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Philanthropy by the people, for the people?
The roles, organisations and motivations of philanthropy in contemporary democracies and social structures

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Editorial

Philanthropy by the People, for the People?

The 12th International Conference of the European Research Network on Philanthropy (ERNOP), held at Heidelberg University on 25–26 September 2025, took place at a time of growing social, political and institutional pressure across Europe and beyond. Against a backdrop of geopolitical conflict, democratic polarisation and increasing strain on civil society, the conference theme — "Philanthropy by the people, for the people?" — invited participants to reflect on philanthropy's evolving roles within contemporary democracies and social structures.

The question at the heart of the conference is both timely and fundamentally contested. Philanthropy is frequently positioned as a force for public good, capable of innovation, long-term engagement and responsiveness in contexts where states or markets fall short. At the same time, it is rooted in private resources, values and decision-making power, raising persistent questions of legitimacy, accountability and democratic alignment. Understanding how these tensions unfold has become increasingly urgent.

The conference invited contributors to examine how philanthropy interacts with democratic processes, social cohesion and inequality, and how motivations, organisational forms and institutional contexts shape philanthropic action today. Scholars and practitioners alike were encouraged to engage with these questions, reflecting ERNOP's longstanding commitment to interdisciplinary research and dialogue between research and practice.

The contributions gathered in this proceedings volume reflect this ambition. Together, they illustrate the breadth and maturity of contemporary philanthropy research, encompassing empirical studies of giving and volunteering, analyses of governance and foundation practices, comparative and historical perspectives, and practitioner-informed reflections grounded in shared scholarly standards. Across diverse contexts and methodologies, several recurring concerns emerge: the legitimacy of philanthropic power, the conditions under which philanthropy contributes to or challenges democratic processes, and the ways in which crises and societal transformations reshape philanthropic roles.

Rather than offering definitive answers, the papers collectively highlight the complexity of philanthropy's position within modern societies. They reveal philanthropy as neither inherently democratic nor inherently problematic, but as a set of practices and institutions whose societal effects depend on context, governance, participation and accountability.

From an ERNOP perspective, this volume underscores the importance of maintaining spaces for critical, independent and internationally comparative research and sharing practices. At a time when both civil society and knowledge production face increasing pressure, such spaces are essential for informed debate and evidence-based reflection.

Barry Hoolwerf
ERNOP Executive Director

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Women's inclusion in the governance board of nonprofit organisations[1]

Ana Carolina Barros Pinheiro Carrenho (Lisbon University), Victor Gustavo Rocha Nylander (Lisbon University)

Abstract

This article addresses the limited access and representation of women on the governing boards and high-level decision-making bodies of non-profit organisations. Relevant international institutions emphasize the benefits of women's inclusion on these bodies for organizational decision-making and strategic vision, strengthening legitimacy and fostering inclusivity. The persistent underrepresentation of women on these boards may contribute to societal imbalances within the philanthropic sector, and this analysis explores how greater inclusion may influence the philanthropic priorities and policy advocacy of these organisations. In conclusion, greater inclusion of women on the governing boards of non-profit organisations is essential for achieving gender equality (SDG 5), stronger governance, and greater social impact, necessitating policies and practices that value diversity, ensure fair remuneration, and secure women's representation on these key bodies.

Keywords: Gender Equality, Nonprofit Governance, Sustainable Development Goals.

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1. Introduction

Even though there are studies and knowledge about the contribution of women for the economy and their important role in the work market and in society, there is little progress concerning the participation of women in strategic or decision-making positions in board of nonprofit organisations, especially considering that the workforce of these organisations is composed of almost 70% women and their boards only around 37% women. Despite the extensive literature on gender diversity in the boards of directors of the private and public sectors, research in the field of third sector remains fragmented and incipient. Existing studies focus mainly on isolated national contexts, with no pan-European comparative data available to assess regional patterns, particularly in view of the structural governance differences regulated by law across countries.

Current studies of the non-profit sector often associate the inclusion of women on boards of directors with greater legitimacy and better governance practices, and despite the growing number of institutions publicly endorsing diversity through manifestos or internal policies, systematic and sector-specific empirical research on the non-profit sector remains limited. In the European context in particular, there is still insufficient evidence regarding the actual composition of foundation governance bodies, especially when comparing women's representation in decision-making roles with their predominance in the nonprofit workforce. The lack of a pan-European comparative framework, combined with the diversity of legal governance regimes governing foundations, constitutes the analytical gap that this article seeks to begin addressing.

Relevant international institutions have increasingly promoted the participation of women in leadership positions and decision-making bodies, recognizing their importance for more inclusive and effective governance. In this sense, the role of the United Nations is a particularly significant guide, especially through the promotion of Sustainable Development Goal 5.5, which seeks to ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making. In this context, this article examines how governance structures in non-profit organizations can include more women in ways that add value to boards, broaden strategic perspectives, and consequently strengthen organizational legitimacy with stakeholders, donors, and the communities in which they operate.

2. Gender Inclusion: Insights from the second sector

Research conducted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development on women's participation on corporate boards reveals substantial cross-country variation in the representation of women and men, particularly when comparing publicly listed and privately held companies.

More broadly, indicators of gender diversity, such as the Board Gender Diversity Index (2009), highlight countries like Norway, Belgium, and France as leaders in promoting inclusion-oriented policies. These findings suggest that gender equality has reached a more advanced stage of societal recognition, reflected in a growing collective understanding of women's role in the professional sphere. Targeted positive actions seek to address structural inequalities, generating short-term effects that may foster longer-term cultural change, grounded in principles of equal opportunity and in the recognised legitimacy of positive discrimination as a means of rebalancing initial disadvantages.[2]

About the topic of women's participation on boards or in decision-making positions in private companies, the main challenges to reaching senior positions have been documented, and the private sector has gradually promoted the inclusion of women in strategic teams.[3] In second sector, gender equality has gained strength through approaches that include eliminating internal discrimination and wage inequality under binding legislative rules, alongside positive actions that promote equal opportunities for professional advancement.

Furthermore, integration is essential to guarantee human rights and social justice for all, incorporating gender perspectives into public and social development has also been acknowledged as an instrumental for broader social and economic goals (The United Nations, 2002).[4]

It is possible to assert that women and men may operate through differentiated and complementary approaches[5] and the benefits of combining these approaches can improve results, under the assumption that women differ from men in aspects that are relevant to 21st-century companies' management.[6] On the other hand, the qualified contribution of women and the synergistic benefits depend on whether these differences in approaches to management and leadership are recognized and enabled, both in the national and in the international market.[7]

As an additional argument in the second sector, the Becker's theory suggests that maintaining discrimination is costly under competitive market forces, growth strategies that open economies to global market competition tend to reduce gender discrimination in employment and the gender pay gap.[8]

3. Governance and women participation

Moving the debate forward, our goal is to explore women in leadership and decision-making environments, since the presence of women as directors reflects the women full possibilities[9]. The literature indicates that moving beyond tokenism helps women participate more comfortably in group discussions correlates with improvements in certain performance[10] and governance[11] dynamics. A considerable number of women on boards is associate with stronger internal monitoring and governance including compliance actions.

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[2] Gennari, F. (2018). Gender balance on boards and corporate sustainability for the 2030 Agenda. *African journal of business management*, *12*(11), 343-356.

[3] Adams, R. B. and D. Ferreira (2009), "Women in the board- room and their impact on governance and performance", Journal of Financial Economics, Vol. 94 (2), pp. 291-309

[4] GENNARI, F. (2018). Gender balance on boards and corporate sustainability for the 2030 Agenda. *African journal of business management*, *12*(11), 343-356.

[5] ABURDENE, Patricia / NAISBITT, John. Naisbitt, *Megatrends for Women*, New York:Villard Books, 1992.

[6] ADLER*,* Nancy. J.*, International Dimensions of Organizational Behavior,* 4th edn, Cincinnati,OH: South Western, 2002b.

[7] CALIGIURI, P.M. / CASCIO, W.F., *Can we send her there? Maximizing the success of western women on global assignments,* Journal of World Business, 33(4), 394–416, 1998.

[8] ADLER, Nancy. *One world: Women leading and managing worldwide*. Handbook on Women in Business and Management, pp.330-355, 2007.

[9] Terjesen, Siri & Sealy, Ruth & Singh, Val. (2009). Women Directors on Corporate Boards: A Review and Research Agenda. Corporate Governance: An International Review. 17. 320 - 337. 10.1111/j.1467-8683.2009.00742.x.

[10] Joecks, J., Pull, K., & Vetter, K. (2013). Gender diversity in the boardroom and firm performance: What exactly constitutes a "critical mass?". *Journal of Business Ethics*, 118(1), 61–72.

[11] Kanter, Rosabeth Moss. *Men and women of the corporation: New edition*. Basic books, 2008.

Reinforcing the importance for companies of women's participation in strategic and deliberative governance bodies, Kramer, Konrad, and Erkut argue that boards should include at least 30% of women to improve performance[12], while Torchia, Calabrò and Huse find that more women increase corporate innovation[13].

Women in power are more likely to implement policies and practices, and with their experience and professional knowledge, they promote more open discussions on sensitive issues such as salaries[14] and can also positively internal influence in leadership compensation.

Boards seeking to improve their governance effectiveness should pair membership with diversity policies and practices that enable positive impact. Inclusive behaviors and culture enhance board capacity, particularly where diversity is higher. Evidence indicates that gender diversity on boards have more effective governance practices than those with less diversity [15] .Women's participation at levels exceeding 30%, ensuring their involvement and active listening to their opinions, is crucial for the effectiveness of the council and for improving sustainability strategies[16].

Specifically regarding nonprofit organizations, Ostrower[17] suggests that the percentage of women on nonprofit boards may be positively associated with success in planning and external relations. The critical mass theory, mentioned earlier, states that impact on an organization's outcomes becomes more likely when a minority group reaches a threshold – usually cited as around 30%[18]. Buse[19] reveals that gender diversity on nonprofit boards not only impacts board governance practices but also internal policies related to diversity and inclusion. Representative approaches allow measurement of proportional gender differences in groups and examination of the point at which women's representation correlates positively with nonprofits performance.[20]

The vast majority of non-profit organizations depend on private donations as a source of funding[21], and in this sense, donors are very sensitive to governance issues, especially regarding compliance with recommendations and best practices concerning trustees. Diversity on boards is a factor associated by donors with better financial performance, greater responsiveness to stakeholders, and a greater ability to attract and retain top talent.

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12 Kramer, V., Konrad, A. M., & Erkut, S. (2006). *Critical mass on corporate boards: Why three or more women enhance governance*. Wellesley, MA: Wellesley College.
13 Torchia, M., Calabrò, A., & Huse, M. (2011). Women directors on corporate boards: From tokenism to critical mass. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 102(2), 299–317.
14 HILLMAN, Amy J.; CANNELLA JR, Albert A.; HARRIS, Ira C. Women and racial minorities in the boardroom: How do directors differ?. Journal of management, v. 28, n. 6, p. 747-763, 2002.
15 LEE, Y. J. (2019). Scarce as hen's teeth: Women CEOs in large nonprofit organisations. *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, 29(4), 601–610.
16 VELTE, P. (2017a). Do women on board of directors have an impact on corporate governance quality and firm performance? A literature review. International Journal of Sustainable Strategic Management, 5(4), 302. doi:10.1504/ijssm.2017.10010121.
17 Ostrower, F. (2007). *Nonprofit governance in the United States: Findings on performance and accountability from the first national representative study*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.
18 Lee, Y. J. (2019). Scarce as hen's teeth: Women CEOs in large nonprofit organisations. *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, 29(4), 601–610.
19 Buse, Kathleen; Bernstein, Ruth S., and Bilimoria, Diana (2014). "The Influence of Board Diversity, Board Diversity Policies and Practices, and Board Inclusion Behaviors on Nonprofit Governance Practices". SIAS Faculty Publications.
20 Dula L, Nicholson-Crotty J, Gazley B. Female leaders and board performance in member-serving nonprofit organisations. *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*. 2020; 30: 655–676.
21Neumayr, M., Handy, F. Charitable Giving: What Influences Donors' Choice Among Different Causes?. *Voluntas* **30**, 783–799 (2019).

Demonstrating to society the effective inclusion of women on their boards provides them with more strategic space, in addition to reflecting a more promising future for the institution itself. Therefore, non-profit organizations, as a reflection of the social environments in which they operate, should reflect this reality in their boards and deliberative bodies. The commitment to disclosure fosters equal access and inclusion of opportunities, creating an environment conducive to inclusive measures and providing reassurance to donors.[22]

The results also suggest that female leaders or trustee and who possess specialized experience in fundraising are better positioned to compensate for possible declines in future donation levels. Women better leverage previous career paths to develop and maintain fundraising networks that enhance their ability to mobilize philanthropic resources.[23]

A relevant statistic from the for-profit sector indicates that companies with a greater presence of women in leadership positions show, on average, a 15% increase in their profitability[24]. If we hypothetically draw a parallel with the revenue growth potential of a foundation that adopts gender equality in its governing bodies—especially when composed of people highly motivated by social transformation and impact—it is possible to glimpse a comparative basis for analytical purposes.

Another relevant aspect is that when the various members of the board of directors of Nonprofits organisations are encouraged to participate fully through meaningful diversity policies and inclusive behaviors, diversity has a positive impact on the community in which it operates. The board must be sensitive to the realities of the places where it operates and will only be able to do so with greater legitimacy if it is more diverse[25].

4. Women's Barriers to Nonprofit Governance

Women in the third sector face additional challenges in being seen and treated as equals, as they are often associated with caregiving roles and social functions, reflecting the implicit association between men and leadership and decision-making.

The sector exhibits a different phenomenon from the second sector, Williams'[26], *"glass escalator"*, which facilitates men's rise to power even unintentionally. Men, despite being less represented in the workforce than women, who make up 69% of the workforce in nonprofit organizations, are the ones who lead and hold seats on the boards of the highest-revenue American nonprofit organizations.

Thus, even though women have a higher level of training and education[27] than their male colleagues, as we have seen previously, these attributes are often underestimated, so that although

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[22] Lee, Y. J. (2024). Board gender diversity and nonprofit CEO compensation: Implications for gender pay gap. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, *53*(1), 257-273.
[23] Brown, Veena L., and Erica E. Harris. (2023). The association of female leaders with donations and operating margin in nonprofit organizations. *Journal of Business Ethics* 185.1, 223-243.
[24] Isidro, H., & Sobral, M. (2015). The Effects of Women on Corporate Boards on Firm Value, Financial Performance, and Ethical and Social Compliance. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *132*(1), 1–19.
[25] Buse, K., Bernstein, R. S., & Bilimoria, D. (2016). The influence of board diversity, board diversity policies and practices, and board inclusion behaviors on nonprofit governance practices. Journal of Business Ethics, 133, 179-191.
[26] Williams, C. L. (1992). The glass escalator: Hidden advantages for men in the "female" professions. *Social problems*, *39*(3), 253-267.
[27] Kramer, V. W., & Adams, C. T. (2020). Increasing Gender Diversity on the Boards of Nonprofit Eds and Meds.

men are fewer in number in the nonprofit workforce, they are disproportionately promoted faster to high-level leadership positions. In addition to being more frequently invited to serve on technical and financially-biased boards.

Even today, women are seen as inclined towards philanthropy and volunteer work, charitable work, and as unprofessional within organizations. The recognition of women's professional attributes in non-profit organizations, where they can serve professionally on boards of directors, represents a major challenge for women to overcome. Unfortunately, those seeking higher levels in social sector careers may feel demotivated when perceived as "maternalistic" individuals who should not hold high-level positions.

Another relevant aspect regarding women on the boards and governing bodies of foundations lies in the fact that they may not be remunerated.[28] For some women, participating as a volunteer trustee on the board of a non-profit organization can represent an addition to the pressure on professional and personal performance. Highly qualified women[29] may be invited to unpaid boards in recognition of their credentials, but the unpaid responsibilities add to existing commitments, including unpaid private work.

The low participation of women as trustees is observed mainly in the largest charities[30]; it has been found that there is a higher resignation rate among female trustees, which is consistent with the difficulty of maintaining these demanding volunteer leadership positions in the context of their other responsibilities, including often disproportionate domestic and caregiving tasks.

5. International governance recommendations

Thus, while earlier to gender equality and women's empowerment were primarily human rights based, there is now evidence that women's participation enriches previously homogenous settings, with competitive potential for companies and countries[31]. Gender equality can enhance competitiveness by broadening the skills pool. When assessing the economic gains from increased women participation in the workforce, organisations and countries that do not discriminate against women tend to outperform those that restrict women's access to the labor market. Integrating women and men doubles the pool of potential talent.[32]

Current explanations for why organisations worldwide are including more women assume that they bring unique skills and approaches to management and leadership from which organisations and societies can benefit[33].Achieving gender equality requires transformative changes in social norms, policies, and institutions to address discrimination and promote equal opportunities. This involves

[28] Beatty, J. E. (2007). Women and invisible social identities: women as the Other in organisations. *Handbook on women in business and management*, 34-56.

[29] Gatrell, C., & Cooper, L. (2007). No Cracks in the Glass Ceiling: Women Managers, Stress and the barriers to success. *Handbook on Women in Business and Management. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Inc*, 57-75.

[30] Hustinx, Lesley and Isis Vandelannote. (2025) Stratification in Formal Volunteering: Occupational Spill-Over Effects on the Hierarchical Positions of Volunteers in Voluntary Organizations. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly,* 143-167.

[31] HAILE, Semere / EMMANUEL,Tsegai / DZATHOR,Augustine. *Barriers and challeges confronting women for leadership and management positions: review and analysis.* International Journal of Business & Public Administration, v. 13, n. 1, 2016.

[32] ADLER, Nancy. *One world: Women leading and managing worldwide*. Handbook on Women in Business and Management, pp.330-355, 2007.

[33] BILIMORIA, Diana/PIDERIT, Sandy Kristin. *Introduction: research on women in business and management.* Handbook on women in business and management, pp.1-9, 2007

women's economic empowerment, participation in decision-making processes, access to essential services and protection against violence.[34]

The United Nations as played a central role in promoting these principles, which underpin subsequent initiatives such as the Commission on the Status of Women Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.[35] This agenda has become integral to globally values issues, including the Sustainable Development Goals-SDGs.[36] Approved in September 2015, the SDGs constitute wide-ranging initiative aimed at economic, social, and environmental development, with indicators and targets to track progress to 2030[37].

To explore the equality's economic relevance, the "*European Union's Knowledge Centre on Gender Equality"* (EIGE) developed an econometric model estimating macroeconomic benefits from gender equality across several socioeconomic aspects, from girls' basic education to women's labor market participation.[38] Findings indicate that, if implemented, EU countries could lead to an increase of 6.3 million to 10.5 million jobs by 2050 (around 70% occupied by women), alongside positive GDP impacts and a 10% increase in GDP *per capita* by 2050.[39] Recent research also suggests that initial conditions and growth patterns are as - or even more - important on poverty reduction, human development, and gender equality.[40]

International coordination reinforce these principles, gender equality features regularly in of G7 and G20[41] declarations and actions, aligning with SDG 5, particularly target 5.5[42]. States are expected to promote sustainable development and provide the means making these requirements more tangible through declarations, resolutions, and international trade treaties.[43] Specifically SDG 5 aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls[44], encouraging full and effective participation, and equal opportunities for leadership at all decision-making levels.[45]

Also, whitin the EU, the Lisbon Treaty (2009)[46], emphasized gender equality and fostered discussions on women in corporative boards.[47] Finally, in November 2012, the European Commission

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34 UNITED NATIONS CHARTER. Peace, dignity and equality on a healthy planet.
35 Idem
36 GIANNINI, Renata Avelar. CAPÍTULO 5–ODS 5 Alcançar a Igualdade de Gênero e Empoderar Todas as Mulheres e Meninas Sustentável *in Os objetivos de desenvolvimento sustentável e as relações internacionais*. João Pessoa: Editora UFPB, pp. 95-116, 2019
37 UN WOMEN, Turning promises into actions: gender equality in the 2030 agenda for sustainable development in *Gender mainstreaming An Overview,* New York:United Nations, 2018.
38 EUROPEAN INSTITUTE FOR GENDER EQUALITY - EIGE. *Gender balance in Business and finance.* Gender Statistics Database. December 2022. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2023. ISBN 978-92-9486-082-8
39 EUROPEAN INSTITUTE FOR GENDER EQUALITY - EIGE. *Gender balance in Business and finance.* Gender Statistics Database. December 2022. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2023. ISBN 978-92-9486-082-8
40 EUROPEAN INSTITUTE FOR GENDER EQUALITY - EIGE. *Gender balance in Business and finance.* Gender Statistics Database. December 2022. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2023. ISBN 978-92-9486-082-8
41 ABRANTES, Pedro; LECHNER, Elsa. *Nós Globais: Investigações em curso sobre Questões da Globalização.* Coimbra:Coimbra University Press, 2022.
42 UN WOMEN *Progress of the World's Women 2015/2016, Transforming Economies, Realizing Rights,* New York: UN Women,2015.
43 BARRAL, Virginie, *Sustainable Development in International Law: Nature and Operation of an Evolutive Legal Norm*. European Journal of International Law, v.23 nº2, pp.377-400, 2012.
44 COLLINS, Andrea M., *Empowerment, rights, and global food governance: gender in the UN Committee for World Food Security*, Globalizations, V.19, 220-237, 2022.
45 MENEZES, Henrique *Os objetivos de desenvolvimento sustentável e as relações internacionais.* João Pessoa: Editora UFPB, 310 p., 2019
46 BAL, S., *EU's Gender Equality Dilemma: A Human Rights or a Market Economy Instrument?*. Kadın/Woman 2000, Journal for Women's Studies, v.20 nº 2), pp. 43–63, 2019.

47 ZAKARIA, Suzanne. Fair Trade for Women, at Last: Using a Sanctions Framework to Enforce Gender Equality Rights in Multilateral Trade Agreements. Geo. J. Gender & L., v. 20, pp. 241-264, 2018.

presented a legislative proposal to accelerate progress towards balanced representation on boards, supported by *soft laws*[48] instrument. International guidelines underscore the role of boards in achieving the 2030 sustainability goals, strengthen organisations that invest effectively in these gender equality strategies. [49]

Non-profit organizations are important allies in promoting the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) through cooperation, community outreach, policy formulation, agenda setting, and public attention mobilization. Given the interconnected nature of the SDGs, non-profit organizations are key actors and should receive political and economic support. Furthermore, non-profit organizations have a responsibility to address gender inequality on their boards and to confront the challenges that perpetuate male dominance on boards, serving as an example to society and further legitimizing their actions and overcoming the challenge of inequality in the face of their predominantly female workforce.

6. Data and methodology

The empirical component of this study was exploratory and descriptive. In 2025, data were collected from the official websites of ten foundations in each country. The selection of foundations was initially based on revenue volume; however, difficulties were encountered in accessing detailed annual revenues for all the foundations surveyed, as well as updated data from the last fiscal year.

Therefore, we also considered institutional notoriety at the national level as a second criterion, to reflect the relevant actors who should be examples in the transparent demonstration of the information we sought to collect. It is important to mention that a number of foundations that are institutionally representative were not analyzed due to the complete absence of data regarding the participation or not of women on their boards. That is, for this research, we chose to examine foundations that provided data that allowed the identification of the members of their boards, and then we examined whether or not there were women composing them. This was necessary so that we had a minimum identifiable sample of publicly verifiable information.

For each foundation, we recorded the types of boards, the total number of members and female members, and we were able to verify the transparency and opacity of this data online. The limitations of the data included incomplete and outdated disclosures, lack of gender identification in some cases requiring a search for each member, and finally, a lack of information on whether the positions were paid or voluntary. The information obtained allowed for comparison between the selected countries, but highlights the limitations of relying on self-reported information and opaque transparency.

The countries analyzed were Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, and the United Kingdom. This is a sample of private foundations, prioritizing those with the highest local revenues for which it was possible to locate data on their websites or in accessible documents made available online.In our search for information on the governing bodies of foundations, we discovered that the bylaws are mostly not available on their websites, and the vast majority of those that do make their bylaws available do so only in their native language, which can

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[48] We quote the recommendations: 96/694/CE; COM(2010)78; COM(2010)491;

[49] Joint Declaration on Trade and Women's Economic Empowerment on the Occasion of the WTO Ministerial Conference in Buenos Aires, December 2017

hinder access for citizens of other EU countries. The difference between the regulatory environment of each country was considered; we identified the main deliberative bodies and instances of senior management. Some foundations have more than one type of board as deliberative bodies (Portugal, Spain, and Italy).

For example, Portugal divides strategic and management responsibilities between the board of trustees and the board of directors. In Spain, this distinction is also evident; the body called "Patronato" has a strong link with the mission and strategy, while the board of directors or executive board, another strategic body, is closer to the management team.

The most strategic function in Italy is assigned to the board of directors or central board, and predominantly the administrative board acts by observing the guidelines of the former and is also close to the administration and the team involved.

We seek to analyze not only in these three countries, but in the entire country, the deliberative bodies and those with the greatest influence on the mission, vision, values, and strategy of organizations with senior-level governance functions. Therefore, we seek to equate the functions of the deliberative bodies and those with the greatest influence on the mission, vision, values, and strategy of organisations with the higher-level governance functions. Evidence at the national level reveals not only variations in the proportion of women on nonprofit boards in Europe, but also structural contradictions within each national context (see Annex Table for country-level data).

Regarding specific data on women who make up senior governing bodies, we should not assume that the largest foundations have a higher participation of women in their ranks as trustees or members of the board of trustees. In Southern European countries, starting with Portugal, the Gulbenkian Foundation — one of the institutions with the highest revenue and visibility in Europe and the world — has less than 40% women on its board, while FLAD, a small foundation in Portugal with a comparatively smaller budget, has more than 55% women on its board. This contrast suggests that institutional prominence does not automatically correlate with inclusion.

In Spain, Fundesplai, the Educo Foundation, and the Madrid Food Bank demonstrate a female majority of over 50%, in stark contrast to the internationally recognized Mapfre Foundation, where women represent less than a third of the board members. This divergence within the same country highlights how mission-driven governance can shape diversity. In Italy, the persistence of predominantly male boards of directors in traditional foundations, despite legal frameworks that encourage transparency, remains a significant point of concern. The average inclusion of women in the Italian foundations surveyed is only 20%. This is because foundations such as Pro.sa, Fratelli Dimenticati, Enpam, and CORTI have very low or zero numbers of women on their strategic boards, contrasting sharply with international EU recommendations and international gender parity governance standards further north in Europe.

In Germany, the Krupp and Bertelsmann foundations have 50% women on their boards and trustees, approaching parity, but other large foundations, such as the Bethel Foundation, remain dominated by men. The Netherlands offers a compelling example: the Star Foundation has 60% women on its board of directors, but other large foundations, such as the Constanter Foundation (0%) and the INGKA Foundation, report only 17% female participation on their boards, suggesting that even in one of Europe's most transparent and dynamic nonprofit sectors today, parity as a standard remains a challenge.

Based on the data presented in the spreadsheet, female participation on the boards of the foundations analyzed in Denmark reveals a global pattern of balance, albeit marked by significant internal variations among the organizations. Most foundations have relatively gender-balanced boards, with several cases where women represent half of the deliberative body's composition. However, distinct situations coexist. Some large and high-profile foundations exhibit female underrepresentation, with percentages below parity, indicating still predominantly male boards. In contrast, other institutions demonstrate a higher female presence than male, evidencing more inclusive governance arrangements. There are also foundations with exactly equal representation, suggesting a balanced and stable distribution between women and men.

France presents a spectrum ranging from parity in the Louvre Endowment Fund to about a third of women in the Foundation of France, demonstrating once again that financial scale and historical prestige do not guarantee balanced governance.

In Belgium, the Evens Foundation and the Queen Elisabeth Medical Foundation report female majorities (above 50%), placing the country among the few where major institutions not only achieve but exceed parity. However, internal heterogeneity can be observed among foundations and their boards in the country, with DavidsFonds and the Evens Foundation having a low percentage of women, suggesting that there is no single standard of governance and inclusion in the country.

The United Kingdom adds another layer of complexity, with the average percentage of women on its boards being 43% among the countries surveyed. Although organizations such as the Wellcome Trust Foundation and the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation report female representation above 55-60%, several of the country's wealthiest foundations remain predominantly male, such as the Ditcheley Foundation (23%) and the Quadrature Climate Foundation (25%), with fewer women on their boards.

The foundations identified as having no female representation on their boards of directors or equivalent governing bodies are Fondazione Pro.sa (Italy), the Constanter Foundation (Netherlands), and the Eugenio de Almeida Foundation (Portugal). Foundations with female representation between 5% and 10% in their senior management positions or boards of directors include Fondazione Fratelli Dimenticati, Fondazione Monte dei Paschi di Siena, and Fondazione Enpam, all based in Italy.

Women participation between 10% and 20% was observed in the following institutions: Fondation Bettencourt-Schueller (France), La France s’Engage Foundation (France), Carl Zeiss Foundation (Germany), Bethel Foundation (Germany), Fondazione Italia Uganda per l’Opera di Padre Giovanni Scalabrini (Italy), Fondazione Monte dei Paschi di Siena (Italy), Fondazione CORTI (Italy), Stichting INGKA Foundation (The Netherlands), IKEA Foundation (The Netherlands), Boumeester Foundation (The Netherlands), Fundação Oriente (Portugal), Fundação Bissaya Barreto (Portugal) and Fundación Help in Action (Spain).

Between 21% and 30% of women hold strategic board positions in foundations; we identified a group of 13 foundations among those surveyed: WWF Belgium and Universitaire Stichting (Belgium), Fondation de France and Hertford British Hospital Charity (France), ElseKröner-Fresenius Foundation and Robert Bosch Stiftung (Germany), Fondazione Terre des hommes (Italy), Fundação Champalimaud and Fundação Montepio (Portugal), Fundación “la Caixa” (Spain), Quadrature Climate Foundation, Church Commissioners for England, and Ditchley Foundation (UK).

The foundations that exceed the critical mass of 30% women on their board of trustees or trustees, reaching half of women members on their respective boards, are as follows: Danish Research Foundation (Denmark), Lego Foundation (Denmark), New Carlsberg Foundation (Denmark), World Diabetes Foundation (Denmark), Louvre Endowment Fund (France), Foundation Pour le Logement des Défavorisés (France), Fondation d'entreprise Wavestone (France), Bertelsmann Foundation (Germany), Krupp Foundation (Germany), and Prins Bernhard Cultuurfonds (The Netherlands).

Finally, a group of foundations stands out for having a predominantly female composition on their boards, with women representing more than 50%—and in some cases up to 80%—of the boards surveyed. Among them are the Fonds de la Recherche Scientifique-FNRS, the Evens Foundation, and the Queen Elisabeth Medical Foundation in Belgium; the A.P. Møller Foundation and the KR Foundation in Denmark; the EDF Group Foundation in France; the Klaus Tschira Foundation in Germany; the Van Leer Foundation and the Start Foundation in the Netherlands; the Luso-American Foundation (FLAD), the António Cupertino de Miranda Foundation, and the CEBI Foundation in Portugal; the Madrid Food Bank, Fundesplai, and the Educo Foundation in Spain; as well as the Wellcome Trust, the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, and The Robertson Trust in the United Kingdom.

Within this group, certain foundations deserve special attention for exceeding expectations, even in a sector where women already constitute a substantial portion of the workforce. As mentioned earlier, women represent approximately 70% of employees at the operational level of third-sector organizations. In this context, the KR Foundation and the EDF Group Foundation are particularly noteworthy, as they demonstrate a significantly higher presence of women on their boards of directors compared to the gender composition of the sector's workforce as a whole.

7. Conclusion

Although foundations in some countries, such as Denmark, France, and the United Kingdom, demonstrate female representation on their boards exceeding 40%, foundations in Italy and Portugal, of equal or greater financial size, have less than 30% women in their highest decision-making bodies. Contrary to expectations, this heterogeneity highlights that institutional prominence or the volume of their revenues does not guarantee effective diversity. It was also possible to verify that transparency itself has become a critical dimension of foundation governance in Europe regarding the issue of diversity.

Despite the lack of gender data, we must emphasize the difficulty encountered in obtaining up-to-date data on assets, revenues, and main sources of funding for comparison purposes. Updating data on board member mandates was also a challenge, given the need for detailed information for comparison purposes, as well as whether these board members are remunerated or not; for this reason, we only analyzed foundations that have accessible data. Considering the governance regimes among foundations in Europe, we believe it is possible to suggest and promote the development of cross-border recommendations and governance guidelines that facilitate the systematic exchange of practices among these foundations. Such transparency measures would increase the dissemination of knowledge, strengthen internal processes for the inclusion and retention of women, and improve compliance.

The persistent lack of comprehensive data on foundation boards—in contrast to the more robust evidence available for the public and private sectors—reinforces the warning issued by the Women's Nonprofit Leadership Initiative in its public statement about the lack of systematic disclosure by non-profit organizations.

However, with this research, we identified a special opportunity to promote sustainable development actions through Foundations, given their reach and dynamism, and it is evident that increasing female representation on foundation boards of directors can be a complex process but one that will bring effective results with their stakeholders.

From the identification of the challenge posed, change can begin with recognition by the boards themselves, since they control recruitment and retention and define inclusion strategies. Breaking with the cycles in which predominantly male boards appoint only men is a first step; if diversity is recognized by board members as more beneficial to the mission, fundraising, and efficiency, and if it truly becomes a strategic objective, change becomes likely.

Finally, a more parameterized governance structure would also allow for the collection of more robust empirical, comparative, and methodologically sound data. This opens a fertile path for future research in the nonprofit sector, especially considering the greater fundamental regulatory equivalences, including empirical observation across countries, testing the relationship between board composition and programmatic agendas, and, most importantly, assessing the impact of persistent deficits in data transparency and opacity.

Through these efforts, it will be possible to develop truly personalized and practical strategies for implementing gender equality policies in the non-profit sector, capable of effectively promoting gender equality in governance, fulfilling the commitments of the 2030 Agenda (specifically target 5.5), contributing to more inclusive and equitable forms of leadership, and to the implementation of EU policies towards social cohesion.

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Table 1. Attached table: National data on the composition of founding boards, based on information collected from official websites in 2025.

Belgium			
Name of the Foundation	**No. of Board Members**	**No. of Women**	**Percentage**
King Baudouin Foundation	13	5	38%
Fonds de la Recherche Scientifique (FNRS)	21	11	52%
Research Foundation – Flanders (FWO)	17	8	47%
Fondation ULB	12	4	33%
WWF Belgium	15	4	27%
DavidsFonds	32	7	22%
Evens Foundation	6	4	67%
Queen Elisabeth Medical Foundation	5	3	60%
Universitaire Stichting	23	7	30%
Total Average of the Foundations			**42%**

Denmark			
Name of the Foundation	**No. of Board Members**	**No. of Women**	**Percentage**
Novo Nordisk Foundation	10	4	40%
A.P. Møller Foundation	5	3	60%
Carlsberg Foundation	13	5	38%
LEO Foundation	11	5	45%
Danish Research Foundation	6	3	50%
Lego Foundation	6	3	50%
New Carlsberg Foundation	4	2	50%
Knud Højgaard's Foundation	6	2	33%
World Diabetes Foundation	8	4	50%
KR Foundation	5	4	80%
Total Average of the Foundations			**50**%

France			
Name of the Foundation	**No. of Board Members**	**No. of Women**	**Percentage**
Fondation de France	17	5	29%
Fondation Bettencourt-Schueller	11	2	18%
Fondation du Patrimoine	24	11	46%
Hertford British Hospital Charity	11	3	27%
Louvre Endowment Fund	6	3	50%
La France S'Engage Foundation	13	2	15%
Foundation Pour le Logement des Défavorisés	12	6	50%
Fondation d'entreprise Wavestone	6	3	50%
L'Occitane Foundation	8	3	38%
The EDF Group Foundation	7	5	71%
Total Average of the Foundations			**40**%

Germany

Name of the Foundation	No. of Board Members	No. of Women	Percentage
Else Kröner-Fresenius Foundation	11	3	27%
Robert Bosch Stiftung	8	2	25%
Klaus Tschira Stiftung	8	5	63%
Joachim Herz Stiftung	3	1	33%
Carl-zeiss Foundaion	13	2	15%
Volkswagen Stiftung	14	6	43%
Elbe Habitat Foundation	11	4	36%
Bethel Foundation	5	1	20%
Bertelsmann Foundation	10	5	50%
Krupp Foundation	10	5	50%
Total Average of the Foundations			**36%**

Italy

Name of the Foundation	No. of Board Members	No. of Women	Percentage
Fondazione Cariplo	35	13	37%
Fondazione Terre des hommes	13	3	23%
Fondazione Fratelli Dimenticati	40	2	5%
Fondazione Monte dei Paschi di Siena	20	2	10%
Fondazione Cariparo	29	13	44%
Fondazione Enpam	13	1	7%
Fondazione AVSI	18	4	22%
Fondazione CRT	29	10	34%
Fondazione Italia Uganda per l'opera di padre Giovanni Scalabrini	5	1	20%
Fondazione CORTI	17	2	12%
Fondazione Pro.sa	10	0	0%
Total Average of the Foundations			**20%**

Netherlands

Name of the Foundation	No. of Board Members	No. of Women	Percentage
Stichting INGKA Foundation	6	1	17%
IKEA Foundation	6	1	17%
VSBfonds	8	3	38%
Prins Bernhard Cultuurfonds	6	3	50%
IRC	6	2	33%
Van Leer Foundation	7	4	57%
Start Foundation	5	3	60%
Constanter	7	0	0%
Boumeester Foundation	7	1	14%
Learning for Well Being Foundation	6	2	33%
Total Average of the Foundations			**32%**

Portugal

Name of the Foundation	No. of Board Members	No. of Women	Percentage
Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian	8	3	38%
Fundação Champalimaud	12	3	25%
Fundação Oriente	6	1	17%
Fundação Luso-Americana (FLAD)	7	4	57%
Fundação Bissaya Barreto	10	2	20%
Fundacão Eugénio de Almeida	3	0	0%
Fundação António Cupertino de Miranda	3	2	67%
Fundação CEBI	9	6	67%
Fundação Montepio	4	1	25%
Fundação Francisco Manuel dos Santos	9	3	33%
Total Average of the Foundations			**35%**

Spain

Name of the Foundation	No. of Board Members	No. of Women	Percentage
Fundación "la Caixa"	15	4	26,7%
Fundación para la educación Catolica	12	4	33,3%
Banco de Alimentos Madrid	13	7	53,8%
Fundación Ayuda em acción	12	2	16,7%
Fundesplai	16	9	56,3%
Fundación Educo	9	5	55,6%
Fundación Secreariado Gitano	14	6	42,9%
Fundación Mapfre	15	5	33,3%
UNICEF Comité Español	23	11	47,8%
Fundación Pere Tarrés	12	4	33,3%
Total Average of the Foundations			**40%**

United Kingdom

Name of the Foundation	No. of Board Members	No. of Women	Percentage
Wellcome Trust	9	5	55,6%
Esmée Fairbairn Foundation	12	7	58,3%
Guy's and St Thomas' Foundation	22	11	50,0%
Quadrature Climate Foundation	4	1	25,0%
Church Commissioners for England	19	5	26,3%
The Robertson Trust	12	8	66,7%
CAF	10	4	40,0%
British Heart Foundation	11	5	45,5%
Macmillan Cancer Support	13	5	38,5%
Ditchley Foundation	13	3	23,1%
Total Average of the Foundations			**43%**

Patterns of Involvement and Motivation in Slovak Volunteer Response to the Ukraine War: Findings from a National Survey[1]

Alžbeta Brozmanová Gregorová (Matej Bel University, Slovakia), Zuzana Heinzová (Matej Bel University, Slovakia), Estera Frgelcová (Matej Bel University, Slovakia)

Abstract

The swift humanitarian crisis caused by the conflict in Ukraine triggered an unprecedented wave of volunteerism across Europe. Due to its geographical proximity and historical ties, Slovakia became a crucial hub for support (Brozmanová Gregorová and Bambúch, 2024). Sharing a border with Ukraine, the country faced a significant influx of refugees, mainly women, children, and older adults seeking safety (Vansač and Gulasova, 2023). The initial response was marked by spontaneous help from ordinary citizens, demonstrating compassion and solidarity (Adamus and Grežo, 2024). Volunteers played a pivotal role in both humanitarian assistance and refugee integration. This study examines the multifaceted aspects of volunteerism during the early stages of the war, focusing on volunteers' demographic characteristics, levels of involvement, and motivations for engagement. Empirical data were collected in 2023 through a representative survey of the adult population as part of the project Volunteering in Slovakia during the crisis, with a research sample of 1,020 respondents. Findings show that 20.7% of adults volunteered to help address the crisis. Most were engaged in informal volunteering. Factor analysis revealed two main motivational patterns: value-based motivation and reactive or pragmatic motivation. Understanding these motives is crucial for sustaining volunteer engagement, especially in prolonged crises where initial enthusiasm may decline (Sengupta et al., 2023). Volunteering during the Ukraine crisis was strongly linked to volunteering in 2023 and to future intentions. This suggests that crisis-related volunteering can evolve into long-term engagement (Baxter-Tomkins and Wallace, 2009), thereby strengthening community cohesion and resilience (Waldman et al., 2018).

Keywords: Volunteering, Motivation, Ukraine, War, Crisis

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1. Introduction

According to UNHCR, more than 5.6 million refugees from Ukraine had been registered worldwide by May 31, 2025 (UNHCR, 2025). The war that erupted in February 2022 precipitated an unprecedented humanitarian crisis with far-reaching consequences across Europe. While refugee crises are not a novel phenomenon within the European Union, the Ukrainian displacement is distinctive in both its scale and character. In the Slovak context, it represents the country's first direct experience with a large-scale refugee crisis, thereby posing unique social, institutional, and policy challenges. (Brozmanová Gregorová and Bambúch, 2024). Bird and Amaglobeli (2022) and Garcés Mascareñas (2022) have identified specific characteristics of this crisis that distinguish it from others. These include the size and speed of the departure, the cultural and social proximity of the refugees, and the atypical profile of arrivals—primarily highly skilled women with children, and a notable proportion with tertiary education and recent migration history. This fostered strong Ukrainian social networks across Europe, particularly in neighbouring countries such as Slovakia. These networks proved invaluable during the initial spontaneous response to the war and in the subsequent months of local-level refugee support.

