300 per month, school fees are not exactly cheap in a country where the lowest wages are just under EUR 230, with families of four often having to get by on this amount.

Colombia is a country with a kind of caste system, something that is clear by how society is divided socio-economically into classes or strata, known as estratos. Estrato 0 covers those that have nothing. The people who live on mountain slopes at risk of landslides, without drinking water or sanitation. Estratos 1 to 3 are deemed so poor that they do not have to pay admission fees in museums, for example. Around eight in ten people in Medellín belong to this group. Estrato 4 is the middle class, which makes up only a small percentage of the population. Estratos 5 and 6 have it all: fincas, vacations in Miami, domestic staff.

“We want high school graduates who develop a social conscience.”

Essentially, the division into estratos is used to calculate electricity and water bills: those who have little get cheap rates, while those that can, pay more. But in a way it can also predict a child’s future: tell me your estrato and I’ll tell you how much you’ll earn when you’re grown up. How much you’ll influence your country’s destiny. The students at the Colegio Alemán come from estratos 5 and 6.

Thinking differently

Scheuten knew what he was letting himself in for when he took the job. He was aware of the contrasts that exist in the country, having himself taken his final teaching exams in Colombia back in the 1990s. His mission is to make alumni of the German School think differently from those at other private schools: “We want high school graduates who excel academically, are capable of studying anywhere in the world, know German, and are developing a social conscience.” Scheuten is keen to make his students aware of the problems gripping the country through community service schemes and voluntary work.

Specifically, this means supporting a partner school in a district of the city of Itagüí that is plagued by warring drug gangs, and providing scholarships for outstanding students from poor families. “By doing this, we are helping people on their way in life, ideally enabling them to make a positive impact themselves on the world around them,” says Scheuten. And then there are the 80 hours of community service that every eleventh-grade pupil at the German School must complete. This can involve caring for disabled children or helping poor families build wooden huts.

“Real life”

Valeria, 15, is an exception: she belongs to estrato 3. Her mother works in the school office, so her daughter’s education is free. Valeria’s mother Alba explains: “I told Valeria back then: ‘your classmates will tell you tales of their vacations and have expensive cell phones, large houses and designer clothes. You won’t have any of that. You can switch to a public school whenever you want.’”

Valeria wanted to stay. “I’ve learned that having more does not make you worth more,” she says. That sounds remarkably perceptive for a tenth-grade student. “I’m looking forward to doing community service next year – if it had been up to me, I’d have started already.” She believes the project work will bring about a change in her classmates’ views: “When they see real life, maybe they’ll change their way of thinking a bit.”

“Real life”? Valeria brushes her dark hair away from her face and smiles shyly. She can’t help being a little embarrassed at being quizzed by a journalist, particularly sitting on a bench in the center of the park-like school grounds and in full view of her fellow students. Maybe this is why she changes the subject, telling the story of the zombie dance that she and her friends want to put on in the afternoon in various locations: in a park, in a shopping mall, wearing spooky make-up. “Just like a flash mob – suddenly we appear!”

Her mother is back at work again, in the administration pavilion. Here, a large portrait of German President Joachim Gauck hangs beside the principal’s desk. Together with his partner Daniela Schadt, the President visited Colombia in May 2013 and was given a tour of Medellín by students from the German School. One of his guides was 17-year-old Agustín, the president of class 11A. He and Gauck took the aerial tramway together to the Santo Domingo district (though they went in different cars, because Gauck had to travel with his bodyguards). The President had come to Colombia to exchange ideas on how a country can come to terms with its own history. He also wanted to see the reality of the country in all its many different forms. No visit would be complete without a trip on the aerial tramway, which
has been held up across the world as an example for inclusion. The poor live up at the top, the rich down in the valley below. The journey to the bottom now lasts 30 minutes – previously, the buses could take up to two hours to navigate the steep lanes.

