

## Is giving a civil act for personal reasons or for social standing?

Johan Vamstad - Marie Cederschiöld University

This article seeks to understand the reasons why people give to charities. It explores the social and individual reasons for giving using social origins theory to analyse the results.

There have been many studies on charitable giving and the reasons why people give. This study focuses on whether giving is an act of individual *civility* (altruistic/personal reasons or making the donor feel as though they are doing good) or societal *civicness* (conforming to societal norms or affirming the bond between the donor and society more broadly).

The research shows that giving in Sweden is relatively consistent and wide-spread with those who are giving for personal reasons.

[#Charity](#) [#Philanthropy](#) [#Giving](#) [#WelfareState](#) [#SocialOrigins](#)

### Background & Context



- The paper explores the social origins of giving in Sweden, and it is argued that that **the appetite for giving in Sweden is deeply rooted in the egalitarian principles of agrarian society**, which historically focused on the contributions of volunteerism (i.e. giving time) rather than giving money.
- It is argued that Swedish **egalitarianism can be traced back over history and has a role in informing and influencing charitable giving** over a significant period of time and led to the establishment of the Swedish welfare state.
- Further to previous studies in this area, **why people give falls into two categories**: 1) personal motivations (**Civility**) and 2) the social context in which the gift is made (**Civicness**).
- **Civility and Civicness are two related concepts, but there are distinct differences**, and by utilising social origin theory, the paper seeks to determine the social origins of giving in Sweden.
- Whilst charitable giving in Sweden is widespread but small scale, it is **mainly carried out and facilitated by unpaid, non-professionals**.

# ERNOP Research Note

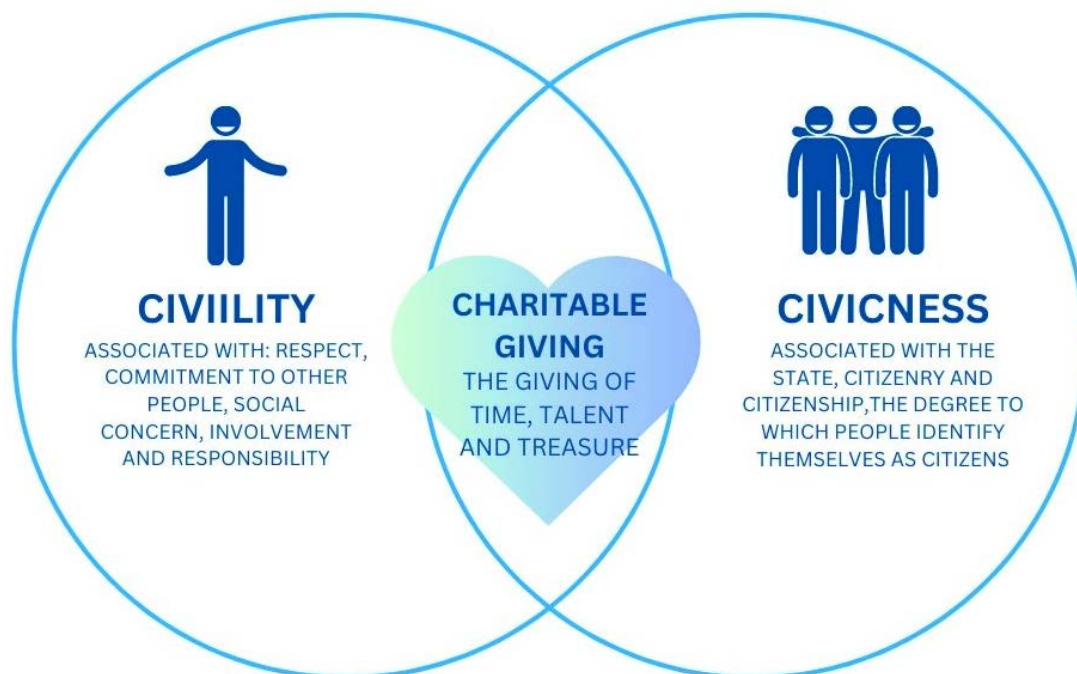
Academic articles on philanthropy through a practitioner lens

## Take aways & Learnings



- The study used **empirical data** from a 2014 survey which has mapped changes in engagement with civil society across 25 years. It sampled 1240 respondents with a response rate of 56%.
- Almost **80% of respondents reported making a charitable gift in the last 12 months**. The definition of a gift was broadened to include a wide variety of activities. Women also gave more frequently and at a higher value than men.
- **Contributing financially and through volunteerism is popular** in Sweden, with the outcome of the study highlighting that there is a strong correlation between those who contribute financially and those who volunteer (58%).
- The research shows that those with **high trust and social inclusion are more likely to donate** or volunteer their time.
- Responses to the question around a 'moral obligation' to charitable giving, were split with 48% agreeing and 48% disagreeing. Potentially highlighting **how giving is a personal act of free will rather than something that society demands**.

## Motivations for charitable giving



ERNOP Research Notes provide easy-to-read, practice-oriented summaries of academic articles on philanthropy and are written by practitioner experts. This ERNOP Research Note 2023/9 is published in March 2023 and has been provided to you by Heather Little. More information can be found at [www.ernop.eu](http://www.ernop.eu).