The humanitarian crisis stemming from the war in Ukraine prompted a robust, multifaceted volunteer response across neighbouring European nations, including Slovakia (Adamus and Grežo, 2024). This widespread mobilisation of civil society highlights the critical role of informal networks and individual initiatives in augmenting official governmental and non-governmental organisational efforts during large-scale emergencies (Macková and Seidlová, 2025). Understanding the underlying motivations and patterns of involvement among these volunteers is crucial for developing sustainable support frameworks and optimising future humanitarian aid operations (Chudzicka-Czupała et al., 2023). This paper, therefore, seeks to analyse the demographic characteristics, motivations, and engagement patterns of Slovak volunteers who contributed to the Ukraine war response, drawing on findings from a national survey.

Whittaker, McLennan, and Handmer (2015) provide an overview of research on volunteering in times of crisis and disaster, highlighting its definitions, opportunities, and challenges. Other studies examine factors at various levels that shape participation in crisis volunteering (e.g., Shi et al., 2018; Shaw et al., 2015), as well as the consequences and risks associated with such involvement. Selected research further explores motivation for crisis-driven volunteering (Sengupta et al., 2023; Chudzicka-Czupała et al., 2023), how crisis-driven volunteering can evolve into long-term engagement (e.g., Shaw and Goda, 2004; Baxter-Tomkins and Wallace, 2009) and how it contributes to building community resilience (McLennan, Whittaker and Handmer, 2015; Ganoe, Roslida, and Sihotang, T., 2023). Beyond individual and structural determinants of crisis volunteering, its contemporary forms have also been shaped by broader modernisation processes and societal transformations which significantly altered how volunteering manifests across countries, reflecting global trends (see

Hustinx and Lamertyn, 2003; Rochester, Paine, Howlett and Zimmeck, 2010; Frič and Pospíšilová et al., 2010).

The crisis associated with the Ukrainian war appears to be generating entirely new patterns of volunteering that may challenge established theoretical frameworks. Research in this area is therefore highly relevant, not only in the Slovak context but also internationally. Specifically, the ongoing humanitarian needs stemming from the conflict necessitate a deeper empirical understanding of volunteer motivations and the mechanisms that sustain their engagement, particularly given the distinct socio-political landscapes of Central and Eastern European nations (Macková and Seidlová, 2025; Sengupta et al., 2023).

Research questions:

1) What was the extent and nature of involvement in volunteering during the refugee crisis caused by the war in Ukraine?
2) What socio-demographic characteristics were associated with involvement in volunteering during the refugee crisis caused by the war in Ukraine?
3) What were the factors motivating volunteering during the refugee crisis caused by the war in Ukraine?
4) How does involvement in volunteering during the refugee crisis caused by the war in Ukraine relate to subsequent involvement in volunteering?

2. Methodology

The study is part of a larger national research project titled "Volunteering in Slovakia in Times of Crisis." We have selected only those findings that answer the research questions.

The data comes from a nationwide representative survey of the adult population of the Slovak Republic (N = 1020), conducted in 2023. The average age of the respondents was 47.5 years (SD = 16.32), with 48% of the sample comprising males.

Volunteering involvement was assessed through questions about participation in activities related to the war in Ukraine. A 16-item questionnaire, inspired by foreign tools, was developed to map motivational factors. The reliability of the scales was verified using Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = 0.80$). The data were analysed using descriptive statistics, difference testing, and factor analysis.

3. Results

3.1. Extent and nature of involvement in volunteering during the refugee crisis caused by the war in Ukraine

According to a representative survey, 20.7% of respondents aged 18 and above have volunteered to help resolve the crisis connected with the war in Ukraine in Slovakia. The majority of volunteers participated in informal aid efforts, operating independently of any organisational structure. Specifically, among individuals assisting with the Ukraine crisis, 40.3% engaged in informal volunteering, while 28.4% contributed through formal organisations, and 31.3% participated in both formal and informal capacities.

Table 1 presents a summary of the duration of volunteers' involvement in crisis-related activities related to the war in Ukraine. The distribution of volunteer duration reveals varied levels of sustained commitment, reflecting both the intensity of initial engagement and volunteers' adaptability to evolving crisis demands.

Table 1. Volunteering during the refugee crisis caused by the war in Ukraine – involvement over time

Involvement over time	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Immediately after the outbreak of war, within two weeks	35,5	35,5
After 3 weeks, the war started	25,6	61,1
After more than a month	19,4	80,6
After more than 2 months	10,0	90,5
More than 3 months after the outbreak of the war	9,5	100,0

Within the initial four weeks of the crisis precipitated by the war in Ukraine, a significant 61.1% of volunteers were engaged. This involvement escalated to 90.5% within three months, clearly indicating a direct response to the unfolding crisis.

3.2. Socio-demographic characteristics associated with involvement in volunteering during the refugee crisis caused by the war in Ukraine

Statistically, women, respondents aged 40–49, university-educated, economically secure, and religiously active (deeply religious and religious) individuals were significantly more involved in volunteering related to the refugee crisis associated with the war in Ukraine. A higher representation was identified among residents of large cities (Bratislava, Košice) and among members of ethnic minorities. Membership in organisations was positively associated with participation in volunteering in response to the crisis related to the war in Ukraine.

3.3. Motivations for volunteering during the refugee crisis caused by the war in Ukraine

Factor analysis identified two basic motivational patterns:

a) Value-based motivation – altruism, solidarity, the need to contribute to the common good.
b) Reactive (pragmatic) motivation – utilisation of current capacity, immediate response to a crisis.

Table 2. Descriptive indicators of motivation for volunteering during the refugee crisis caused by the war in Ukraine (N=211; Men = 88; Women = 123)

	Motivation total			Value-based motivation			Reactive motivation		
	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women
Mean	69.8	69.0	70.3	35.8	35.0	36.4	33.9	34.0	33.9
SD	16.8	16.8	16.9	8.6	8.3	8.7	10.2	10.3	10.1
Skew	-.25	-.04	-.40	-.54	-.22	-.77	-.17	-.13	-.21
Kurt	-.18	-.53	.16	-.15	-.73	.38	-.37	-.35	-.34
Min	17.0	32.0	17.0	7.0	16.0	7.0	8.0	10.0	8.00
Max	105.0	105.0	105.0	49.0	49.0	49.0	56.0	56.0	56.0

Note: Skew – skewness, Kurt- kurtosis, Min- minimum, Max- maximum

Statistical verification of intergroup differences using Student's t-test did not confirm differences between men and women involved in volunteering during the refugee crisis caused by the war in Ukraine, either in overall motivation or in its two components. According to the Student's paired t-test, respondents scored statistically significantly higher on the Value-Based Motivation factor, with a moderately strong effect size. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Student's paired t-test of differences between the Value-based Motivation factor and the Reactive (pragmatic) Motivation factor among respondents involved in volunteering in the refugee crisis caused by the war in Ukraine (n=211)

	Mean	**SD**	**t**	**p**	**Cohen's d**
Value-based motivation	35.82	8.56	3.255	.001	0.224
Reactive motivation	33.95	10.17			

3.4. Volunteering during the refugee crisis caused by the war in Ukraine and subsequent involvement in volunteering

The last research question focused on verifying whether involvement in various forms of volunteering (organised and unorganised) before 2023 and in 2023 was related to respondents' participation in volunteer activities during the refugee crisis caused by the war in Ukraine. To verify these relationships, we used the chi-square test, supplemented by Cramer's V as an indicator of the strength of association between variables.

The results (Table 4.) confirmed that volunteer engagement before 2023 and in 2023 was statistically significantly and moderately strongly associated with involvement in volunteering in the refugee crisis caused by the war in Ukraine. Similarly, it was found that respondents' plans to continue volunteering in the future were significantly related to their involvement in volunteer activities in the refugee crisis caused by the war in Ukraine. These findings suggest continuity in volunteer behaviour—past experiences and future intentions are closely linked to current engagement during a humanitarian crisis.

Table 4. Volunteering during the refugee crisis caused by the war in Ukraine, and subsequent involvement in volunteering

	Involved in volunteering in the Ukraine Crisis	**Not involved in volunteering in the Ukraine Crisis**	**p value**	**Cramers V**
Formal volunteering before 2023	67,2%	32,8%	< .001	0.428
Formal volunteering in 2023	73,9%	26,1%	< .001	0.385
Informal volunteering in 2023	82,5%	17,5%	< .001	0.308
Plans to be engaged in volunteering	89,3%	10,7%	< .001	0.291

4. Discussion

A national survey in Slovakia indicates that approximately one-third of the population volunteers. Specifically, research from 2019 found that 36% of adults participated in formal volunteering and 55% in informal volunteering within the preceding 12 months (Vašečka et al., 2020). More recent data from the 2023 study "Volunteering in Slovakia in Times of Crisis" reveals that 34.2% of adults were involved in formal volunteering and 52.7% in non-formal volunteering. While the proportion of individuals volunteering for the Ukraine crisis is lower than these overall figures, this is attributed to the shorter, specific timeframe of crisis-related volunteering compared to the broader tracking of general volunteering. Nevertheless, the data indicate a tangible increase in solidarity, as manifested through volunteerism. This surge underscores the dynamic nature of civic engagement in response to acute humanitarian needs, challenging previous assumptions about volunteer participation rates in specific crisis contexts. This increased participation, particularly in informal aid efforts, highlights the crucial role of spontaneous civic action during humanitarian emergencies (Høgenhaven, 2025). The results confirm that volunteering related to the refugee crisis caused by the war in Ukraine builds on existing social and cultural ties with Ukraine in Slovakia. Unlike Slovakia's previous experiences with migration, this was the first time Slovakia faced a mass refugee crisis in its immediate neighbourhood, reflected in an unprecedented mobilisation of the population (Bird and Amaglobeli, 2022; Garcés Mascareñas, 2022; OECD, 2022).

Among individuals assisting with the Ukraine crisis, 40.3% engaged in informal volunteering, while 28.4% contributed through formal organisations, and 31.3% participated in both formal and informal capacities. This dual involvement highlights the fluid nature of crisis-driven volunteerism, in which individuals frequently transition between structured and unstructured support mechanisms in response to emergent needs and personal capacity (Carlsen et al., 2020). The prevalence of informal assistance, often involving the direct provision of goods or services, aligns with observations from other acute humanitarian crises, where spontaneous, community-level responses frequently precede or complement institutional aid efforts (Whittaker et al., 2015; Yükseler and Yazgan, 2023). Furthermore, this finding indicates a significant proportion of the general population is actively engaged in direct support, extending beyond those formally affiliated with established humanitarian organisations (Høgenhaven, 2025). The rapid, large-scale mobilisation of informal volunteers in Slovakia mirrors similar patterns observed in neighbouring countries, where the perceived proximity and urgency of the Ukrainian conflict galvanised a strong, localised response that transcended typical barriers to participation (Macková and Seidlová, 2025). This substantial volunteer engagement also contrasts with some other humanitarian crises, where a significant majority of assistance remained within formal organisational structures (Zakariás et al., 2023). This informal engagement highlights the critical role of grassroots initiatives and individual altruism in immediate crisis response (Macková and Seidlová, 2025).

The findings suggest that women and individuals with greater social resources were more likely to volunteer during the refugee crisis caused by the war in Ukraine. To compare the social profiles of respondents in our representative survey who volunteered in general in 2023, we present the social profile of volunteers involved in informal volunteering. An informal volunteer was a creatively employed individual aged 50–59 with a university education, living in an economically secure household. They identify as believers, but not as deeply religious. Most often, they were persons of other nationalities residing in smaller municipalities (5,000–9,999 inhabitants) outside the Trenčín Self-Governing Region. Gender and marital status did not significantly influence this profile.

Our results confirmed two main dimensions of volunteer motivation during the war in Ukraine: value-based motivation ($M = 35.82$, $SD = 8.56$) and reactive (pragmatic) motivation ($M = 33.95$, $SD = 10.17$). A statistically significant difference ($t = 3.255$; $p = .001$; Cohen’s $d = 0.224$) indicates a slight predominance of value-based motivation over pragmatic motivation. These motives play a crucial role in maintaining volunteers' long-term engagement (Sengupta et al., 2023).

A similar structure of motivations was identified in a study by Sengupta et al. (2023), which examined volunteers during the refugee crisis in Ukraine in Poland. The authors reported that hedonic (pragmatic) motives dominated among young Polish volunteers, followed by normative (value-based), eudaimonic, and personal motives. While pragmatic motives prevailed among them, our sample shows a stronger representation of value-based motives. This different arrangement of motives may point to cultural, demographic, or situational specifics. While young Polish volunteers may have been motivated by emotional relief or personal satisfaction during the immediate response to the crisis, Slovak respondents—spanning across age categories—seem to be more driven by internal values such as solidarity and altruism.

Furthermore, our findings confirm that value-based motivation is strongly related not only to current volunteer activity but also to future intentions to continue volunteering. This relationship supports the theoretical foundations of a functional approach to motivation, such as the Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI) model, which posits that value motives predict volunteer engagement and retention.

Our data confirm that the experience of crisis volunteering also strengthens future volunteering intentions, suggesting its potential to transform into lasting engagement (Baxter-Tomkins and Wallace, 2009; Waldman et al., 2018).

Our data show that the willingness to help after the outbreak of war in Ukraine was not a random, one-off impulse. On the contrary, it builds on the respondents' existing volunteer behaviour outside of the crisis: those who were involved in both formal and informal volunteering before 2023 and in 2023 were statistically significantly more likely to be engaged during the Ukrainian crisis (Cramér V = .428, .385, .308; all $p < .001$). The same pattern of continuous behaviour can also be seen in plans—those who plan to volunteer are also those who have already been involved during the crisis. This "continuity model" is consistent with the idea of a volunteer career and role identity, according to which an existing stock of networks, skills, and volunteer identity is activated in a crisis, rather than an entirely new cohort of helpers emerging (Wakefield et al., 2022).

Similar findings have been reported in international studies of the COVID-19 pandemic. Australian longitudinal data show that previous formal volunteering is a strong predictor of later (including informal) helping; continuity thus explains who becomes active when the need arises (Biddle and Gray, 2022). In the British context, coordinated aid-giving during the pandemic was based on pre-pandemic volunteer role identities and connections—that is, people who had previously engaged in volunteering (Wakefield et al., 2022). In addition, even outside of strictly volunteer indicators, previous prosocial practice predicts help in crises (e.g., donating items during lockdown was significantly linked to the frequency of volunteering before the pandemic among young adults) (Nowakowska, 2023).

At the same time, however, the literature points out that, in addition to the "core" of continuous volunteers, crises also attract so-called emergent (unorganised) volunteers. A systematic review of crisis volunteering shows that many essential tasks are performed by spontaneous, unaffiliated volunteers who join ad hoc and outside traditional structures (Whittaker et al., 2015). In the context of the Ukrainian refugee crisis in Poland, there has also been a substantial influx of new volunteers in community and mutual aid initiatives; among young people, hedonistic-pragmatic motives prevailed over normative (value-based) ones, which differs from our profile (Sengupta, 2023). Qualitative studies from the UK also show

how these groups can be sustained through group processes (horizontal management, community ties) (Fernandes-Jesus et al., 2021; Perach et al., 2023).

5. Conclusions

The study's results showed that more than a fifth of Slovakia's adult population participated in volunteer activities in the refugee crisis caused by the war in Ukraine, with informal volunteering being the most prevalent. The socio-demographic profile showed a higher representation of women, educated and economically secure individuals, and residents of large cities. Factor analysis identified two motivational patterns – value-oriented and reactive motivation. Value-based motivation was statistically significantly stronger, which points to the deep-rooted nature of volunteer work in solidarity and altruism. A significant relationship was found between involvement in volunteering during the refugee crisis associated with the war in Ukraine and actual and planned participation in the later period. Crisis volunteering thus appears not only as an immediate response, but also as a potential for long-term civic engagement. This suggests that the initial catalytic event of the humanitarian crisis could foster sustained prosocial behaviours, potentially integrating these individuals into broader civic participation frameworks beyond the immediate emergency (Horstmann et al., 2017). This enduring commitment challenges the transient nature often associated with crisis-driven volunteerism, suggesting a more profound integration of altruistic impulses into everyday civic life (Trujillo et al., 2024). The distinct patterns of engagement and motivation observed in Slovakia offer valuable insights into the broader dynamics of crisis volunteering within Central and Eastern Europe.

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Philanthropy, Responsibility and Influence: Business Engagement with Society in the 1950s[1]

Michael Bzdak (Rutgers University)

Abstract

This paper argues that the strategic use of philanthropy and the accumulation of social and cultural capital by key actors shaped both corporate practices and international relations during the 1950s. The article seeks to answer how philanthropic strategies influenced US foreign policy and what roles individual actors played in blurring the lines among business, philanthropy, and politics The paper also describes and analyzes post-war business engagement with society and the emergence of Corporate Social Responsibility in the 1950s. Philanthropy's role as a strategic practice is discussed through examples of US relations with India, Japan and Italy. The article will investigate a critical decade (1950s) where companies, philanthropic leaders and governments exerted great influence on foreign policy and international relations and, as Eleanor Brilliant describes a time when the borders separating philanthropic, third sector activities and political activities were blurred. The article will also highlight the importance of social and cultural capital as it was accumulated and leveraged by members of the Rockefeller family as well as by Adriano Olivetti as he led his company's growing business presence in the US. The paper will also investigate the roles of a select group of lesser-known individuals who worked behind the scenes to advance the agendas of corporate, philanthropic and government leaders. The work of these individuals illustrates the power of cultural, social, and symbolic capital; for example, their educational achievements (cultural capital), networks (social capital), and reputations (symbolic capital) enabled them to gain power and influence.

Keywords: Philanthropy, CSR, Modernism, Soft Power, Cultural Diplomacy, Mid-century

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1. Introduction

The late 1940s and 1950s marked a time when Western society was still coming to grips with globalization, the post-war economy and Cold War tensions. Companies were increasingly more visible in their efforts to engage with society and contribute to the greater good. Since the US private sector had proven its patriotism in multiple ways in the preceding decade, business leaders were eager to sustain and enhance their citizenship efforts. The increasing practice of cultural diplomacy offered new avenues of engagement for business and philanthropy. Concurrently, many companies were also embracing European Modernism with adventurous designs for office buildings and, in some cases, initiating formal programs to support the arts and humanities.

The early 1950s also witnessed the expansion of new state laws (in the United States) that allowed corporations to be more philanthropically engaged with efforts to improve the common good. In an often-cited 1953 case, A. P. Smith vs. Barlow, it was found that charitable contributions by corporations do not have to demonstrate a direct benefit to companies (Washington Law Review 1954). In other words, companies were free to support broader community efforts such as education, social services and the arts. As Baumol and Bowen pointed out, the establishment of company foundations for charitable giving grew dramatically; in 1939 there were 20 and in 1962, there were more than 1,500. While tax laws surely were a factor, companies were also taking on more responsibility for community needs in response to stakeholder expectations (Baumol & Bowen 1966).

This paper examines business engagement with society and the emergence of Corporate Social Responsibility in the 1950s. This decade is worthy of renewed attention due to the pivotal changes in the relationship of business to society. Following decades of evolving business practices and shifting societal expectations, the 1950s witnessed unprecedented collaboration between corporations, government, and cultural institutions. Included in this study are discussions of the role of philanthropy as a mechanism for companies and foundations to demonstrate their citizenship in the context of societal expectations.

The following essay argues that the 1950s marked a decisive turning point in corporate responsibility practice, fundamentally reshaping how businesses engaged with society in four key areas: 1) corporations came to be seen as leaders in supporting critical social issues; 2) corporate leaders gained the trust and the power to convene important dialogues around societal issues; 3) corporations and foundations collaborated with government to advance local, state, national and global agendas; 4) increasingly in the 1950s, art, culture, design and the humanities were seen as tools of economic development and diplomacy by businesses, foundations and government. Drawing on historical records, philanthropic studies, and recent literature on modernist design, this paper explores how corporate responsibility evolved during this transformative decade

In examining the literature on corporate responsibility at mid-century, Howard Bowen and Patrick Murphy are often cited as early thinkers in defining the role of business in society. Bowen's Social Responsibilities of the Businessman, published in 1953, is probably the most cited source and was thankfully republished in 2013 making it more accessible to new generations of scholars (Bowen 1953). The publication of Peter F. Drucker's The Practice of Management in 1954 represented a new and formal view of management theory and practice and helped to raise the profile of the corporate executive and their role within and outside of the company. Patrick Murphy, writing in 1978, characterized the time period leading up to the 1950s as “the ‘philanthropic’ era in which companies donated to charities more than anything else.” Subsequently, in Murphy’s view, “1953–67 was classified as the ‘awareness’ era, in which there became more recognition of the overall responsibility of business and its involvement in community affairs” (Murphy 1978, pp. 20-21). While these classifications are helpful, various industries practiced more or less sophisticated types of social responsibility depending on the leadership style of the CEO and the company’s willingness to move away both from traditional philanthropy as well as shareholder primacy.

The 1950s also witnessed a deeper look and increasing critique of the corporation in film and popular literature. William Whyte published The Organization Man in 1956 and painted a picture of a dehumanizing corporate culture where conformity was seen as a weakness and an actual threat to American democracy. The portrayal of the modern company in novels like Executive Suite (Hawley 1952) and the Man in the Grey Flannel Suit (Wilson 1955), signaled a more public curiosity of the company in society. Hawley’s Executive Suite traced the evolution of a family-owned furniture company in southeastern Pennsylvania. The book was made into a popular and award-winning film in 1955. While the book provided a broad context of American manufacturing at mid-century, the movie dramatized the conflicts inherent in family-owned business as well as the tensions of shareholder capitalism. The film reached a dramatic climax in a boardroom battle over profit versus responsibility to multiple stakeholders. Implicit in this conflict was the focus on short-term versus long-term view of the business and the tensions around shareholder primacy. These works explore the tensions that emerged in an era of emerging stakeholder capitalism where managers and senior leaders faced trade-offs in meeting the expectations of the consumer, the employee, the community and the stockholder.

2. Cultural Diplomacy

Following the large-scale roll out of the Marshall Plan in 1947, American foreign policy continued to seek ways to influence the rebuilding of Europe and thwart the threat of communism including more collaboration with companies and foundations. The Point IV Program, announced by Harry Truman at his inaugural address in January of 1949, deserves more attention since it influenced the practice of international development and the private sector’s involvement with global development. Its goals were simple, “Creating markets for the United States by reducing poverty and increasing production in developing countries…Diminishing the threat of communism by helping countries prosper under capitalism.” (USAID ND) In simple terms, “Expecting altruism to result in friendship and gratitude, American philanthropic generosity was meant to demonstrate the willingness of the United States to share its wealth with its needy neighbors” (Amuzegar 1958, p. 531).

According to Stephen Macekura, “As the first formal government program explicitly designed to ameliorate social, economic, and political conditions in any ‘underdeveloped’ nation, Point IV brought international development policy into the U.S. foreign policy apparatus to an unprecedented extent" (Macekura 2013, p. 130). Point IV was built on a similar premise as the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) in its global aspirations to lift the rural poor out of poverty. A key element of Truman's proposal was the involvement of the private sector in international development efforts. It is safe to say that this approach to development not only influenced the creation of USAID in 1961 but also fueled the nascent Corporate Social Responsibility movement. Adding to the complexity of this emerging international development paradigm, the participation of US foundations such as Ford, Carnegie and Rockefeller was significant. Kumar and Brooks have described the workings of these foundations serving as bridges, platforms and satellite (Kumar & Brooks 2021).

This time period was also important to the promotion of American modern art through cultural diplomacy in what Greg Barnhisel has labeled "Cold War Modernism" (Barnhisel 2015). As Edward Berman and others have argued, the boundaries between big business, government and large foundations were blurred as the US shaped it post-war foreign policy (Berman 1983). This blurring was most notable in the small circle of (mostly male) elite leaders who were advancing US foreign policy through capitalism, philanthropy and government. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, American cultural diplomacy increasingly included efforts to incorporate the visual arts, design and architecture into strategic programming. The early efforts, however, are mostly attributable to the Rockefeller family. The Rockefeller family epitomizes the potential of one family to exert a great deal of global influence due to their social and cultural capital. While the inclusion of modern art into diplomatic relations was seemingly unprecedented, it is no surprise that Nelson Rockefeller, no stranger to culture nor politics, was integral to the US Government's efforts to integrate art into diplomacy. Institutions such as the Museum of Modern Art and the related Rockefeller family supported organizations were involved in a number of international development efforts.

Nelson Rockefeller was appointed by President Roosevelt to lead the US Government's Office of Inter-American Affairs (OIAA) in 1939. Rockefeller had a deep interest in Latin America and often used his personal philanthropy to fund cultural programming (Arndt 2005). Through his engagement with MoMA, the Museum was, "strategically focusing on the development of art infrastructures in Latin America: if modernism was to be the banner under which America would deploy its international cultural policy in Brazil, it was necessary, to begin with, to induce the appearance of modern art museums similar to, and guided by, the MoMA" (Söderlund 2019, p. 2). Freedom of expression, as evidenced in abstract art, connoted a free and democratic society.

Based on the success of his business success in developing the Avila Hotel (1942) in Venezuela with the help of Wallace K. Harrison, Rockefeller was also engaged in the growing embassy programs and government building abroad and was involved in the selection of Harrison & Abramovitz to design embassies in Rio de Janeiro (1948) and Havana (1950) as well as the United Nations Secretariat Building (1947-1952) in New York City. Modernist architecture and design became emblematic of a progressive image that the US was promoting and exporting globally (Loeffler 2011). Corporate modernism as evidenced in celebrated buildings like the Lever House and Seagram Building in NYC as well as the PSFS Building in Philadelphia communicated power and prestige while reflecting managerial efficiency through the use of glass and steel and simple geometry.

As Grace Ong Yang (2020) argued, modernism afforded corporations the opportunity to adopt elements of design as elements of corporate branding. As Ron Robin noted, "…the embassies were identical in style to the headquarters of monolithic American conglomerates that were simultaneously arising throughout the world. Unconsciously or otherwise, the striking similarities between the embassy designs and the architecture of corporations conveyed to beholders that the United States envisioned a global economic arena of unrestricted commerce and harbored a deep conviction in the intrinsic ties between free trade and free government" (Robin 1992, p. 145). In the 1950s, branding was a relatively new practice especially in the areas of consumer motivation. Influential publications such as the Harvard Business Review explored this emerging dynamic in a number of articles in the 1950s (Newman 1955).

3. Museums and Cultural Capital

In 1951, after John D. Rockefeller III and his wife Blanchette visited Japan as Cultural Consultants to the Peace Settlement Mission, a plan was put in place to create a series of cross-cultural exchanges. The Rockefellers were directly involved with three exhibitions hosted by The MoMA. In a clear demonstration of social and cultural capital, MOMA was again called upon to act as a cultural diplomat at the behest of the Rockefeller family and the United States Government. The Japan Society in New York had been created in 1907 to foster understanding between the US and Japan but ceased operations during the war years and when operations resumed in 1952, Rockefeller served as President. Rockefeller's efforts went well beyond exporting American culture to Japan. As Kida explains, "It is thus evident that America was both attempting to foster a feeling of amity towards Japan in its own population, through a process of cultural exchange that introduced them to aspects of Japan's culture such as crafts and architecture, and also trying to foster pro-American sentiment in the Japanese population, drawing it into the liberal democratic camp" (Kida 2012, p. 393).

The MoMA organized a 1955 exhibition titled Textile and Ornamental Arts of India organized by Edgar Kaufmann, Jr and designed by Alexander Girard**.** Charles and Ray Eames produced a short film for the exhibition (Mathur 2011). In 1958, Charles and Ray Eames visited India for three months at the invitation of the Government and with the sponsorship of the Ford Foundation to study design efforts and to make recommendations for a formal design training program (Eames, 1958). Subsequently, the Ford Foundation grants helped the Ministry of Industry to establish the National Institute of Design (NID) in Ahmedabad. "The Institute was founded to offer training, research and services in the field of design so that Indian manufacturers could compete more effectively in world markets" (Staples 1992, p. 51). These efforts, not surprisingly, aligned with US foreign policy in strengthening India's economic and cultural strength.

Building on their legacy of promoting global design, The MoMA collaborated with The Ford Foundation and the United States Information Agency (USIA) in organizing a major exhibition, Design Today in America and Europe, for travel to India in 1959. Modeled on the Good Design series, the exhibition included furniture, dining ware and other domestic objects that modeled the MoMA's standard of good modern design at affordable prices. Beyond the political overtones of cultural diplomacy, the exhibition hosts, the National Small Industries

Corporation, had aspirations of inspiring good design among India's manufacturers (Kari 2010). The exhibition of over 300 objects toured Armristat and New Delhi and was seen by more than 190,000 visitors (Franc 1994). By highlighting modernism through the validation of the MoMA and through the influence and philanthropy of the Rockefeller family, business was able to promote capitalism, democracy and good design in active partnership with the government.

Italy also became a focus for post- war diplomacy and cultural production was singled out for further support both as tool for building international understanding but also to help support a market in the US for Italian art and design. Like efforts in India and Japan, traditional arts and design were featured in a major exhibition supported by the Marshall Plan. Italy at Work, organized by the leaders from the Art Institute of Chicago and the Brooklyn Museum and opening in 1951, featured crafts and design that reflected the uniquely Italian traditions of ceramics, glass, textiles, and furniture. A small section devoted to industrial design included Olivetti and Fiat. The catalog presented artists and designers that were exemplars of historic traditions of craft and decorative arts, except for Gio Ponti and the producers of industrial arts (Rogers, 1950). Beyond building closer ties and goodwill with Italy and raising awareness of distinct cultural traditions and innovations, the exhibition was also intended to expand the market for Italian products in the US. These efforts were intended to foster pro-American sentiment and align consumption with democracy and, as Antje Gamble (2024) also suggests, the US was also using Italy to validate its commitment to culture.

4. Olivetti's Social and Cultural Capital

In 1933, 32-year-old Adriano Olivetti took over as leader of a typewriter factory founded by his father in the town of Ivrea, Italy. Adriano elevated Olivetti, a small family business and early manufacturer of typewriters, to the world stage over a period of 30 years until his death in 1960. Under Adriano, the Olivetti company became a global experiment in humanizing an industrial city (and region) by means of art, architecture and design. His thinking was progressive for an industrialist in the early twentieth century, especially in his focus on taking care of his employees as well as the local community. As one scholar summed it up, "…he succeeded in creating an 'Olivetti-system' through the creation of favourable attitudes and consensus for the firm, improving the quality of the life of his fellow citizens, developing shared value systems; generating a strong sense of belonging to his firm, fostering the motivation of the individual and constructing a strong brand with a very positive image" (Arrigo 2003, p. 127). For Adriano, cultural and social responsibility meant well-designed facilities, good housing and daycare and an extraordinary focus on progressive design.

During World War II, Olivetti was exiled in Switzerland where he "came into contact with key leaders in the US Government including CIA Director Allen Dulles, Ambassador Clare Boothe Luce, and Henry Kissinger" (Barbiellini & Goldstein 2012, p. 7). According to Barbiellini and Goldstein (2012), Adriano met David Lilienthal who led the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) work under FDR. In his own writing on his experience at TVA, Lilienthal asserted "that when the use of technology has a moral purpose and when its methods are thoroughly democratic, far from forcing the surrender of individual freedom and the things of the spirit to the machine, the machine can be made to promote those very ends" (Drumright 2002, p.

495). The Company’s post-war influence extended well beyond Italy as evidenced by important building commissions in most major markets.

Lillienthal’s focus on humanity coexisting with industrialism would have surely resonated with Adriano and his model of the interdependence of community, region and factory. Lillienthal’s thinking on democracy and technology and the power of human development may have influenced Adriano’s own thinking on the regional development in the Canavese district surrounding Ivrea. David Lilienthal espoused the interdependence of human life and natural resources as well as local participation in governance and called for a balance of centralized and decentralized governance. His book, TVA—Democracy on the March was published in 1944 and was widely read especially in post-war Europe where the TVA approach was seen as an attractive model to promote democracy and thwart communism (Drumright 2002).

Olivetti’s influence in the United States became very tangible in 1950 when the company opened an office at 580 Fifth Avenue and later a research facility in New Canaan, Connecticut in 1952. The Company’s main competitor in the typewriter and calculator markets was Remington Rand. Olivetti “competed on quality and innovation rather than price” and its products were differentiated by “design excellence” (Barbiellini & Goldstein 2012 , p. 264). In 1952, the exhibition, Olivetti: Design in Industry, opened at the Museum of Modern Art. According to Jim Carter, “Olivetti was promoted as the paragon of modern design, the pioneer and flag-bearer of a coordinated corporate image that American industry, in its role as cultural producer, was fervently encouraged to follow” (Carter 2018, p. 103). What the public did not know, however, was that Olivetti funded the exhibition and controlled the design and content. Instead of a catalog, the exhibition was memorialized by a member’s bulletin (1952), a 24-page publication replete with images of Olivetti buildings and products. The publication, designed by Leo Lionni, is printed in black and white with the exception of the cover where a large mustard-colored and iconic “O” dominates the page.

The MoMA example points to a shrewd use of a major art institution to validate a company eager to burnish its identity as a design leader. Olivetti made the calculated choice to enter the US market where they felt they could compete in an era shaped by politics, technology and an evolving international trade climate. There were, however, intangibles that the company leadership leveraged to their advantage. According to Adriana Castagnoli, “Olivetti's expansion also rested on Camillo's and Adriano's social and entrepreneurial vision, hence on advantages deriving from institutional assets such as the company's code of ethics and social responsibility (towards the environment, design, training, and work)” (Castagnoli 2014, p. 1303). The Olivetti example also differs in that their products were directly marketed to individual consumers as well as corporate clients at a time when they were building their presence in the American market.

Equally interesting is the 1954 opening of an Olivetti retail space in the same 580 Fifth Avenue building and designed by prominent Milanese architects, Belgiojoso, Peressutti and Rogers. The space included use of a variety of materials including elegant Italian marble and organic brass pedestals that were used to display the office products. The entire space was dominated by a 75-foot, sand-cast relief sculpture by Constantine Nivola. Now lost, the space is described as “one of the most daring and powerfully imagined designs in postwar New York” (Sherer 2012, p. 260). Also in, 1954 MoMA organized a new exhibition, The Modern Movement in Italy: Architecture and Design, and featured a section devoted to Olivetti. (Carter, 2020) It appears as though Olivetti leadership was consciously exercising influence and power to establish and fortify their brand in the United States through very deliberate public relations, marketing and branding. In 1959, Olivetti began the process of acquiring US-based competitor Underwood. This acquisition is notable in this era in that it was rare for a foreign company to acquire a US company. In fact, at the time, it was the largest ever foreign takeover of a US company.

The intangibles of design leadership and cultural responsibility are clearly part of the differentiation the company brought to markets outside of Europe. The focus on environmental, social and design put Olivetti in a class of its own in terms of social and cultural responsibility. It would be decades before the business community adopted this progressive view of the role of business in society. Olivetti prided itself on leadership in what they termed “integrated design” and its unique grounding in Italy. By integrated design, Olivetti saw product design, corporate image and the corporate workplace as falling under a “single high standard of taste.” The 1952 MoMA publication reveals more detail on the elements of design in regard to advertising and promotional material; four characteristics are described, “(1) a sober use of language; (2) imaginative pictorial symbols; (3) presentation unified by one esthetic concept; (4) emphasis on the company’s high standard of design” (Bulletin, 1952). Hardly a playbook for design, these four characteristics do not really reveal any secrets about the Olivetti approach to design nor the Italian roots of their aesthetic. Both phrases, “high standard of taste’ and “high standard of design” are conceptually ambiguous.

This approach to integrated design became one of the defining features of this global brand. Olivetti was clearly ahead of the US where companies were just discovering the strategic role of design as part of brand identity. The involvement of renowned figures like Paul Rand and Eliot Noyes at IBM illustrates the growing seriousness with which business leaders approached corporate branding and image. Their influence extended well beyond mere product design, signaling a new era where the visual identity and public perception of a company became central to its strategy and reputation. Noyes, for example, led to the development of a comprehensive design guide for the company as well as playing a role in product design and the design of IBM building throughout the world (Harwood 2011). Senior leaders at IBM were well aware of the Olivetti approach especially since the company’s NY retail presence (discussed above) generated a great amount of critical attention including a glowing review by Ada Louise Huxtable (1954).

The abstract quality of all Olivetti design was known at the “Olivetti Touch” or the “Olivetti Idiom” as described by Toschi (2018). Olivetti’s focus on the abstract notion of its own identity rooted in Italy was commensurate with Italy’s efforts to promote “the highly marketable idea of a ‘national creative essence’ which, together with the artisanry which enabled the Italian designer to readily adapt his production to consumer tastes and industrial innovations, allowed the designer to compete in the rigorous international marketplace” (Orto 1995, p. 5). At Olivetti, “Design promoted not just technical values, but cultural, intellectual and artistic values as well. Its aesthetic style was also progressive: it was modern and rational, apparently against the decorative aesthetics prevalent at that time, much in the manner of Behrens in AEG…" (Järvinen & Koskinen 2001, p. 28).

As Mauro Sciarelli and Mario Tani (2015) argued, Adriano Olivetti was practicing a form of stakeholder capitalism before the term existed. Olivetti was keenly aware that the company's identity was an intangible asset that required careful curation while also leaving room for experimentation and innovation. Olivetti went a step further in commissioning cutting-edge architects to design its advertising, factories and employee housing as well as social services. As one architectural publication stated, Adriano "consolidated the idea of a close-knit community founded on the awareness of the inalienability of the spiritual values of man's existence, capable of turning the challenges involved in the rise of industrial civilization and the endless opportunities of technological progress in man's favor"(Domus 2012). Olivetti also pioneered management practices which have become commonplace in the private sector. For example, an emphasis on integrated design and rigor in defining corporate purpose and brand promise were actively pursued by Adriano and his successors and accordingly structured its design practice much the same way design is integrated into major MNCs today many decades later.

It appears that Adriano was influenced by American modernism and planning and through the publication and translations of Lewis Mumford's **The Culture of Cities** in 1954 and **Italy Builds** by G.E. Kidder Smith in 1955. Kidder Smith's book is a curious attempt to contextualize post-war Italian architecture within unique Italian traditions. The introduction by Ernesto Nathan Rogers includes a brief passage explaining architecture's co-existence with fascism and the resistance movement while underscoring the positive role being played by architects in post-war Italy. Smith's book featured four Olivetti projects: Figini and Pollini's Day Nursery, Worker Housing and Olivetti factory and Nizzoli and Fiochi's Workers Housing; Leo Lionni designed the jacket while Olivetti executive Giorgio Soavi is acknowledged for his help with the Italian edition (Kidder Smith 1955).

A lesser-known element of Olivetti management philosophy was recently investigated by scholar, Caterina Toschi (Toschi, 2018). In order to sustain the Olivetti idiom, senior leaders sought a means to introduce new management recruits to Olivetti culture. A sales training facility, combining technical training and humanistic thought, was created in Florence in 1954 to immerse early in career executives in the identity of Olivetti. The curriculum went far beyond an introduction to the Olivetti business and exposed aspiring executives to the "Olivetti Touch" and the role of design with the company culture. Although US companies Like IBM, GE and AT&T developed in-house management training programs in the 1950s, most companies relied on university-based training courses.

5. Corning Glass-Corporate Responsibility and the Power of Convening

Corning Glass, among a handful of other leading pro-social companies, embraced its role as a responsible company at the local and national level. As this industrial company evolved, its relationship with multiple stakeholders became a critical factor in business and social decision-making. At the heart of Corning's approach was an acknowledgement that science and art were interdependent and that good design was something that demanded deliberate attention. Arthur A. Houghton, Jr., one of the company's leaders, described his aspirations for the new Glass Center, "we are seeking to present a rounded picture of a single industry in all its many aspects-historical, scientific, aesthetic, utilitarian, humanistic-indicating its past development, its present impact on society, its future potentialities. In particular, we are concerned with the humanistic aspect of the industry-that is, its relationship to those working in it and those for whom its products were designed, namely, the community at large" (Staley 1951, p. 11). This statement is fascinating in its progressive view of both industry and the recognition of stakeholders other than stockholders.

In 1951, Corning Glass leaders organized a conference to address life in the industrial age in collaboration with the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS). This remarkable gathering, hosted by Corning in their new modernist museum (Glass Center) and library, featured a diverse group of participants from all sectors of society with a large concentration of representatives from business and academia. The conference explored issues of human values in an industrial civilization and featured prominent scholars, art and cultural leaders and business leaders. Fortunately, the gathering is memorialized in a detailed publication of the proceedings (Staley 1952). One of his core themes was the perception that American culture is perceived as too reliant on consumption and capitalism and less on the humanities and individualism. The roster of participants included prominent academics, art and cultural leaders including the director of The MoMA and business leaders from GE, RCA, sociologists, and writers, including Margaret Mead, Leo Lionni and David Lilienthal of TVA fame and architect, Wallace K. Harrison.

The conference explored issues of human values in an industrial civilization and featured in depth discussions around topics such as the idea of community in the context of industrial civilization and issues related confidence in technology and personal morale. The conference became known for the openness to cross-fertilization of thought evidenced by the diverse group of participants. Corning Glass's leaders were sounding a call on a pro-social view of business and its role in society. The organizers recognized that the world had changed significantly in the wake of WWII and were also acutely aware that business had assumed a new leadership role in the new world order. The act of a corporation convening thought leaders, however, was not new. Walter Paepcke, CEO of the Container Corporation of America (CCA) formalized the idea of convenings through the founding of the Aspen Institute in the early 1950s. His greatest impact and legacy were in promoting the cross-fertilization of thought through gatherings large and small.