**Wooden huts in the poor district**

Many of those living at the top of the mountain are internally displaced persons. Colombia has over five million such people, more than any other country apart from Sudan. Colombia’s armed conflict between guerillas, the armed forces and paramilitary organizations will soon have been raging for 50 years now – with the ordinary people caught up in the middle. Massacres, threats and murders are commonplace. They have settled on the outskirts of the big cities – simple peasant farmers who are unable to return to their homes.

One of the community service projects available to this year’s eleventh grade at the Colegio Alemán was based on one of these mountain slopes. Under the guidance of the “Techo” ("Roof") organization, the students helped to construct wooden huts in a poor area of the city. But that’s not all: before this happened, a group of 27 students had spent a year collecting money to build the huts, selling nachos at school parties and organizing various other campaigns. But when it came to doing the actual work, some students weren’t allowed to take part: it was too dangerous, thought the parents. Others were unable or unwilling to go: if the excuses are anything to go by, then a surprisingly large number of pupils had important family gatherings or birthdays to celebrate that weekend. In the end only four really pitched in, among them Agustín, tour guide to the German President.

For a weekend, they slept in sleeping bags at a school very close to the poor district. “There was not even any running water there,” says Agustín, who is around six feet tall with short hair. He wants to be a physician or a businessman, but has not yet fully made up his mind. Thanks to the project, this is the first time that he has been up the mountain, to one of these villages of wooden shacks. Paradoxically, the poor people who call this home also have the best view of the city from up here, looking out over downtown Medellín and the skyscrapers of the El Poblado district, where the rich people live. “Down below, we live in a great bubble in which we’re doing just fine,” Agustín says. “I’m sorry, the elevator’s broken,” she says with an embarrassed laugh, offering a helping hand to visitors who slip and slide while clambering up the steep, muddy path. Yesterday saw heavy rain, and some has leaked in. “Where exactly?” Agustín asks. Without further ado, he grabs a hammer, climbs onto the roof and adjusts the nails. It’s a matter of honor. After all, he was part of the team that rammed the posts now supporting the house into the ground. Then he talks about how much fun he has had building the hut, and how the neighbors brought hot chocolate when it started to rain: “They have shown us the most amazing welcome,” he says.

**“Down below, we live in a great bubble in which we’re doing just fine.”**

**Education nurtures humanity**

Back at the German School, the settlements cobbled together on the mountain slopes seem a world away. Hummingbirds are buzzing outside the principal’s office. From his desk, Dominik Scheuten can look out over the plot where the “staff pineapples” are grown – once a year, employees at the school divide up the fruit between them. The principal is sitting in his office and replying patiently to all questions.

How important are the community service projects at the school? “Very,” he says. “Parents see them as invaluable.” He is not a man accustomed to mincing his words. For instance, at a parents’ night he once called on everyone to treat their domestic staff well and give them proper access to education. Most domestic staff in Colombia are given tiny rooms in their
employer’s house. Day and night, they have to look after their employer’s children, even though they might not see their own children for days on end.

“For my own sense of well-being, it’s important that I make a difference to the world around me,” Scheuten says. He speaks hesitantly – maybe he doesn’t want to boast about how he is funding further training for his maid, or how he bought her a motorbike so she can dodge the traffic and make it to work and back home in the evenings on time. He also did what he could to ensure that one 15-year-old boy at the partner school in the poor district could finally learn to speak properly: “In Europe, he would have had an operation to fix his cleft lip when he was still a baby.”

The school has a tradition of social commitment, says Scheuten. The Colegio Alemán was founded in 1969 by Benedikta Zur Nieden, who was born in Herscheid and moved to Medellín in 1934 to be with her husband. Her story is an unhappy one: when her 19-year-old daughter died and her husband was kidnapped and murdered – supposedly on the orders of the drug baron Pablo Escobar – she bequeathed her many estates to educational institutions. Education nurtures humanity, said the ill-fated Benedikta before her return to Germany.

**The Juan Echeverry Abad partner school**

Many years ago, therefore, the Colegio Alemán established a partnership with the Juan Echeverry Abad school, situated in a no-go zone in Itagüí. In their original single-story building, the pupils scarcely had enough space to sit on the floor. The current building was extended with help from the German School: three floors high, plus a playground and sports field. It should have been the government’s job. But the government doesn’t fulfil its obligations. Not then, and not today either: for around 500 children, it provides only 57 school lunches.

