

Abstract for review

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New modes of giving: unwrapping the prize as a form of philanthropy for sustainability

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Abstract:

The use of prizes and contests has become an increasingly prominent theme in philanthropy (Wasson, 2016). While some commentators have raised concerns about the appropriateness of such prize philanthropy (Starr, 2013; Williams, 2015), the area remains underresearched. Building on wider calls for increased environmental philanthropy (Carter & Ross, 2013; Murray et al. 2014) and popular perceptions of prize philanthropy as a catalyst for innovation (McKinsey&Company, 2009), this paper examines the concept and context of the prize as a form of philanthropy for sustainability by exploring three overarching issues: what can prizes reveal about the contemporary practice of philanthropy?; what is the current shape and form of sustainability prizes?; and how can prizes contribute to sustainability?

To address these questions, the paper takes a multi-method approach that combines desk-based research and ethnographic fieldwork of the St Andrews Prize for the Environment (SAPE) between 2013 and 2017. SAPE is a novel example of a sustainability prize that involves a multinational energy corporation and a university. The SAPE medal and money is awarded annually at an event following the evaluation of an idea, an implementation plan for impact and the perceived merit of

the individual/initiative. The emergent prizescape features 29 prizes that award initiatives that aim to address issues such as biodiversity loss, ecosystem degradation and resource management. Our findings show that donors and recipients are primarily located in the US or UK while winning initiatives are located around the world. The number and monetary value of prizes is expanding, with increased donor influence on the strategic focus on prizes. SAPE has catalysed the recognition and application of innovation within a context of mutual learning for recipients and donors. While financial resources are important, winning the prize can provide access to social networks and develop capacity of those involved. We conclude, the prizes are an adaptable and diverse form of philanthropy that can support innovation. However, we need to recognise the ethical and political implications of this form of giving to support sustainability.

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