As a business leader, Paepcke used his power and influence to bring many disparate partners together to advance his belief in the pro-social power of business. His humanistic crusade became less about advancing his business and more about using his influence to bring leaders together. His commitment to European Modernism marked the beginning of a new chapter for corporate cultural responsibility in the United States, while Chicago became a pioneering nexus for the corporate embrace of design and Modernism. In essence, Paepcke realized one of the goals of the Bauhaus with the integration of human-centered design throughout CCA. Not surprisingly, Paepcke was one of the participants in the Corning Conference.

6. Conclusion

The examples of The Museum of Modern Art, Olivetti and the deep influence of the Rockefeller family underscore the importance of Eleanor Brilliant's observation "about the borderlines between philanthropic, third sector activities and political activities, and how these borders may shift or even disappear under certain conditions of time and place" (Brilliant 1993, p. 95). This ambiguity around the role of companies, foundations and government prompted calls for more transparency and oversight from multiple stakeholders including government regulators, activists, Wall Street and concerned citizens. The ambiguity also raised concerns around the role of foundations in growing and sustaining the hegemony of the US (Parmar 2012). While new regulations and transparency in reporting have become standard, there remains a tension around individuals and institutions accumulating and leveraging social and cultural capital. The tension applies to museums as well since their missions dictate public education without donor influence.

The formalization of corporate philanthropy was also a key building block of an emerging normalization of corporate social responsibility that allayed shareholder objection to broader citizenship and employee engagement practices. In terms of architecture and design, businesses had at least two motivations to support these cultural efforts. First, it was recognized that arts were always a reflection of current societal thinking and reflected freedom of thought and expression. Second, companies were beginning to see the value in aligning their brands with innovation and creativity. Olivetti epitomizes how a company in partnership with a cultural institution could promote cultural, intellectual and artistic values through design practice.

Many artists, architects and designers saw industry of a means to advance new aesthetic principles such as those espoused by the Bauhaus and the concept of *gesamtkunstwerk*. The philanthropic leadership of Carnegie, Rockefeller and Ford in the early twentieth century was now becoming more of an institutional rather an individual practice among corporations. Ironically, it was the leaders of the steel, oil and car manufacturing companies that took the lead in advocating for more freedom in corporate engagement in societal issues. The financial industry, in the following decades, also played a role in both philanthropy and assembling corporate art collections. The embrace of European modernism led to innovations in advertising and product design also signaled a new era in art and commerce collaborations. Finally, museums were increasingly involved in elements of advocating for better industrial design through direct relationships with the production potential of companies.

At the core of this transformation were leaders such as Walter Paepcke, Adriano Olivetti, Jamie and Amo Houghton and the Rockefeller family. What they shared was a commitment to broader issues of social cohesion, celebrating humanity, and, of course, leading successful businesses. One of the key elements of this shift to corporate cultural responsibility was the openness to cross-fertilization of thought evidenced by the Corning Conferences and the Aspen convenings. Business leaders such as those from Corning convened conversations addressing unease around a perceived lack of confidence in industrial civilization and modernism in the context of the Cold War, global political tension and a growing international economy.

The social and cultural capital accruing to business and foundations is difficult to measure. There are notable examples of individuals exerting and gaining influence within the Rockefeller, Ford and Carnegie Foundations. Most notable are Paul Hoffman who directed the Marshall Plan and later became the Ford Foundation president; Frank W. Abrams, who served as Chairman of the Board of Standard Oil Company and also as Ford Foundation trustee; Johns Foster Dulles who served as United States Secretary of State under President Dwight D. Eisenhower and as a Rockefeller Foundation trustee and President Dwight D. Eisenhower who served as a Carnegie Foundation trustee in 1950 while he was president of Columbia University.

However, there are other individuals whose stories remain untold who have contributed to this growing body of social and cultural capital. Revisiting the Corning Conference of 1951 and the participant list there are at least three individuals who played powerful roles in realizing the new power afforded to business: 1) David Lillienthal, TVA and Atomic Energy Commission played a major role in leading a massive development project aimed at empowering rural communities. Lilienthal was very conscious of his influence as a champion for business and community development. In 1952, he published Big Business: A New Era where he extolled the virtues of free enterprise; 2) Wallace K. Harrrison, architect and planner, led the design team for the United Nations Secretariat in NYC and also designed embassies for the US government as well as significant buildings for Corning Glass, Alcoa and others; 3) Leo Lionni was an editor at Fortune as well as a designer and was instrumental in the The MoMA exhibition and later joined Olivetti as a design advisor.

These individuals, although hardly famous, played critical roles in catalyzing a paradigm shift in the role of business in society. They quietly led the transformation of the relationship of business to government and the third sector as they moved within the elite circles of American society. They were known and trusted by powerful leaders and were entrusted with creating a seismic shift in how commerce and culture could not only co-exist but become interdependent and synergistic. Each of these examples illustrate the workings of cultural, social and symbolic capital as each individual was able to accumulate these forms of capital to enable them to gain power and influence and to advance cultural diplomacy. These individuals helped to promote democracy and capitalism by positioning industry as a responsible citizen and were key in normalizing corporate responsibility.

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Sense of Community Responsibility's Impact on Philanthropic & Civic Behaviors[1]

Richard Clerkin (University of North Carolina Wilmington), Chris Prentice (University of North Carolina Wilmington)

Abstract

Prosocial behaviors, including volunteering and donating, are essential for preserving and improving civic health and community well-being. We investigate whether individuals with a greater feeling of personal responsibility for community well-being volunteer or donate more than their counterparts. Results indicate that the more responsibility individuals feel for their community (i.e., higher levels of Sense of Community Responsibility), the mo-re likely they are to volunteer and donate in that community. Further, higher levels of Sense of Community Responsibility are associated with higher levels of both the amount of secular donations and the proportion of those donations that remain in the community, as well the number of hours they volunteer with secular nonprofits each week. Somewhat surprising, we see very little influence of Sense of Community Responsibility on one's philanthropic behaviors towards houses of worship. These findings also raise implications for local nonprofit and government leaders who want to increase donations and volunteers to local nonprofits by creating and enhancing sense of community, and the responsibility individuals feel for the communities in which they live.

Keywords*:* sense of community responsibility, volunteering, donating, secular nonprofits, religious nonprofits

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1. Introduction

Prosocial behaviors are essential for preserving and improving civic health and community well-being (Boyd & Piatak, 2025). Prosocial behavior “covers the broad range of actions intended to benefit one or more people other than oneself” (Batson & Powell, 2003, p. 463) and includes behaviors like donating and volunteering. In this research, we explore the influence an individual’s Sense of Community Responsibility (SOC-R) has on their prosocial behaviors. Nowell & Boyd (2014a) define SOC-R as “a feeling of personal responsibility for the individual and collective well-being of a community of people not directly rooted in an expectation of personal gain” (p. 231). We seek to extend SOC-R research from workplace and inter-organizational collaboration settings to philanthropic and civic behaviors. We expect that individuals with a greater SOC-R to the community in which they live will more be more philanthropically and civically engaged.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Sense of Community

Building from McMillan and Chavis’ (1986) foundational work, Sense of Community (SOC) is a construct based on various aspects of group bonding. The construct has four components representing related yet distinct aspects of bonding, including 1) being a member and belonging to a group, 2) having influence in a group and making a difference, 3) feeling that resources will be distributed and needs will be fulfilled through membership in a group, and 4) sharing emotional connection and commitment to a group (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). In a meta-analysis of 106 empirical studies of SOC from 1980 to 2012, Talò et al. (2014) demonstrate that there is a moderately strong relationship between SOC and community engagement (both civic and political participation) among US adults.

Nowell and Boyd (2010) argue that this approach to SOC, based on a psychological theory of needs, treats community as a resource, where people take action – e.g., civically engage – on the expectation of personal gain (i.e., fulfillment of an individual’s psychological, social, and/or resource needs). Despite the construct’s prominence, Nowell and Boyd (2010) suggest SOC requires a complementary theoretical approach that centers on an individual’s “sense of responsibility to advance the health and well-being of a community and its members” (Boyd & Nowell, 2014, p. 109). They argue that Sense of Community Responsibility (SOC-R), a related but distinct construct to SOC, influences individual behavior “through the mechanism of cognitive dissonance such that actors who experience a strong SOC-R are going to be motivated to take action to facilitate alignment between their social identity and their behavior” (Boyd et al., 2018, p. 431). Stated differently, individuals with a social identity centered on a sense of responsibility to and accountability for the well-being of one’s community are motivated to engage the community to ensure their prosocial behaviors match that identity.

To date, most SOC-R research applying the psychological construct to group engagement has focused on public service workplace communities (e.g., Boyd et al., 2018) and community-based coalitions or collaboratives (e.g., Nowell & Boyd, 2014b; Nowell et al., 2016; Treitler et al., 2018), finding positive associations between SOC-R and prosocial behaviors like organizational citizenship behaviors and community engagement. Other research has explored the relationship between SOC-R and altruism. Yang et al., (2020) find that higher levels of SOC-R were associated with more altruistic behaviors among residents in a community, establishing some evidence that SOC-R may be present and have impacts beyond workplace communities and community coalitions or collaboratives.

2.2. Giving and Volunteering

Research on giving typically falls into one of two categories, 1) a focus on the donor's demographic characteristics and social position as correlates of giving (e.g., religious affiliation, socioeconomic status, and gender); or 2) a focus on nonprofit financial characteristics as signals to prospective donors (e.g., administrative costs, organizational wealth, or the "price" of donations) (Ressler et al., 2021). Bekkers & Wiepking's (2010) eight mechanisms of giving – awareness of need, solicitation, cost and benefits, altruism, reputation, psychological benefits, values, and efficacy – are emblematic of a way to categorize the former. Calabrese's (2011) analysis of efficiency measures and the amount of donations nonprofits receive is emblematic of the latter. Along the lines of Konrath & Handy's (2017) examination of social motivations for giving and Paarlberg et al. (2018) and Prentice's (2016) call for understanding the ecological and environmental impacts on donations to nonprofits, we seek to introduce SOC-R as a means for examining how an individual's connection to their community impacts their donations.

Research on volunteering also tends to fall into two categories, 1) a focus on the volunteer's demographic characteristics as correlates of volunteering and individual motivations to volunteer; or 2) a focus on a volunteer management practices that attract and retain volunteers. In general, research in the first category demonstrates that volunteering is positively related with individual characteristics like the number of children in the household, amount of informal social interaction, and religiosity (Wilson & Musick, 1997), and volunteers are motivated to volunteer if the experience sates one or more of six psychological needs – values, career, understanding, social, enhancement, or protective (Clary, Snyder, & Stukas, 1996). In the other category of inquiry, the volunteer management literature tends to support the presence of 11 effective volunteer management practices, including: liability insurance, clearly defined roles, job design, recruitment strategies, screening and matching, orientation and training, supervision and communication, recognition, satisfying motivations, reflection, and peer support (Einolf, 2018).

Given our above review of SOC-R and literature on giving and volunteering, and building on evidence that SOC is related to philanthropic (Clerkin & Prentice, 2023) and community engagement activities (Talò, et al., 2014), and that SOC-R is related to organizational citizenship (Boyd & Nowell, 2017) and altruistic behaviors (Yang, et al., 2020), there is theoretical evidence to suggest that a person's connection to their community will have an impact on their donating and volunteering. Therefore, we hypothesize the following:

H1a: The higher an individual's SOC-R to the community they are living in, the more likely they are to donate to secular nonprofits
H1b: The higher an individual's SOC-R to the community they are living in, the more total dollars they donate to secular nonprofits

H1c: The higher an individual's SOC-R to the community they are living in, the greater proportion of donations they give to local secular nonprofits
H2a: The higher an individual's SOC-R to the community they are living in, the more likely they are to donate to houses of worship
H2b: The higher an individual's SOC-R to the community they are living in, the more total dollars they donate to houses of worship
H2c: The higher an individual's SOC-R to the community they are living in, the greater proportion of donations they give to local houses of worship
H3a: The higher an individual's SOC-R to the community they are living in, the more likely they are to volunteer with secular nonprofits
H3b: The higher an individual's SOC-R to the community they are living in, the more hours they volunteer with secular nonprofits
H4a: The higher an individual's SOC-R to the community they are living in, the more likely they are to volunteer with houses of worship
H4b: The higher an individual's SOC-R to the community they are living in, the more hours they volunteer with houses of worship

3. Data & Methods

We use data from a nationally representative sample of US adults to examine how an individual's sense of community is associated with giving and volunteering to secular nonprofits and places of worship (e.g., church, synagogue, mosque, or other place of worship). Our data are collected as part of the Cooperative Election Study (CES) panel study with questions asked pre- and post 2024 US election

(https://tischcollege.tufts.edu/research-faculty/research-centers/cooperative-election-study). Our SOC-R and philanthropic data are collected in the pre-election questions. After data cleaning, we retained 897 completed responses. Descriptive statistics are reported in Table 1. We first performed a confirmatory factor analysis of SOC-R, then analyzed the data using various multivariate regression techniques.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

Dependent Variable	Proportion	Observations
Categorical		
Any Volunteering	25%	897
Secular Volunteering	16%	897
Religious Volunteering	14%	897
Any Donations	56%	897
Secular Donation	32%	897
Religious Donation	27%	897

Dependent Variable				
Continuous	Mean	standard error	Range	Obs

Secular Donation Total Past Year	$930.81	182.10	5 – 52,000	295
Religious Donation Total Past Year	$2,26.70	412.34	5 – 60,000	218
Percent Secular Donations Local	55%	3.33	0 – 100	296
Percent Religious Donations Local	74%	3.89	0 – 100	231
Secular Volunteer Hours/Week	8	1.42	1 – 120	143
Religious Volunteer Hours/Week	5	0.64	1 - 40	122

Independent Variable	Proportion	Observations
Categorical		
Male	48%	897
White	71%	897
Education Level		897
High School or Less	35%	
Some College	30%	
4-Year Degree	22%	
Post-grad Degree	14%	
Party Identification		897
Democrat	44%	
Independent	14%	
Republican	42%	
Married	48%	897
Child under 18	23%	897
Importance of Religion		897
Not at all	25%	
Not too much	16%	
Somewhat	28%	
Very Important	32%	
Family Income		897
Less than $10,000	4%	
$10,000	7%	
$20,000	12%	
$30,000	8%	
$40,000	8%	
$50,000	9%	
$60,000	7%	
$70,000	7%	
$80,000	9%	
$100,000	7%	

$120,000	8%	
$150,000	7%	
$200,000	4%	
$250,000	1%	
$350,000	1%	
$500,000 or more	0.0006%	
Region		897
Northeast	17%	
Midwest	23%	
South	38%	
West	21%	

Independent Variable

Continuous	Mean	standard error	Range	Obs
Age	50	0.93	18 - 91	897
Sense of Community Responsibility (SOC-R)	3.4	0.36	1 - 5	897
Years Residing in Current Community	18	0.76	0 - 77	897

In general, our volunteering and donating results are consistent with other recent survey data on giving and volunteering. A Rethink Priorities survey conducted in the summer of 2024 found 54% of US adults made a monetary donation in the past 12 months (Elsey & Moss, 2024), while our survey similarly indicates 56% of US adults donated. The Census Bureau's Current Population survey, covering September 2022 – September 2023, shows that 28.3% of the 16+ population in the US volunteered (Schlachter & Marshall, 2024) compared to 25% of adults 18+ in our sample from summer 2024.

4. Results

Our data have good fit to the SOC-R model (RMSEA = 0.049; CFI = 0.998, TLI = 0.996), providing empirical evidence that SOC-R can be extended beyond workplace and interorganizational collaborative settings to the broader community in which individuals reside.

Table 2. Confirmatory Factor Analysis

	Standardized Factor Loading	s.e.
SOCr 1: It is easy for me to put aside my own agenda in favor of the greater good of my community.	0.747	0.015
SOCr 2: Being in service to my community is one of the best things I can do to improve it.	0.808	0.013
SOCr 3: When volunteers are needed by my community, I feel like I should be one of the first to step up.	0.762	0.015
SOCr 4: I am always ready to help people in my community even if it creates hardship for me.	0.751	0.014
SOCr 5: I often feel a strong personal obligation to improve my community even if my costs outweigh any personal benefit I receive.	0.837	0.012
SOCr 6: I feel it is my duty to give to my community without needing to receive anything in return.	0.846	0.011

Results from the multiple regression analyses indicate that SOC-R increases secular donating (see Table 3) and volunteering and religious volunteering (see Table 4) but is not associated with religious donating (see Table 3). We also find that SOC-R is positively associated with increased secular giving and the proportion of secular donations to local nonprofits (see Table 3) and the number of secular volunteering hours per week. However, we find no relationships between SOC-R and the amount of religious donations, the percent of donations that remained in the local community, or the amount of religious volunteering. Taken together, these findings indicate an individual's connection to place increases their engagement with local secular nonprofits but not with places of worship.

4.1. Donating Results

SOC-R seems to be driving secular donations, while religious importance seems to be driving religious donations. In evaluating our hypotheses, we see support in Table 3 for those related to secular donating, H1a (increased probability of secular donating), H1b (increased amount of secular donations), and H1c (increased proportion of secular donations made to local nonprofits), but no support for the ones related to religious donating, H2a (likelihood of making a religious donation), H2b (total amount of religious donations), and H2c (proportion of religious donations to local houses of worship).

Table 3. Donating Regressions

	(1) Any Secular Donations	(2) Any Religious Donations	(3) $ Secular Donations	(4) % Secular Donations Local	(5) $ Religious Donations	(6) % Religious Donations Local
Sense of Community	2.422***	1.349	860.798*	15.288***	-320.168	4.180
Responsibility	(0.000)	(0.062)	(0.041)	(0.000)	(0.636)	(0.457)
Years in Current	1.000	0.954*	10.645	0.414	24.506	0.208
Community	(0.991)	(0.021)	(0.709)	(0.467)	(0.697)	(0.692)
Years in Current Community	1.000	1.001*	-0.195	-0.004	0.386	0.001
Squared	(0.647)	(0.012)	(0.681)	(0.618)	(0.783)	(0.906)
Some College	3.255***	3.882***	604.541	4.598	1,025.202	13.311
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.072)	(0.689)	(0.625)	(0.095)
College Degree	4.855***	4.621***	598.783	19.087	284.171	3.977
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.233)	(0.105)	(0.882)	(0.682)
Postgraduate	6.364***	7.751***	551.639	1.738	215.204	4.246
Degree	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.158)	(0.881)	(0.875)	(0.614)
Independent	0.794	1.073	36.451	8.713	-728.332	-0.925
	(0.631)	(0.885)	(0.942)	(0.462)	(0.550)	(0.930)
Democrat	1.352	0.983	323.529	-2.302	-985.204	1.781
	(0.237)	(0.953)	(0.262)	(0.735)	(0.364)	(0.820)
Religious	0.872	3.092***	-144.555	-5.582	1,261.929*	5.288
Importance	(0.195)	(0.000)	(0.555)	(0.059)	(0.010)	(0.205)
Family Income	1.099*	1.064	85.726	1.059	208.468	1.880*
	(0.010)	(0.162)	(0.067)	(0.285)	(0.139)	(0.041)
Northeast	1.472	0.849	-254.170	0.528	-324.524	3.747
	(0.209)	(0.637)	(0.405)	(0.948)	(0.791)	(0.662)
Midwest	0.583	0.556	415.604	0.863	-841.996	4.910
	(0.087)	(0.079)	(0.557)	(0.911)	(0.596)	(0.564)
West	0.398**	0.887	-365.257	-7.000	966.451	5.005
	(0.004)	(0.725)	(0.422)	(0.400)	(0.543)	(0.568)
Married	1.173	1.981**	400.019	2.566	1,480.831	5.811
	(0.522)	(0.009)	(0.126)	(0.693)	(0.059)	(0.400)
Child under 18	1.374	1.130	-475.322	11.309	1,298.746	4.763
at home	(0.334)	(0.732)	(0.110)	(0.185)	(0.301)	(0.568)
Male	0.999	0.809	237.179	4.168	-818.346	-5.429
	(0.997)	(0.422)	(0.450)	(0.483)	(0.366)	(0.443)
White	0.871	1.192	557.121*	-10.079	535.325	-7.036
	(0.608)	(0.555)	(0.033)	(0.153)	(0.680)	(0.369)
Age	1.026**	1.002	35.240	-0.167	4.270	0.457*
	(0.002)	(0.837)	(0.076)	(0.479)	(0.799)	(0.043)
Constant	0.001***	0.001***	-5,783.817*	4.071	-5,083.212	-9.732
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.014)	(0.887)	(0.177)	(0.708)

Observations	897	897	295	296	218	231
R-squared			0.107	0.167	0.101	0.170

pval in parentheses
*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05

To understand the substantive impact of SOC-R on donating, we calculated predicted outcomes for the probability of making a secular donation (see Figure 1), amount of secular donations (see Figure 2), percent of secular donations to local nonprofits (see Figure 3), and probability of making a secular donation by education level (see Figure 4) over changes in SOC-R.

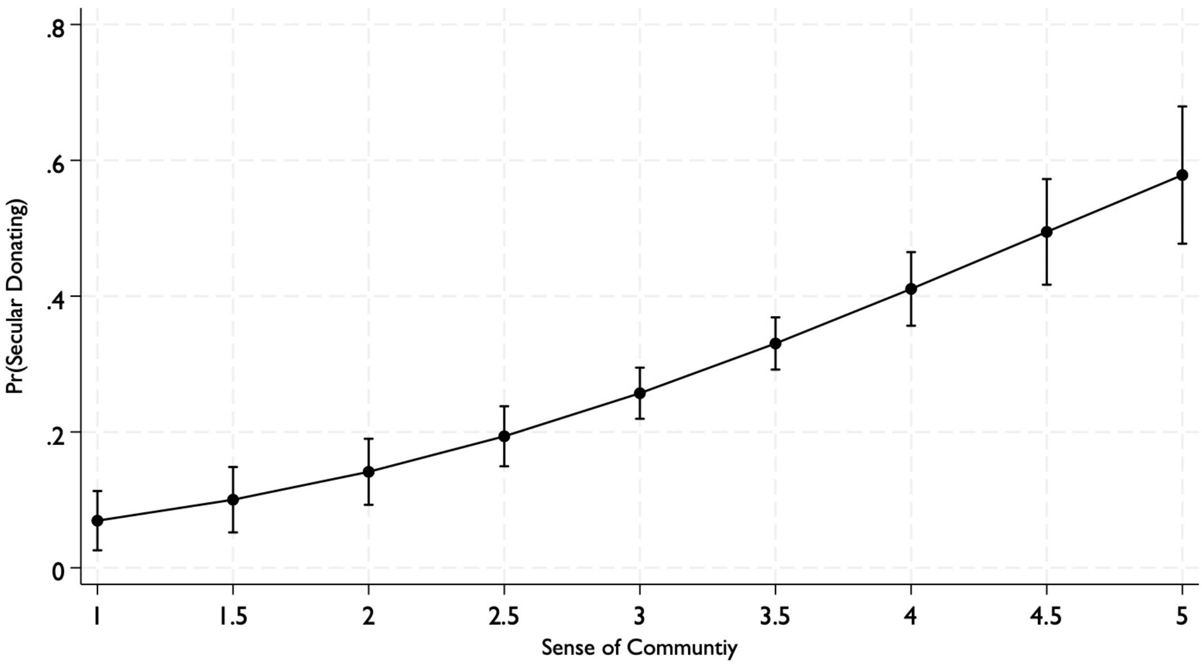

Figure 1. Predicted Probability of Making a Secular Donation over SOC-R

As seen in Figure 1, the predicted probability of donating rises from about 7% to 58% over the range of SOC-R. The more people feel responsible to their community, the more likely they are to donate to secular nonprofits. In general, a 1 unit increase in SOC-R is associated with about a 10% increase in the likelihood of making donations.

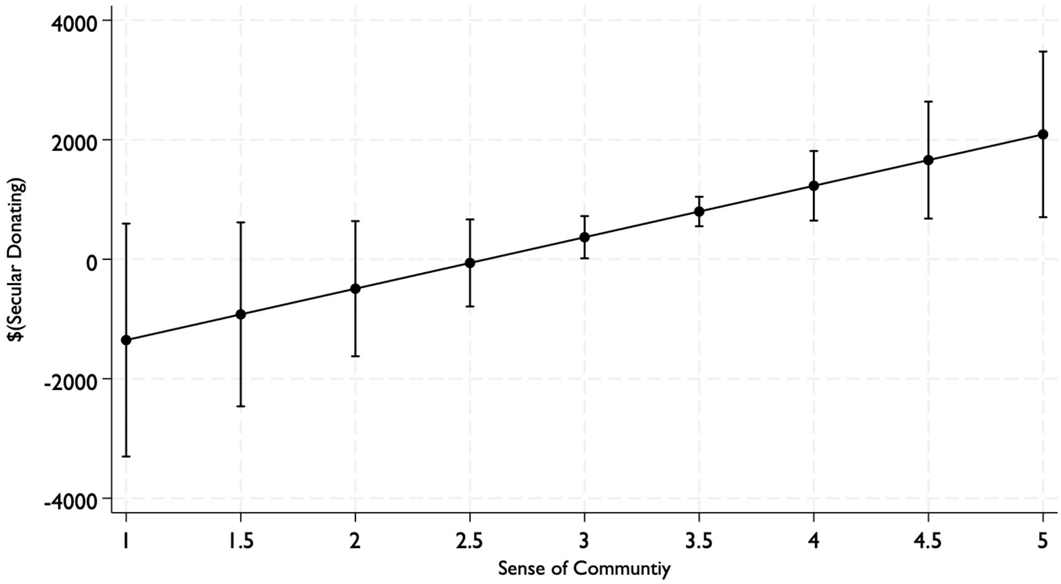

Figure 2. Predicted Amounts of Secular Donations over SOC-R

Increasing SOC-R raises the likelihood of making a secular donation (Figure 1), while also increasing the amount donated (see Figure 2). Although the predicted point estimates for individuals with less than an SOC-R of 3 are not feasible (someone cannot make a negative donation), all of the 95% confidence intervals for predicted amount of secular donations contain positive numbers, lending credibility to the insight that SOC-R starts impacting the amount people donate if they have an SOC-R higher than 3.

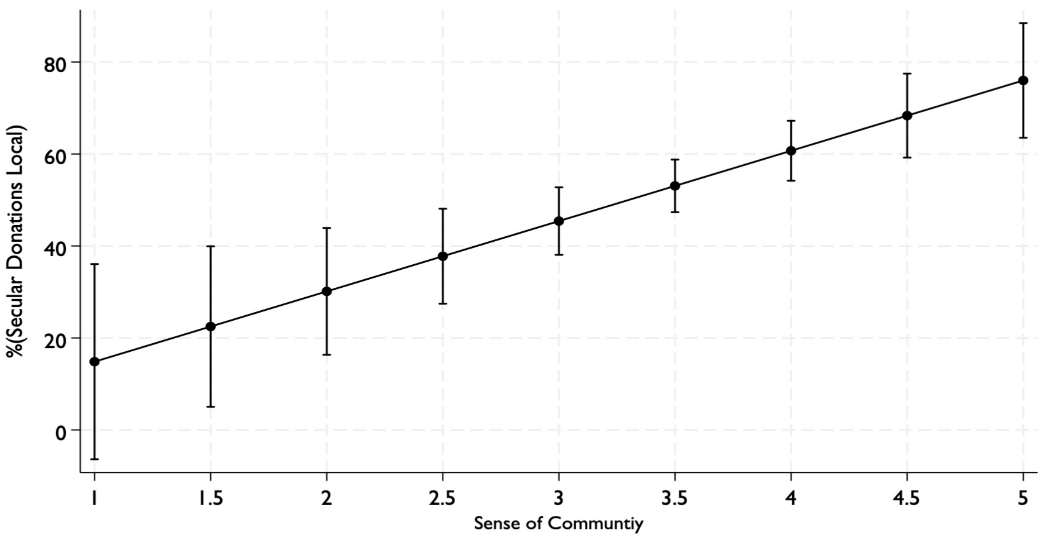

Figure 3. Predicted Percent of Secular Donations to Local Nonprofits over SOC-R

As seen in Figure 3, SOC-R also has a strong impact on the proportion of secular donations respondents make to local nonprofits, ranging from about 15% for people with the lowest SOC-R to about 75% for those with the highest level of SOC-R.

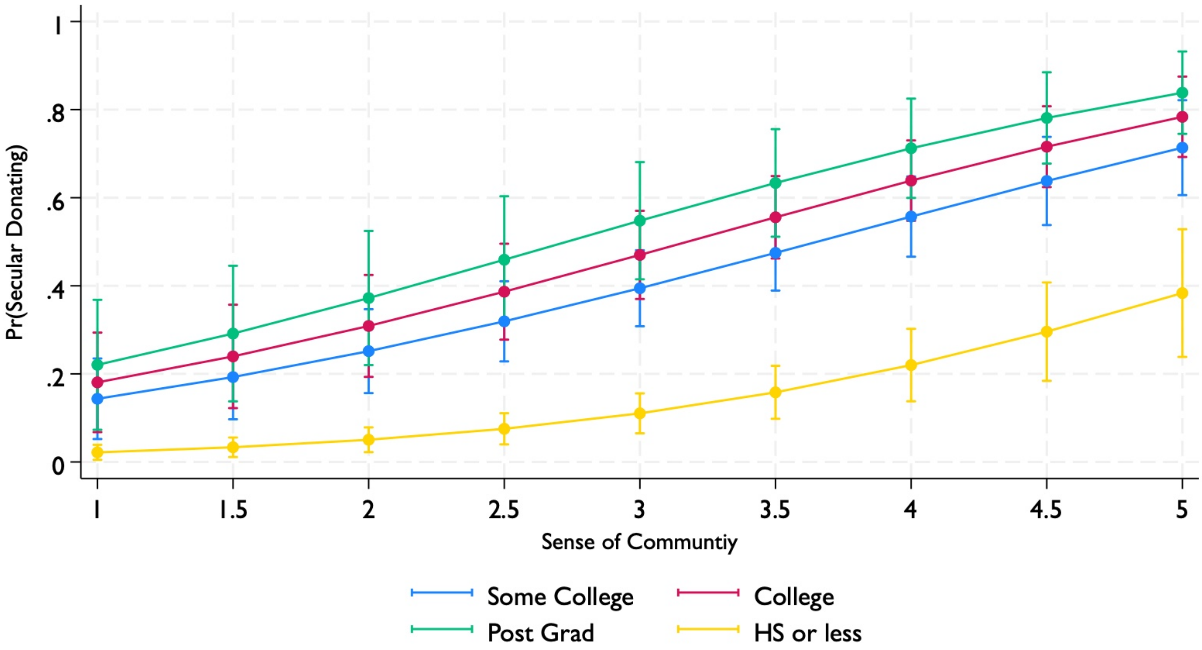

Figure 4. Predicted Probability of Making a Secular Donation by Education Level over SOC-R

One of our control variables, education level, had an impact on the likelihood of making a secular donation where differences between levels are impacted by changes in SOC-R. As seen in Figure 4, changes in SOC-R increase a respondent's likelihood of making a secular donation regardless of their education level. However, it seems to have the biggest impact on people with a high school degree or less. Although the 95% confidence intervals never overlap, which could indicate a similar probability of making a secular donation, the predicted probability of an individual with a high school degree or less goes from about 2% with an SOC-R of 1 to almost 40% for someone with an SOC-R of 5.

4.2. Volunteering Results

Similar to our findings above related to donating, we find that SOC-R is positively associated with both the likelihood and amount of secular volunteering. However, SOC-R also appears to positively impact the likelihood, but not amount, of religious volunteering. In evaluating our hypotheses, we see support in Table 4 for H3a (increased probability of secular volunteering), H3b (increased hours of secular volunteering), and H4a (increased probability of religious volunteering), but not for H4b (increased hours of religious volunteering).

Table 4. Volunteering Regressions

	(7) Any Secular Volunteering	(8) Any Religious Volunteering	(9) Secular Volunteering Hours/Week	(10) Religious Volunteering Hours/Week
Sense of Community Responsibility	5.410***	1.756**	3.894*	1.663
	(0.000)	(0.009)	(0.032)	(0.087)
Years in Current Community	1.064*	0.997	-0.203	-0.329
	(0.027)	(0.893)	(0.379)	(0.051)
Years in Current Community Squared	0.999*	1.000	0.003	0.004
	(0.023)	(0.703)	(0.363)	(0.081)
Some College	1.551	2.757**	-3.646	0.577
	(0.303)	(0.009)	(0.272)	(0.689)
College Degree	2.455*	2.154	-5.671	1.938
	(0.048)	(0.111)	(0.079)	(0.414)
Postgraduate Degree	2.877*	10.466***	-4.230	0.274
	(0.028)	(0.000)	(0.174)	(0.876)
Independent	3.188*	1.533	-7.305	-2.062
	(0.025)	(0.467)	(0.090)	(0.299)
Democrat	2.735**	1.167	-2.591	0.816
	(0.002)	(0.641)	(0.443)	(0.620)
Religious Importance	0.803	3.470***	-0.608	0.241
	(0.122)	(0.000)	(0.469)	(0.829)
Family Income	1.075	1.021	-0.705	-0.101
	(0.132)	(0.703)	(0.064)	(0.552)
Northeast	1.011	0.471	-2.350	-0.162
	(0.979)	(0.118)	(0.279)	(0.934)
Midwest	1.040	0.554	1.001	0.923
	(0.928)	(0.110)	(0.758)	(0.637)
West	0.427*	1.071	2.959	1.475
	(0.027)	(0.858)	(0.453)	(0.323)
Married	1.606	1.600	2.571	-0.791
	(0.133)	(0.118)	(0.252)	(0.572)
Child under 18 at home	0.621	1.323	-4.285*	-1.015
	(0.212)	(0.516)	(0.027)	(0.502)
Male	0.467**	0.944	6.833**	1.232
	(0.007)	(0.835)	(0.004)	(0.440)
White	1.022	2.409*	-5.143	1.072
	(0.954)	(0.016)	(0.098)	(0.433)
Age	1.007	1.010	-0.137	0.043
	(0.498)	(0.359)	(0.100)	(0.257)
Constant	0.000***	0.000***	15.138	-2.022
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.061)	(0.653)

Observations	897	897	143	122
R-squared			0.334	0.170

pval in parentheses
*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05

To understand the substantive impact of SOC-R on volunteering, we calculated predicted outcomes for the probability of secular volunteering (see Figure 5), probability of religious volunteering (see Figure 6), probability of secular volunteering by party ID (see Figure 7), and hours of secular volunteering by gender (see Figure 8) over changes in SOC-R.

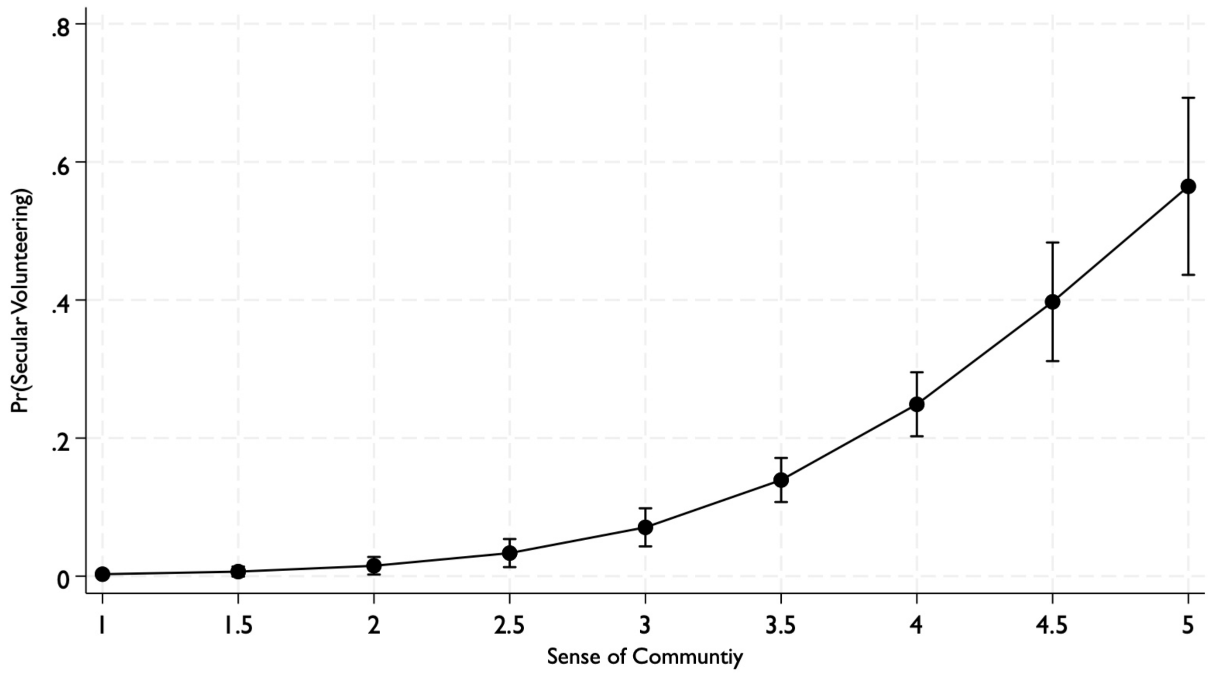

Figure 5. Predicted Probability of Secular Volunteering over SOC-R

Figure 5 highlights the non-linear relationship of SOC-R and secular volunteering. Increasing SOC-R has relatively little impact on the predicted probability of secular volunteering at low levels of SOC-R; respondents on the low end of the scale have a near zero (about .02%) likelihood of volunteering at an SOC-R of 1, raising to only about 3% for those with an SOC-R of 2.5. However, at the higher end of the scale, we see much larger impacts of SOC-R on the likelihood of secular volunteering, increasing from about 14% for people with 3.5 SOC-R to 56% for respondents with an SOC-R of 5.

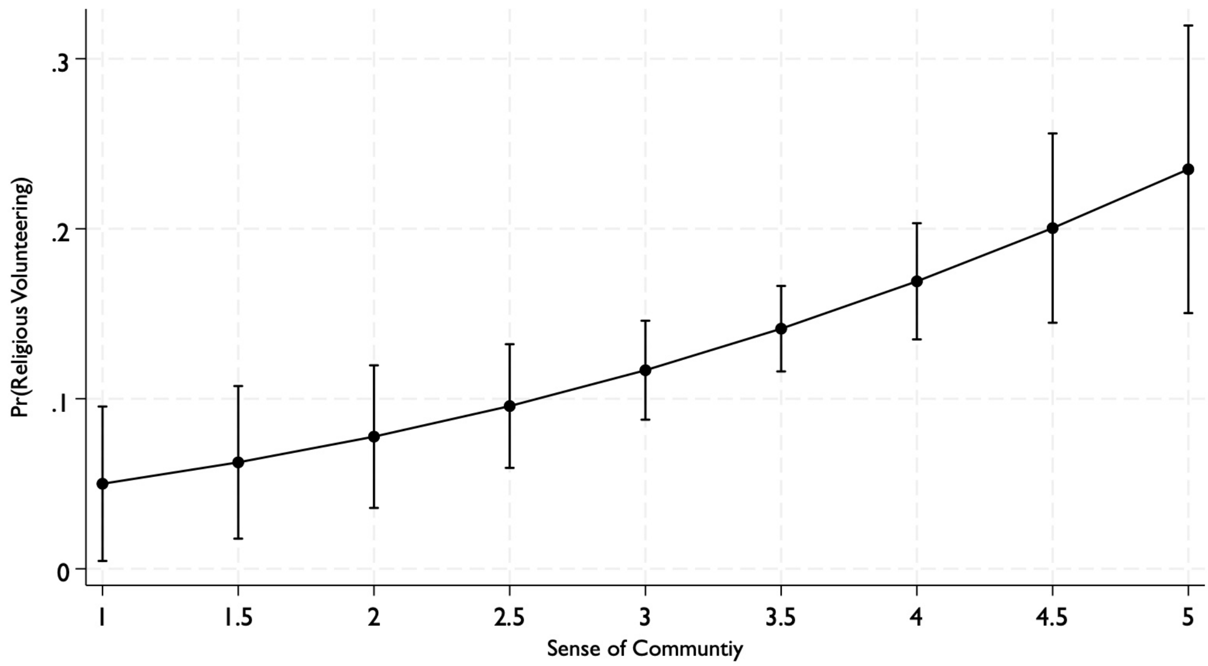

Figure 6. Predicted Probability of Religious Volunteering over SOC-R

We observe an increase in the predicted probability of religious volunteering as SOC-R increases (Figure 6), though the impact is not nearly as dramatic as we observed in the probability of secular volunteering (Figure 5). Over the range of SOC-R, the predicted probability increases from about 5% at an SOC-R of 1 to about 23% for an SOC-R of 5.

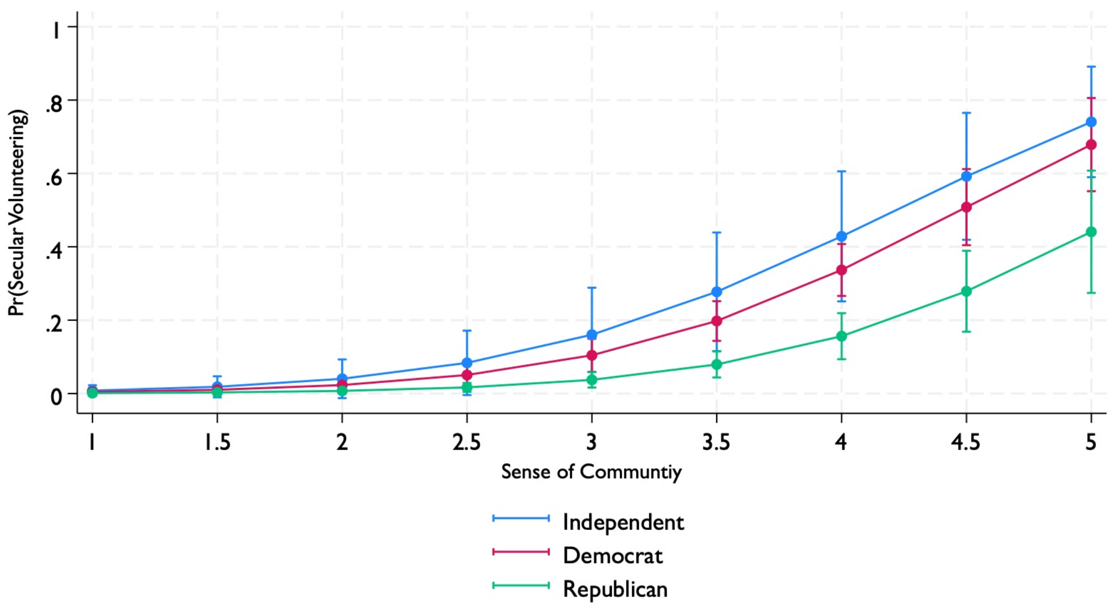

Figure 7. Predicted Probability of Secular Volunteering by Party ID over SOC-R

Our regression results in Table 4 model 7 show that independents and registered democrats are more likely to engage in secular volunteering than registered republicans. Figure 7 shows that, while increasing SOC-R increases the likelihood of secular volunteering for all respondents, regardless of party ID, the effect is larger for independents and registered democrats than it is for registered republicans (particularly for an SOC-R of 3.5 to 4.5).