“And being part of a group can be a bit like a life insurance policy.”
Not long ago, the partner school had nearly 1200 pupils, as many as the Colegio Alemán. But the area is a battlefield: the drug gangs have laid down invisible boundaries that must not be crossed by anyone – even the students. Nowadays, only 487 come to lessons. The others don’t dare, says the school’s principal. But at least no students were murdered last year, she says – the year before, there were three.

Music coming from the sports field drifts into the classrooms. It’s band practice time. The 60 children who are playing start off in a bit of a muddle but then line up like a marching band: at the front on the left-hand side the dancers, on the right the girls twirling their batons. Behind them the wind and brass – clarinets, trombones, trumpets, a tuba. The glockenspiel players. And bringing up the rear the drummers and timpanists. It’s a minor miracle: as little as five months ago, none of the children could play an instrument. But since then they have all come together, enthusiastic and ambitious.

The band was set up by the German School, which still pays the three music teachers who rehearse with the children on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. “We hope they’d rather take up an instrument than a weapon,” says Principal Scheuten. “And being part of a group can be a bit like a life insurance policy. Something like that gets you respect, even in troubled districts. Music is highly regarded in Colombia, across all levels of society.” It’s true, says a boy we shall call Norberto: music has led him to think new things. With a saxophone in his hand, he says, he feels a bit like Lisa from The Simpsons. Not long ago, his brother was shot dead during a gang battle.

“Are you sitting down?”
When the call came, 15-year-old Javier Eulisses was at home. At the time, he lived only a few yards from the partner school’s sports field. He passed ninth grade by the skin of his teeth and was nearly forced to repeat the year. In tenth grade, however, he “put the batteries in,” as they say in Spanish. And suddenly he was top of the class, and vice-captain of the volleyball team. “Are you sitting down?” asked the then principal over the phone. “You’re flying to Germany. For a year.” “I was sweating, crying, my head was spinning, and I hung up,” says Javier. Then the phone rang again.

Javier didn’t have a passport. Why would he need one, anyway? A boy from this district doesn’t travel anywhere, except perhaps to a finca to see relatives. His mother is a housewife.
his father a poorly paid security guard. Three younger siblings. Their little house under constant threat of being swept away every time the nearby stream swelled to a raging torrent after a tropical storm.

“The year I spent in Germany changed my life,” Javier says. Now in his early 20s and very tall for a Colombian at just over six feet, he recounts how he used to cycle even at night in a park without feeling afraid. How he was embarrassed when, naked in the communal showers at a swimming pool, he suddenly found himself standing next to other men. That you have to bring your own meat to a barbecue, hardly know your neighbors and have to be quiet so as not to annoy them. “I learned a lot, now turn up on time and have put on over 50 pounds,” Javier laughs.

Then he turns more serious: after coming home from Germany, he received further support from the Colegio Alemán, qualified as an occupational health and safety officer, and soon found a job. His wages enabled his family to build a new house a bit higher up the mountain. Another, for his uncle this time, is under construction. Although Javier is not one to complain, what he would really like is a house of his own to share with his girlfriend. Maybe in another part of town. Because even staying home isn’t safe around here. A few months ago, members of a gang broke in and shot his younger brother Saul three times in the head and chest from point-blank range. The next day, they came back to apologize: they had mistaken the brother for someone else. Miraculously, Saul survived – one of the bullets is still lodged in his body. Like Javier, he too wants to be an occupational health and safety officer.

In their new house on the mountainside, Javier and his siblings listen to the band of the Juan Echeverry Abad partner school practicing. “Really very good, for the little time they’ve had,” he thinks. It’s not just the sound of a student band – it’s the sound of hope.

Journalist Karen Naundorf lives in Buenos Aires and works as a freelance reporter for well-known magazines including “Der Spiegel,” “Die Zeit,” “GEO Special” and “Neon” as well as radio and TV. Her main area of expertise is South America.