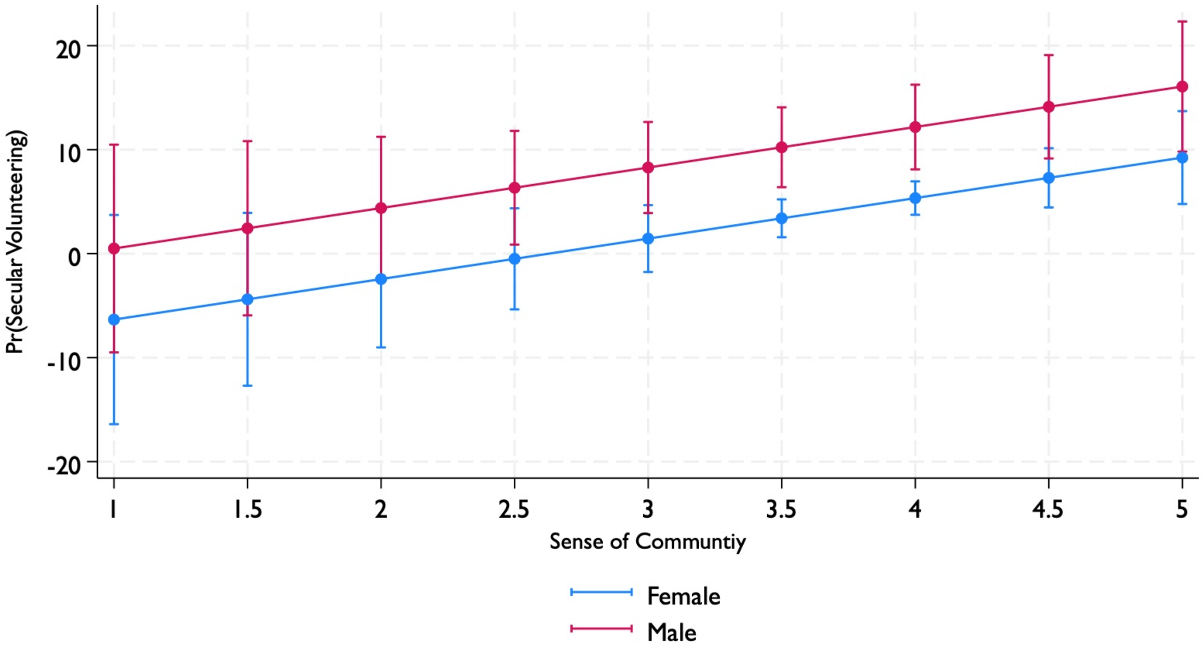

Figure 8. Predicted Hours of Secular Volunteering by Gender over SOC-R

While men (12%) are less likely to volunteer than women (20%) (see Table 4 model 7), men in our sample volunteer more hours per week (12 hrs/wk) than women (5 hrs/wk). As seen in Figure 8, as SOC-R goes up the number of hours both men and women volunteer each week increases, particularly for men with an SOC-R of 3.5 to 4 when compared to women.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Our results indicate that SOC-R has a strong potential to increase our understanding of an individual's prosocial behaviors via contributions to the community in which they reside. The more responsibility they feel for their community, the more likely they are to volunteer and donate in that community. This felt responsibility also increases the intensity of engagement with secular nonprofits. Higher levels of SOC-R are associated with higher levels of both the amount of secular donations and the proportion of those donations that remain in the community, as well the number of hours they volunteer with secular nonprofits each week.

Somewhat surprising, at least in regard to our hypothesized relationships, we see very little influence of felt responsibility on one's philanthropic behaviors towards houses of worship. While we see some evidence supporting higher levels of SOC-R and religious volunteering we find no evidence of a relationship between SOC-R and religious donating. This result could indicate a belief that volunteering through houses of worship benefits the broader community the respondent resides in (thus the positive relationship between SOC-R and likelihood of religious volunteering), but donating to religious organizations primarily benefits the religious community specifically and thus is not influenced by SOC-R.

Introducing SOC-R to the donating and volunteering literature that examines the relationship between an individual’s connection to place and their philanthropy moves us beyond thinking about community as a resource that enables/drives philanthropy and toward reclaiming philanthropy as a social exchange. These findings highlight the connection between people feeling responsibility for improving their community and prosocial behaviors, specifically through engaging with secular nonprofits. Future research should explore the influence of SOC-R on the types of secular nonprofits people are engaging with in their community. For example, are these behaviors more related to consumption philanthropy (e.g., donating to your children’s sports team or volunteering at your parent’s senior center) or more altruistic philanthropy (e.g., volunteering at the food bank or donating to the domestic violence shelter)? These findings also raise implications for local nonprofit and government leaders who want to increase donations and volunteers to local nonprofits by creating and enhancing sense of community, and the responsibility individuals feel for the communities in which they live.

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Private Giving and Civil Society Organizations: Towards New Relations
Mapping Knowledge Needs and Relationship Dynamics in a Changing Philanthropic Landscape[1]

Floriant Covelli (French Institute for Civil Society Organizations), Amira Azaiez (French Institute for Civil Society Organizations)

Abstract

In France, private giving plays an increasingly important role in the trajectories and strategies of civil society organizations (CSOs), without calling into question the centrality of public funding. Despite growing interest, the concrete relationships between private giving actors and CSOs remain underexplored as a research topic. Existing studies most often address donors, tax mechanisms, or philanthropic organizations in isolation, leaving in the shadows the relational, organizational, and democratic dynamics that structure these interactions.

This article draws on the results of a participatory working group coordinated by the French Institute for Civil Society Organizations (IFMA), which brought together researchers and practitioners around the issue of relationships between private giving and CSOs. Based on exchanges from these workshops, a targeted literature review, and a white paper devoted to the topic, the article examines how these relationships are structured, negotiated, and transformed in the French context, as well as the main knowledge gaps they raise. The analysis shows that private giving cannot be understood as a simple funding mechanism, but must be approached as a multidimensional social relationship, shaped by power asymmetries, issues of trust, evaluation frameworks, and sometimes competing conceptions of the public interest. By adopting a relational perspective, the article highlights the tensions and reconfigurations at work in CSOs' socio-economic models and governance practices.

The article therefore proposes a structured research agenda, aimed at informing academic debates on philanthropy and civil society, while opening up lines of inquiry transferable to other welfare state contexts.

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Keywords: private giving, civil society organizations, donor–association relationships, trust, governance, France

1. Introduction

Private giving plays a growing but uneven role in the financing and strategic positioning of CSOs in Europe. In France, as in other welfare-state contexts, public funding remains dominant, yet private donations—whether from individuals, corporations, or foundations—have gained strategic importance for many organizations. This evolution generates both opportunities and tensions, particularly regarding autonomy, accountability, and legitimacy.

Despite this shift, academic research has largely treated private giving and civil society as separate objects of study. Philanthropy research often centres on donors, foundations, or tax regimes, while civil society studies focus on governance, participation, and public action. As a result, the relationship itself—the interactions, negotiations, and power dynamics between private giving actors and CSOs—remains insufficiently theorized.

This paper builds on a collective research initiative led by IFMA to address this gap. Rather than presenting a policy-oriented white paper, we reframe its findings into an academic proceedings contribution that clarifies the analytical focus, methodological approach, and scholarly relevance for ERNOP.

2. Research Question and Analytical Framework

The paper addresses the following research question:

How are relationships between private giving (donations, corporate philanthropy, philanthropy) and CSOs in France structured as social and organizational practices, and what consequences do these relationships have for CSOs' autonomy, governance, and democratic contribution?

The proposed study is based on three main theoretical strands:

- The sociology of the gift (relationship, reciprocity, values) provides a framework for moving beyond a purely economic reading of funding (Marcel Mauss, 1925; Annette Lareau & Elliot B. Weininger, 2003).
- Organizational and field theories shed light on the structural and institutional dynamics of these relationships (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Fligstein, 2001).
- Critical approaches to philanthropy and governance enable an analysis of the normative, democratic, and political implications of these relationships (Stout, 2012; Eynaud, 2015; Edin, 2021).

3. Definitions & Scope

3.1. Civil Society and Private Giving: A Few Key Points of Reference

3.1.1. The Private Giving Sector

Private giving represented 9.2 billion euros in 2022 in France, broken down into several types of donations.

Individual donations accounted for 5.4 billion euros, including declared and undeclared donations (such as donations to religious institutions and online collections) and gifts (bequests and life insurance). 5.5 million tax households donated in this way (France Générosités, 2024)

[1]. Corporate donations were evaluated at 3.8 billion euros in 2022; 142,500 companies made donations, including many small businesses that gave small amounts but were very numerous. Donations take many forms: financial patronage, in-kind contributions and skills sponsorship (France Générosités, 2024)[2]. Skills sponsorship is a more recent development and concerns around 15% of companies involved in giving, with various levels of commitment (Admical, 2022)[3].

Funds and foundations play a central role, both as beneficiaries of donations and, for most of them, as distributors of funds to CSOs. There are around 5,700 active funds and foundations in France; an increase of 88% in the last 10 years. They represent 42 billion euros in assets and paid out more than 16 billion euros in 2022 (Observatoire de la Philanthropie, 2024)[4]. This sector of funds and foundations is diverse, with multiple legal statuses, operating methods (distributor, operator or mixed) and means of action.

3.1.2. The Civil Society Sector

In 2019–2020, the civil society sector comprised about 1.4 million CSOs and 9% of non-state employment (Prouteau et al., 2023)[5]. Around 12.5 million people volunteered with CSOs, with 5.5 million active every week (Recherches et Solidarités, 2024)[6]. In 2021, the overall budget of CSOs was 124 billion euros (113 billion in 2020), i.e. +9% (Prouteau et al., ibid)[7]. In 2020, 51% of CSO funding came from public resources and 49% from private resources (Prouteau et al, 2023)[8].

3.1.3. Private Giving in The Funding Structure of CSOs

Most private resources come from membership fees and sales to users. Private giving (individuals, foundations, businesses) represents about 5% of the civil society budget in France across all sectors, a share that has remained stable for 20 years (Prouteau et al., 2023)[9]. There are marked sectoral differences (Prouteau et al., 2023)[10]: humanitarian, social, health ≈ 6% (≈ 3.9 billion euros); promotion of rights, causes and interests ≈ 8% (≈ 689 million euros); culture and leisure ≈ 2–3% (≈ 306 million euros).

A 6,000-structure consultation by the Economic, Social and Environmental Council (CESE) reported that 62% of CSOs lack sufficient funding to meet their objectives; 70% have developed a fundraising strategy to cope with cuts in public funding (CESE, 2024). In a 2021 survey of its members (111 CSOs and foundations seeking public donations), France

[1] France Générosités. (2024). Social connectedness and generosity – Do Good Institute – Janvier 2024 (article in FR).

[2] *Ibid*.

[3] Admical. (2022b). Infographie Baromètre du Mécénat d'Entreprise.

[4] Observatoire de la philanthropie (2024). Baromètre annuel de la philanthropie, édition 2024. Fondation de France.

[5] Prouteau, L., Tchernonog, V., Nirello, L., & Tabariés, M. (2023). Le paysage associatif français : Mesures et évolutions. Éditions Dalloz Lefebvre.

[6] Recherches & Solidarités. (2024). La France Bénévole en 2024.

[7] Prouteau, *ibid*.

[8] *Ibid*.

[9] Prouteau, *ibid*.

[10] *Ibid*.

Générosités found that private giving represented 36% of resources for these stakeholders, with strong variation by sector: around 70% for protection of rights or the environment, around 50% for international solidarity or scientific and medical research, and around 6% for the medical/social sector (France Générosités, 2023)[11].

3.2. Three Choices to Guide Reflection

3.2.1. Philanthropy Or Private Giving?

Philanthropy can be considered in rather philosophical terms (love for humanity, humanist perspective). The concept of private giving offers a broader approach to funding and private support for the public interest, embracing both financial and in-kind contributions (time, skills, equipment) by natural persons (from small to large donors) and legal persons (foundations, companies). Donations can occur with or without intermediation (fundraising). We chose to include all these types of donations in our reflections. Volunteering requires a different approach due to its volume and specific mechanisms and is therefore not included in the scope of this work.

3.2.2. Public Interest Organizations or Civil Society in Broad Terms?

To define the scope of civil society, we referred to the 1998 French tax doctrine (which frames public interest organizations eligible to receive private donations) and to the 31 July 2014 law on the social and solidarity economy (which defines social and solidarity organizations and social utility, including many CSOs). As in previous works, IFMA adopts a broad scope including CSOs and their partners (public authorities, foundations, consulting bodies, etc.). De facto organizations and informal collectives are concerned but are difficult to include: without official status, they cannot receive private donations.

In line with this broad scope, we retain the concept of private giving because it offers a comprehensive lens on funding and support for the public interest that goes beyond the strictly financial dimension and complements state action. We therefore treat private giving as a plural, non-homogeneous practice and value system: analysis must look past legal statuses to include financial and in-kind forms (e.g. skills sponsorship), the circulation of objects and ideas, and the organizational influence, values and rules at play in the relationship.

3.2.3. The Choice to Study the Relationship Between Private Giving and CSOs

Dialogue between private donors and CSOs has grown in recent years in France via their representative bodies (e.g. Centre Français des Fonds et Fondations, France Générosités and Le Mouvement associatif), which regularly join forces to advocate on taxation. However, civil society and private giving are usually studied separately based on legal scope in France, whereas in Germany, the UK and the US, these two sectors are often studied together (non-profit studies). The workgroup therefore chose to focus specifically on the relationship between these two spheres across multiple dimensions (governance, locations, socioeconomic models, evaluation and democratic implications), rather than on isolated actors.

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[11] France Générosités, *ibid*.

4. Literature Review: Fragmented Approaches to Private Giving and Civil Society

Existing research on private giving and civil society organizations has developed along largely separate analytical trajectories, resulting in limited understanding of the relationships that connect donors, philanthropic institutions, and CSOs.

4.1. Theories of Giving and the Relational Dimension

Foundational work on giving originates in anthropology and sociology, most notably Marcel Mauss's *Essay on the Gift* (1925)[12]. Mauss conceptualizes giving as a social relationship governed by obligations to give, receive, and reciprocate, emphasizing its political and moral dimensions. Subsequent sociological interpretations, including those by Alain Caillé (1997; 2019)[13] and Philippe Steiner (2016)[14], further distinguish between giving as a creator of social ties and giving as a transfer without guaranteed reciprocity.

While this theoretical tradition offers a powerful relational lens, it has rarely been applied to contemporary, institutionalized forms of private giving, such as foundation grants, corporate patronage, or intermediated donations. As a result, the relational implications of modern giving practices—particularly those involving organizations rather than individuals—remain insufficiently theorized.

4.2. Research on Private Giving: Donors, Instruments, and Critiques

Empirical research on private giving has often focused on donor behaviour, drawing on economics and psychology (Andreoni, 1990; Andreoni, 2006; Sargeant and Woodliffe, 2007)[15]. Scholars such as James Andreoni and Adrian Sargeant analyse motivations, incentives, and decision-making processes, primarily at the individual level. Corporate philanthropy has been examined through management and organizational lenses, notably by Bartkus *et al.* (2002)[16], Gautier and Pache (2015)[17], and Bory (2018)[18], who highlight strategic, reputational, and human-resource dimensions.

A substantial body of literature—especially in Anglo-American contexts—addresses foundations and philanthropy more broadly. Historical and comparative analyses by Zunz

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[12] Mauss, M. (1925) *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*. Translated by W.D. Halls. London: Routledge, 1990.

[13] Caillé, A. (1997). Le don : Une approche sociologique. Éditions La Découverte.
Caillé, A. (2019a). Extensions du domaine du don :, donner, recevoir, rendre. Actes Sud.
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Andreoni, J. (2006) 'Philanthropy', in Kolm, S.-C. and Ythier, J.M. (eds.) *Handbook of the Economics of Giving, Altruism and Reciprocity*. Amsterdam: Elsevier, pp. 1201–1269.
Sargeant, A. and Woodliffe, L. (2007) 'Gift giving: An interdisciplinary review', *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing*, 12(4), pp. 275–307.

[16] Bartkus, B.R., Morris, S.A. and Seifert, B. (2002) 'Governance and corporate philanthropy', *Business & Society*, 41(3), pp. 319–344.

[17] Gautier, A. and Pache, A.-C. (2015) 'Research on corporate philanthropy: A review and assessment', *Journal of Business Ethics*, 126(3), pp. 343–369.

[18] Bory, A. (2013). Le mécénat d'entreprise et ses enjeux : Une analyse du bénévolat d'entreprise. Éditions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme.

(2011)[19], Anheier and Daly (2007)[20], Salamon (1999)[21], and Powell and Steinberg (2006)[22] examine institutional development, legal frameworks, and sectoral roles. More recently, critical scholars such as McGoey (2015)[23], Reich (2018)[24], Cagé (2018)[25], and Edin (2021)[26] interrogate philanthropy's relationship to inequality, capitalism, and democratic legitimacy.

While these contributions raise essential normative questions, they tend to approach philanthropy as a macro-level political or economic force, paying limited attention to everyday relational dynamics between donors and CSOs.

4.3. Civil Society Research: Governance, Value, and Public Action

In parallel, research on civil society organizations has developed a distinct body of work, particularly in sociology, political science, and nonprofit studies. Scholars such as Tchernonog (2013)[27], Prouteau (2019)[28], Laville (2010)[29], and Hély (2009)[30] analyse CSOs' governance structures, socioeconomic models, and role in co-producing public action. Work on nonprofit governance by Renz (2010)[31], Brown (2005)[32], and Andersson (2013)[33] further examines professionalization, accountability, and democratic participation.

French and European scholarship has also emphasized CSOs' territorial embeddedness (Fourdrignier; Fraisse, Henry and Laville) and their contribution to democratic life, including experimentation and advocacy. However, within this literature, private giving is often treated as a secondary or contextual resource, rather than as a structuring relationship that shapes organizational practices, power balances, and value creation.

4.4. An Underexplored Research Object: Relationships

Across these strands of scholarship, a common blind spot emerges: the relationship itself. Donors, foundations, corporations, and CSOs are typically analysed as separate actors or sectors, while the interactions that connect them—marked by asymmetry, trust, negotiation, and contested definitions of the public interest—remain marginal.

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[19] Zunz, O. (2012b). Philanthropy in America: A history. Princeton University Press.

[20] Anheier, H.K. and Daly, S. (eds.) (2007) *The politics of foundations: A comparative analysis*. London: Routledge.

[21] Salamon, L. M. (2002). The State of Nonprofit America. Brookings Institution Press.

[22] Powell, W. W., & Steinberg, R. (2006). The Nonprofit Sector: A Research Handbook (2nd ed. Yale University Press)

[23] McGoey, L. (2015). No Such Thing as a Free Gift: The Gates Foundation and the Price of Philanthropy. Verso Books.

[24] Reich, R. (2018). Just Giving: Why Philanthropy Is Failing Democracy and How It Can Do Better. Princeton University Press.

[25] Cagé, J. (2020). Philanthropie et démocratie : Un débat nécessaire. Politique américaine, 16(1), 19-35.

[26] Edin, V. (2021). Quand la charité se fout de l'hôpital. Enquête sur les perversions de la philanthropie. Éditions Rue de l'échiquier.

[27] Tchernonog.V, P. & L. (2019). Le paysage associatif français, mesures et évolutions, 3e édition. Dalloz Juris associations.

[28] Prouteau, *ibid*.

[29] Laville, J.-L. (2010) *Politique de l'association*. Paris: Seuil.

[30] Hély, M. (2009b). Les métamorphoses du monde associatif. Presses Universitaires de France.

[31] Renz, D.O. (2010) *The Jossey-Bass handbook of nonprofit leadership and management*. 3rd edn. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

[32] Brown, W.A. (2005) 'Exploring the association between board and organizational performance in nonprofit organizations', *Nonprofit Management & Leadership*, 15(3), pp. 317–339.

[33] Andersson, F.O. (2013) 'Nonprofit governance: Theoretical foundations and empirical evidence', *Public Performance & Management Review*, 36(3), pp. 395–427.

Some address this gap, notably those on power and asymmetry in philanthropy (Monier, 2019)[34], organizational isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983)[35], and social regulation (Reynaud, 1993)[36]. Yet these perspectives have not been systematically integrated into a relational framework capable of capturing both financial and non-financial dimensions of private giving.

This gap is particularly salient in a welfare-state context, where private giving interacts with strong public institutions rather than substituting for them. Addressing it requires a relational, interdisciplinary approach that bridges philanthropy studies and civil society research—an approach this paper seeks to advance.

5. Methods

This paper is based on a participatory and exploratory research design aimed at addressing the relationship between private giving and civil society organizations as a research object. The study was conducted between June 2023 and April 2024 under the coordination of the French Institute for Civil Society Organizations (IFMA).

5.1. Research Design

The research adopted a qualitative, co-constructive approach, combining academic analysis with practitioner knowledge. This design responds to the fragmented state of existing research and to the exploratory nature of the research question, which seeks to identify how private giving–CSO relationships are structured, experienced, and problematized rather than to test predefined hypotheses.

A participatory format was deliberately chosen to capture relational dynamics that are difficult to observe through quantitative or document-based methods alone, particularly those involving trust, asymmetry, negotiation, and shared conceptions of public interest.

5.2. Data Collection

Data was generated through three structured, multi-stakeholder workshops bringing together 44 participants, including academic researchers, CSO leaders and practitioners, representatives of foundations and corporate donors, and sector intermediaries. Each workshop combined workshop sessions with facilitated thematic working groups focusing on governance, funding relations, evaluation, and democratic implications.

In parallel, a targeted review of French and international academic literature on private giving, philanthropy, and civil society informed the framing of discussions and supported the identification of theoretical blind spots. Collective synthesis sessions were used to consolidate insights across workshops and to articulate shared knowledge gaps and research priorities.

5.3. Analytical Strategy and Scope

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[34] Monier, M. (2019b). Dominations et asymétries dans la philanthropie contemporaine. Sociologie du travail, 61(4), 543-559.

[35] DiMaggio, P. J., & Powell, W. W. (1983). The iron cage revisited: Institutional isomorphism and collective rationality in organizational fields. American Sociological Review, 48(2), 147-160.

[36] Reynaud, J.-D. (1993). Les règles du jeu. L'action collective et la régulation sociale. Paris : Armand Colin.

The analysis followed an iterative and reflexive process, moving between empirical discussions, literature-based interpretation, and collective validation. Rather than producing empirical generalizations, the study aimed to map recurring relational patterns, tensions, and knowledge needs as identified by actors positioned at different points within the private giving–CSO ecosystem.

As a result, the methodological contribution of this paper is not statistical inference but the systematic articulation of an agenda for future research, grounded in both field experience and academic reflection. This approach is particularly suited to a conference proceedings context, where the objective is to advance conceptual clarity and identify promising directions for further empirical investigation.

6. Key Findings: Structuring and Experiencing Private Giving–CSO Relationships

Drawing on the participatory workgroup discussions and the synthesis of academic and professional literature, the analysis reveals that the relationship between private giving and CSOs cannot be reduced to a funding mechanism. Instead, it emerges as a multidimensional social relationship structured by asymmetries, negotiated norms, and competing conceptions of value and public interest. Four main findings stand out.

6.1. Private Giving–CSO Relations Are Multistakeholder and Ecosystemic

A first key finding is that private giving–CSO relations are rarely dyadic. Rather than a simple donor–recipient interaction, relationships are embedded in complex ecosystems involving public authorities, foundations, corporate actors, intermediaries (consultants, evaluators), and beneficiaries.

Participants emphasized that these ecosystems operate across multiple scales—local, national, and European—and that their configuration varies significantly by sector (e.g. health, education, advocacy, culture). This multistakeholder nature complicates accountability and decision-making, as CSOs must simultaneously respond to public funders, private donors, regulatory bodies, and societal expectations.

Importantly, the state remains a structuring—if often indirect—actor. Even when public authorities are not directly involved in funding relationships, they shape interactions through tax policy, legal recognition, and evaluation norms. This triangulation between CSOs, private giving actors, and the state challenges analytical models that treat philanthropy as operating “outside” public governance.

6.2. Asymmetry Is Structural but Actively Negotiated

A second finding concerns power asymmetries, which participants widely acknowledged as inherent to private giving relationships. Asymmetries stem from control over resources, agenda-setting capacity, and evaluation frameworks, particularly in project-based or call-for-proposals funding.

However, the analysis shows that asymmetry is not static. CSOs actively negotiate it through:

- diversification of funding sources,
- informal relational work (trust-building, personal ties),
- selective acceptance or refusal of private funding,

- reframing evaluation requirements.

These negotiations are unevenly distributed. Larger or more professionalized CSOs are generally better equipped to manage donor expectations, while smaller or locally rooted organizations often experience stronger dependency.

Corporate philanthropy and skills-based sponsorship were repeatedly identified as contexts where asymmetry may be intensified, especially when private-sector norms are transferred into nonprofit settings without adaptation.

6.3. Trust and Risk Are Central but Under-Institutionalized

Trust emerged as a central organizing principle of private giving–CSO relationships. Participants consistently stressed that durable relationships rely less on formal contracts than on shared values, mutual understanding, and reputational mechanisms.

At the same time, trust remains fragile and unevenly institutionalized. Evaluation practices, reporting requirements, and impact metrics often function as substitutes for trust rather than complements to it. This is particularly visible in innovation-oriented funding, where CSOs emphasized the tension between experimentation and accountability.

A recurrent theme was the distribution of risk. While private giving is often rhetorically associated with risk-taking and innovation, CSOs reported that risks are frequently shifted onto them—financially, reputationally, and operationally. The absence of an explicit “right to error” limits learning and may discourage genuinely innovative or advocacy-oriented initiatives.

6.4. Private Giving Reshapes CSO Socioeconomic Models Beyond Funding Volumes

A fourth key finding concerns the role of private giving in CSOs’ socioeconomic models. Although private giving represents a relatively small share of total CSO funding on average, its strategic effects are disproportionate.

Participants highlighted several functions of private giving:

- enabling experimentation and pilot projects,
- supporting advocacy and underfunded activities,
- compensating for declining public subsidies,
- facilitating access to non-financial resources (skills, networks, legitimacy).

At the same time, private giving can reshape organizational cultures, professional identities, and governance arrangements. The growing use of project-based funding and impact-oriented evaluation contributes to managerial rationales that may conflict with participatory or activist traditions within civil society. These transformations are not uniform and vary by sector, organizational size, and territorial anchoring.

6.5. Evaluation Is a Key Site of Tension and Co-Construction

Finally, evaluation emerged as a central relational device. Rather than a neutral technical tool, evaluation structures dialogue, defines value, and redistributes power within relationships.

Participants expressed dissatisfaction with narrowly quantitative impact assessments, which may obscure social utility, relational work, and long-term democratic contributions. At the same time, evaluation was also seen as a potential space for mutual learning and co-construction, provided that CSOs are involved in defining criteria and purposes.

This ambivalence positions evaluation as a critical research frontier: it simultaneously reflects and shapes asymmetries, trust, and conceptions of the public interest within private giving–CSO relationships.

6.6. Contributing to democracy by connecting actors

Relationships between private giving and CSOs raise important democratic issues, both for organizations' internal governance and for their role in the public sphere. The involvement of private giving actors in CSO governance calls into question the balance between autonomy and dependence, particularly when major donors hold decisive financial weight. These situations highlight the need to better understand the mechanisms that help preserve internal democracy, deliberative capacity, and citizen participation.

At a broader level, relationships between CSOs, private giving, and public authorities form a structuring triangle for the pursuit of the public interest. In the French welfare state context, the democratic contribution of CSOs funded by private donations is based on a logic of complementarity with public action. This contribution is expressed in particular through place-based philanthropy, strategic philanthropy, and individual giving, which foster social ties, experimentation, and the strengthening of collective trust.

Finally, the analysis would benefit from incorporating the study of so-called counter-progressive practices, in order to examine their relationship to the public interest, their potentially harmful effects on democracy, and the regulatory frameworks that may govern them.

6.7. CSO–private giving relationships from a territorial perspective

Academic approaches to territorial philanthropy remain underdeveloped, and significant blind spots persist, particularly regarding how relationships between civil society and private giving operate within differentiated local dynamics.

A territorial perspective would make it possible to better understand the specific role of CSOs in structuring spaces for coordination and broader forms of local governance, as well as their interactions with other actors in their ecosystem. These relationships generate contributions that are complementary or alternative to public action and renew links to the public interest.

Finally, this perspective invites examination of the influence of local contexts—cultures, socioeconomic frameworks, and public policies—on the forms taken by local philanthropy. The diversity of territorial ecosystems appears to lead to differentiated prioritization of social issues and may foster the emergence of local development initiatives, particularly those focused on strengthening social ties and managing conflicts over the use of shared spaces.

7. Conclusion

The analysis highlights a persistent lack of mutual knowledge between civil society organizations and private-giving actors, which in some cases also extends to public authorities. This mutual unfamiliarity contributes to misinterpretations, normative tensions, and, at times, entrenched mistrust. Participants consistently emphasized that these frictions are not merely interpersonal but structurally embedded in differentiated professional cultures, regulatory frameworks, and evaluative norms.

In response, the workgroup identified the need for deliberate relational infrastructures capable of supporting dialogue, shared understanding, and reflexivity. Such spaces—conceived not as advocacy platforms but as sites of collective learning—could contribute to greater symmetry and reciprocity in private giving–CSO relationships by fostering a shared vocabulary, clarifying expectations, and enabling joint problem-solving.

Beyond these relational considerations, the study mapped a set of priority knowledge needswith strong relational, organizational, and democratic implications. This mapping provides a structured agenda to guide future research and comparative analysis.

The discussions also underscored methodological implications for addressing these knowledge gaps. Participants called for transdisciplinary approaches that combine insights from sociology, economics, political science, and management studies; for enhanced use of statistical data and open datasets; and for international comparisons to situate national specificities within broader European welfare and philanthropic regimes. Importantly, they stressed that research agendas should remain closely connected to field relevance, advocating for participatory research designs, early consideration of dissemination and uptake, and the use of pilot projects to test and refine analytical frameworks.

Taken together, these findings position the white paper not as a prescriptive roadmap but as a collective research foundation. By articulating shared problem definitions and priority questions, it aims to support continued inquiry into the evolving relationships between private giving and civil society. Building on this work, The French Institute for Civil Society Organisations intends to extend the process through further dissemination, public academic dialogue, and through a European practitioner-researcher working group, thereby contributing to the consolidation of this emerging field of study.

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Appendix - Developing the relationship between private giving and civil society as a research subject

Proposed by Anne Monier, academic co-leader of the group and researcher at the ESSEC Philanthropy Chair – 7 November 2023

To understand the development of a subject, we need to go back to the revolution represented by the ideas of Gaston Bachelard in the inter-war period (The Formation of the Scientific Mind, 1938), which conceptualized the fact that "scientific subjects" are no longer given, but built. The subjects do not just spring out of nature ready-made; the definition of a subject is a process of intellectual construction ("first and foremost, we need to know how to pose problems"). Adopting a research approach is therefore the art of knowing how to ask the right questions.

We must forget what we know; we must dismantle it, in order to question, describe and characterize relationships. Many disciplines are concerned with relationships (sociology, economics, anthropology, political science), but this subject is seldom addressed in the literature on philanthropy. Relationships can be between worlds, between organizations and between individuals. To better analyze a relationship, we can explore four main categories of questions:

Who comes into contact in the relationship and forms part of the ecosystem – who is involved: individual donors, funds and foundations, CSOs, intermediaries (asset managers), volunteers, etc.)? What stakeholder profiles are present (training, experience, etc.)? What roles do the different stakeholders play (funder, recipient, advisor, consultant, etc.)?

• Types and methods of relationships: is the relationship symmetrical or asymmetrical? Informal or formal? Long term or short term? Is it a long-distance relationship (emails, etc.) or an in-person relationship? What are the means of communication used? How can the relationship change?

• Circulation: what circulates between the entities? Representations, dialogue, money, expertise, practices, etc.

• Effects of the context and the environment: how does the tax and regulatory context, the political context, the sectoral context, the cultural context, etc. influence the relationship? What effects does it generate?

Declarations

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The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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The data underlying this article are available in the Publications' section of the IFMA website at: White-paper-private-giving-and-civil-society.pdf

Ethical Approval:

All participants provided consent prior to participation. The study followed ethical guidelines.

The philanthropic behavior of the Romanian Diaspora A comparative analysis of the giving of the Romanian communities living in the US, UK, Germany, Belgium, Italy, and Spain[1]

Zoltán Levente Fejes (Research Center for Civil Society), Bogdan Mihai Radu (Babes-Bolyai University/Research Center for Civil Society Center for the Study of Democracy), Szilárd Bartok (Research Center for Civil Society), Maria Olariu (Center for the Study of Democracy)

Abstract

This study examines how Romanians living in the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Belgium, Italy, and Spain engage in philanthropic activities, and compares their giving patterns with those of donors in Romania. It examines the frequency of diaspora members' donations, the causes of their support, the factors that motivate their generosity, and the barriers that limit sustained engagement. The research included a mixed-methods design that combines a quantitative survey of 1,861 respondents aged 18–55 with qualitative interviews and focus groups involving 44 participants across major diaspora cities such as Chicago, London, Berlin, Brussels, Barcelona, and Milan. By integrating these data with existing studies on giving and migration, the study offers a multidimensional perspective on Romanian transnational philanthropy. Findings reveal a strong culture of giving among diaspora members, influenced by factors such as income, trust, and emotional connection to Romania. Differences between host countries reflect local economic and cultural contexts, yet common themes include a preference for NGOs and social causes, as well as the importance of transparency and perceived impact in sustaining donor engagement. The study contributes to understanding how migration reshapes philanthropic practices and highlights the need for tailored strategies to foster long-term connections between diaspora donors and home-country initiatives. In doing so, it

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broadens current perspectives on transnational civic engagement and the evolving forms of solidarity within migrant communities.

Keywords: Philanthropy, Diaspora, Donations, Transparency, Engagement

1. Introduction

The main goal of this study is to investigate the individual donation behavior of the Romanian diaspora living in the US, UK, Germany, Belgium, Italy, and Spain, and, where possible, compare it with that of Romanian donors. The study aims to determine whom and how much the diaspora gives, how and why diaspora groups give to charities, and the key drivers, obstacles, and strategies of diaspora philanthropy. Understanding diaspora philanthropy is essential in the context of such a sizable population living outside the borders, especially one that maintains significant ties with the motherland. NGOs and community leaders benefit from understanding the trends in donations, psychological factors, trust mechanisms, and expectations that influence diaspora giving. Clarity regarding goals and challenges fosters effective partnerships between diaspora groups and local NGOs, amplifying social impact.

Research questions concern donation targets, amounts, and frequency; donation methods; motivations; and barriers to giving. The study also examines country-specific patterns and characteristics, variations among countries, and comparisons to Romanian donors. The scope includes six host countries plus Romania. Limitations arise from non-random sampling, the exclusion of non-donors, and demographic constraints. Differences in questionnaire items between Romania and diaspora samples also required recoding.

2. Literature review

2.1. Overview of the Romanian Diaspora

Romania's diaspora is estimated to be between 3.6 and 5.7 million people, making it one of the largest in the OECD (OECD 2019; MAE 2021). Migrants are concentrated mainly in Italy, Spain, Germany, the UK, Belgium, and the United States. They represent a crucial socio-economic actor through remittances, knowledge transfer, and civic engagement (Tiuț & Teacă 2023). Migration is driven primarily by employment and family reasons, though education is an increasing factor.

Education levels differ significantly by host country. In Italy and Spain, much of the diaspora has low or intermediate levels of education, while in Belgium, Germany, and the UK, larger shares of migrants are highly educated. In the US, more than half of the Romanian community has a university or postgraduate degree. Age structures also vary, with Germany showing a larger share of migrants aged 64 and older.

Romanian migrants are overrepresented in low-skilled jobs compared to native born and other foreign-born persons in OECD countries. Employment patterns differ by country. In Italy, Spain, and the UK, Romanians are heavily concentrated in low-skilled occupations. For men, construction and manufacturing are major sectors. For women, health services, retail trade, education, and food and beverage service activities dominate (OECD 2019).

2.2. Place of Origin

The largest shares of emigrants come from the Northeast and South Muntenia regions. Bucharest is the leading county of origin, followed by Iasi, Prahova, Timis, Bacau, and Cluj. Counties with the smallest emigrant shares include Covasna, Salaj, Tulcea, and Mehedinti.

2.3. Global Generosity Context

The CAF World Giving Index shows that despite economic and humanitarian challenges; global generosity remains strong. The global index score of 40 is among the highest since 2021, with 73 percent of adults reporting that they helped a stranger, volunteered, or donated in the past month. This underscores the relevance of exploring giving behaviours in a large Eastern European diaspora.

2.4. National Differences in Philanthropy

Giving cultures vary significantly across the countries included in the study. The United States ranks among the highest globally in philanthropy, with individual giving exceeding 370 billion dollars annually. The UK has a long tradition of charitable giving, with about 70 percent of adults donating. Germany shows rising giving among younger adults. Belgium’s giving focuses on health, humanitarian aid, and social justice. In Spain, nonprofits rely heavily on government funding, though individual participation remains steady. Italy shows declining donor participation, with donors primarily supporting medical research, humanitarian aid, and poverty relief. Romania ranks low globally, although 52 percent of urban adults made a donation in the past year (Fejes 2023).

2.5. Previous Studies on Philanthropy in the Diaspora

Few studies address philanthropy in the Romanian diaspora. Research in Țara Făgărașului identified employment, economic conditions, and education as drivers of migration and found that lack of information, low trust, and limited time are major barriers to philanthropic engagement (Cibian et al. 2019). Research conducted by the Romanian United Fund showed that donors in the US are motivated by helping others, moral principles, and perceived need, while barriers include low wages and lack of information (Scarlat 2022). These studies support the need for a broader comparative examination.

3. Methodology

The quantitative component of the study included 1,861 completed online questionnaires among Romanians aged 25 to 55 with at least secondary education living in the six diaspora countries. Questions covered past donations, frequency, type, amounts, motivations, preferred methods, and perceived barriers. The qualitative component consisted of 44 participants in focus groups and individual interviews conducted between May and July 2024.

Comparative analysis used data from the 2023 Individual Giving in Romania study (Fejes 2023). Quantitative analysis focused on statistically reliable segments with sample sizes above 100. Qualitative analysis used thematic coding to identify recurring themes and contextualize quantitative findings.

Table 1. Sample size by country

Country	Sample size
USA	318
UK	300
Germany	312
Belgium	307
Spain	307
Italy	317

4. Findings

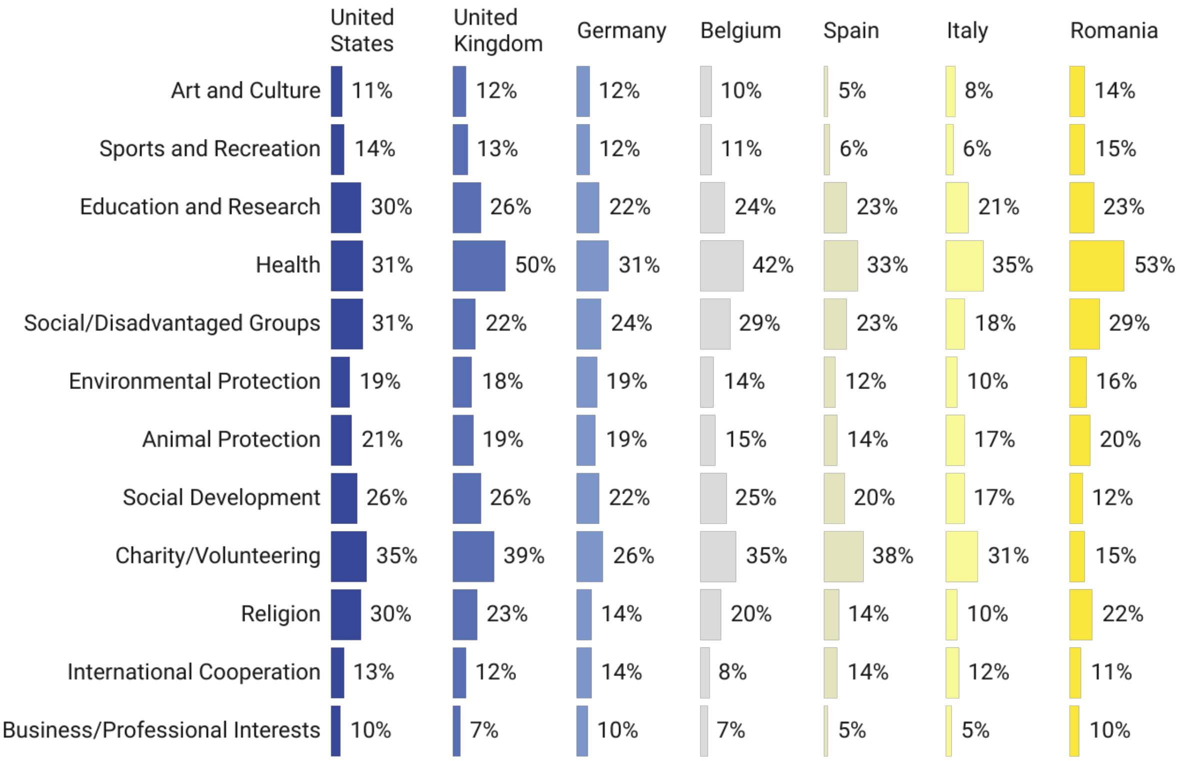
4.1. Philanthropic Engagement Levels

The diaspora's philanthropic engagement is high, with 72 percent of respondents donating in the past year or intending to donate. Key finding: The average annual donation is 780 euros—substantially higher than Romania's 61 euros. Nearly half donate between two and four times per year. Donors give about 868 euros annually, lapsed donors 686 euros, and intenders 410 euros. The preferred methods of donation provide additional insight beyond understanding donor motivation. Direct payments, such as online transfers, card payments, and cash donations, are most common. Donors favor digitized and direct donation methods. Lapsed donors are more likely to use SMS giving, event tickets, and workplace mechanisms, often associated with smaller amounts. Cash remains prevalent in the US, Spain, Belgium, and the UK.

4.2. Key Areas of Support

Most donors support causes in their country of residence. Notably, 36 percent also support Romanian causes, with the US diaspora being the most likely to donate to Romania. Main finding: Donors prioritize health, charity/volunteering, education and research, social services, and social development. NGOs and foundations are the primary beneficiaries, followed by individuals in need and hospitals. Religious giving is highest in the US and lowest in Spain and Italy.

Figure 1. Causes Supported by Country of Residence



Created with Datawrapper

To understand what motivates diaspora giving, it is helpful to review insights from scientific literature. Eight key mechanisms drive charitable giving: awareness of need, solicitation of donations, costs and benefits, altruism, reputation, psychological benefits, values, and donation efficacy (Bekkers & Wiepking, 2010; Wiepking & Bekkers, 2011, 2012). These mechanisms interact differently depending on the donor, organization, and context. Donations are often driven by multiple motivations at once. Analysis of diaspora donors shows that trust, efficacy, and benefits are the primary drivers of donations. Key finding: In Spain, donation efficacy is highest (63.5 percent), followed closely by trust (62 percent) and psychological benefits (43 percent). Trust is crucial everywhere. In Spain, knowing the organization is as important as trusting it, while in the US, Belgium, and Germany, interpersonal trust is more significant. Institutional trust is more relevant in the UK, Spain, and Italy.

Efficacy-based motivations are significant, including the belief in one's ability to help or contribute to change. Compassion and moral duty are also common. While solicitation and recommendations are less influential in the diaspora, they are more relevant in Romania, where donors often rely on interpersonal trust networks.

Patterns of trust vary: Interpersonal trust is highest among donors in the US, Belgium, and Germany. Institutional trust, by contrast, is higher in Spain and Italy, while German and UK donors rely more on trust in the individual soliciting donations. Romanian donors have the lowest institutional trust and prefer recommendations from close contacts. Qualitative data consistently show that trust is essential for motivating engagement across contexts.

Emotional connection with Romania, while quantitatively minor, emerges more strongly in qualitative interviews. US-based donors, for example, often articulate intensified nostalgic ties associated with their longer time abroad.

4.3. Socio-Economic Characteristics and Donation Behaviour

To explore correlations between socio-demographic factors and giving, the study examined education, income, age, and gender. Education was grouped into three categories to harmonize Romania and diaspora data: high school, university, and postgraduate. Across all countries except Spain, the highest share of donors has postgraduate education.

Higher education usually correlates with higher donation amounts, except in Italy, Spain, and the UK, where university graduates donate less than those with lower educational attainment, likely due to income constraints. Age-related giving patterns also differ in the US, Belgium, and Italy, younger respondents donate less, whereas in Spain and Germany, younger groups are more active donors. In Romania, both middle-aged and younger groups are the main donors. Gender differences remain small overall, but men donate slightly more in Romania and the US.

Income shows the strongest correlation with giving. Main finding: Across diaspora countries, higher income generally corresponds to more frequent or higher donations—although significance appears primarily in Spain. The UK and Germany have the highest donation rates among top-income groups, but also substantial giving among lower-income groups. Spain's top income bracket includes the highest share of donors, while Belgium and Italy have fewer donors in the top brackets. In the US, non-donors appear in both the lowest and the highest income brackets.

4.4. Barriers to Donations

Lack of Transparency is the most cited reason for stopping donations, mentioned by 47.7 percent of respondents. Main finding: This concern is most pronounced in Italy, Spain, the UK, and Belgium, and cuts across age and gender groups. US and German donors are less concerned about reporting requirements. In the US, legal issues are more important, while in the UK, changing priorities matter more. Visible impact is less of a barrier in Italy than in other countries.

Comparing blue-collar and white-collar workers, white-collar workers donate more frequently in every country except Spain. However, blue-collar workers show much higher intent to donate, especially in the US and Germany. White-collar workers still represent the majority of donors across all countries.

5. Donor Profiles

Across the six diaspora countries, donors share a similar socio-demographic profile: most are men aged 36 to 45 with university degrees. They usually have medium to high incomes, though those in Italy and Spain tend to earn less. These characteristics align with donors in Romania and highlight the importance of socio-economic stability for sustained philanthropy. Lapsed donors tend to be younger men aged 25 to 35 with lower or unstable incomes. Although many hold university degrees, financial insecurity limits their ability to give consistently. Intenders, mostly women aged 36 to 45 with lower incomes, express willingness to donate but face constraints that prevent engagement.

Spain has more female donors, while Italy has more with only a high school education. In the US and UK, even lapsed donors are often from higher-income groups. These variations show local economic conditions shape donor makeup, yet the overall profile remains broadly consistent.

Donor characteristics closely match motivations and barriers. Middle-aged, financially stable donors prioritize trust, transparency, and impact, reinforcing engagement. Younger and lower-income donors, despite positive attitudes, are more likely to lapse

Table 2. Donors - Donated in the last 12 months and will donate in the future

Country/SES	Age	Gender	Income	Education
United States	36-45	Male (58%)	High	University
United Kingdom	36-45	Male (53%)	High	University
Germany	25-35 & 36-45	Male (55%)	High	University
Belgium	36-45	Male (52%)	High	University
Spain	36-45	Female (51%)	Low	University
Italy	36-45	Male (51%)	Low	University & High school

6. Comparative Country Analysis

Comparing philanthropic behaviour across the six diaspora countries highlights how socio-economic conditions, cultural norms, and labour market structures shape giving. While certain patterns remain consistent, such as the centrality of NGOs and the importance of trust, each country displays distinct features that reflect the lived realities of Romanian migrants in those environments.

6.1. United States

Romanian migrants in the United States demonstrate the highest average donation levels, supported by higher household incomes and a strong philanthropic culture within American society. The US context is characterised by tax incentives, widespread nonprofit infrastructures, regular solicitation, and a cultural emphasis on voluntarism. Donors in the US display strong interpersonal trust in fundraisers, community leaders, and representatives of organisations. Religious giving is more common here than in all other diaspora countries, partly due to the organisational role of churches for Romanian communities. Long term migrants often develop stronger emotional ties to Romania, reflected in higher levels of giving directed toward homeland causes. However, legal considerations and compliance requirements are also more salient barriers in the US than elsewhere.

6.2. United Kingdom

In the UK, donation amounts are moderate, and donors rely heavily on digital giving tools, reflecting the country's advanced online fundraising ecosystem. Institutional trust is relatively high, and donors prefer NGOs and hospitals. UK based donors emphasise the importance of clear communication and visible impact. Younger donors are active but donate smaller amounts. Giving to Romania is relatively stable even among longer term migrants, reflecting the UK's balanced labour market opportunities and diverse civic landscape.

6.3. Germany

Germany has one of the most structured civic environments, which shapes Romanian diaspora giving. Donation amounts are high, second only to the US. Germans prioritise transparency, ethical conduct, and well-established nonprofit organisations, and Romanian migrants adapt to these expectations. Support for families in difficulty and schools is also relatively strong. Donors have higher confidence that their contributions make a substantial difference. Religious giving is moderate, and interpersonal trust is more influential than institutional trust, echoing patterns in the US and Belgium.

6.4. Belgium

Belgian donors exhibit similar patterns to German donors but with slightly lower levels of engagement. Belgium's Romanian community includes many highly educated migrants working in European institutions and multinational organisations. Donation amounts are relatively high, and donors often contribute to multiple causes. Interpersonal trust plays a strong role. Family based or community-initiated campaigns receive substantial support, while institutional causes attract donors who seek structured programmes and long term outcomes. Giving to Romania remains notable among long term migrants.

6.5. Italy

Romanian migrants in Italy tend to have lower education levels, lower incomes, and less stable employment conditions. These constraints shape donation behaviour, with donors giving lower amounts on average. Despite this, institutional trust is relatively high, and donors strongly emphasise transparency and visible impact. Family and community networks remain important channels of information and solicitation. Religious giving is less common compared to the US, but support for hospitals and families in difficulty is relatively strong. Giving to Romania declines significantly with longer residence, reflecting deeper local integration and socioeconomic adaptation.

6.6. Spain

Spain shows the lowest donation amounts, due largely to lower incomes and a younger migrant population. However, donors express strong trust in organisations and strong efficacy-based motivations, believing that their contributions can help others. Women are more likely to be donors than men, which distinguishes Spain from all other countries. Donors favour NGOs, health causes, and families in difficulty. Barriers include lack of transparency and concerns about the impact of donations. Giving to Romania is lowest in Spain and declines sharply with time.

7. The Influence of the Length of Stay on Donating Behavior

Length of stay is one of the strongest predictors of cross border giving. While new migrants often maintain strong ties to Romania, donating to causes linked to their home communities, giving to Romania decreases as migrants settle into their host societies.

In the US, long term migrants maintain relatively strong giving patterns toward Romania compared to other countries, though donations still decline over time. In the UK, the decline is modest, suggesting that UK based migrants can maintain homeland connections even while integrating locally. In Germany and Belgium, giving to Romania decreases moderately with length of stay. In Italy and Spain, the decline is steep, exceeding 20 percent. These patterns reflect differences in economic opportunities, social integration, and perceptions of Romanian institutions.

Length of stay also influences motivation. Newer migrants emphasise clear perceived need and compassion, while long term migrants emphasise efficacy, values, and psychological benefits. Transparency and ethical conduct grow increasingly important the longer migrants live abroad, indicating rising expectations shaped by exposure to host country nonprofit sectors.

8. Discussions, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Across all regions, NGOs/foundations are consistently the top recipients, followed by families in need, hospitals, and, in some contexts, religious organizations. This highlights NGOs as key beneficiaries of donations in all regions.

Belief in the power of contributions, coupled with transparent, accountable operations, underpins donation decisions. Trust is an underlying driver that transcends types of donors, with intenders and lapsed donors seeing it as central as donors. Indeed, trust seems to be more important than disposable income when deciding to support a certain cause. The centrality of trust can also be seen in the importance of transparency, in the absence of which donors withdraw.

Middle-aged donors lead in sustained giving. Given the decline in giving towards Romania correlated with the increase in time spent in the adopted country, NGOs need to adjust fundraising efforts to include younger generations of potential donors—who may be born and/or raised abroad—and who respond to different mobilization strategies than their parents. Not focusing on the younger generations carries significant risks both for NGOs and their beneficiaries.

While broad patterns hold, each diaspora community exhibits nuances shaped by the diasporan's own socio-economic "baggage," local social norms, economic conditions, and the strength of the Romanian community networks.

8.1. How significant is the philanthropic engagement of the Romanian diaspora and who are the donors?

The Romanian diaspora shows strong philanthropic engagement, with 72% identifying as active donors and about 15% each as lapsed donors and intenders. A quarter of donors give more than four times per year, reflecting the influence of host countries with stronger giving cultures and higher incomes. Donors are typically highly educated and between 35 and 45 years old, while younger respondents are more often intenders. Lapsed donors and intenders tend to have lower income and education levels.

Donation amounts vary: donors give an average of €868 annually, lapsed donors €686, and intenders €410. The highest levels, close to €1,000 per year, are found in the United States, Belgium, and Germany. In Italy and Spain, where incomes are lower, yearly giving ranges between €300 and €500. Education affects donation behavior largely through income, although many migrants remain overqualified for their jobs abroad.

Socioeconomic backgrounds also shape giving. Many migrants originate from lower-income Romanian regions, which influences both migration patterns and philanthropic habits. While host-country norms support stronger giving, first-generation migrants still carry the imprint of their origins. This context matters for fundraising strategies. Re-engaging lapsed donors is particularly effective because they already have a giving history and often pledge higher amounts than intenders, frequently exceeding €1,000 compared to under €300. Understanding these patterns helps organizations strengthen donor engagement and grow their donor base.

8.2. Who are the beneficiaries of donations and what mechanisms do donors use?

Across all six countries (and in Romania), most donors prefer giving to NGOs or foundations, with over half choosing them over other beneficiaries. Spain and Italy show the widest margins favoring NGOs, while over 40% of donors—rising above 50% in the US and UK—also help families or individuals in need. Churches attract about a quarter of donors, ranking third after hospitals and health institutions. Support for churches is highest in the US (around 40%) and lowest in Spain and Italy, where religion is nonetheless strong among migrants. Many donors support both NGOs and churches, suggesting overlapping giving patterns that merit further study on religiosity and engagement with faith-based institutions.

Health, volunteering, and education are the most supported causes, consistently ranking above religion. Most donors give locally (79%), though 36% also support projects in Romania. Digital payments dominate—mainly online transfers and card donations—while 10–20% use direct debit. Lapsed donors favor ad-hoc methods like SMS or workplace giving, linked to smaller, impulsive amounts. Although digital giving is rising, cash remains common except in Italy and Germany. Linking donation methods to age and education could help organizations reduce barriers and tailor fundraising strategies.

8.3. What motivates donors to engage and why do they stop engaging?

Key motivations for donating include trust, perceived efficacy, empowerment, and emotional factors such as compassion and the 'warm glow' effect. These findings underscore the necessity for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to foster trust through transparent and ethical practices. A significant proportion of respondents (83%) consider long-term commitment to a single cause important, highlighting the centrality of sustained trust. Middle-aged donors (ages 36–45), who represent the largest segment with moderate-to-high incomes, prioritize trust, demonstrable outcomes, and alignment with personal values. Nearly half of respondents (48%) identify lack of transparency as a primary reason for discontinuing support, with insufficient visible impact and ethical or legal concerns also cited. This suggests that NGOs aiming to engage diaspora donors must enhance their professionalism. To advance understanding of the psychological and motivational drivers of giving, future research should gather more granular data on donors' values and belief systems, including social values, postmaterialism, and ideology. Although the present study addressed values and institutional trust, further analysis is required to elucidate how these factors influence donation behavior and to generate actionable recommendations.

8.4. How do donors relate to the motherland?

Even after more than a decade abroad, many still see Romania as “home,” feeling a moral or emotional duty to support Romanian causes, especially those in the US, less so in Europe. Yet, the longer migrants stay abroad, the more they donate locally: 79% give to causes in their country of residence, compared to 36% who support Romania, with donations to Romania declining over time. This suggests rapid integration in host countries, though the supported areas remain like those in Romania.

Diaspora donors show only slight differences in cause preferences, with marginally higher support for progressive areas like arts, environmental protection, animal welfare, or international cooperation (under 5% difference). The main exception is social development and living conditions, which attract more than twice as much support abroad (compared to 12% in Romania), likely reflecting migrants' socioeconomic experiences. Data gaps remain on second-generation migrants and their connection to Romania, but younger donors (25–35) are often lapsed or potential donors who cite financial limits—an issue that diaspora organizations should consider when designing engagement strategies.

8.5. How do diaspora donors compare to donors living in Romania?

The top reasons for donating relate to trust, efficacy, empowerment, and emotions such as warm glow and compassion, showing the importance of transparency and ethical behavior for NGOs. A large majority, 83%, believe in supporting the same cause over time, emphasizing sustained trust.

Middle-aged donors (36–45), the largest and higher-income group, prioritize trust, visible results, and alignment with personal values. Nearly half of respondents (48%) would stop supporting a cause due to lack of transparency, and many also cite lack of visible impact or ethical and legal concerns. These expectations underline the need for greater professionalization among NGOs working with diaspora donors. Future studies should include deeper exploration of donors' values and belief systems, as these shape motivations and could provide more actionable insights.

8.6. Country Variations

The observed socio-economic variations - patterns such as having a larger proportion of older donors in Italy, or extremely high-income donors in the US - highlight how migration flows, and job markets shape the philanthropic capacity of donors. In addition, donor behavior in a specific country may be linked to the socio-economic, cultural, and religious 'baggage' that the immigrants bring with them to the 'new' country, their behavior bearing many similarities to that of Romanian donors both in terms of areas of support and entities supported.

Nevertheless, regional variations observed in the study of individual giving in Romania have relevance for fundraising practices abroad, meaning that while NGOs can rely on general patterns and characteristics when crafting their fundraising strategies, they should also be aware of their donors' backgrounds and aspirations. In addition, given the observed effect of time spent in the adopted country, NGOs should also pay attention to the country-specific philanthropic culture and economic realities when planning fundraising strategies.

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Volunteering and Philanthropy in Central Asia: Fusion of Ancient Local Traditions and Modern European Values[1]

Viacheslav Ivanov (Centre for Studies of Civil Society and the Non-Profit Sector, HSE University, Moscow)

Abstract

The historical development of volunteering and philanthropy in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan has been studied from ancient times to the present day. It was found that volunteering and charity in Central Asia have common historical roots. The tradition of collective mutual aid has always played an important role in the region's culture, evolving into modern volunteering and philanthropy over time. It is important to note that the modern revival of these civil society practices coincided with the period during which the above states gained independence. In the present day, the effectiveness, usefulness and significance of volunteering and charity for society has increased, as has the range of opportunities for their implementation. Support from state bodies and improvements to the legislative framework that took into account the interests of the volunteer movement, public associations of citizens and non-profit organizations played an important role in this activity. The development of legislation in all countries of the region took place in parallel and was influenced by various factors that led to the emergence and strengthening of civil societies, strengthened trust and interaction between parliamentarians and voters, involved academic circles and experts, and shared, considered and used each other's and neighboring countries' experience.

Keywords: Volunteering, Philanthropy, Traditions, Legislation, Central Asia

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1. Introduction

Central Asia is a territory comprising five neighboring states, most of which are traditionally considered part of the historical region of Central Asia: Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. Kazakhstan, located to the north of these countries, is also included in this group. The region was selected for the study in accordance with the geographical scheme of the world's regions as it described by *UN Statistics Division, 1999*. According to this scheme, Central Asia is one of six subregions that form the macro-region (continental region) Asia. For convenience and consistency with the different geographical classification used by UNESCO and its associates, the term region is used in this study instead of subregion for Central Asia.

The economic, political, demographic and cultural characteristics of the region are such that its territory was continuously part of a single state – the Russian Empire, later the USSR. During this period for a total approximately 160 years, from 1830s up to the end of 1991, the Central Asia region had no internal borders. At that time, the entire population of the region engaged in common economic activities within the framework of a single country. The peoples of Central Asia used, along with their own national languages, a single official language – Russian. To this day, it serves as the language of interethnic communication for all peoples living in the region.

2. Research Methodology

In this study, we defined how do historical precursors in five Central Asian countries shape the contemporary landscape of volunteering and philanthropy, as evidenced through public recognition, civic engagement, and state support via civil society legislation. This approach employs a historical institutionalist framework described by *Thelen, 1999* and *Pierson, 2000* to analyze the development of volunteering and philanthropy in Central Asia. This allows us to trace how historical precursors—such as Soviet mass mobilization, Islamic charitable traditions, and clan-based mutual aid—have created distinct institutional path dependencies. We examine how these legacies interact with contemporary critical junctures (e.g., independence, new legislation) to shape the current landscape of public engagement, civil society organizations, and state-civil society relations in the five countries. It also corresponds to the Post-Soviet context of the social origins of civil society by *Salamon, 1998*.

Various tools, methods and procedures were applied to conduct the qualitative study. These were based on gathering information from reliable sources for subsequent processing and analysis. The main research technique was based on collecting secondary data, which was the main source of available information related to volunteering and philanthropic activities, and their contribution to and impact on the societies, cultures and economies of the countries under study.

Sources of data included the official websites of government and regional authorities, local self-government bodies, statistical and research organizations, consulting agencies, commercial companies, public associations and foundations, non-profit organizations, charity foundations and volunteer support and development centers. During the course of the study, relevant materials were collected and analyzed from peer-reviewed scientific publications, conference proceedings, literature reviews, analytical reports, laws and other regulatory acts, publications on social networks, online reference systems and data search engines. A number of regional experts from the non-profit sector were personally interviewed.

3. Historical Background

Since prehistoric times, the vast territory of Central Asia has been inhabited by nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes who engaged in cattle breeding and agriculture where the climate permitted. The harsh living conditions gave rise of the social practice of *khashar* (an Arabic-Persian word that has become established in the Uzbek and Tajik languages) in local communities. This is a unique charitable tradition throughout the region, consisting of voluntary, unpaid, collective assistance to neighbors, relatives, friends and comrades, and in general to people living in the same area. In other regional languages, it is known as its linguistic variations *ashar* (Kyrgyz), *asar* (Kazakh) and *yowar* (Turkmen). During the period when Central Asia was under Russian rule, information about these practices of mutual assistance was not widely available. However, they were well known in local communities and were also studied by Moscow's ethnographers who published the results under supervision by *Tolstoy, 1963*.

Above tradition is considered the main philanthropy practice which is well-known over the region. There are discovered also a number of the other practices which used by population in different part of the region under study. One part of them are more related to volunteerism as giving a time and labor efforts and other part is a charity as giving a money of goods to other people in needs.

The above tradition is considered the main philanthropic practice in the region. A number of other practices used by the population in different parts of the region under study have also been discovered. Some of these are more related to volunteerism, involving the donation of time and labour, while others involve charitable deeds such as giving money and goods to people in need, gathered by *Ivanov et al., 2024*.

If we look beyond ancient traditions and search for historical parallels with modern philanthropy and organized volunteering, historians *Gorlova and Tumanova, 2022*, have convincingly demonstrated that these practices emerged in the region alongside the activities of public organizations in pre-revolutionary Russia. They have demonstrated that the social and moral values on which volunteering and philanthropic activities were based throughout the Russian Empire, including its Central European territories, were largely similar to European values, becoming particularly evident at the end of the 19th century and continuing until the end of the First World War.

4. Philanthropy and Volunteering in the Soviet Era

In the first half of the 20th century, the entire region underwent significant economic transformation, despite still essentially living in medieval conditions. In order to implement industrialization, collectivization and electrification projects, the leadership of the Soviet Union and its republics needed to attract huge labour resources. This was largely achieved by recruiting local residents as voluntary laborers. v, provides multiple examples of some of the most notable projects involving volunteers in Central Asia, including the construction of the Great Fergana Canal in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan (1939–1940), the Great Gissar Canal in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan (1940–1942), the Karakum Canal in Turkmenistan (1954–1988), and the Vakhsh Cascade Hydroelectric Power Plant, also known as Vakhshstroy, in Tajikistan (1931–1955). Additionally, youth volunteer teams were dispatched from across the USSR to Northern Kazakhstan to develop virgin land (1954–1965).

It would be not correct to consider the mass recruitment of people for large-scale industrial and construction projects in the USSR to be the same phenomenon as modern volunteering. This is because there are differing opinions on the matter, including the coercive nature of such state-initiated activities. However, local scholars and experts from non-profits believe that these labour efforts feats embodied the spirit altruism based on collective good deeds and, most importantly, the centuries-old khashar tradition. There is evidence that such mass public participation in giant construction projects was perceived positively by society, as their results improved the quality of life for millions of people, so this is worth agreeing with. Additionally, *subbotnik* — the name given to volunteer teamwork activities carried out on weekends, originating from the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic — gradually became integrated into the everyday lives of people in Central Asia in the last century, and this tradition still exists today.

5. Renaissance of Philanthropy and Volunteering

After gaining political and economic independence in the early 1990s, each Central Asian republic and its people embarked on their own development journey. As civil society and the non-profit sector gradually developed in these countries, a growing awareness emerged of the need to adopt special laws and introduce legal norms aimed at supporting and regulating charitable activities and volunteer work.

In all countries of the region, the process of developing and adopting decisions to improve the legislative framework protecting the rights and interests of volunteers and the entire volunteer movement proceeded in parallel. The formation of modern legislation was influenced by many factors. These included significant economic and political transformations that contributed to the emergence and development of civil society institutions, strengthened trust between members of parliaments and the population, encouraged the active participation of scientists and specialists, and facilitated the exchange of experience within the region and with neighboring countries.

The process began in the early 2000s with the adoption of the first laws promoting civil society and the non-profit sector. These laws focused on charity, patronage, philanthropy, state social procurement, youth policy, non-profit organizations, non-governmental organizations, public associations, social partnerships and social entrepreneurship. Initially, the focus was not on volunteer activities. An example of this is Kazakhstan's 2001 law 'On Non-Profit Organizations', which includes volunteerism among the objectives of NPOs alongside charitable activities and activities aimed at achieving social goals.

The 2007 Uzbekistani Law on Charity explicitly defines volunteers as individuals who engage in charitable activities in the form of unpaid work or services provided for the benefit of a beneficiary or charitable organization. This definition remains in place today. For example, Tajikistan's 2018 Law on Charitable Activities defines volunteers as individuals who carry out charitable activities in the form of unpaid work for the benefit of a beneficiary or charitable organization. In Kyrgyzstan, the 2017 Law on Patronage and Charitable Activities provides a definition of volunteering, and the 2023 Law on Youth states that volunteering is one of the key areas of work for the authorized state body responsible for youth policy.

An important result of the development of civil society in Central Asia is that all countries in the region now have basic laws that regulate philanthropic voluntary activities separately. These laws are described in details by Ivanov et al., 2024: This indicates a steady trend among government officials and national parliaments, supported by civil society experts, to make philanthropic and volunteering legislation more effective and relevant.

6. Conclusions

Research has shown that volunteering and charity practices in Central Asia have evolved over the centuries. Modern forms of these practices in Central Asian societies are essentially a fusion of ancient local traditions and modern values based on the European concept of philanthropy.

Furthermore, the study revealed that public policy on philanthropy and volunteering in Central Asian countries is the responsibility of the highest legislative and executive authorities. In all countries surveyed, the state plays an active role in developing philanthropy and volunteering by introducing measures to support and financially assist the improvement of volunteering infrastructure, as well as encouraging citizen participation. All five countries have a regulatory framework for the legal management of charitable activities and volunteering. These laws and regulations provide a solid foundation for the development of philanthropic practices, including charitable and volunteering activities carried out by organizations, initiative groups, and individual citizens.

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Technology in Asia's Social Sector: Cross-Regional Insights for Philanthropy in Asia and Europe[1]

Ke Li (Centre for Asian Philanthropy and Society)

Abstract

Digital technology is reshaping the social sector globally. Yet, the *Doing Good Index* 2024,[2] published by the Centre for Asian Philanthropy and Society (CAPS), reveals gaps in the technological readiness of Asia's social sector. These gaps include insufficient hardware and software access, inadequate cybersecurity measures, and a lack of staff capacity, hindering effective and safe technology adoption for social service delivery. As Asia rapidly advances in technological innovation and usage, Europe's social sector also sees a similar upward trend with stronger digital infrastructure and regulatory frameworks. Faced with shared challenges that hinder the further leverage of digital technology, the social sectors in Asia and Europe can benefit from cross-regional learning. Drawing on primary data from the *Doing Good Index* 2024 and secondary analysis, this article adopts a comparative approach to examine technology usage and readiness levels in Asia's social sector while also drawing from insights from the European counterpart. It also maps key stakeholders in the philanthropic ecosystem as well as their roles and characteristics in addressing the social sector's technological needs. By filling the knowledge gap between Asia and Europe in this field, the article aims to enhance philanthropy's role in empowering the social sector with more effective and strategic technology adoption.

Keywords: social sector, technology usage, technological readiness, philanthropic ecosystem

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[2] The *Doing Good Index* is biennial study, published since 2018, that examines the regulatory and societal environment that influences private capital to do good in 17 Asian economies. It comprises four sub-indexes: Regulations, Tax and Fiscal Policy, Ecosystem, and Procurement, and groups economies into four clusters: Doing Well, Doing Better, Doing Okay, and Not Doing Enough. Separate surveys were designed for the social sector experts and Social Delivery Organizations (SDOs). The two surveys capture different perspectives of the social sector and are designed to complement each other. (CAPS, 2024a)

1. Introduction

Digital technology has been developing rapidly in the past two decades, especially in the Asia Pacific region. In 2022, the percentage of population using the internet in East Asia and the Pacific reached 72% (World Bank, 2024). The expected smartphone adoption in the region is expected to exceed the global average of 92% in 2030 (Asian Development Bank, 2023). Despite gaps in development statuses across regions and countries, technology has been widely adopted in various forms, enabling greater connectivity and the flow of information and resources.

The social sector has benefited from adopting technology, leveraging digital tools and platforms to increase effectiveness, supercharge fundraising efforts, and expand access to social services. In Asia, 95% of Social Delivery Organizations (SDOs)3 surveyed reported using technology to deliver services to beneficiaries in 2024 (CAPS, 2024a). The COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated this trend, with digital technology becoming an essential tool for staying informed and connected (Lee et al., 2021). Technology holds considerable transformative potential for enhancing the effectiveness of nonprofits and advancing their social missions (Boles, 2013; McNutt et al., 2018; Bobsin et al., 2019). Recent developments in artificial intelligence (AI) present additional opportunities to improve social service delivery and expand access to resources through more tailored engagement with stakeholders (Coen, 2023; Pasic, 2023). However, many organizations in the social sector face persistent barriers to technology adoption. These challenges are particularly pronounced in less developed economies, which are unable to fully realize the potential benefits of digital innovation (Ejiaku, 2014). An enabling environment is therefore essential to accelerate technology adoption among social organizations. Particularly, philanthropy holds significant potential to address resource and capacity constraints faced by SDOs in using technology more effectively.

Current debates on philanthropy and technology remain largely shaped by the Global North (Hewage, 2024), where major corporations and donors decide social priorities and funding flows. However, philanthropy in Asia diverges from Western models in its giving traditions, economic conditions, and social dynamics. Understanding this landscape will be more important than before in the current geopolitical and economic shifts. A comparative analysis of social sectors between Asia and Europe, particularly in terms of technology adoption and the role of philanthropy, can help illustrate these contextual differences and contribute to more inclusive philanthropic approaches.

This article adopts a comparative, cross-regional lens to examine technology adoption in Asia's social sector, the challenges faced, and the role of philanthropy in addressing them. Additionally, it examines the philanthropic ecosystem that supports technology adoption in

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[3] Centre for Asian Philanthropy and Society (CAPS) uses the term Social Delivery Organizations (SDOs) to refer to organizations engaged in delivering products and services that address a societal need. The commonly used term "nonprofits" is less useful because many organizations include a for-profit or social enterprise income stream. "Non-governmental organization" (NGO) is also not quite right in Asia, as many such organizations have government affiliations. The term "SDO" allows us to differentiate social delivery from pure advocacy organizations that take on a different role within the Asian context. It covers a range of organizations, including traditional nonprofits, nonprofits with income streams, social enterprises and philanthropic foundations. (CAPS, 2024a)

[3] The 17 economies are: Bangladesh, Cambodia, Chinese Mainland, Hong Kong SAR, India, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Chinese Taipei, Thailand, Vietnam

Asia’s social sector through stakeholder mapping. To promote cross-regional learning, these findings are considered comprehensively alongside insights from the European counterpart.

2. Technology Usage in Asia’s Social Sector

2.1. Data source

The analysis of technology usage in Asia’s social sector draws on primary data from 2,183 SDOs and interviews with 140 experts across 17 economies,4 collected through CAPS’ *Doing Good Index* 2024 survey. This biennial study examines the regulatory and societal environments that influence the flow of private resources for social good in Asia. The survey is structured around 35 indicators across four subindexes: regulations, tax and fiscal Policy, ecosystem, and government procurement. Each iteration of the *Doing Good Index* examines a thematic trend affecting Asia's development and the social sector. The 2024 iteration focused on the influence of digital technology on the sector. Survey questions covered SDOs’ access to the internet and digital tools, internal operations, social media presence, cybersecurity, challenges SDOs face, and their technological needs.

Data was collected between April and August 2023 through an online platform in collaboration with partner organizations in each economy. Of the surveyed SDOs, 89% are nonprofits, 7% are nonprofit social enterprises or social ventures, and 4% are for-profit social enterprises or social ventures. Data about the European social sector is drawn from existing literature and secondary resources.

2.2. Technology Usage

2.2.1. Internal operations

Asian SDOs increasingly integrate digital tools into their daily operations and administrative processes. According to the *Doing Good Index* 2024, 97% of surveyed organizations use basic software such as Microsoft Office and Google Workspace. Many also rely on digital tools for information management. For example, 80% collect financial records digitally, and 87% store these records in digital formats. Over three-quarters of SDOs store donor information digitally, while 80% maintain digital records of clients and beneficiaries. However, adoption of more specialized tools remains uneven. Only around half of SDOs reported using operational software, such as customer relationship management (CRM) systems and accounting software. Only 35% use more advanced digital tools, such as video editing and statistical analysis packages.

Longitudinally, technology adoption in internal operations has been increasing among SDOs, with 67% reporting increased technology use over the past two years. Thailand shows the highest growth, with over 95% of SDOs reporting greater reliance on digital tools. By comparison, a 2023 survey of 671 European charities found that 40% increased their usage of digital channels internally (European Fundraising Association et al., 2024). While not directly

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[4] The 17 economies are: Bangladesh, Cambodia, Chinese Mainland, Hong Kong SAR, India, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Chinese Taipei, Thailand, Vietnam

comparable, this suggests that Asian SDOs may be adopting digital tools at a faster pace than their European counterparts currently.

2.2.2. Service delivery

Digital technology also enhances the provision of social goods and services, especially in underserved areas with limited public resources. In Asia, 95% of surveyed SDOs reported using technology in service delivery. The most commonly used channels are via telephone (69%), instant messaging (63%), and video calls (57%). Approximately half (52%) host online events, webinars, or training sessions. Nonetheless, most organizations rely on relatively basic digital tools, highlighting the potential for greater adoption of more advanced and customized technologies. For example, only 27% of SDOs disburse payments or grants digitally, despite the region's leading position in digital payments (Deloitte, 2024a). This gap may reflect limited infrastructure or inadequate sectoral support for technology transfer.

Among other more advanced tools, custom smartphone applications can be efficient for more targeted service delivery. For example, one nonprofit organization in Thailand, Starfish Education, developed an online learning platform designed to address gaps in the public education system. However, this approach is also underutilized in Asia's social sector, with just 21% of SDOs utilizing it for service delivery. Adoption is especially low in Japan, Korea, and Chinese Taipei (all under 10%), three of the more developed economies in Asia. Interestingly, 51% of SDOs in Vietnam reported using applications to deliver service, the highest across Asia. In more recent years, some SDOs have begun experimenting with AI. During the 2024 Henan floods in China, for example, the Shenzhen One Foundation deployed its Disaster Response AI Brain to generate a material allocation plan within two hours (Kuang, 2025). At the same time, 5% of Asian SDOs report not using any form of digital technology in their service delivery.

Longitudinally, 56% have increased their online services in the past two years, with the highest figures in Thailand (67%) and Sri Lanka (64%). Rising geopolitical, economic, and climate pressures have intensified demand. In Aisa, 60% of SDOs reported a rise in demand for their products and services over the past year. This trend suggests that greater reliance on digital tools for service delivery is likely to continue.

In Europe, a 2023 survey found that one-third (33%) of nonprofits had experienced increased service demand, while 25% expressed intention to deliver services in new ways (European Fundraising Association et al., 2024). For the European social sector, scaling up technology adoption can represent a critical strategy for meeting evolving needs, which are becoming increasingly complex.

2.2.3. Communications and outreach

Digital technology allows SDOs to raise awareness about their work and engage with stakeholders more effectively. Social media is the most widely used communication and marketing strategy in Asia's social sector, with 73% of surveyed SDOs listing it as one of the most important marketing outlets. Chinese Mainland leads at 89%. Across Asia, over 90% of surveyed SDOs have social media profiles, while fewer (78%) have websites. Social media usage has increased over the past two years, with 72% of SDOs reporting an uptick in social media usage to promote their work. Facebook is the most popular platform, especially in Thailand, Malaysia, and the Philippines, followed by Instagram and YouTube. In Chinese Mainland, most organizations are WeChat users (95%). A quarter of SDOs listed enhancing social media presence as one of their top needs.

Similarly, European nonprofits see websites and social media as the two most effective communication and fundraising tools, representing 87% and 85% of surveyed nonprofits, respectively (Nonprofit Tech for Good, 2019). However, the two regions have slightly different priorities for their digital presence. The proportion of nonprofits with a website in Europe reaches 95%, significantly higher than in Asia, and there is more regular engagement with stakeholders via social media (95%). In addition, 44% of nonprofits in Europe had a written social media strategy, and 27% tracked return on investment (ROI) for campaigns, practices less common in Asia (Nonprofit Tech for Good, 2019). European nonprofit organizations also exceed the global average for investing in advertising, with 42% of nonprofits in Europe purchasing Google Ads. These differences highlight opportunities for Asian SDOs to adopt more strategic approaches to social media engagement as they expand their social media presence.

2.2.4. Fundraising

SDOs in Asia and beyond are increasingly leveraging digital technologies to expand their funding base. The *Doing Good Index* 2024 data shows that 35% of Asian SDOs increased their online fundraising activities over the past two years. The most commonly used tools are organizational websites (54%), social media channels (52%), and direct email campaigns (44%). Additionally, 29% of SDOs raise funds through third-party online platforms, particularly in Singapore and Chinese Mainland, where 55% and 49% of SDOs, respectively, do so. Digital payment systems are also integral to charitable giving. In Hong Kong, for example, the mobile payment platform PayMe recorded a 430% increase in nongovernmental organization clients within two years (HSBC, 2022).

European nonprofits report similar trends, with 70% increasing their use of digital channels to reach and engage supporters. Notably, 14% now raise more money through digital channels than traditional channels (European Fundraising Association & Salesforce, 2023). Similar to Asia, social media (53%), websites (50%), and email (49%) are the primary fundraising tools in Europe (Salesforce, 2024). In Europe, web-based fundraising is most popular in Germany, with 82% of nonprofits citing it as their main fundraising channel (Lepper, 2021).

Compared to Europe, crowdfunding is gaining more traction in Asia, supported by the emergence of homegrown platforms in recent years. According to the *Doing Good Index* 2024, 27% of SDOs currently use crowdfunding, and 64% plan to adopt it in the future. In Chinese Mainland, 29 crowdfunding platforms have received government approval, collectively facilitating millions of dollars in donations annually (CAPS, 2024). Tech giant Tencent's public fundraising platform raised RMB 3.8 billion (approximately US$530 million) during the 2023

99 Giving Day, involving 2700 charitable organizations (Tencent, 2024). In contrast, only 11% of nonprofits in Europe and other Western countries report using crowdfunding (Salesforce, 2024).

3. Technological readiness in Asia's social sector

3.1. Technological readiness framework

To harness technological advancements effectively, SDOs need adequate infrastructure, resources, and skills. To assess the sector's capacity in this regard, CAPS has adapted a framework (Figure 1) that examines three levels of technological readiness.[5] Foundational readiness refers to the prerequisites for adopting new technologies, such as internet access, technological hardware and software. Operational readiness reflects the ability of SDOs to use digital tools effectively and safely. This includes in-house IT skills and expertise, cybersecurity measures, and necessary funding. Transformational readiness focuses on an SDO's capacity to maximize the long-term benefits of digital technologies, which depends on leadership commitment, staff support, and continued investment in digital technology (CAPS, 2024a).

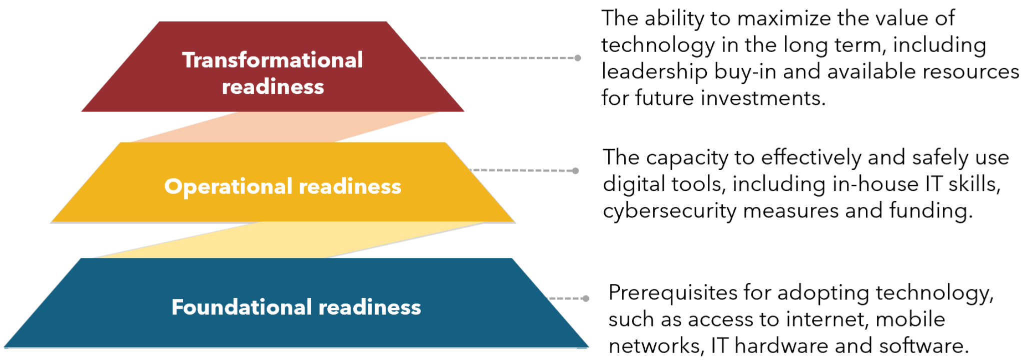

Figure 1. Technological Readiness Framework for the Social Sector. *Adapted from: CAPS, 2024a.*

3.2. Foundational readiness

Digital infrastructure in Asia continues to face significant gaps, particularly in lower-income economies. While 84% of surveyed SDOs have sufficiently reliable internet access at their workplaces, this figure drops to 76% outside of home or office environments. In Bangladesh and Nepal, 22% of SDOs lack reliable internet access even at their offices. In contrast, 84% of the population in Europe and Central Asia uses the internet, compared to 72% in East Asia and the Pacific, and 45% in South Asia (World Bank, 2024). Access to hardware—such as computers, tablets, and other devices—also constrains foundational readiness. Less than 70% of SDOs say that their staff have adequate access to computers/tablets to meet organizational needs (Figure 2). In Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, and Nepal, only roughly half of SDOs consider their hardware resources to be insufficient. In fact, hardware is the most frequently cited digital technology need, identified by 38% of SDOs overall.