…than a weapon,” says Principal Dominik Scheuten. Today, the sounds of the marching band echo from the sports field to the classrooms. It’s a minor miracle: just a few months ago, none of the children could play an instrument.
Her heart deeply touched by the poverty around her, the woman devotes her gaze completely to the little child at her feet. With her right hand she offers a coin, while the child in turn offers affection with open arms. The benefactress is Elizabeth of Portugal, married to King Denis since her twelfth year and possessed of considerable means thanks to her marriage contract. A page to her left hands her alms for the poor from a bowl full of gold and silver coins that signify her riches. To the left at the front, a mother with bare feet is leaving with her three children; she has already received her portion. To the right sits a beggar, reciting the Holy Rosary while waiting for his alms. Behind him, a woman with open arms advances to the Queen, full of hope. Above the Queen, angels hover, bearing a cornucopia from which coins fall to earth. A little cherub holds a garland, representing the heavenly crown that Elizabeth will earn for her deeds.

“St. Elizabeth of Portugal giving alms” was painted in 1736/37 by the Austrian artist Daniel Gran (1694 to 1757), more than a 100 years after the canonization of Elizabeth and 400 years after her death. She was born in Zaragoza in Spain around 1270, and after her marriage she lived in Portugal. Elizabeth's role as a peacemaker was as legendary as her unwavering piety. She did not just patronize churches and monasteries, but personally dedicated herself to the needy – including lepers whose wounds she tended, and the poor, to whom she gave generous alms.

In those times, much of the population suffered from poverty, and welfare was primarily a matter for private citizens, monasteries and foundations. Alms and donations given as an act of Christian charity were also “treasure stored in heaven” that helped the almsgiver to attain salvation for his or her soul. At the same time, there emerged in the early 12th century a poverty movement that took its cue from the Biblical parable of the rich man and Lazarus, and differentiated between the “involuntary poor” and the “voluntary poor.”

The mendicant orders, including the Franciscans and the Poor Clares, practiced a life without possessions after the example of Christ. They respected the dignity of the poor for their own sake, without preconditions. Elizabeth of Portugal withdrew to Coimbra in 1325 after the death of her husband, and as a member of the Third Order of St. Francis she placed herself at the service of the poor and the sick until her death in 1336. This “Third Order” that she chose for her monastic life meant that she was committed to the spiritual and charitable spirit of the Franciscans without living among the Order herself.

The duty of a ruler, the aristocracy and the Church to care for the penniless was a major topic of the time, amidst all the Baroque magnificence of the triumphant Church of the Counter-Reformation. As a result of the accelerating pace of change in society and religion that was then compounded by the French...
Revolution, the middle classes would later embark on a debate about the virtues of public versus private relief for the poor. It was questioned whether private charity ought not to be a merely supplementary measure, with the main emphasis placed instead on institutional help and on strengthening the will of the poor to help themselves. Others feared a “taxpayer mentality” on the part of donors and so campaigned in favor of acts of public spiritedness derived from personal conviction. But an overarching sense of public welfare as a point of reference for their actions was something that both groups had in common.

Dr. Johann Kräftner is the director of the Princely Collections of the House of Liechtenstein and from 2002 to 2011 was director of the LIECHTENSTEIN MUSEUM, Vienna. He is the author of numerous monographs on the history and theory of architecture.
Opposites attract: this is often the culminating point in the tense process of contrasting characters coming together. In her mid-19th century novel “North and South,” a love story played out against the backdrop of the industrial revolution, British author Elizabeth Gaskell followed the same dramatic vein. At the same time, she knew how to reconcile opposing forces, such as the social conflicts of interest between the north and the south of England, between the emerging “industrial aristocracy” and the long-established landed gentry, and between rich and poor.