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[5] The framework is based on IBM's AI Readiness Framework, adapted to the needs of the social sector, as outlined by Hewage (2024).

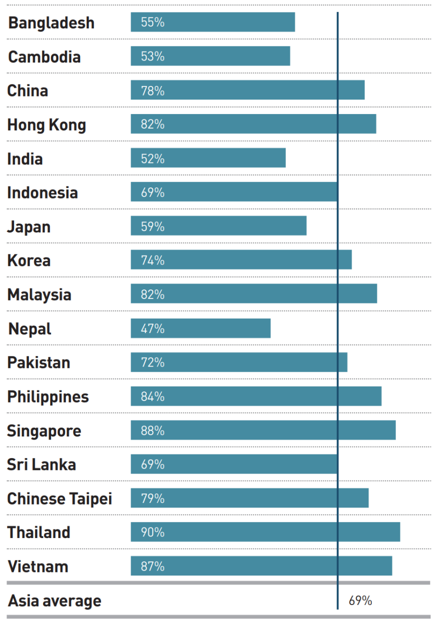

Figure 2: Percentage of SDOs with sufficient access to computers/tablets
Source: CAPS, 2024a

3.3. Operational readiness

While most SDOs use basic software, 31% and 27% of surveyed Asian SDOs listed operational and advanced software as pressing needs for digital adoption. Besides these IT resource needs, recruiting and retaining staff have also long been challenges for Asia's social sector, as shown in successive iterations of the *Doing Good Index*. The challenge intensifies as organizations prepare for the digital future. According to the 2024 Index, 59% of SDOs reported that their staff lack the skills required for digitization. It is the most frequently cited barrier in Cambodia (70%), Japan (70%), and the Philippines (62%).

Comparative data on workplace digital skills also underscores the gaps in staff capacity. In terms of digital skills readiness scores (Table 1), disparities across Asia are particularly stark, with India demonstrating relatively high preparedness and Japan lagging significantly behind (Salesforce, 2022a). The situation in Europe is not promising either, as the scores of several leading economies are generally lower than the global average. In addition, senior leadership in the European social sector tends to be more optimistic about their staff's digital skills than managers and individual contributors, suggesting a disconnect in perceptions of digital skills readiness (Salesforce, 2022b).

Table 1. Workplace Digital Skills Readiness in Leading Economies in Asia and Europe

	Regions	Index Score	Very Prepared with Workplace Digital Skills	
			Now	In 5 years
	Global	33	40%	34%
	United States	36	44%	38%
Asian economies	India	63	76%	58%

	Japan	15	21%	13%
	South Korea	17	14%	12%
	Singapore	35	36%	34%
European economies	Germany	25	39%	28%
	United Kingdom	21	30%	20%
	France	22	27%	20%
	Italy	25	23%	16%

Source: Workplace Digital Skills Readiness (Salesforce, 2022a)

Regarding safety, the adoption of digital technology introduces heightened exposure to cyber risks for the social sector. The Asia-Pacific region is among the most vulnerable globally. In 2024, the region accounted for 34% of all cyber incidents investigated worldwide (Raj, 2025). While most cyberattacks target governments and for-profit companies, SDOs' limited IT capacity and inadequate security measures leave them more vulnerable (Positive Technologies, 2023).

Although most surveyed Asian SDOs have not experienced any cyberattacks in the past two years, the risk remains high. This is reflected in the figure, which shows that 70% of organizations lack or are unaware of a cybersecurity or cyber-resilience strategy. While 63% have invested in basic tools such as antivirus or malware protection, fewer have invested in preventive measures, such as staff training (29%) or partnerships with external cybersecurity providers (15%).

By contrast, a 2024 survey of nonprofits in Europe, the United States and Australia, found that 34% provide cybersecurity training for all staff, 35% maintain formal data handling policies, and 24% have breach response plans (Salesforce, 2024). As of 2019, 40% of surveyed European nonprofits were already using encryption technology to protect data, reflecting the impact of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), a European Union regulation on information privacy in the European economies (Nonprofit Tech for Good, 2019). Europe, therefore, appears to be comparatively better prepared for cyber risks than Asia. However, both regions have room to strengthen their resilience if they are to fully embrace emerging technologies, such as AI, securely.

3.4. Transformational readiness

Organizational digital transformation has become pivotal in an era of rapid technological advancement (Omol, 2024). Strategic integration of technology can enhance mission-related outcomes and improve overall performance (Hackler & Saxton, 2007). Evidence suggests a strong correlation between digital maturity and organizational effectiveness, with digitally mature nonprofits consistently outperforming their peers (Salesforce, 2022c).

A critical enabler of digital transformation for the social sector is access to operational funding, which provides stability and flexibility to make long-term and strategic investments in digital capacity. Yet only just over half (52%) of Asian SDOs reported having received donor support for technology and IT-related expenses. Support is highest in Cambodia (76%), Sri Lanka (75%), and Bangladesh (73%), where foreign funding is more prevalent. By contrast, fewer than 40% of SDOs in Korea, Japan, Thailand, and Chinese Mainland reported receiving such funding. More broadly, over 80% of Asian SDOs reported difficulty in obtaining unrestricted funding, a constraint that limits their ability to invest strategically in digital technology. Despite these financial barriers, organizational leadership and staff in Asia generally show strong support for digital adoption. Only 6% of Asian SDOs cite leadership reluctance as a barrier, and only 12% cite staff reluctance (CAPS, 2024a). This suggests broad internal buy-in in the sector for technological change.

In the West, three-quarters (76%) of surveyed nonprofits report that employees recognize technology as a critical part of organizational success (Salesforce, 2022c). They are similarly proactive in exploring emerging technologies: nonprofits cite training, board buy-in and investment in system integration and security as essential prerequisites for AI adoption (European Fundraising Association et. al., 2024). Compared to Asia, European nonprofits often adopt a more strategic approach, seeking external expertise and purchasing services from professional providers (Štremfelj & Valič, 2023). Nonetheless, European experts highlight insufficient strategic planning among senior leaders when it comes to AI and big data (Štremfelj & Valič, 2023).

In summary, while the European social sector currently benefits from stronger resources and awareness of technology investments, both Asia and Europe remain in the early stages of adopting advanced technologies. Across regions, broad staff and leadership support is prevalent. However, greater strategic planning, investment, and donor flexibility will be critical to realizing the transformational potential of digital technology in the social sector.

4. The Role of Philanthropy in Enhancing Social Sector's Technological Readiness

4.1. Role of philanthropy in addressing challenges faced by SDOs

In Asia, most SDOs demonstrate basic foundational and operational readiness. However, many lack the necessary resources and capacity to adopt advanced technologies and safeguard themselves against the risks associated with digital use. Long-term planning and sustained investments are also needed to prepare the sector for a digital future.

According to the *Doing Good Index* 2024, the most frequently cited barriers to technology adoption among Asian SDOs are insufficient funding (71%), inadequate staff skills (59%), and a lack of awareness of digital technology and tools (46%). Talent shortage in the social sector compounds these challenges. Almost three-quarters (71%) believe it is difficult to recruit staff, and 70% reported difficulty retaining staff. SDOs also face limited resources for staff upskilling, with only 16% receiving regular support for capacity building from donors. Similar constraints exist in many Western countries, as 62% of nonprofits face staffing-related challenges, including recruitment, retention and training (Salesforce, 2024). Strengthening training and upskilling opportunities is therefore critical for enabling SDOs to fully harness digital opportunities (European Fundraising Association, et al., 2024).

Philanthropy can play an important role in providing much-needed financial and technological resources for SDOs. With 88% of Asian SDOs intending to increase their use of digital technology in the next two years, philanthropic contributions—financial, in-kind and skill-based—are essential. First, direct philanthropic funding should extend beyond programmatic activities to include investments in technology, IT systems, and staff development. Greater access to unrestricted or operational funding can empower organizations to enhance their digital capacity with greater stability and flexibility. Second, companies, especially those in the technology industry, can contribute hardware, software and cybersecurity tools through in-kind donations or at a subsidized rate. Third, companies also often possess essential expertise in strategic planning and IT management. Through skill-based contributions or employee volunteering, companies can provide much-needed capacity-building, particularly in areas such as cybersecurity and the application of advanced digital tools.

4.2. Characteristics of Asian Philanthropy

Asia's rapid economic growth over the past few decades has created a strong foundation for philanthropy. The Asia Pacific region now accounts for 46.6% of global GDP (IMF, 2025). Private wealth is also expanding rapidly, with the number of ultra-high-net-worth individuals (UHNWIs) projected to reach 228,849 by 2028 (Knight Frank, 2024). Accompanying the accumulated financial resources, philanthropy holds great potential to catalyze the overall social development across the region. At the same time, distinct socio-economic dynamics, including uneven levels of development, diverse cultural traditions and varying governance structures, have shaped philanthropic practices in Asia that differ from established Western models. Recognizing these characteristics is essential for strengthening the sector and fostering cross-border understanding.

As identified by Shapiro et al. (2018), Asian philanthropy exhibits three notable characteristics. Firstly, there is a great overlap between individual and corporate philanthropy in Asia. Family-dominated firms are more prevalent in the region, with roughly two-thirds of listed Asian companies controlled by families or their foundations (Stewart Investors, 2025). This means that, in many cases, personal and family philanthropy are channeled through corporate initiatives, blurring the boundaries between business social responsibility and charitable giving. This integration often leads to pragmatic win-win solutions that benefit local communities, the environment and business objectives (CAPS, 2023c).

Secondly, Asian philanthropy tends to focus on local needs. Many economies in Asia are emerging markets with pressing domestic social and environmental challenges. Local giving towards a specific community is therefore prioritized over cross-border philanthropy, a pattern reinforced by existing personal and professional networks of the donors. This contrasts with Western philanthropy, which tends to combine local and global agendas, often framed around a specific issue. Given the declining foreign aid and shifting geopolitical dynamics, domestic giving is expected to become even more prominent in Asia.

Thirdly, philanthropic activities in Asia tend to align closely with government priorities.

Compared to Western contexts, Asian governments exert greater influence in agenda-setting and policy development (Jomo, 2001). In response, the private sector frequently mobilizes resources to support the government's initiatives, both to advance public objectives and to maintain constructive governmental relations. For example, When China's President Xi Jinping introduced the 2016-2020 national poverty alleviation plan, state-owned enterprises were required to support designated priority areas. It also significantly boosted participation from private companies and foundations. By the end of 2020, approximately 800 million people had been lifted out of poverty in the country (World Bank, 2022).

Despite these regional distinctions, both Asian and Western philanthropy are increasingly shaped by a global consensus around sustainable development. Businesses and philanthropists alike are under pressure to address social and environmental concerns, redefine stakeholder responsibilities, and integrate socioeconomic and environmental considerations into their core strategies (Marschlich & Ghanesh, 2002; Awa et.al., 2024). In several Asian economies, including India and Nepal, this shift has been formalized through mandatory CSR spending requirements (CAPS, 2024a).

5. Philanthropic Ecosystem for Technology Adoption in Asia's Social Sector

Asia's social sector has yet to fully harness the potential of digital technology. It particularly lags in advanced digital tools, cybersecurity, and staff capacity. Philanthropy increasingly plays an empowering role in bridging these gaps, especially amid geopolitical shifts and declining foreign aid. To maximize the impact of philanthropy, an enabling environment and supportive stakeholders in this ecosystem are crucial.

This section examines the philanthropic ecosystem for technology adoption in Asia's social sector (Figure 3). It highlights the roles and characteristics of key stakeholders while providing comparative insights with European counterparts. Although Western Europe enjoys the most favorable philanthropy environment according to the *Global Philanthropy Environment Index* (Indiana University Indianapolis, 2025), Asia's distinctive philanthropic landscape provides comparative insights for strengthening ecosystems across regions.

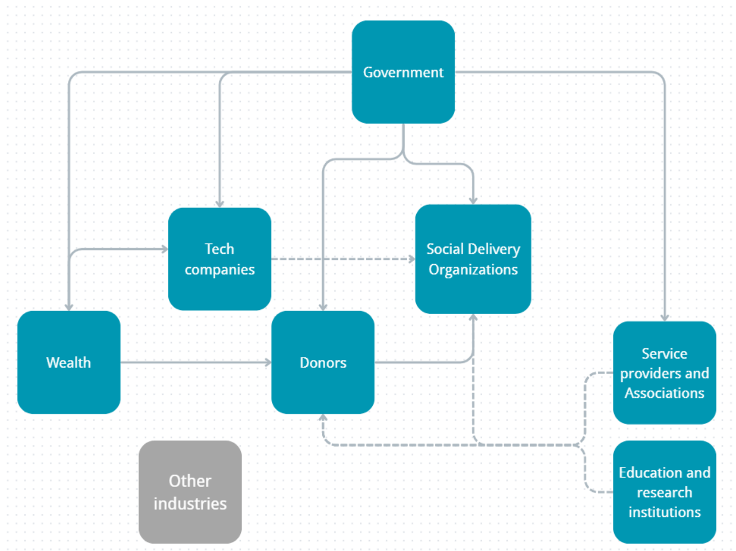

Figure 3. Philanthropic Ecosystem for Technology Adoption in the Social Sector
Adapted from: The Key Components for a Philanthropy Cluster, CAPS (2023a)

5.1. Wealth: Prerequisite of philanthropy

The accumulation of private wealth is a fundamental prerequisite for philanthropy. Global wealth has grown consistently, particularly in the Asia Pacific region (Deloitte, 2024b). This wealth expansion is also reflected in Asia's rising number of UHNWIs (Table 2) (Knight Frank, 2024). This wealth creation is shaped by several key forces, with technological advancement being a primary driver (Deloitte, 2024b). Conversely, the further development of technological solutions is deeply rooted in the investment of accumulated wealth.

Table 2: Projected Increase in UHNW Individuals in Asia (2023-2028)

	2023	2028	Growth rate
Asia	165,442	228,849	38.3%
Chinese Mainland	98,551	144,897	47.0%
Hong Kong	5,957	7,290	22.4%
India	13,263	19,908	50.1%
Indonesia	1,479	1,984	34.1%
Chinese Taipei	7,640	9,174	20.1%
Thailand	889	1,020	14.7%

Source: Knight Frank, 2024.

As wealth accumulates and social needs become increasingly complex, the demand for effective approaches and tools to utilize private wealth for good intensifies. While precise data on philanthropic capital deployed in Asia remains limited, philanthropic giving tends to grow in tandem with wealth. For instance, social donations in Chinese Mainland totaled RMB 140 billion (USD 19.3 billion) in 2022 (Yang & Zhu, 2023). Among UHNWIs in the Chinese Mainland, Hong Kong, and Chinese Taipei, 97% report making philanthropic contributions and want to do more (CAPS, 2023b). Singapore's Temasek Trust raised USD 777 million when launching the Philanthropy Asia Alliance in 2022 (Philanthropy Asia Alliance, 2023), a Temasek Trust initiative dedicated to catalyzing collaborative philanthropy in Asia.

Looking forward, Asia is projected to undergo an estimated intergenerational wealth transfer of approximately USD 2.5 trillion by 2030 (Wealth-X, 2021). This transition, along with emerging technological developments, will significantly influence the region's philanthropy and its role in supporting digital adoption in the social sector.

5.2. Donors: Funders and capacity builders

Donors, including individuals, families, foundations, and corporates, provide essential resources to SDOs for accelerating technology adoption. Their contributions range from funding hardware and software to offering expertise and capacity-building. Asian donors have a long history of directly engaging with local communities and supporting local initiatives, leveraging their contextual knowledge and existing relationships (Shapiro et. al., 2018). Corporate volunteerism is also strong, with 63% of surveyed Asian SDOs reporting engagement with corporate volunteers (CAPS, 2024a). Notably, many major Asian donors have only been established in the past two decades (Bridgespan, 2024), shaping the region's philanthropy with modern characteristics. Increasingly, Asian donors are coming together to give collectively and strategically, as exemplified by the Singapore-based Asia Philanthropy Circle, launched in 2015 (CAPS, 2024b).

By contrast, Europe and North America have a highly concentrated distribution of philanthropic foundations, with nearly 60% located in Europe (Harvard Kennedy School, 2019). The difference between Asia and the West also lies in the type of work. Foundations in the United States are often grantmaking institutions (Harvard Kennedy School, 2019), while in Asia, many philanthropic entities often combine grantmaking with direct service delivery and social innovation (CAPS, 2022). Donors in the global North also take the lead in the discussion on ethical technology usage, such as the Responsible AI Institute's work on responsible AI (Hewage, 2024). This reflects a broader role of institutional philanthropy and its advocacy work, more often seen in Europe than in Asia.

5.3. Technology developers and service providers: Creators and conveyors of digital tools

Technological companies are at the forefront of developing new tools and platforms. Globally, the Tech for Good initiative[6] has been expanding, amid growing expectations for companies to be socially responsible. The sector encompassing health tech, education tech, cleantech, femtech and enterprise ESG software is seeing increased investments, reaching $79 billion globally in 2021 (Tan, 2023).

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[6] A descriptor for the space where technology is deployed to take on big social and environmental problems (Ming Tan, 2023).

Despite their commercial orientation, these companies have the potential to develop affordable, scalable solutions, such as AI-driven telehealth platforms or digital fundraising tools. And they can do so in collaboration with SDOs. In Thailand, AIS developed the AorSorMor Online app to connect health-promoting hospitals and volunteers for community health. In China, Alibaba's Ant Forest project uses digital technology to reward low-carbon activities with "green energy," which is then converted into real trees planted or conservation areas protected in partnership with local SDOs. In Singapore, Grab founded the nonprofit Tech For Good Institute to promote inclusive technology usage. India's Wipro offers its Salesforce software at a discount to nonprofits and provides training on using its tech for fundraising and community outreach. For the social sector, these companies can contribute beyond product development to digital maintenance, skill training, and cybersecurity support, which are essential for longer-term technology adoption. Research underscores this growing importance of software developers in nonprofit program delivery in the European context as well (Štremfelj & Valič, 2023).

The low engagement rates of Asian SDOs with third-party cybersecurity vendors (15%) and limited investment in specialized staff training (29%) (CAPS, 2024a) underscore a substantial opportunity for technology firms to enhance their support in the social sector. Targeted incentives—such as tax benefits, corporate responsibility mandates, or matched-funding schemes—can encourage better alignment between corporate innovation and social needs.

5.4. *Social Delivery Organizations: Users of technology for social services*

SDOs—encompassing nonprofits, NGOs, and social enterprises—are the primary end-users of technological innovation for social service delivery. The *Doing Good Index* 2024 highlights a robust collaboration among Asian SDOs, facilitating vital knowledge-sharing, partnership building, and collective advocacy (CAPS, 2024a). In fact, 84% of surveyed Asian SDOs collaborate with other SDOs, mostly to advocate for a joint cause (70%) and to deliver services (69%). About 65% of SDOs have increased their use of online platforms to collaborate with others, and 59% use digital tools to access partnership opportunities. Further technological adoption will benefit the social sector. Meanwhile, SDOs' on-the-ground experience provides the crucial feedback and real-world testing necessary to ensure that technological solutions effectively address societal needs.

However, the digital divide exists not only across different economies but also within various SDOs. While larger, well-resourced organizations may possess the infrastructure and capability to pioneer new technologies, smaller SDOs face barriers such as limited IT funding and low digital literacy, hindering their ability to fully leverage technology for social good.

5.5. *Government institutions: Regulators and enablers*

Government institutions establish regulatory frameworks for technology development while implementing incentives to promote philanthropic giving to the social sector. In Asia, governments are especially influential in agenda setting with significant implications for corporate and philanthropic behavior. In addition to investing in digital infrastructure, governments establish policies to promote the development of ethical technology as well as social sector accountability. While comprehensive data protection laws are still not widespread in many Asian economies (World Bank, 2019), several are moving toward stronger AI governance frameworks, with Chinese Mainland, Singapore, Japan, Hong Kong, and Korea already taking steps (Norton, 2025). Government regulations encouraging accountability and transparency among SDOs can help build trust and increase donor confidence (CAPS, 2024a).

Fiscal and tax interventions can accelerate the transfer of technology to the social sector. Among the Asian SDOs, 45% have received government grants, with Singapore reaching 83% (CAPS, 2024a). These funds can be used to improve technology adoption by the SDOs. Tax incentives, such as tax deductions for charitable contributions from donors and tax exemptions for SDOs, can increase funding flows while signaling government support for the social sector. When combined with preferential or targeted schemes related to technology, these mechanisms can be further leveraged for technology adoption in the social sector.

Since philanthropy in Asia often aligns with government efforts, governments can create collaborative programs utilizing private sector technology and grassroots social expertise. Such Public-Private-Philanthropic Partnerships have emerged across many Asian economies. One example is the Philippine Disaster Resilience Foundation, initiated by the government and supported by over 60 private sector members, which aims to build disaster-resilient communities leveraging technologies (CAPS, 2024b).

In contrast, European governments exhibit a less prominent role as funders but provide stronger regulatory frameworks. Data from Europe, Australia, and the US shows that over one-third of nonprofits have received government funding for their services (Salesforce, 2024). This is lower than in Asia. However, European regulatory frameworks, such as the GDPR and the EU AI Act, set a global standard for data security and AI governance. Many Asian countries have drawn on the European framework to develop their AI policies (Flint Global, 2025). European governments also take measures to promote technology adoption. For example, the Dutch nonprofit sector is adjusting to the government's digital transformation initiative (Štremfelj & Valič, 2023). However, regulations can also pose barriers to adopting technology due to strict data protection policies, such as in the UK (Štremfelj & Valič, 2023).

5.6. Other stakeholders: Supporting the ecosystem

Service providers and associations related to philanthropy, such as private wealth management firms, banks, and philanthropic advisors, function as intermediaries, providing information, products and services and creating linkages among wealth owners, donors and other cluster institutions (CAPS, 2023a). Philanthropy services are increasingly in demand by private wealth clients, with 88% of surveyed UHNWIs respondents in the Greater China region seeking external advice on philanthropic resources and social investment options. This indicates both a need and an opportunity for professional service providers in the philanthropy sector (CAPS, 2023b).

Education and research institutions support philanthropy and technology adoption in the social sector by generating and disseminating knowledge. They also provide educational opportunities for wealth owners and donors to enhance their philanthropic and social investment practices grounded in evidence. Furthermore, they contribute to the human capital, thereby professionalizing the social sector and laying the foundation for further leveraging technology. Other related industries, such as art and culture, also support private wealth owners and philanthropic donors.

6. Discussion and implications

The *Doing Good Index 2024* shows that Asia's social sector is not yet fully prepared for the technological future. On one hand, the use of digital technology is now commonplace, and most SDOs demonstrate basic levels of foundational readiness. On the other hand, this progress is uneven across the region, and significant challenges remain for organizations to effectively and safely leverage digital technologies. In some economies, barriers are as fundamental as inadequate hardware or unreliable internet access. In others, the gaps lie in access to specialized software for more complex tasks, such as communication, fundraising, or program evaluation. Operational readiness is less developed than foundational capacity. Many SDOs face challenges in staff training to enable more profound digital transformation, and cybersecurity remains a pressing vulnerability. Although Asia has widely adapted innovative digital solutions, such as crowdfunding and mobile payments, these remain underutilized in the social sector. At the transformational readiness level, SDOs need more stable and flexible funding to cover digital and IT-related costs if they are to adapt to the rapidly evolving technological landscape. While Europe benefits from stronger digital infrastructure, more institutionalized strategic planning, and greater emphasis on cybersecurity and data protection frameworks, both regions face common challenges, particularly the need to build staff capacity in advanced technologies and to address evolving cyber risks.

Technology adoption has the clear potential to improve the social sector's performance in both regions, especially given the growing interest in harnessing innovation to address social challenges (e.g., the Digital Social Innovation for Europe initiative). Philanthropy can serve as a critical enabler by providing flexible financial resources, particularly unrestricted or operational funding, which allows SDOs to allocate resources according to their specific needs. In-kind donations, skill-based volunteering, and capacity-building initiatives can further strengthen infrastructure and human capital. With sustained and strategic philanthropic investments, SDOs will be better equipped to expand digital capacity, invest in organizational systems and mitigate risk. While Europe generally benefits from a more favorable regulatory and structural environment, Asia's philanthropy ecosystem—though fragmented—is evolving rapidly, shaped by its distinctive socio-economic and cultural contexts. As digital technology continues to advance, fostering cross-border collaboration is not just beneficial but essential. Knowledge exchange, co-creation of replicable solutions, and alignment of philanthropic strategies across regions can help bridge the digital divide and strengthen the resilience of the global social sector.

This article provides Asia-focused and cross-regional insights into technology adoption in the social sector. However, the analysis is primarily based on data from the *Doing Good Index 2024* survey focusing on Asia, while the comparative analysis with Europe remains limited by the lack of directly comparable data. Future research could aim to create more comparable datasets using a similar methodology across both regions, enabling more rigorous cross-regional insights.

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The patrimonialisation of private artworks: from individuality to collective memory. The case of the collection of the municipal Museum of Fine Arts of Ixelles (Brussels, Belgium)[1]

Anne Malmendier (Université libre de Bruxelles)

Abstract

The paper shares selected preliminary results of an ongoing doctoral research project in anthropology carried out at the Université libre de Bruxelles (Belgium). The research observe the mechanisms of the construction of collective memory through the practice of donation of artworks to public museums in Europe today, taking the specific case of the Museum of Fine Arts of Ixelles (Brussels, Belgium) as a starting point and privileged field of investigations, set to be extended to other Belgian and French museums.

At the crossroads of the disciplinary fields of anthropology, museology and cultural history, from which it borrows methodologies and theoretical frameworks, the research project uses complementary methodologies in order to identify the present-day characteristics of the phenomenon. The research uses museum archives analysis to compare current observations with past cases, field surveys such as semi-directive interviews with today's donors and the participant observation at the Museum of Ixelles as the researcher was part of the museum team from 2021 to September 2025 as Head of Development and Partnerships.
In the context of the 12th ERNOP Conference, the paper shares the first results that illustrate the trend of this specific form of philanthropy and the typical motivations that drive specific individuals to donate artworks to public museums. Consistent with the questions articulated by the conference, particular emphasis will be placed on presenting the elements in a manner that elucidates the ways in which philanthropy contributes to democratic processes and foster social cohesion, while considering the duality of private interests versus public good and bridging research and practice.

Keywords: Donation, artworks, museums, patrimonialisation, anthropology, memory.

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1. Introduction

This paper presented as part of the 12th International Conference of the European Research Network on Philanthropy (ERNOP), discusses preliminary findings from an ongoing doctoral research project in anthropology, initiated in September 2022 at the Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB), focusing on the practice of donation of private artworks to public museums in Europe, with particular attention to Belgium and France. In France, museum collections are enriched each year by several hundred thousand objects, 60% of which enter museums through donations or bequests.[2]

Grounded in an anthropological epistemological approach, the project aims to enhance the understanding of the processes through which individuals contribute to the construction of collective memory, and to examine the motivations of donors who take part in building public museum collections, considered as *collective material memory*.

The methodology combines three approaches from the social sciences: archivistic research, qualitative enquiry with semi-structured interviews, and participant observation.

The phenomenon of the practice of donating private artworks to museums, seldom studied and often underestimated, is explored through the hypothesis that such non-market transactions arise from complex social interactions and a will to make memory that go beyond traditional conceptions based on social class or economic status.

1.1. Overall research question of the ongoing doctoral research

The research project seeks to unravel a "heritage mechanism" by examining the process through which objects are transmitted from the private to the public sphere. On the one hand, it analyses the motivations of individuals who choose this specific form of transmission. Why opting for patrimonialisation rather than intra-family transfer or sale, at a time when selling an artwork on the art market has never been so easy? Why select one museum over another? On the other hand, the research examines the dynamics of patrimonialisation and the decision-making process employed by museum professionals when deciding to integrate specific private objects into public collections. Together, these two approaches provide an up-to-date view of the dynamics of patrimonialisation, enabling us to better understand how collective memory is constructed in today's societies.

The donation of artworks to public museums constitutes a specific form of philanthropy. Within the framework of the present conference and its central questions, this paper presents the theoretical framework and methodology of the research, focusing particularly on its first findings. Special attention is given to the motivations expressed by philanthropists when they choose to transmit their often intimate possessions into the public domain. The paper also highlights the ambivalence of philanthropy : on the one hand, it can be seen as an enrichment of the collective heritage in the service of the general interest. On the other, it may be

[2] French *National Report of the Regional Scientific Acquisition Committees*, CSRA, year 2024. Published on 30 Juil. 2025. URL (accessed on August 27, 2025): https://www.culture.gouv.fr/thematiques/musees/pour-les-professionnels/conserver-et-gerer-les-collections/gerer-les-collections/bilan-national-des-commissions-scientifiques-regionales-d-acquisitions-csra

perceived as a privilege reserved for economically endowed individuals, capable of "acting on the collective" in order, consciously or unconsciously, to influence shared decisions and, in doing so, exert a degree of control over the collective future (Duvoux, 2023).

1.2. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this doctoral research lies at the intersection of three branches of anthropology: social, cultural, and economic. It draws first on the anthropology of memory, which examines the transmission and interactions between individual and collective memory within the cultural and social contexts that shape them. Secondly, museum anthropology considers the museum as a social and cultural space, analysing the collection and circulation of objects as well as the power relations, memory, and identity dynamics that crystallise within it. Finally, the anthropology of gift studies how members of a society use gifting to create and maintain social relationships, beyond the purely economic logic of the art market.

Within the anthropology of memory, "transmission and its *modus operandi* are rarely a starting point, a subject of study in themselves" (Berliner, 2010, p. 6). Researchers have tended to describe the results of transmission rather than the act of transmitting itself. While the concepts of "collective memory" and "cultural memory" are now widely used in anthropology, only few studies explore the processes through which culture and memory are produced and transmitted. Furthermore, the notions of "individual memory" and "collective memory," theorised by Emile Durkheim (1898), Henri Bergson (1896), Maurice Halbwachs (1924), Paul Ricoeur (2000), or Wertsch (2008), have recently been revisited, notably in cognitive sciences (Gagnepain *et al.*, 2020), offering new insights into their interrelation.

The museum is here regarded as an instrument of "collective memory," part of the "arsenal necessary for transmission" (Nora, 1997, p. XX), alongside schools, ceremonies, commemorations, historical monuments, or street names. "The nationalisation of collective memory and the significant role of the State in its transmission are major developments in its history over the past two centuries" (Pomian, 1998, p. 107–108). What, then, is the role of individuals in shaping collective memory through the museum institution?

Museum anthropology and museum studies, relatively recent disciplines, focus on the circulation and provenance of objects. Their development was encouraged by the adoption of the Washington Principles in the United States in 1998, concerning the restitution of artworks looted during World War II, and by the publication in France in 2018 of the Sarr-Savoy Report on the restitution of African cultural heritage[3], related to objects pillaged during the colonial period. Research examining the role of donors in the formation of public collections remains scarce and seldom adopts a fully anthropological perspective.

The French philosopher and director of the Culture and Creation Department at the Centre

[3] Sarr, F., & Savoy, B. (2018). *Rapport sur la restitution du patrimoine culturel africain. Vers une nouvelle éthique relationnelle.* (Report commissioned by the President of the French Republic, Emmanuel Macron, published in November 2018 and authored by the Senegalese scholar and writer Felwine Sarr and the French art historian Bénédicte Savoy)

Pompidou in Paris (France), Mathieu Potte-Bonneville describes "the immense number of non-market transactions that organises itself around a collection such as that of the Musée National d'Art Moderne[4], the second largest modern and contemporary art collection in the world[5] and the largest in Europe. These transactions take the form of gifts, bequests, loans, and donations, creating a fascinating universe of interactions, social relations, and relationships between objects." [6] He notes that these interactions have been largely neglected by ethnographic research, and that the proliferation of gifting activity has received little attention. Museums rarely publish quantitative data on the composition of their collections, and scholarly literature has largely focused on the histories of major national museum collections and on social elites, often through prosopographical studies of major collectors or museum patrons (Long, 2007).

The museum phenomenon and the history of social elites, notably business magnates, attract significant research in all countries. Yet the intersection of these two themes (collections and museum donations) has only been the subject of scattered and pioneering monographs, without a comprehensive analytical framework (Long, 2007, p. 10). Moreover, not all collectors are museum donors[7]. The research provides an updated view of the types of donors in museums, with a particular focus on "amateur" donors.

This paper does not examine the nature of the donated object, the status of the artwork, or its role within the current exchange system, nor the various values it may carry (affective, museal, market, symbolic, etc.). Likewise, the fiscal benefits associated with donating or bequeathing artworks in Belgium and France are not discussed here but are perspectives integrated into the overall study.

This paper is primarily positioned within the field of the anthropology of gift, drawing on the foundational work of Marcel Mauss. Mauss, the founder of social anthropology and a pioneer of French ethnography, nephew and successor of Émile Durkheim, published in 1925 his *Essai sur le don* (translated into English in 1954 as *The Gift*). His work has influenced numerous scholars, including the French anthropologist Maurice Godelier (1996, *L'Énigme du don*), the French sociologist Alain Caillé (2007, *Anthropologie du don*), the Québécois sociologist Jacques Godbout (2007, *L'Esprit du don*), the German philosopher Georg Simmel (1987, *Philosophie de l'argent*), the American anthropologist Marshall Sahlins (1976, *Culture and Practical Reason*), and more recently, the French sociologist and anthropologist Florence Weber (2023, *La nouvelle anthropologie économique*).

[4] The collection of the Musée national d'Art moderne–Centre Pompidou holds 140,000 works. URL (accessed September 1, 2025): https://www.centrepompidou.fr/fr/collection/les-chefs-doeuvre
[5] The largest collection of modern and contemporary art is that of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, which holds 200,000 works. URL (accessed September 1, 2025): https://www.moma.org/collection/
[6] Private interview with Mathieu Potte-Bonneville, June 13, 2025, Paris (France); and in Boucheron, P. (2024, November 24). *Au théâtre des valeurs de l'art* [Radio broadcast]. In the series *Allons-y voir!*, France Culture, 58 min. URL (accessed August 17, 2025): https://www.radiofrance.fr/franceculture/podcasts/allons-y-voir/au-theatre-des-valeurs-de-l-art-8647201
[7] Patrons of the Louvre represented less than 6% of Parisian collectors in the interwar period (Long 2007: 10). The case of the Goncourt brothers' collection is a telling example: in 1896, Edmond de Goncourt's will specified that his collection should be "scattered under the blows of the auctioneer's hammer, so that the pleasure I derived from acquiring each item might be returned, through each sale, to an heir of my tastes." (Poulot, 2022, p. 20).

1.2.1.The "Total Man" versus Homo Economicus

Marcel Mauss (1872–1950) considers the gift as a "total social fact," defined as a complex set of concrete phenomena that "set in motion […] the entirety of society and its institutions" (Mauss, 1925, p. 159).

Based on careful readings of ethnographies, Mauss develops a general conception of the gift and human behaviour that goes beyond the model of *homo œconomicus*. The representation of *homo œconomicus*, as formulated by Max Weber (*The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 1904), depicts humans as perfectly rational, profit-maximising economic agents, whose every choice is guided by rational calculation, devoid of emotion, and socially isolated.

For Mauss, humans are not merely "economic animals." He describes a "total man" embedded in a complete social life, taking into account "a variety of aesthetic, moral, religious, and economic motives, as well as various material and demographic factors, all of which constitute society and collective life" (Mauss, 1925, p. 165).

Through his essay in comparative sociology, Mauss seeks to highlight the nature of the social bonds that enable societies to exist, exploring the full range of possible prestation in which the personal relationship carried by the given object is central. He considers the gift to be "in theory voluntary, in reality obligatorily given and returned" (Mauss, 1925, p. 61), within a system involving giving, receiving, and repaying (the so-called *maussian gift*). The essay goes beyond a purely economic view of interests to describe non-market exchanges that sustain social cohesion and reveal "the fleeting moment when the society emerge" (Mauss, 1925, p. 160).

For Mauss, the gift signifies membership in society: the donor's motivation is to participate in the broader circle of exchange, affirming their status as a social actor, and the symbolic value of the gift rests on solidarity and trust. In this sense, the *Essai sur le don* represents a key milestone in the development of the French welfare state, which emerged after the Second World War (Weber, 2023, p. 7).

1.2.2.Museum Context: The Donation of Works of Art

The donation of private objects and artworks to public museums is rooted in a long-standing tradition, dating back to the creation of modern museums as we know them today. Through their roles and missions – disseminating knowledge, fostering critical thinking, and preserving local, national, or "universal" material memory – museums present themselves as instruments of modernity and social cohesion.

Emerging from the Enlightenment in the 18th century (*Aufklärung, Les Lumières*), first in Italy, then in the Germanic world, and formalised by the French Revolution in 1789 with the creation of Napoleon's universal museum (today's Louvre), the museum is a multifaceted institution in constant evolution, shaped by successive societal challenges. As such, it is here preserved as a privileged observation point for social transformations, a kind of stethoscope to take the pulse of a society. Observing the practice of art donation by individuals to a public museum over the long term allows us to examine the relational dynamics between the individual and the collective, the private and the public, the intimate and the institutional. The ongoing doctoral research focuses on memory "in the making" and describes how contemporary societies "make memory."

The museum is defined by the International Council of Museums (ICOM) as '*a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing*.' [8] As such, in its core missions, a museum supports the democratic values. But this definition, adopted by the Extraordinary General Assembly of ICOM in 2022, sparked significant debate within the museum community, highlighting the difficulty of providing an encompassing definition for the diverse range of 21st-century museums: fine arts museums, natural history museums, history museums, community museums, and both public and private museums across the world. For the French art historian Bénédicte Savoy, Professor at the Technical University of Berlin and at the Collège de France , "the museum is a European concept - untranslatable, as there is no conceptual equivalent of the 'museum' in many languages (Wozny and Cassin, 2014) - which has been the most successfully exported since the 18th century[9]".

As a multifaceted object, the museum must be approached critically. First, it can be an institution that promotes democratic values (equity, freedom of thought, speech and expression, tolerance, and respect for fundamental rights) but it can also be used for political propaganda, shaping people's imagination under totalitarian regimes[10], or for cultivating taste and consumption habits (as the universal exhibitions since 1851). Second, despite its ambition to reach the widest possible audience, inclusion remains a major challenge: museum visitors are still most often university-educated and affluent, representing the majority group. Third, objects displayed as material witnesses of a glorious past may also reflect power asymmetries, considering the vast accumulation of goods obtained through spoliation, plunder, theft, or cultural appropriation. Museums are therefore public institutions embedded in social and political contexts, which must be acknowledged, yet careful analysis can reveal much about these contexts.

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[8] Definition of the museum adopted by the Extraordinary General Assembly of the International Council of Museums (ICOM) in Prague, August 24, 2022.

[9] Savoy, B. (2018, 14 février). *Histoire culturelle des patrimoines artistiques en Europe, XVIII^{e}-XX^{e} siècle.* Lecture at the Collège de France. URL (accessed August 17, 2025) : https://www.college-de-france.fr/fr/agenda/cours/histoire-transnationale-des-musees-en-europe/introduction.

[10] For example, the Führermuseum, Hitler's projected museum in Linz (Austria), which was never realized but intended to exhibit "true art," the only kind recognized as legitimate under the Reich; the Museum of the Belgian Congo in Tervuren (Belgium), designed by Leopold II to legitimize his colony in Congo; or the Museo Coloniale in Rome (Italy), inaugurated in 1923 under Mussolini's fascist regime, which aimed to generate adherence to the Italian colonial project, foster social cohesion, inspire patriotic fervor, and encourage nationalist and communitarian sentiment. Falcucci, B. (2022). « Les « martyrs » dans les collections coloniales italiennes pendant le fascisme ». In Poulot, D. (Ed.). (2022). *L'Effet musée. Objets, pratiques et cultures. Travaux de l'École doctorale «Histoire de l'art »*. Éditions de la Sorbonne, pp. 107-127.

While it is often assumed that states are the main agents behind these massive assemblages, many of the masterpieces seen in museums today entered collections thanks to the initiatives of individual collectors, artists, and curators, through a variety of means.

1.2.3.Donations in Museum Acquisition Policies

The donation of private objects and artworks to public museums represents a specific form of philanthropy. It's part of a broader philanthropic landscape that structure the so-called museum 'alternative resources' (incomes coming from the ticketing, rental spaces for private events, friends membership, restaurant or bookshop, etc.), alongside with financial donations from philanthropists, corporate sponsorship and patronage, specific foundation financial supports, and other specific public fundings. While all these actors come together to support the museum's activities, the museum's structural budget continues to be covered predominantly by its public supervisory authority.

One of the main missions of the museum is to enrich its collection. Yet, its structural acquisition budget are largely insufficient to allow them to be competitive on the art market (representing in most cases less than 1% of their annual operating budget)[11]. Donations of artworks by private individuals to public museums are then considered as "a necessity, an essential" means of enriching museum's collections[12]. Today, the two main modes of acquisition are the purchases on the one hand, and donations or bequests on the other[13], which represent two distinct dynamics. Purchases follow a proactive patrimonial strategy, seeking works to fill gaps in a collection or to integrate today's contemporary art. Donations and bequests, in contrast, constitute "incoming" proposals of works that museums must decide whether to retain, according to the logic of the existing collection. Beyond mere proposals, numerous examples illustrate the desire of some donors to "force open the doors of the museum" in order to introduce artists or artistic movements that are underrepresented or absent into the collective heritage[14], for better or for worse. In the worst case scenario, the museum becomes a tool to influence or even oppose democratic values by imposing a certain type of art, or even an ideology, or as shown by Nicolas Duvoux, a place where philanthropists is in 'capacity to act' on the collective, as a mechanism of reproduction and legitimization of

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[11] The annual acquisition budget of the Museum of Ixelles amounts to €90,000. The annual acquisition budget of the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium is €50,000.

[12] Interviews with Claire Leblanc, Director-Curator of the Museum of Ixelles (Brussels, Belgium), on October 9, 2024, and with Kim Oosterlinck, Director of the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium (Brussels, Belgium), on July 9, 2025.

[13] Long-term deposits are also practiced; however, since ownership of the object is not transferred to the museum, such works cannot be considered as strictly part of its collection.

[14] The Caillebotte bequest (1894): The collector and painter Gustave Caillebotte (1848–1894) attempted to circumvent the French legislation then in force by bequeathing to the French State 67 Impressionist paintings (Millet, Degas, etc.), in an effort to accelerate the official recognition of the Impressionist movement, which was still disparaged by museums at the time. See Pierre Vaisse, "L'impressionnisme au musée: l'affaire Caillebotte," *L'Histoire*, no. 158, September 1992, pp. 6–14. The Doucet bequest (1921): The collector and couturier Jacques Doucet (1853–1929) proposed bequeathing to the Louvre 21 modern paintings (Sisley, Monet, Degas, Van Gogh, Cézanne, Picasso, etc.), but the French State accepted only two (Douanier Rousseau, Seurat). The State refused Picasso's *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* (1907), considering it scandalous: "At the Louvre, at the Luxembourg, no one wanted to hear about Picasso - he was despised." In 1937, the French State again refused the bequest offered by Doucet's widow. She eventually sold the painting to the Museum of Modern Art in New York (MoMA), where it remains on display today.

social inequalities through an ability to shape collective choices and to take control of the collective future (Duvoux, 2023).

Given the limited objective data available from both literature and museums, the research seeks to address the following questions: what proportion of public collections consists of works donated or bequeathed by private individuals? How visible are these works? Can we observe the evolution of collections and the share represented by donations over time? Who are these donors, and what motivates them to give to museums?

1.3. Methodology

Methodology and epistemological positioning

The study aims to answer the research questions by employing three complementary mixed methods (quantitative and qualitative) from the social sciences:

1. Analysis of museum archives relating to donations since the late 19th century, to trace the evolution of the practice and identify any contemporary specificities;
2. Ethnographic survey, based on semi-structured interviews with donors, wealth management professionals, and museum staff;
3. Participant observation at the Museum of Ixelles, Brussels (Belgium), in the role of Head of Development and Partnerships from March 2021 to September 2025. This position allows for a close integration of research and practice.

To date, over 500 archival documents of the Museum of Ixelles related to donations have been analysed, enriching the digital inventory of the collection with sociological data. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 21 museum donors, 6 professionals connected to donors (auction houses, foundations, wealth managers), and 12 museum professionals. These interviews focused on donor trajectories, the motivations behind their decision to donate to a museum (rather than through family inheritance or sale), the choice of one museum over another, and the emotional and symbolic relationship with the donated object.

1.3.1.Fieldwork

The researcher’s position at the Museum of Ixelles (Brussels, Belgium), defined a specific and privileged field of study, allowing for a participant-observer approach and a detailed analysis of the subject thanks to several advantages: access to donation and bequest archives since the museum’s founding in 1892, providing an in-depth understanding of the collection’s and institution’s history; observation of the types and number of incoming donation proposals; insight into the museum’s internal decision-making process regarding acceptance or refusal of donations; and easy access to meet donors.

The Museum of Ixelles is a fine arts museum founded in 1892 by the municipality of Ixelles (one of the nineteen municipalities of the Brussels-Capital Region, Belgium), following the donation of the private collection of the Belgian painter (Edmond de Pratere, 1826–1888). Today, the museum preserves over 15,000 artworks, representing the third-largest collection of modern and contemporary art in Belgium. The collection offers a panorama of Belgian art from the 19th century to the present day, featuring major artists such as René Magritte, Paul Delvaux, James Ensor or Léon Spilliaert. The initial donation paved the way for numerous subsequent contributions.

The museum is known for its various educational and social projects for all kind of visitors (schools, hospitals, neighbours, local associations) and its "human scale approach," which fosters close relationships with visitors, partners, and donors.

The specific case of the Museum of Ixelles is also considered in relation to other Belgian and French museums, which share common cultural, legal, and fiscal frameworks.

1.3.2.The Legal Status of Museums and the Inalienability of Collections

The cultural and legal definition of a museum is of particular importance in comparative analyses of museum status. As highlighted by ICOM, the concept of the museum encompasses a wide variety of institutional realities, with legal applications that vary across countries, thereby generating contrasting legal frameworks (Cornu *et al.*, 2021).

In both Belgium and France, a museum is primarily defined by its collections, which constitute its material and symbolic foundation (Cornu *et al.*, 2021, pp. 454, 501). In France, the "museum" label may only be granted to an institution that conserves a collection[15]. Although less explicitly codified, a similar logic applies in Belgium. It is worth noting that the first Belgian museums were established under French administration between 1795 and 1814[16], prior to Belgium's independence in 1831. Local museums, such as the Museum of Ixelles, implicitly follow this untouchable principle. Legally, museums are considered as 'public', since their collections belong to the public domain, thereby rendering them inalienable.

The principle of inalienability prohibits the sale, exchange, transfer, or expropriation of public assets. In both Belgium and France, this principle applies to all public collections, as they are dedicated to public service. In France, inalienability also extends to the objects of private museums when they derive from donations, legacies, or acquisitions supported by public authorities (Cornu *et al.*, 2021, p. 367). This legal framework, inherited from Roman law (Civil law), is common to most continental European countries, where it is upheld either by statutory law or jurisprudence, including France, Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Germany[17], Italy, Spain, Greece[18], etc. This rule does not apply to *Common law* countries (such as the United States, United Kingdom, etc.) where deaccessioning is allowed under certain conditions.

[15] *Under the terms of the present law, a museum is defined as any permanent collection of objects whose conservation and display are of public interest, and which is organized for the purposes of knowledge, education, and the enjoyment of the public. (Law 2002-5 of January 4, 2002, as amended, relating to the Museums of France, Article 1).*

[16] The current Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium were established by the *Arrêté Chaptal* of 1801, which inaugurated the opening of museums in 15 cities outside Paris, intended to receive the "surplus of the Central Museum of the Arts" (the present-day Louvre). This initiative followed the French Revolution of 1789 and the subsequent nationalization of ecclesiastical, dynastic, and aristocratic property. The Museum of Fine Arts in Ghent was created in 1803 (Arrêté Chaptal of 1801), while the Museum of Fine Arts in Antwerp was established in 1810 by Napoleonic imperial decree.

[17] In Germany, no law defines the very notion of "museum," nor its missions or functions (Cornu et al., 2021, p. 405).

[18] In Greece, it is the functions and purposes of the institution (notably public accessibility) that determine its accreditation as a "museum" (Cornu et al., 2021, p. 454).

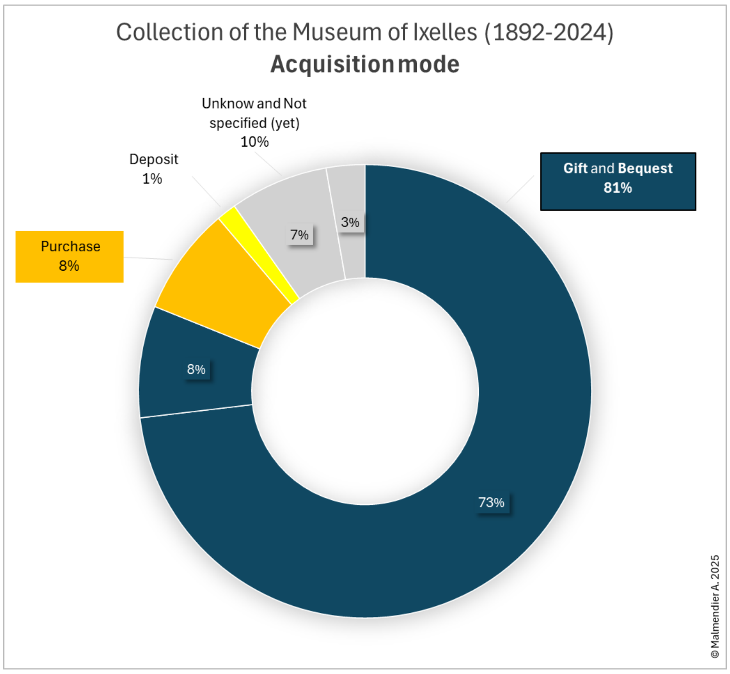
1.4. Results and Analysis

1.4.1. The Share of Donated or Bequeathed Works

1.4.1.1. Within the Collection

What do the initial results reveal regarding the share of donated or bequeathed works in the collection of the Ixelles Museum, which in 2024 preserves nearly 15,000 artworks? The inventory, enriched with the museum's archival data (as of 16 February 2025) and covering the period from 1892 (the year of the museum's foundation) to 2024, shows that 81% of the collection (11,877 items) entered through donations and bequests from private individuals. Acquisitions account for 8%, corresponding to 1,129 works purchased by the museum thanks to the municipal acquisition budget and the financial support of the Friends of the Museum association. Deposits make up 1% of the total. The mode of acquisition of 10% of the objects (1,028 items) remains unknown or undetermined (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Distribution by mode of acquisition (Number of objects), Museum of Ixelles (Belgium), 1892–2024.



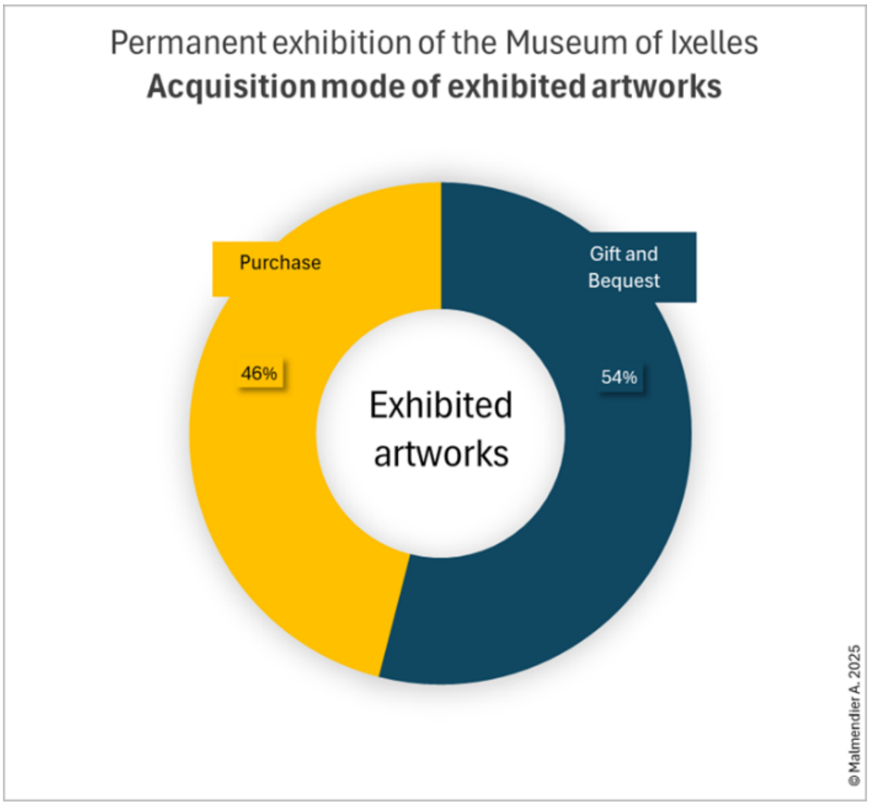
1.4.1.2. Within the Permanent Exhibition

If 81% of the museum's overall collection consists of donated or bequeathed objects, what proportion is actually accessible to the public? The museum's permanent exhibition shows to the public approximately 250 to 300 works, the 'masterpieces'. The exhibited objects represent approximatively 2% of the total items recorded in the inventory[19]. An analysis of

[19] This observation is consistent with the findings of the international survey conducted by ICCROM and UNESCO in 2011 on collections stored in museum reserves worldwide: only 5% of collections are accessible to the public, while 95% remain in

the acquisition modes of these exhibited works reveals that 54% originated from donations or bequests (Figure 2). In other words, during their visit to the permanent exhibition, visitors encounter as many works acquired directly by the museum as works stemming from the generosity of donors.

Figure 2. Distribution of Works in the Museum of Ixelles' permanent exhibition by mode of acquisition (Number of Objects).



1.4.1.3. Formation of the Collection since 1892

The initial analyses also make it possible to trace the development of the collection over time. Figure 3 shows that two-thirds (66%) of the collection were formed before 1940, amounting to nearly 10,000 objects accumulated within 50 years. Of these, 95% entered through donations and bequests (9,421 objects), 4% through purchases (384 objects), and 1% as deposits. The remaining third (33%), corresponding to about 5,000 items, was added to the inventory over the following 84 years.

storage. (RE-ORG Project, 2011, ICCROM–UNESCO. Accessed August 22, 2022. URL (accessed August 17, 2025) : https://www.iccrom.org/fr/programmes/re-org

Figure 3. Overall Collection Growth by Mode of Acquisition (Number of Objects). Museum of Ixelles, 1892-2024.

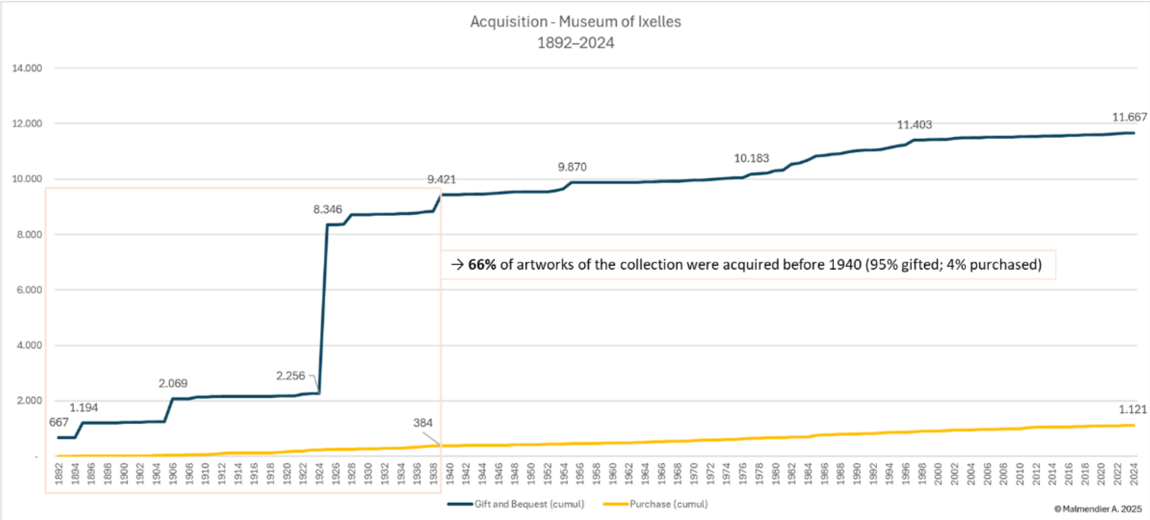


Figure 4 more clearly illustrates the decreasing trend in the number of works entering the collection through donations and bequests.

Figure 4. Trend of Donated and Bequeathed Works at the Museum of Ixelles, 1892–2024. (For reasons of clarity, the donation of 6,000 drawings from 1925 has been removed from the graph)

A closer analysis shows, however, that while the number of donated works has decreased, the number of donors has, conversely, increased. The following figures present the evolution of the average annual number (by decade) of works donated to the museum (Figure 5) as well as the average annual number (by decade) of donors (Figure 6). These observations indicate that, over time, fewer artworks have been donated, but the number of individual donors has gradually increased.

Figure 5. Average Annual Number (by Decade) of Donated Works at the Museum of Ixelles, 1892–2023.

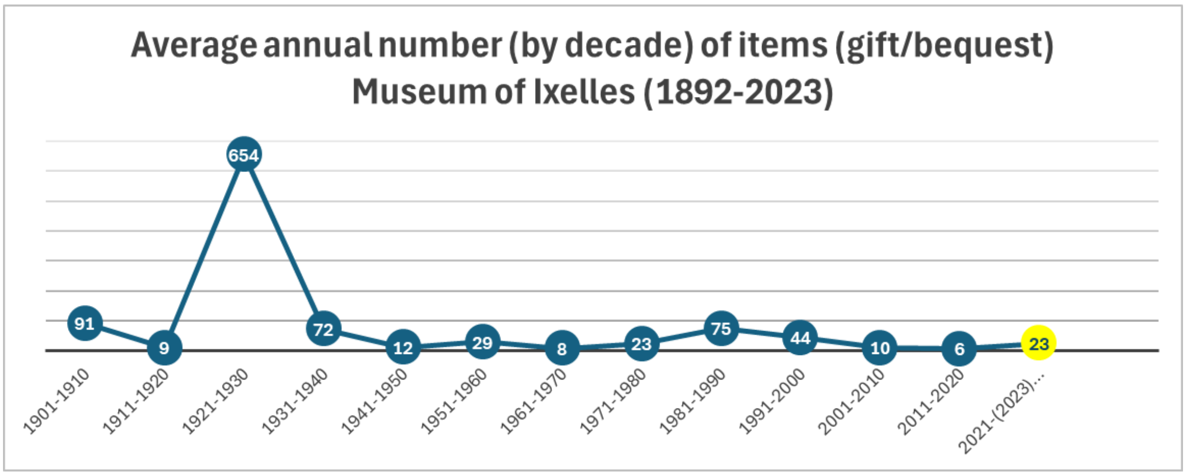
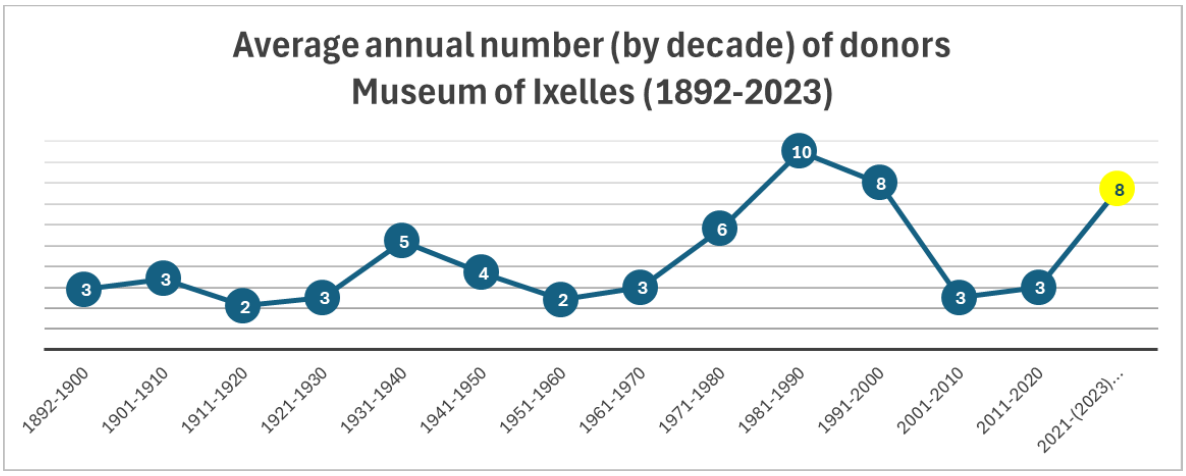


Figure 6. Average Annual Number (by Decade) of Donors at the Museum of Ixelles, 1892–2023.



A caveat must nevertheless be added to these observations. The decrease in the number of donated objects could suggest that donors are indeed offering fewer items than before. However, an alternative interpretation is possible: the museum itself may be accepting fewer proposals, as suggested by the analysis of incoming donation offers at the Museum of Ixelles during the years 2021, 2022, and 2023 (participant observation). Table 1 shows that, out of 43 donation offers (from individual donors) received between January 1, 2021, and December 31, 2023, only 53% were accepted (23 donors). Furthermore, of a total of 473 objects proposed, only 15% were ultimately accepted (69 objects).

Table 1. Number of Donation and Bequest Proposals Received by the Museum of Ixelles in 2021, 2022, and 2023.

Year	Number of proposal (gift/bequest)	Number of accepted proposal (gift/bequest)	Number of items proposed (gift/bequest)	Number of items accepted (gift/bequest)
2021	17	7	332	25
2022	14	9	103	25
2023	12	7	38	19
Total	**43**	**23**	**473**	**69**
% accepted		53%		15%
Annual average		8		23

Whereas the archives from the early 20th century show that the museum readily accepted entire collections as they were proposed (including libraries and personal artistic productions), today the institution adopts a more selective and cautious approach, accepting only those items deemed most relevant.

This shift can be explained by several factors: the increasing constraints of limited storage space (saturated reserves), the economic and environmental challenges related to the conservation of artworks, and the gradual decline in public funding.

The research considers that these conditions are leading to a shift in the acquisition policy compared to the last century, when unlimited accumulation was the norm. The research suggests that, due to these constraints, the museum now applies a more reasoned acquisition policy and makes more selective patrimonial choices, thereby fostering a way of "making memory" that differs significantly from the early 20th century.

1.4.2. Donors

1.4.2.1. Typology of museum's donors

After analysing the evolution of the collection and noting the growing number of donors, is it possible to establish a typology of 21st-century donors? A collective volume published on the occasion of the exhibition *Les donateurs du Louvre* (Musée du Louvre, 1989), under the direction of Michel Laclotte, then President-Director of the Louvre (1987–1994), proposes such a typology. Nine categories of donors are distinguished:

1. Philanthropists, heirs of the Enlightenment, driven by ideals of public utility;
2. Literary and artistic figures committed to fostering cultural life;
3. passionate collectors (notably of contemporary art), eager to prevent the dispersal of their collections;
4. Artists and their families (or heirs), concerned with securing the posterity of their name and work;
5. Models and their descendants, who seek to reunite model and painter (often renowned) before the visitor's gaze in a quest for immortality;
6. Local families and personalities (notables), wishing to preserve the memory of their relatives by donating portraits and self-portraits;
7. Support groups for the museum, such as associations of "Friends of the Museum";
8. Curators themselves, acting as donors;
9. Collectors of antiquities, learned societies, and amateur archaeologists, serving as suppliers of archaeological material.

Based on the provenance analysis of works in the Museum of Ixelles' collection (Table 2), a tenth category can be added:

10. galleries, intent on having the artists they represent consecrated by a museum, with the explicit or implicit goal of enhancing their market value[20].

Table 2. Provenance of Donations and Bequests at the Museum of Ixelles, 1892–2024.

	Acquisition mode			
Provenance	**Gift and Bequest**		**Purchase**	
Private collection	9.653	81%	151	13%
Artist's family	1.028	9%	3	0%
Artist	811	7%	321	29%
Other (org., foundation, assoc.)	21	0%	10	1%
Collection d'entreprise	5	0%	-	0%
Gallery	7	0%	71	6%
Auction house	-	0%	2	0%
Unknown	352	3%	563	50%
Total	11.877	100%	1.121	100%

Table 2 also shows that the vast majority (81%) of donated and bequeathed objects come from private collections. Museum archives indicate that these collections were formed by individuals, collectors, or art amateurs, and often transmitted to their heirs, who then chose to donate them to the museum.

The typology established by Michel Laclotte in 1989 provides a synthetic overview of the various motivations underlying the act of donation. However, one dimension seems absent. In France, rooted in the revolutionary legacy of appropriated patrimony from the Church, the monarchy, and the aristocracy, what role does civic consciousness play, along with the desire to share beauty with the widest possible audience? What about this aspiration to "perform an act of citizenship"[21]? It is precisely these "amateur" donors which do not seem to meet strictly the motivations mentioned above that constitute a central focus of the present research.

Just as the study focuses on "amateur" donors - who appear to make up the majority of the museum's benefactors - it also seeks to examine this specific motivation that drives private individuals to contribute to the common good embodied in a patrimonial collection.

In order to better assess the practice of donating artworks to public museums, greater quantitative transparency should be encouraged - for instance, through the systematic recording, centralization, and public disclosure of donation and bequest proposals. Such a mechanism would facilitate the submission of donations and bequests by philanthropists, the management of proposals, and the allocation of objects and artworks to the most relevant museums. From a conservation perspective, this process would also help to avoid redundancies, much as libraries and archival centres already do.

[20] The "gallery" category could be extended to include estates (artists' estates), as well as foundations and institutes whose purpose is to promote the artists they represent.

[21] Ingrid Jurzak, Director of the Musée de Valence (France) and curator of the exhibition *Histoires de collections. Deux siècles de donations au musée* (December 16, 2023 – May 19, 2024, Musée de Valence, Valence, France). Private interview conducted on February 14, 2024.

1.4.3.Donors' motivations

Interviews conducted with the category of "amateur" donors - generally from the upper middle class, educated, relatively affluent individuals belonging to majority groups (similar to the museums visitors) - reveal particularly insightful elements with respect to the questions at stake. At this stage of the research, the aim is not to make sweeping generalizations.

From a general philanthropic perspective, based on the 'Eight Mechanisms That Drive Charitable Giving' article published by Bekkers and Wiepking (2011), some observations can be made. Based on the review of 500 academic studies, Bekkers and Wiepking identified height mechanisms that encourage giving in general: awareness of need, solicitation, costs and benefits, altruism, reputation, psychological benefits, values, and efficacy (Bekkers and Wiepking, 2011). If all those mechanisms can be identified in donors' motivation, yet it does not provide a completely satisfactory understanding for the decision-making process that leads a donor to donate their artworks to public museums. By the authors' own admission, the quality of the academic studies on which the development of the eight mechanisms was based and the replicability of the results call into question this list of motivations: '*Of the eight mechanisms, research on efficacy, material costs, solicitation, and psychological benefits tends to replicate better than research on awareness of need, reputation, values, and altruism*.'[22] The awareness of need and the solicitation are embedded into the museum internal discourses but there is no formal strategy for soliciting donations of artworks. The mechanism seems both simpler and more complex. That is why an anthropological approach with detailed field analyses can teach us more.

At this stage of the research, several reflections can be shared concerning the stated motivations of philanthropists and how their motivations can be interpreted from an anthropological research perspective.

At the root of the decision to donate an artwork to a museum lies, invariably, a sensitivity to art: an affective bond with the museal institution, positive visiting experiences, memories, emotions, an attachment to the public mission of museums, a recognition of something of oneself within the museum, and an awareness of its social and memorial role. For all donors interviewed, the museum is perceived as a place accessible to all - or at least to those who share a taste for beauty and for objects of the past. They unanimously express a deeply held conviction that the museum is a site of preservation and transmission of memory to future generations. Their choice is therefore motivated, sometimes unconsciously or without explicit articulation, by the certainty that the museum will outlive them, that it will endure "beyond them" and almost "despite them."

The principle of the inalienability of collections, though implicit, is understood as self-evident: without question, the museum will survive them. In their desire to "leave a trace,"

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[22] Bekkers, R., 2024. *Eight Mechanisms, Seventeen Years Later* [WordPress personal blog]. URL : https://renebekkers.wordpress.com/2024/11/07/eight-mechanisms-seventeen-years-later/

the museum appears as the most appropriate institution. While the demands and conditions attached to donations have become increasingly modest, one requirement remains constant: the donor's name must appear on the label of the work. One donor, after several hours of interview, even called the researcher the following day to emphasize that this detail should not be forgotten. In reference to Marcel Mauss's theory of gift and counter-gift (1925), the perpetuation of the donor's name may today be considered the museum's principal counter-gift: the assurance that the donor's name will remain eternally inscribed in the memory of the institution and its visitors.

Undeniably, there is a strong desire to share with the museum and its public an intimate object, materializing an affective or familial bond - an item carefully acquired or inherited after having hung for years on the walls of the family home. Donated objects often carry an identity and a history (Weiner, 1985). Their affective value is independent of their market or aesthetic value, although the latter may reinforce their symbolic weight. The decision to donate a René Magritte worth several hundred thousand euros involves far more complex considerations than that of donating works by a great-uncle, once an artist of modest renown whose name has not been retained in the canon of art history.

Several testimonies illustrate this intimate dimension, such as a donor in her forties recounted that, together with her brother, they had "given away the things they cared about the most." [23] Prematurely made heirs after the sudden death of their parents, Manon (pseudonym), a social worker, and Thomas, an actor, were obliged to empty the family home:

"For every object, for everything that passed through my hands since the death of my parents, I asked myself: Do I keep it? Do we keep it? Do we give it away? We gave many things to our parents' friends, many others to charities. We also sold a lot of things. But for the two artworks we gave to the museum, it was obvious that we had to donate them." (Interview with Ms. Dupont. 10 August 2023)

It had all begun a few months earlier with an email sent to the museum's general address:

"We have decided to return to the public domain. It makes sense for us to offer them to the Museum of Ixelles, not only because these two artists seem to fall within the scope of your collections, but also because I greatly appreciate the activities organized by the museum."[24]

This excerpt illustrates both the sense of attachment to the museum - despite the absence of any direct connection - and a recurrent theme found in other testimonies: the idea of a "return to the public domain." It reflects a desire to control the destiny of the work, to place

[23] Interview on 10 August 2023 with Ms. Dupont (pseudonym), donor to the Museum of Ixelles. Works donated: Émile Claus, Evening Mist, 1898. Lucien Levy Dhurmer, Young Girl with a Cherry Branch, 1890. Public acknowledgement: Donations from Mr. and Ms. Dupont. In tribute to their father and mother, Catheline and Pierre Dupont (1950-2021). ©Museum of Ixelles (Inv. CC 4474 and CC 4475)

[24] Donation proposal. Email from Ms. Dupont dated 15 February 2023.

it permanently under the museum's protection and beyond the speculative anonymity of the art market[25], in accordance with the principle of inalienability.

As the donor herself expressed:

"To turn to a public museum is to render public that which is truly beautiful. And since it is a public museum, and by definition these two works will belong to everyone, they will also continue to belong to me. Because yes, I think this work is much more at home in a museum than in a private residence, where it will now be seen by the greatest number. But the day they came to take it away, yes, I cried. It was a real emotional tear. Because we were attached to these two works. And when I say 'we,' I mean the entire family, both the living and the dead."[26]

In this case, the donation of an intimate object to the museum resembles a symbolic funerary ritual[27], whereby the placement of a beloved object within the museum can be seen as a funerary ex-voto, embodying both the memory of the deceased and the recognition of the living. As Mauss noted in his *Essai sur le don* (1925, p. 73), "Even when abandoned by the donor, the object is still something of him." Building on this, Annette Weiner (1985) emphasized the notion of "inalienable possessions," objects that cannot be sold and which compel us to reconsider how value is created in things destined to remain outside of circulation. She demonstrated how such possessions are fundamentally linked to the ways in which objects embody personal and collective histories, spiritual powers, and an appearance of immortality. In dialogue with Mauss and Weiner, French anthropologist Maurice Godelier (1996) further developed the theory of inalienability, arguing that every object retains a personal trace that forbids it from being discarded or sold, and showing how one can simultaneously give an object away and keep it.

Finally, the concept of a "return to the public domain," echoed in several interviews as a desire to "share with the greatest number," resonates with the idea of "mutualisation" mentioned by Florence Weber in her 2023 introduction to Mauss's Essai and illustrated by French sociologist Christian Baudelot (2008) through his account of donating a kidney to his ill wife: "It was not a gift, but a kind of mutualisation, where in the couple everything had always been shared; I could not fail to put into the common pot an organ that was of no use to me."[28] Following Mauss, who sought to conceptualize a form of giving outside the constraining cycle of gift and counter-gift - a generosity that avoids humiliating charity and endless dependence (Mauss, 1925, p. 47) - mutualisation may provide a specific way of conceiving the patrimonialisation of private objects and of understanding a museum collection as a collective asset, or even as a "common good" to be managed collectively (Ostrom, 1990).

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[25] Interview on 19 July 2023 with Ms. Nicole d'Huart, Director-Curator of the Museum of Ixelles from 1987 to 2007, Deputy Director-Curator of the Museum of Ixelles from 1967 to 1987. Donor to the Museum of Ixelles (Inv. CC 4235, AMIS 82). Member of the Board of Directors of the non-profit organisation of the Friends of the Museum since 2007.

[26] Interview on 10 August 2023 with Ms. Dupont, donor to the Museum of Ixelles.

[27] Interview on 23 May 2024 (New York, USA) with Fred R. Myers, Anthropologist, Professor of Anthropology (retired), New York University, USA.

[28] Baudelot, C., intervention in Bourmeau, S., 2008 (1 July). Marcel Mauss, savant et politique [émission radiophonique]. In *La Suite dans les idées*, Radio France, France Culture. URL (accessed August 17, 2025) : https://www.radiofrance.fr/franceculture/podcasts/la-suite-dans-les-idees/marcel-mauss-savant-et-politique-7268222

1.4.4. Gender analysis

Within the framework of this “Gender, Power & Philanthropy” session, it could be worth highlighting the results of a gender-based analysis of the collection. The examination of the gender of donors and artists represented in the collection reveals that, among the 546 donors identified at the Museum of Ixelles, 56% are men and 39% are women (some acting as executors of estates). The remaining percentages represent donations from galleries, companies or organizations.

Furthermore, among the nearly 3,000 artists represented in the entire collection, only 6% are women (176 female artists). Beyond this numerical underrepresentation, the disparity is even more pronounced when considering the number of works: artworks made by male artists account for 94% of the artworks in the collection, each of them represented by an average of five works, whereas artworks made by female artists account for only 3% of the artworks in the collection, each of them represented by an average of two works.

Cross-referencing data on female donors and female artists shows that 62% of the artworks made by women artists (255 pieces) entered the collection through donations or bequests, and that two-thirds of these works (169 pieces) were given or bequeathed by female donors[29]. This observation points to the presence of a gender-related dimension in processes of transmission, an hypothesis currently being pursued in ongoing research[30].

1.5. Conclusion

The analysis of art donations made by “amateur” donors to the Museum of Ixelles sheds new light on this practice, from the late 19th century to the present day. It reveals the decisive role played by private individuals, whose contribution proves to be far more significant than previously assumed.

Today, the collection of the Museum of Ixelles is composed by 81% of objects coming from donations (73%) and bequests (8%). In its permanent exhibition - representing only 2% of the total collection - the masterpieces on display are almost equally divided between works acquired by the museum and those donated or bequeathed by private individuals (54%). A historical study of the collection’s formation since 1892 shows that two-thirds of it was assembled before 1940, almost entirely through donations and bequests (95%). Since then, while the number of objects acquired in this way has steadily declined, the number of unique donors has tended to increase.

This decline, however, does not reflect a decrease in offers. An examination of the years 2021, 2022, and 2023 shows that only 53% of donation proposals were accepted, representing

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[29] The same observation can be made at the Musée d’Orsay: “works by women were more often donated or bequeathed than purchased: of the 1,501 works by women in the Musée d’Orsay’s collections, 902 came from donations and bequests, representing 60%” (*source: France Culture, Morning News, March 8, 2024*).

[30] Lyse Vancampenhoudt, PhD candidate in Art History at the Université catholique de Louvain-la-Neuve, whose research focuses on four Belgian women artists represented in the collections of the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium.

just 15% of the objects proposed. Whereas in the early 20th century the museum could accept entire huge private collections, it now applies a much stricter selection process. This shift can be explained by contemporary constraints: storage facilities are already overcrowded, rising conservation costs (energy), and dwindling public funding. Within this context, the museum must make careful choices, directly shaping the way it “makes memory” today and placing it in a situation of “limits,” both spatial and temporal.

Donors’ motivations often stem from a desire to “leave a trace” within collective memory. This dynamic can be likened to a form of funerary ritual: the object, placed under the protection of the museum and its principle of inalienability (which prohibits any sale or disposal of object from the museum collection), functions as a funerary ex-voto, carrying the memory of the donor. It retains part of the donor’s identity and history, echoing the theories of Marcel Mauss, Annette Weiner, and Maurice Godelier on the inseparable link between the gift and the person. At the same time, the gesture reflects a will to “give something beautiful” back to the community, opening the way for an understanding of donations not only as gifts but as acts of mutualisation - transforming the museum collection into a shared common good.

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Philanthropy in an elite-biased democracy: Strategies in times of crisis[1]

Lina Ochoa-Carreño (Civance Research)

Abstract

This paper offers a theoretical integration of philanthropy within the framework of *elite-biased democracy*, as proposed by Ansell and Samuels (2014). In this setting, philanthropy is driven by industry-level investment, rather than individual charitable giving. Multiple investment instruments are available to philanthropy, and endowed foundations stand out as a default organizational arrangement protected by the institutional prerogative of perpetuity. However, in times of crisis, philanthropists reconsider their strategies and re-examine the idea of perpetuity. Presenting an exploratory analysis of the evidence provided by two major trends in philanthropic investment in the last two decades –spend-down foundations and Donor-Advised Funds (DAFs)– the paper lays out four ideal-type scenarios to understand how the factors in the system will influence the choice of philanthropic strategy that weakened elites will adopt in the aftermath of a crisis. This theoretical perspective explores the pivotal role that the technological transition ("green transition") is bound to play in philanthropy: a shift in investments and a sectoral rebalance in the economy will have major consequences for the practice of philanthropy. Thus, investment-driven philanthropy reveals its potential as part of the "green transition", and its connection to the variety of coalitions and strategic interactions involved in the "Joint Democracy Game", as well as its particular contributions to democratization and economic sustainability. Implications for the funding of research and science are also considered.

Keywords: Philanthropy, Political Economy, Democracy, Foundations, Economic Transitions

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1. Introduction

A stream of political economy literature has emerged roughly in the last decade to bring new elements to the analysis of democracy: the *elite-biased democracy* approach, or elite-competition approach (Ansell and Samuels, 2014; Menaldo, 2016; Albertus and Menaldo, 2018). This analytical framework is founded on the core idea that democratization is not built 'from below', as it has long been assumed, nor does it pursue popular, widely shared political views. Instead, according to its proponents, democracy is built on the stronghold that a number of elite groups have on society, and any major changes or transitions are essentially based on the interests of those groups.

This paper presents an argument that integrates philanthropy within the framework of elite-biased democracy. After decades of scholarly work, philanthropy continues to be a multidimensional subject with a blurred scope and porous boundaries (see, for instance, Edwards *et al*., 2014; Barman, 2017; von Schnurbein *et al*., 2021). To date, major debates continue on how to weigh and bring together both the informal and formal institutions, organisations and practices of philanthropy. However, given that philanthropy relates strongly to the redistribution of economic resources, the focus here is on its economic character and intrinsic connection to key economic dynamics. More concretely, this paper examines philanthropy in its relation to wealth accumulation and the economic structure, in the context of an elite-biased democracy.

Thus, this paper departs from the conventional economic understanding of philanthropy based on individual charitable giving and utility considerations (Andreoni and Payne, 2013; Andreoni, 2015). Instead, it adopts a broader perspective, one that acknowledges the productive and social processes of the economy where philanthropy is embedded. Such broader view builds on multiple features addressed over decades in studies of economic growth, technological change, distributional transitions, and their organisational, entrepreneurial and behavioral aspects (see, for instance, Kuznets, 1955; Hirschman, 1958; Hirschman and Rothschild, 1973; Holcombe, 1998; Chang and Andreoni, 2019; Lavoie, 2022; De Martino *et al.*, 2024).

In the elite-biased democracy framework, crises are considered an opportunity for democratic reform. In regards to philanthropy, this paper examines how elite donors evaluate their options in the aftermath of a crisis, and may undertake changes to their philanthropy strategies, with consequences for the deepening of democracy and overall economic outcomes. The analysis is focused on two types of strategies that have been on the rise for the past 20 years: spend-down foundations, that is, foundations that have decided to put an end to their organisational life (also known as time-limited foundations or sunset foundations), and Donor-Advised Funds (DAFs). While the number of philanthropic instruments has expanded in the last 30 years –mostly driven by investment instruments (Salamon, 2014), this paper examines in particular these two types of strategies as representative of a dilemma in the way donors aim to retain control of their investments and influence on philanthropy.

Ultimately, philanthropy must be understood as part of the economic system. The transmission belt that connects it with the production and investment dynamics must be fully acknowledged. This will offer an opportunity to envisage new configurations of the system that respond to questions of technological and social sustainability. At the end of the day, the choices that elites make in regards to their philanthropy strategies boil down to choices of technology and investments. They involve, in turn, choices and restrictions on the use of time in the productive, public and private spheres.

The shift in investments envisioned as a requisite for widespread technological transitions, clustered under the banner of the 'green transition', will then have major consequences for the funding and practice of philanthropy. Are elite philanthropists, in their capacity as investors, willing to move the needle in this respect? While DAFs ensure greater flexibility and control over investments in established areas, a spend-down strategy has the potential to help achieve the technological transitions, but the details of its implementation will reflect the underlying priorities of those leading the process and will show if that potential will actually be achieved, and how well it will align with democracy.

This paper is structured as follows. After this introduction, the second section lays out the key contours of the elite philanthropy phenomenon that is the subject of the paper. A fundamental feature of elite philanthropy is its strong dependence on private investment and the institutional rules and market mechanisms that sustain it. In this case, investment is embodied in endowments and the foundations that hold them. Associated to the institutions that sustain investment is the notion of perpetuity, a prominent operational principle of foundations. Yet, the two types of strategies studied in the paper gain relevance when one considers a critical political and economic environment that challenges the practice of perpetuity. The third section gives an overview of spend-down foundations and donor-advised funds (DAFs), introducing the critical factors that drive donors to move away from perpetuity and to adopt one of these strategies. The fourth section presents four propositions about how the factors in the system will influence the choice of philanthropic strategy in the aftermath of a crisis. The fifth section offers some exploratory considerations on the potential legal transformation of philanthropy. The sixth section outlines a few further extensions to the analysis, which could be of interest for future research, and concludes.

2. Philanthropy in an Elite-biased Democracy

The literature on the political economy of development has long been concerned with the study of democratization. The dynamics between economic growth, inequality and political participation has been at the centre of this project. Conventional approaches focus on what has been called the redistributivist models (Boix, 2003; Acemoglu and Robinson, 2001, 2006; see Ansell and Samuels, 2014). However, such models have been challenged due to their weak empirical support (Alesina and La Ferrara, 2005; Milanovic, 2010; Ansell and Samuels, 2014; Acemoglu *et al.*, 2015).