Margaret Hale is a carefree young woman of 19 when her father, for reasons of conscience, gives up his post as vicar in the charming southern English village of Helstone and the family has to move to Milton-Northern in Darkshire, a fictitious depiction of real-life Manchester. The town is a center of cotton manufacturing, and Margaret finds it a cold and hostile place at first. She is deeply troubled by the poverty she encounters there and the often violent clashes between workers and mill owners.

Her father is now working as a tutor and one of his students is a certain John Thornton, the owner of Marlborough Mills. To begin with, Margaret thinks John is coarse and churlish, but after a while she is forced to respect him for what he has made of himself from his own initiative. His first impression of her is of an arrogant goose, but he gradually finds himself attracted by her directness and self-confidence.

In parallel with this romantic narrative thread, the author Elizabeth Gaskell gives an account of Margaret’s acclimatization in her new surroundings, which she first learns to understand and eventually to love. After all, the more she finds her feet in
the town and gets to know the people there, the more able she is to judge the workers' situation and the social injustices for what they are. When her friend Bessy Higgins, the daughter of an eloquent trade unionist, dies of a lung disease caused by inhaling cotton dust, Margaret resolves not to simply stand by and watch any longer.

A strike by the mill workers builds up to a dramatic scene, in which Margaret asks John Thornton to intervene only to be struck on the head herself with a stone in all the commotion. Lying unconscious, she then misses his declaration of love. Margaret's brusque refusal of Thornton's proposal of marriage a short time later leads him to believe that she has not yet lost her old air of arrogance and he misjudges the great extent to which she has now come to identify with the workers. A tragic mix-up ensues.

Yet just as significant – in the author's eyes – as the eventual reconciliation between the two protagonists is the growing understanding between Thornton, an insightful industrialist who is able to adapt and learn, and his workforce. This is symbolized by the relationship between Thornton and Nicholas Higgins, for whom Margaret procured a job at Marlborough Mills. Through conversations with each other, a deep mutual respect develops between the militant trade unionist and his supposed “class enemy.” In the end, both of them realize that the well-being of their own social class cannot be achieved simply at the expense of the other. It is therefore perfectly plausible for “North and South” to be read as an early critique of capitalism. Above all, however, the novel conveys an absorbing and realistic impression of the living conditions and class divisions of its time.

“North and South” was published between September 1854 and January 1855, initially as 20 individual episodes in the weekly magazine “Household Words.” The revised book edition released in 1855 was extended by Gaskell to include several more chapters. Incidentally, the novel owes its pithy title to none other than Charles Dickens, who was editor of “Household Words” at the time. After all, Gaskell's novels – including “Mary Barton,” “Cranford,” and, of course, “North and South” – are undisputedly part of the literary canon of her British homeland.

Elizabeth Gaskell
Elizabeth Gaskell, née Cleghorn Stevenson, was born in London in 1810 and, following the untimely death of her mother, spent her childhood with relatives in the rural town of Knutsford. Her family was involved in the Unitarian movement, an enlightened and tolerant non-conformist religious sect that enjoyed its heyday in the 19th century. William Gaskell, the man Elizabeth married in 1832, was a Unitarian minister like her father. Through her charity work in Manchester, Gaskell gained direct insight into the lives of the working classes, which is what gave her socio-critical novels their distinctive touch of authenticity. The Gaskells had four daughters. Their only son died in infancy, and her grief over his death is what prompted Elizabeth Gaskell, then aged 35, to take up writing.

Her first novel, “Mary Barton. A Tale of Manchester Life,” was published anonymously in 1848 and attracted a certain amount of attention as an early example of an English industrial novel. The novel “Ruth” (1853) portrays the fate of an unmarried mother, but “Cranford” (1851 to 1853) and “North and South” (1855) proved more successful. Gaskell also ventured into the field of psychological study with “The Life of Charlotte Brontë” (1857), a biography of her friend and fellow writer. Her later novels, however, lacked the distinctive character of her earlier works, with the likes of “The Grey Woman” (1861) or “Sylvia’s Lovers” (1863) remaining largely unknown. Elizabeth Gaskell died in 1865, leaving her last novel "Wives and Daughters" unfinished.
If we intend to be able to feed a worldwide population of nine billion people in 2050, then we will need to use ecological and locally based methods to do so. This is the firm belief of Hans Rudolf Herren, holder of the Alternative Nobel Prize and President of the Biovision Foundation. Herren is advocating a global change of policy in agriculture, with the aim of supporting small-scale farmers in particular – for the benefit of the global population.

During my 26 years as a researcher in Africa, I became increasingly aware of how little those most in need actually benefit from our scientific work. The transfer of knowledge and opportunities for exchange are essential for overcoming hunger and poverty and enabling people to help themselves. At the same time, however, it became clear to me just how vital the practical experiences of farmers in the field really are – experiences we researchers often lacked. I came up with a vision of a world in which these structural barriers are broken down and to this day I am convinced that this is the way to overcome hunger and poverty.

Being awarded the Alternative Nobel Prize in 2013 was a significant indication that there are others besides me who share this vision. My experience as co-chair of the World Agriculture Report from 2002 to 2008 also showed me that a global
change of policy in agriculture is the only way in which we can achieve our goal: we need to move away from industrial agriculture, which is squandering our planet’s finite resources, in favor of efficient small-scale farming structures, which are based on sustainable ecological cultivation methods and socially responsible principles. They also ensure that people can be supplied locally with a sufficient amount of healthy food in a healthy environment. While current methods use up to 12 calories to produce a single calorie of food, with an ecological approach it is possible to produce up to 30 calories from one calorie in a process that conserves resources and protects the environment.

I grew up in a rural area in the Swiss canton of Valais. It was there that, as a youth, I witnessed the destructive effect of the use of chemicals on the natural equilibrium. My studies at ETH Zurich and the University of California in Berkeley confirmed me in my belief that our world will only have a future if we work with nature rather than against it, and if we tackle the causes of problems rather than the symptoms.

As a young graduate, I then had the good fortune to be able to put my convictions into practice. The fight against a cassava pest that posed a threat to the basic food supply for 200 million people across Africa turned out to be an unprecedented success and gave me the courage to continue further in this direction. The pest in question, the mealybug, was brought under control in the 1980s by a beneficial insect discovered in South America, an ichneumon wasp, at relatively little expense and with no adverse impact on the environment. And this pest control method is still working today, with no further input required. This is the best possible proof that biological pest control pays the highest dividends.

I was awarded the World Food Prize in 1995 for this achievement, and I used the prize money to set up the Biovision Foundation in Zurich in 1998. This foundation aims to improve living conditions in Africa in a sustainable and environmentally compatible way and works in close cooperation with local partners and communities to help people help themselves. At the heart of our project portfolio is the Farmer Communication Programme (FCP) for small-scale farmers, which also serves as a channel for farmers to provide feedback for the scientists with regard to their requirements, questions and suggestions. This ensures that the information loop is complete.

However, over the years it has also become evident that the political framework conditions for a change of policy must be coordinated at national and international level. At the Rio+20 environmental summit in 2012, Biovision, along with its partners, managed to incorporate a clear commitment to sustainable ecological agriculture in the final declaration. The Committee on World Food Security in Rome was asked to provide support for countries to help them reorganize their agricultural systems along these lines. Biovision, in cooperation with the Millennium Institute, is assisting this process at international level through three pilot projects in Senegal, Kenya and Ethiopia.

Yet a change of policy can only be achieved if more money is invested in local research, provided that this funding is independent from private commercial interests. From a global perspective, the return on investment would be huge: a future for everyone!

Dr. Hans Rudolf Herren is one of the world’s leading scientific experts on biological pest control. He spent 26 years living and conducting research in Africa, and was Director General of the International Centre for Insect Physiology and Ecology (icipe) in Nairobi, Kenya, from 1994 to 2005. Since 2005 he has been President of the Millennium Institute in Washington D.C. Herren has received numerous awards, including the World Food Prize in 1995. He was the first Swiss person to win this accolade. He and the Biovision Foundation were awarded the Alternative Nobel Prize in 2013.
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