One response to this analytical impasse is the *elite-biased democracy* framework (Ansell and Samuels, 2014; Menaldo, 2016; Albertus and Menaldo, 2018). This perspective makes a blunt assessment of democracy and departs from the idea that democracy is built 'from below' and that it pursues popular, widely shared goals. Elite-biased democracy is characterised instead by the presence of several social groups, some of them are elites and some are non-elites. Elites are divided into incumbents and outsiders. These two groups are engaged in an ongoing conflict over power as the outsider elites see in the incumbents a threat to their property rights. In turn, the non-elite groups are potential coalitional partners for outsider elites to fight incumbents and bring about a regime change that, to some extent, will improve their material conditions.

The starting point of analysis is the theoretical integration of philanthropy within the elite-biased democracy framework outlined above. Instead of charitable giving or individual behavior (Andreoni and Payne, 2013; Andreoni, 2015), philanthropy here is anchored in investment, profitability and industrial structures strongly reliant on monopolies and oligopolies, a typical expression of economic elites (Boulding, 1962; Raddon, 2008; Roelofs, 2015; Maclean *et al*., 2021). This does not mean that other forms of philanthropy, such as those based on communal bonds or small-scale solidarity, are not important or unworthy of cultivation or study. Rather, what this means is that all these different forms complement each other, even though the focus here is on what could be called 'price-making' philanthropy; that is, a dynamic that shapes philanthropy by transforming the underlying economic structure and outcomes, where investment has a potential to be realised.

2.1. Investment as the Source of Philanthropic Funding in an Elite-biased Democracy

A world of elite-biased democracy is a world where private investment in the industrial sector plays a critical role in the growth process, even though the gains of investment and growth are skewed towards a few (Menaldo, 2016; Ansell and Samuels, 2014; Beramendi *et al.,* 2019). Financial development and investment come eventually to play a major role in this setting as well (Menaldo and Yoo, 2015).

This paper posits a general social setting to understand better the reasons for the existence of philanthropy. We can consider a social system of production, made up of multiple industries and social groups where investment is a core engine of the economic system. Industries have idiosyncratic traits, both technical and organisational, and they are comprised of multiple processes, on both of these dimensions. These are sources of variation that inevitably give origin to inequality, and at any given time, some of these social groups will be left behind. Not all the industries will achieve the same degree of success in their efforts to organise the production, articulate their interests when needed, or react to new forces in the economy. This setting borrows from an extensive literature on the determinants of economic growth, technological change and distributional transitions, as well as their organisational, entrepreneurial and behavioral dimensions (see, for instance, Kuznets, 1955; Hirschman, 1958; Holcombe, 1998; Chang and Andreoni, 2019; Lavoie, 2022; De Martino *et al.,* 2024).

Both the technical and the organisational aspects are major sources of inequality. Philanthropy is meant to address the resulting disparities, relying in principle on solidarity-based mechanisms. However, as economic elites take hold, their consolidation and outreach affect the social space and resources (including the available time) for the expression of solidarity and redistribution mechanisms among non-elite groups and between elites and non-elites. This is one of the main aspects in which this paper departs from the notion of philanthropy as individual charitable giving, as in Andreoni and Payne (2013). The elite-biased character that the economy progressively takes on implies that a large part of philanthropy is increasingly reliant on wealth accumulation and inequality. The profits made on investments are central to sustain both the economy and the philanthropy space.

The type of philanthropy that emerges from economic elites is embodied in endowed foundations. Endowed foundations rely on private investment and an institutional prerogative to exist in perpetuity, provided the market conditions are favourable to that goal. Perpetuity in this case is not a metaphysical, ethereal, intrinsic quality, as the word may suggest. Instead, it is the result of a political bargaining process and a legal system that is adjusted to give room to that prerogative (see, in particular, Soskis [2020] and Horvath and Powell [2020] for the history of perpetual endowments in the U.S.; Strachwitz [2015] and Adam and Lingelbach [2015] for the case of Germany). Yet, perpetuity as an operational principle of endowed foundations has been increasingly questioned, and is the subject of many current discussions around new paths forward for philanthropy.[2]

We need to consider now in more detail how elite philanthropy fits within the framework of elite-biased democracy and the 'elite-competition' approach. There are three major aspects that shed light on this connection: first, the consolidation of elites and how the competition among elites plays out in philanthropy; second, the social contract and the 'promise' that is at the heart of philanthropy; and finally, the way in which economic crises and uncertainty shape elites' philanthropic strategies (which will be the focus of Section 4).

2.2. What Does an Elite-biased Democracy Mean for Philanthropy?

The wave of elite-biased democracy studies in the last decade takes as its starting point a view of social classes that differs from that in the redistributivist models. Elite-biased democracy analyses address the dynamics among multiple elite groups and potential interactions with non-elites.[3] Ansell and Samuels (2014) develops an elite-competition approach where outsider elites fear the overreaching power of incumbent elites. The main threat are the incumbent elites, rather than the redistributive demands from the poor. The presence of multiple groups opens the door for outsider elites to form coalitions with non-elite groups. Thus, Ansell and Samuels (2014) and Albertus and Menaldo (2018) depart from the conventional assumption of the redistributivist models that there are only two classes: the rich and the poor. Instead, the elite-biased world is filled with a variety of sectors and groups that can become focal points of political mobilization. This setup is also crucial to understand the emergence and dynamics of coalitions, a critical component in the analysis of regime change and transitions to democracy.

This perspective is similar to that adopted by Hirschman (1958, 1971) and Olson (1982), in their rejection of an analytical framework based on two social classes. Instead, their worldview is comprised of multiple social groups (either active or latent) and potential

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[2] The pledge to perpetuity appears to have decreased over time, particularly among foundations created in the last 40 years (Foundation Center, 2009).

[3] Ansell and Samuels (2014) starts with a critique of the median-voter model by Meltzer and Richard (1981) and the political economy analyses that have been built on it.

coalitional actors. According to Hirschman (1971), change will come from the interactions among such groups, rather than a grand revolution carried out by any given single group. In this respect, he calls to look for 'specific "agents" or "carriers" of change' (Hirschman, 1971, p. 22) and to move away from 'the obsessive search for the vanguard or spearhead of the revolution, for the one or at least the principal class or homogeneous group that can be counted on to overthrow the existing order or to effect needed changes.' (Hirschman, 1971, p. 22).

The split among elites involved in philanthropy has a number of expressions. The fact that some foundations operate under the principle of perpetuity, whereas others were established with a limited timespan from the outset, and still for many others this is an unsettled question, open to ongoing assessment, reflects this split. Thus, elites reveal different preferences for perpetuity vs. time-limited foundations. A variety of industrial origins and economic interests, as well as different areas of philanthropic support (education, health, housing, the arts, among others) are another expression of the split among elites. Even more, philanthropy allows for the maintenance of the territorial aspect of elites through the concentration of funding in given geographic areas, in many cases the areas influenced by the business operations and commercial interests of the companies that give origin to endowed foundations. An especially interesting venue for elite competition in philanthropy is the think-tank and research space, one that major funders try to influence with the goal of attracting attention from policy circles and shaping the policy process in critical fields (Roelofs, 2015; Maclean *et al*., 2021; Vogel and Shipman, 2023).

A second aspect that brings philanthropy to the purview of an elite-biased democracy is the idea that there is a 'promise' implicit in the social contract of democracy, which philanthropy will help materialise. Increasingly democratic scenarios offer, at least in principle, the chance for a better life and greater well-being. Philanthropy plays a part in that, funding service provision in multiple areas and contributing to build a sense that things will get better and that people just have to be a little more patient. But, over time, if the fruits of democratization cannot be reaped at some sensible level, the promise loses its credibility and people get frustrated.

Hirschman and Rothschild (1973) described what they called "the tunnel effect" to examine how the expectations of a good future – 'the promise'- can evolve over time, as different social groups benefit from democracy and development at a different pace –or not at all. If those expectations are not met, the threat of social unrest looms in the horizon. As these authors put it, there is a changing tolerance to income inequality along the development process. Adverse outcomes and social stagnation after nominal democratization feed into systemic uncertainty. In this case, people get sceptical that philanthropy will be able to deliver on promises of more prosperous, inclusive livelihoods and upward social mobility, under the prevailing economic conditions. A powerful source of tension with the 'promise' are the tax benefits and other regulatory privileges granted to foundations. The bias in public spending toward the already privileged groups, even after a democratic transition, is a consistent 'stylised fact' found in multiple studies in developing countries (see, for instance, Lindert *et al*., 2006; Acemoglu *et al.*, 2015). The exemptions, subsidies and policy benefits that foundations enjoy arguably fall under this category. As people realise the magnitude of these benefits, it is almost inevitable to get a sense that the field is tilted toward a few.

The third major aspect is that in an elite-biased democracy, economic crisis and uncertainty can serve as major game-changers that open new opportunities for outsider elites and other social groups to join forces to form coalitions and push for reform (Albertus and Menaldo, 2018; Albertus *et al*., 2025). Whether a financial crisis, a fiscal crisis, or even a natural disaster, these shocks set the incumbent elites in damage-control mode and push them to devise strategies to deal with the crisis. Depending on the severity of the crisis, it may even take the elites to the point of seeking a bargain to exit their ruling position on as good terms as possible (like in the canonical case of new democratic constitutions, examined by Albertus and Menaldo, 2018).[4]

The next section introduces two types of philanthropic strategies that have rapidly increased in popularity: spend-down strategies and the establishment of Donor-Advised Funds (DAFs). They have been major strategies in response to a widespread crisis. However, these two strategies represent different approaches to the investment that underlies elite philanthropic funding, and, accordingly, to the technological outlook (and room for its potential transformation) that underpins private investment.

3. The Rising Trends of Spend-down Foundations and Donor-Advised Funds

Economic elites have played a leading role in philanthropy; this phenomenon can arguably be thought of as one of the mechanisms by which elite-biased democracy is sustained. While endowed foundations operating in perpetuity have been the norm for a long time, a critical examination of perpetuity is increasingly taking place nowadays. At the same time, two strategic approaches have been on the rise for the past two decades, reflecting changing attitudes to philanthropy and reinforcing the split among elites.

First is the trend of spend-down foundations. These are foundations that have decided to impose a time limit to their formal existence as an organisation, set a close-by date and spend down their entire endowment in pursuance of its organisational mission. Some foundations make the spend-down choice at their inception, while for others the decision is the result of an assessment of evolving conditions and the development of a new mindset. To be fair, although the spend-down trend has gained steam lately, setting spend-down foundations is far from new. The first wave of these foundations can be traced back to the early 20th century.[5] At the time, they were a rather fringe tier of philanthropy, and operating in perpetuity was the norm. Some of the most famous examples of spend-down foundations are the Rosenwald Fund, which operated since 1917 until 1948; more recently, the Atlantic Philanthropies, which finished its closing down process in 2020, and the Bill and Melinda Gates

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[4] Burt (1983) argues that corporate philanthropy is an instrument to '*eliminate*' uncertainty in the market the company is concerned with.

[5] The Center for Strategic Philanthropy and Civil Society from the Sanford School at Duke University has compiled a rich dataset of spend-down foundations. https://cspcs.sanford.duke.edu/time-limited-philanthropy/time-limited-foundations/). Accessed: February 14, 202

Foundation, which recently announced it will close down in 2045, effectively shortening the spend-down timeframe it had set earlier.

The other main funding strategy are the Donor-Advised Funds (DAFs). A Donor-Advised Fund is a "giving vehicle that enables donors to support charitable organizations and causes" (National Philanthropic Trust, 2024). In the U.S., DAFs have their origin in community foundations and their funding practices, going back to the early decades of the 20th century. These practices were streamlined with the passage of the 1969 Tax Reform Act, and have further consolidated over time, particularly with the Pension Protection Act from 2006 (Berman, 2015).

DAFs have become a significant funding tool ever since. In 2017, DAFs' commercial sponsors surpassed operating charities as the main recipients of charitable donations (Brakman Reiser, 2023). In 2023, their total assets stood at USD 251 billion (National Philanthropic Trust, 2024). Preference for DAFs seems to be particularly high among family foundations (Foundation Center, 2009). DAFs are characterised by lower administrative costs and more generous regulations than private foundations, including greater flexibility and privacy, and less stringent disclosure requirements, all while performing almost the same functions as a foundation. But they have also spurred a wave of criticism because of these very reasons; scholars are wary of the major regulatory concessions granted to these philanthropic instruments (Berman, 2015; Brakman Reiser, 2023), and the incentives and agency problems involved in the commercial transactions surrounding DAFs (Galle, 2021).

If DAFs and the option to set up a spend-down foundation (or implement a spend-down strategy) have been part of the philanthropic repertoire for a long time, why are these instruments gaining momentum now? The rationale put forward by foundations and practitioners in the field points to some reasons that help explain the mounting interest in these options. Their narrative accounts emphasise a sense of systemic crisis and the generational handover in foundation leadership.

3.1. Crisis and Uncertainty

It is often stated that crises are opportunities for change. The experience of foundations resonates with this principle. The 2007-2008 financial crisis took a toll on many of the relatively small foundations created in the 80s (Foundation Center, 2009). After seeing their endowments shrink as a result of the crisis, foundations likely assessed differently the costs and benefits of their operations. At that point, DAFs became an appealing route for donors to maintain an engagement in philanthropy, as these instruments enjoy more favourable terms and greater regulatory leniency.

The spend-down option has also gained salience among donors, given the critical political and economic environment. Donors have a heightened sense of crisis and uncertainty in the current conditions worldwide, and they have pointed out that the decision to spend down is generally influenced by the larger social context (Honig *et al.*, 2021; Hengevoss and von Schnurbein, 2025). Predictably, the Covid-19 pandemic has been reported as a significant factor that has driven some foundations to adopt or accelerate their spend-down timeframes

(Honig *et al.*, 2021). For donors working with a view to international affairs, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have triggered new approaches to funding, including the option to spend-down. Others see spend-down as a way to help the domestic economy regain competitive capabilities and potential for autonomous prosperity, for instance, by supporting a low-carbon economic transition (see Ivey and Lourie [2022], for an example of this perspective in the Canadian context).

Amid the crisis, foundation leaders report to undergo a 'change in view', a shift in attitudes and preferences away from perpetuity as they perceive a series of unmet and evolving needs in society, and have a desire to have greater, more immediate impact. Practitioners' reports indicate that the reason for spending down is 'a shift in the founder(s)' attitude toward limited lifespan versus perpetuity' (Foundation Center, 2009, p. 2); a 'disdain for perpetuity' (Behrens and Gordillo, 2019, p. 1). Perhaps this attitudinal shift is intertwined with the generational handover in foundation leadership and a series of managerial conflicts that come with it.

3.2. Generational Handover and Conflict

One of the routes to de-bias democracy is the generational renewal that gives way to new political forces and facilitates change (Albertus and Menaldo, 2018). In the case of foundations, generational change and the renewal of organisational leadership have been associated to a greater inclination to spend-down, especially in the case of family foundations (Foundation Center, 2009; Mansson, 2020). Incoming cohorts of leaders are likely to develop a different vision of the foundation's role, and may decide to adopt a spend-down strategy.

Yet, this generational handover also tends to expose a good deal of conflicting views among family members about the traditional organisational forms and practices of philanthropy (Foundation Center, 2009; Mansson, 2020). Mansson (2020), based on a report by the National Center for Family Philanthropy, dissects multiple facets that the generational conflict in foundation leadership can display:

- "Older and younger generations are interested in different issues.
- Generations have different opinions about how to achieve results and impact with grantmaking.
- The younger generation has often moved away from the primary location of the foundation's place-based focus.
- There are conflicting political, social, and religious views among generations.
- Generations have different opinions on how transparent the foundation should be about its grantmaking decisions." (Mansson, 2020, p. 90).

All these aspects become evident in diverging approaches to management and decision-making, as the implementation of a DAF or a spend-down strategy will require multiple decision nodes that will shape the long-term legacy the foundation wants to leave (Hengevoss and von Schnurbein, 2025). Amid crisis, new generations may be undecided as to whether and how to maintain their involvement in philanthropy. This leaves donors at a crossroads, with several possible ways in front of them to implement a strategy. They will look around to observe and weigh the strategies that others are deploying, and will make a choice depending on their assessment of other elite and non-elite groups.

4. The Strategies of the Weakened Elites – Four Propositions

Elites obtain the resources for philanthropy from their economic activities. Economic crises hit investments and businesses, reducing the resources for philanthropy and exposing the threat of social unrest. Elites want to remain involved in philanthropy in order to counter such threat. Yet, philanthropy involves different combinations of material resources, legitimacy and social networks, and this will be on display as elites implement their strategies in a variety of contexts. Unlike the setting proposed by Ansell and Samuels (2014, p. 98) in the "Joint Democracy Game", where there is an initial divide between incumbent and outsider elites, with the latter trying to fight the threat to their property rights that the incumbents pose, here the divide is caused by the crisis itself. The crisis changes the relative position of a number of established elites, and those who end up in the most diminished positions will attempt to recover their standing.

We can now look into the split among elites that arises in the aftermath of an economic crisis, and examine the potential philanthropy strategies that can be adopted by the elites that have been left in a weaker position (which will be called here the *weakened* or *downcast* elites). The crisis deepens differentiation and competition among elites. Some of them will come out as relative 'winners', while others will leave as 'losers'.[6] The winning elites can afford to 'dig in their heels' and continue with the same strategy they had before the crisis. This essentially amounts to keep their foundations operating in perpetuity, benefiting from the market dynamics that have worked out for them. This is possible precisely because they remain in control of significant parts of the economic structure, supported by sustained strategies of industrial consolidation. In a way, this means that any technological transition gets coopted to serve the interests of these elites.

It is the weakened elites who need to reconsider their philanthropy strategies. Their diminished financial position means that any administrative costs of philanthropy will now be relatively higher for them to bear. Spending down presents itself as a suitable option. Through spend-down, they will phase out the foundation; at the same time, they will make a greater effort at retaining their legitimacy as potential partners in the philanthropy space and strengthening their networks. In this scenario, downcast elites consider that this was not just an individual crisis, but a rather systemic one. Thus, they will scan the environment for potential allies and external organisational resources, and prompt a bandwagon effect among their peers. In other words, they become more oriented to form coalitions and explore options that will help them to remain waiting in the wings, for the next chance to increase their resources and influence again. These downcast elites realise that crises will be ever more likely

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[6] This can happen either because of purely private decisions and market outcomes, or because some elites, who are closer to the policymakers, are able to negotiate a bailout for themselves. This distinction can be the focus of a future extension to the present analysis.

to occur, and want to retain legitimacy so as to get support for any new strategy they may decide to adopt later. At the same time, their resources, while fewer than those of the winning elites, are likely invested in a more diversified way across industries, giving them several options to take advantage of new technological breakthroughs in the future.

But, alternatively, these elites may choose to double down on a winning-elite type of strategy. They think that they have been caught in a temporary situation that affected them individually, and not a systemic crisis. They believe that the economic fundamentals will rebound soon and will offer good investment prospects again. In this case, setting up a Donor-Advised Fund (DAF) is the preferred option. Other philanthropic tools are also available, but DAFs are unique in its close derivation from perpetual foundations. DAFs allow the elites to maintain the control of resources under even more generous legal and regulatory conditions than those applicable to endowed foundations. However, by virtue of the economic mechanisms at play, the likelihood of new economic crises and persistent instability that will affect DAFs keeps growing. DAFs are, just like endowed foundations, reliant on market investments. An economic structure pervaded by financialisation and overreaching monopolies and oligopolies puts those investments increasingly at risk. Thus, elites are subject again to the risk of losing resources and tainting their legitimacy. Until a solid institutional response is devised to counter this trend, the cyclical crises and the threat of social unrest are bound to persist. Then, this is a case of economic crises affecting elites differently, with some of them coming out of the crisis in a relatively winning position. They can continue business as usual; but for those on the losing side, the aftermath of the crisis drives them to re-evaluate their philanthropy engagement and the investments behind it.

What determines that they will choose a DAF or a spend-down strategy? The elite looks around to gauge the condition of the actors it intends to engage with: other elites and the non-elite groups. First, looking at other elites, it will try to determine whether the crisis was individual or systemic. If they think that the crisis was individual, they will choose to move their investments to a Donor-Advised Fund, counting on a good performance of the economy as a whole, that will reassure their expectations of good profits. If they think that the crisis was systemic, and that other elites were also affected in major ways, they will choose to spend down. In turn, the general situation of the non-elite groups will influence the implementation of the strategy. If those groups are perceived as weak, disorganized, or lacking a specific agenda, the elite can deploy its strategy reaping the bulk of the benefits for itself. On the other hand, if the non-elites are perceived as strong, articulate and well-organized, the elite has to compromise more and engage in less biased coalitions.

Based on these elements, the following propositions delineate the conditions that lead a weakened elite to choose a given philanthropy strategy:

Proposition 1: The perception by the elite that the crisis was an individual crisis, combined with weak non-elites, leads to the adoption of a long-term DAF strategy.

Proposition 2: The perception that the crisis was an individual crisis, combined with strong non-elites, leads to the adoption of a short-term DAF strategy.

Proposition 3: The perception that the crisis was a systemic crisis, combined with weak non-elites, leads to the adoption of a high-cooptation, low-compromise spend-down strategy.

Proposition 4: The perception that the crisis was a systemic crisis, combined with strong non-elites, leads to the adoption of a low-cooptation, high-compromise spend-down strategy.

As can be inferred from the preceding analysis and these propositions, the spend-down strategy is the most congruent with the technological transitions and sectoral re-alignments needed to return to a sustainable economic and social path; thus, it is the most likely to contribute to a gradual de-biasing of democracy. However, the actual outcome of the spend-down will depend on how it is implemented and the way in which emerging issues in the economic structure and social organising dynamics are addressed. Specifically, it will depend on how the shift in investments and the technological transitions associated to it play out. It is in the details of these transitions that we will be able to observe how democracy will get stronger or not.

As noted above, unlike the original treatment (Ansell and Samuels, 2014; p. 98), here the divide among elites is caused by the crisis itself. The weakened elites will attempt to recover their position and influence. In order to achieve this goal, they may be inclined to undertake investments in new areas and form new coalitions. Additionally, we need to zoom in on the concept of “masses” present in the Joint Democracy Game, to uncover a myriad of interest groups that pull in different directions. Elites will attempt to build coalitions with some of those groups, leading to a variety of partial outcomes with differential impacts on democratization and economic prosperity and sustainability.

Yet, due to the fragile position in which many of the elites find themselves, achieving a critical mass of like-minded donors proves crucial for the success of the spend-down strategy on a macro-level. The systemic nature of the crisis demands a major change in the economic structure and a pool of resources to act on different fronts.

4.1. Building up a Critical Mass - The Bandwagon Effect

When weakened elites understand that they are in the middle of a systemic crisis, they know they have to compromise in order to survive. They need to cede control over philanthropic resources, in exchange for preserving the legitimacy of their position. This will be beneficial when they try to regain favourable terms in the future. Precisely because of their compromised position, they need to join forces with like-minded philanthropists who are in a similar situation. Thus, they will be able to build up a critical mass of peers in order to adopt a coordinated strategy and increase their chances of coming out of the transition successfully. Such strategy must deal not only with philanthropy and a tangible threshold of resource transfer. It has to deal, more essentially, with a major shift in the economic structure and the technological change necessary to make the economy more sustainable.

The recent experience of spend-down foundations indicates that this trend has been propelled by a sort of bandwagon effect. Leading spend-down philanthropists make announcements about their plans, and are straightforward about their goals to ‘inspire’, ‘cultivate’ or ‘influence’ their peers (Markham and Ditkoff, 2013; Honig *et al.*, 2021). This has prompted a wider discussion that has convened other foundations, raising visibility around spend-down. Clearly, the networking element is fundamental to the success of this strategy.

Associated to the leadership and networking aspects, shaping the narrative is another key component of the spend-down strategy and its emphasis on retaining elites' legitimacy. Spend-down foundations highlight the notion of 'giving back', 'returning resources back to the communities their wealth came from, shifting the focus from the individual entirely to the community.' (Honig *et al.,* 2021, p. 6). According to one of the foundations surveyed, one of the aspects of the messaging around spend-down is the ability to 'tell a complete story' about the foundation and its social value. Operating in perpetuity, telling people that there is always tomorrow, keeping the 'promise' always latent, unrealised, does not give the same chance. Spending down helps make it 'visible on the horizon, versus being so far in the future that it feels indeterminate.' (Honig *et al.,* 2021, p .6).

5. The Sustainability of Philanthropy and the Economy

On a higher level, what does the elite-biased democracy framework mean for the legal arrangements governing philanthropy? Albertus and Menaldo (2018) have studied the various ways in which the legal system is heavily influenced by the elites and is shaped to protect their interests; most notably, through constitutional reform, legal immunities for former elites, campaign finance laws, and a ban of minority parties (Albertus and Menaldo, 2018). In such a setting, it is not hard to get a sense that the legal arrangements that govern philanthropy share the same spirit.

Part of the task of de-biasing democracy entails redesigning the legal arrangements that support philanthropy, and reforming the nexus between market outcomes and philanthropy with the goal of creating a sustainable economy. Multiple voices have called for legal and regulatory changes to philanthropy, on different fronts, but desirable reforms are still on hold (see Deep and Frumkin [2006] for a discussion of potential reforms to the 5% foundation payout rule; Reiser and Dean [2023] examines the case for the reform of Donor-Advised Funds and philanthropy LLCs). Pistor (2019) has studied in numerous historical contexts the influence of the legal system on the dynamics of wealth accumulation. She has critiqued the way the legal system is tilted towards the interests of the wealthy, and how elites have continually been able to create new legal rights to favor and reinforce their position. Some of her ideas to rebalance the legal system to serve society more widely could be applied to develop a new institutional framework for philanthropy. This could include wider arrangements that support and complement spend-down foundations and other funding and organisational structures.

Still, as sustainability becomes a matter of increasing concern, not just in the philanthropy domain but more widely in the economy, different approaches to this idea and to the legal arrangements needed to support it are already the source of new conflicting views. On one hand, spend-down foundations have pledged to help nonprofits become sustainable by connecting them to larger philanthropy networks and long-term funders, supporting the continuation of existing funding models, building fundraising capacity, and making nonprofits more 'deserving' of funding by installing specific metrics-oriented programs (Behrens and Gordillo, 2019; Honig *et al.,* 2021).

On the other hand, nonprofit groups with a different stance have advanced proposals to modify the philanthropy and nonprofit ecosystem. This perspective calls for a re-examination of the economic dynamics on which philanthropy rests (Henderson and Ebrahimi, 2024). The proponents of this alternative envision a world in which the resources obtained from spend-down foundations and similar sources go to create new productive hubs and support a new economy. This view would be accompanied by new philanthropic practices where investment and grantmaking are more closely connected than has conventionally been the case with perpetual foundations and other giving vehicles driven by established investment insiders (O'Donnell and Chen, 2023; Henderson and Ebrahimi, 2024).

Nonprofits could certainly benefit from a rewriting of the legal rules and established norms that have for so long shaped the funding and operations of the philanthropy realm. A renovated legal framework should open the door to a broader set of ownership and management structures, leading to more sustainable connections between the market and philanthropy arenas. An analysis of the strategic interactions toward the change of legal arrangements of philanthropy or the structuring of new types of contracts between funders and nonprofits, along with their implications for policy-oriented coalitions, is a rich area for exploration.

6. Conclusion

This paper has presented a theoretical integration of philanthropy within the analytical framework of elite-biased democracy. The focus has been, in particular, on philanthropy that originates in investment and wealth accumulation. Extending the original elite-biased democracy framework, this paper has introduced concrete settings and economic dynamics under which philanthropy reveals itself as an expression of the split and competition among elites. A crisis scenario is instrumental to understand how philanthropy involves multiple alternative strategies from which elites can choose. Using a mix of material and nonmaterial resources (legitimacy, reputation, networks), elites who come out of the crisis in a relatively weak position can nonetheless redesign their philanthropy strategy to engage in coalitions with non-elite groups. Such coalitions provide opportunities for a progressive, gradual de-bias of democracy.

The paper has offered four propositions to understand the main factors that determine which strategy will be adopted by a weakened elite. Those strategies can be assimilated to a range of possibilities to undertake technological transitions that may shift the sectoral and industrial balance in the economy. Thus, the technological transitions clustered under the banner of the 'green transition', and their effects on philanthropy, can be understood using the elite-biased democracy framework, where investment-as-philanthropy plays a role in re-aligning elites and non-elites.

In the case of the spend-down strategy, the formation of a critical mass of aligned actors that will be decisive to see the outcomes of the strategy in full effect has also been considered. Thus, integrating philanthropy into the analysis of elite-biased democracy offers an opportunity to examine an array of potential coalition scenarios and their effects on economic outcomes, extra-market / philanthropic redistribution and political participation. A more fine-grained analysis of specific scenarios is material for future research. The preceding analysis has implications for the funding of research centres and think tanks, as these organisations rely heavily on the profits earned by endowed foundations. Those earnings are allocated to research organisations, mostly in the form of grants, to finance their programs. An analysis of how a crisis might trigger a shift in strategy among elites when it comes to funding science and research is left as an exercise for future work.

One of the most consequential implications of the previous analysis is probably that related to the possibilities of a transformation of the legal arrangements that support philanthropy. Albertus and Menaldo (2018) examined outgoing elites in a waning political autocracy, and the exit bargain they achieved, which was mostly visible in the form of a new constitution. But how to deal with economic elites who, unlike elected politicians, do not have a timed mandate and can use other means to confront crisis and keep their stronghold in a more covert manner? Pistor (2019) gives a hint when she mentions that many of the legal precedents and regulations applicable to wealth accumulation are designed and agreed on among private actors first, then taken to the public sphere and converted into State-enforced law. Arguably, this has been the case with the boom of new philanthropic instruments (such as those presented by Salamon, 2014) and the regulations around them. They represent an expansion of investment criteria and standards into philanthropy, which deepens the legal edge in favor of established investors. More work needs to be done to fully understand the implications of this trend on nonprofits and design new legal arrangements that take advantage of investment instruments in a more inclusive and transparent way.

Relatedly, just as the generational handover can help turn the tide among foundations, this demographic trend could also become pivotal in the legal transformation of philanthropy. However, an updating of beliefs among younger cohorts of donors is necessary to make them more inclined to embrace legal reforms. The generational renewal by itself is no guarantee that philanthropy will take on a greater democracy-friendly orientation or that more inclusive practices will be adopted. New generations might as well stick to the same values that previous generations upheld, reproducing beliefs that make them uninterested or opposed to the demands of certain social groups. This may open the door to protracted reactionary scenarios. In this respect, the direction and effectiveness of generational change across a range of organisational philanthropic actors (and its implications for democracy) is another question for future research. Spend-down strategies are considered by many nonprofits as an opportunity to initiate alternative mechanisms that reset their funding and sustainability path. How they will be embedded in the economy as a whole and the way in which the legal system support them will illustrate the bonds that can be forged in the long term between philanthropy and democracy.

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Accounting for Philanthropy: A Technical, Social and Moral Practice[1]

Gina Rossi (University of Udine)

Abstract

This paper contributes to the conceptualization of accounting for philanthropy (AfP) as a multidimensional practice that requires technical rigor, has social implications, and requires moral considerations. Intended as a "position paper", it does not test hypotheses or propose regulatory models. Rather, it aims to encourage reflection on the multifaceted nature of AfP by presenting anecdotal evidence based on Italian foundations of banking origin. This reflection is considered a prerequisite for developing a data infrastructure that can provide researchers, organizations, and policymakers with a comprehensive view of philanthropy.

Keywords: Philanthropy, accounting, social and moral practice, Italian foundations of banking origin

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1. Introduction

Philanthropy is a cultural phenomenon with a long history in Europe and beyond (Cunningham, 2016; Gautier, 2019). Before the establishment of the welfare state and government-funded public services, private contributions played a crucial role in societal development (Bremner, 1994). Over the centuries, philanthropy has evolved from a local to a global setting. It has expanded from addressing basic needs to supporting health, education, science, the arts, cultural heritage, and nature. Additionally, philanthropy has evolved from a religious perspective to a political, economic, and social one (Rubin, 2002; von Schnurbein et al., 2021).

While philanthropy is undeniably part of the European identity (Bekkers, 2022), any discussion of its role and societal significance requires an understanding of this practice in the contemporary era. According to a pioneering study (Hoolwerf and Schuyt, 2017), the lower bound estimation of money donated annually by individuals, foundations and corporations amounted to € 87.5 billion in 2013. But what is the actual picture of giving in Europe today?

Academics (Bekkers, 2022; Holzer et al., 2024; Hoolwerf and Schuyt, 2017; von Schnurbein et al., 2021; Wiepking, 2009), practitioners (Venon, 2022), and public institutions agree that, except for a few countries, there is a lack of reliable data “on the potential size and weight of philanthropic donations and the potential to leverage this kind of private investment to further social economy and other EU policy goals” (European Commission, 2021, p. 20). Regulations and practices in rapid transformation, a plurality of entities involved in it, and disagreement on definitions are among the barriers that impede drawing a comprehensive picture of philanthropy (von Schnurbein et al., 2021), and confine knowledge to little more than anecdotal evidence (Bekkers, 2022). The ability to only “peek through the keyhole” complicates attempts to both promote research and actually reach those in need of support.

The importance of reliable, up-to-date data invites academics, practitioners, and policymakers to reflect on the relationship between accounting and philanthropy, as well as on how accounting can help philanthropy reach its full potential in pursuing the public good. Despite the research on philanthropy in Europe is well underway (Bekkers, 2022), the focus on the “accounting side” of the phenomenon is usually neglected, or, at most, it is limited to the institutional (i.e., foundations) and corporate philanthropy domain. The ERNOP 12th International Conference is an opportunity to reflect on the role and core essence of Accounting for Philanthropy (AfP), which involves collecting, using and being accountable for philanthropic information. To this end, the framework proposed by Carnegie et al. (2023) is employed to examine AfP in terms of its technical, social, and moral dimensions. This framework is suitable for application to AfP due to the alignment between the expected impacts of accounting and philanthropy in their respective operational contexts. Philanthropy is commonly defined as “every voluntary action for the public good” (Payton, 1988, p. 7) intended to improve the quality of human life. Similarly, accounting aspires to “shape a better, more sustainable world, acting in the public interest” (Carnegie et al., 2024, p. 1542). To provide a better setting for the reflections, AfP is discussed in relation to the Italian context and the case of foundations of banking origin (FBOs), which are the most important players in the Italian philanthropic domain.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 introduces the framework proposed by Carnegie et al. (2023) and applies it to AfP. Section 3 provides the context for the reasoning in the field of institutional philanthropy. Section 4 outlines the case of Italian FBOs and the social and moral implications of their accounting. Finally, Section 5 offers some concluding remarks.

2. The multidimensional nature of accounting for philanthropy

Looking back to commonly accepted definitions from the past, accounting is usually understood as the practice of "recording, classifying, and summarizing […] in terms of money, transactions and events which are, in part at least, of a financial character, and interpreting the results thereof" (American Institute of Accountants, 1953, p. 9). However, recent critical research (Frémeaux et al., 2020; Twyford and Abbas, 2023; Vollmer, 2024) urged us to consider the social and moral connotations of accounting and proposed a multidimensional framework aimed to substantiate the conception of accounting as a technical, social, and moral practice (Carnegie et al., 2021, 2023, 2024).

Many studies in different accounting domains have applied this framework. Most of these studies focused on environmental and sustainability accounting, and provided insight on how the social and moral connotations of accounting practices can benefit the nature and a sustainable world (e.g., Branco et al., 2024; Burritt et al., 2023; Morrison et al., 2024; Pujiningsih and Utami, 2024; Pupovac and Nikidehaghani, 2024). Other studies applied the framework to the education sector to address the need for an accounting profession that can meet contemporary challenges (e.g., Othman and Ameer, 2024; Powell and McGuigan, 2023; Twyford et al., 2024). Some researchers situated their work in the innovative field of artificial intelligence, emphasizing its role in advancing accounting (e.g., Eager et al., 2024; Peng et al., 2023). Currently, the multidimensional framework of accounting has never being used in the philanthropic domain, yet. Only a couple of studies applied it to the nonprofit sector. Oliveira et al. (2024) examined how visual images in the annual and sustainability reports of a Portuguese charity fostered organizational legitimacy and improved accountability by making social impacts more visible. Nguyen et al. (2024) examined how interactive stakeholder engagement through social media influenced accountability strategies used by the Australian Red Cross to ensure its sustainable development. Both studies recognized that an organization's sustainability requires socially and morally responsible accounting to facilitate clearer, enhanced meaning and engagement with stakeholders when making decisions that affect them.

From a technical perspective, accounting is defined as a set of procedures and techniques related to "the measurement and communication of economic information relevant to decision makers" (Watts and Zimmerman, 1986, p. vii). The concepts, assumptions and models for providing accounting data are based on generally accepted principles, which are set out in standards, rules or laws (Carnegie et al., 2023). Similarly, AfP is concerned with measuring, recording, classifying, summarizing and communicating information related to voluntary resources collected and utilized for the common good (e.g., money, in-kind donations, time, and service), subjects involved (e.g., individual donors, nonprofit organizations, corporates engaged in philanthropy, governments, regulators, beneficiaries), and results achieved (e.g., outputs, outcomes, and impacts).

Accounting data are commonly used to support informed decision-making. Therefore, accounting is a practice with social relevance. It does not merely describe the world as it is (Miller, 1994); rather, it shapes the world by influencing people's behavior and the way organizations function (Carnegie, 2025; Carnegie et al., 2021). When accounting is examined as a social practice, the focus is on its impact on people, organizations, and society (Carnegie et al., 2023), as well as who benefits from the information it provides and for what purposes it is used (Carnegie et al., 2022). As a social practice, AfP is used by individuals, organizations and governments for decision-making purposes. For instance, information about the efficient use of funds, the programs implemented, and the outputs achieved can affect the amount of contributions collected by nonprofits because it signals that the organization is worthy of donors' support (Gandía, 2011; Rossi et al., 2024; Yeo et al., 2017). Information on the present state of giving may set a precedent for future philanthropic behaviors because subsequent donors tend to imitate the choices of initial donors (Bekkers and Wiepking, 2011; Bhati and Hansen, 2020; Bøg et al., 2012). Furthermore, AfP can help governments in developing policies related to philanthropy, such as tax incentives for nonprofit supporters, promotion of specific causes, and subsidies for civil society organizations (Phillips and Jung, 2016).

Finally, accounting is a moral practice because it raises issues of accountability and faithful representation, which help to prevent misinformed decision-making (Carnegie et al., 2023). Accountability and faithful representation require the disclosure of positive and negative information. This gives stakeholders monitoring power and compels organizations to improve performance by allocating resources efficiently and avoiding mismanagement (Lu et al., 2020). By aligning with these values, AfP shows if and how philanthropy improves people's lives (Bekkers, 2022; Phillips and Jung, 2016). Furthermore, making information easily available for public scrutiny reduces search costs and information asymmetries (Gandía, 2011), enables the timely identification of potential collaborative opportunities (Holzer et al., 2024), and supports researchers in producing well-documented studies (Bekkers, 2022). If AfP fails to adhere to the principles of accountability, transparency, and accessibility, it could become a means of manipulating information and influencing what is considered "good for the public".

Acknowledging the social and moral dimensions of AfP mitigates the risk of taking just formal accounts, and makes it capable of enabling the flourishing of the philanthropic ecosystem.

3. AfP in the domain of institutional philanthropy

AfP is typically well-developed in the field of institutional philanthropy, which refers to independently governed foundations that strategically use their own financial resources for the public good (Philea, 2025). Foundations are among the oldest and most significant organizations involved in philanthropy. They are independent private institutions established through the transfer of an endowment from one or more donors to make grants or operate their own projects for specific public purposes (Anheier, 2014).

According to European data (Philea, 2025), there are more than 175,000 public-benefit foundations operating in 34 countries. These foundations have a total of €516 billion in assets and €76 billion in annual giving. These figures represent the best estimate of the institutional philanthropy landscape in Europe. However, the complete picture is far from being drawn. “A major issue is the lack of transparency in sharing foundation data: If foundations do not share their data, we cannot provide an accurate picture. As often said in the sector, everyone wants data, but only a few are willing to provide it”, said Sevda Kilicalp, Philea’s head of research and knowledge development (Musaddique, 2024).

The availability of data on institutional philanthropy is undoubtedly a result of legal requirements binding foundations to specific accounting and public reporting structures, according to generally accepted principles in the sector (Anheier, 2014). Accounting data on funds collection and allocation, causes and beneficiaries supported, outcomes and impacts achieved are used by internal stakeholders for decision-making purposes that are related to the management of the organization. At the same time, they influence the behavior of external stakeholders. The literature emphasizes that nonprofits that provide more information about their activities and results are viewed as more legitimate and trustworthy by their stakeholders and receive greater support in terms of time and money (Alhidari et al., 2018; Dethier et al., 2023; Rossi et al., 2020). Furthermore, foundations—and nonprofits in general—pay particular attention to issues of accountability and transparency (Ortega-Rodríguez, 2020). Transparency is indeed an essential ethical standard for nonprofit organizations because of their mission to serve the public good (Dethier et al., 2024; Jeavons, 2016; Willems and Faulk, 2019).

AfP in the field of foundations and nonprofit organizations has, therefore, a multimensional connotation. It requires technical rigor, influences behaviors, and involves value choices.

This multifaceted nature of AfP is particularly evident among Italian FBOs.

4. The case of Italian FBOs

Among the main players in the Italian philanthropic context, FBOs stand out in terms of importance. Established by law in the early 1990s as part of a reform of the Italian credit system (Jassaud, 2014; Leardini et al., 2014), they are a particular type of community-owned foundation that “pursues exclusively social utility and economic development objectives […], mainly in relation to the local area” (Legislative Decree No. 153/99, Art. 2). Consequently, FBOs are legally required to use income from asset management to support public interest projects within their local communities.

Currently, 85 FBOs are operating in Italy and are variably distributed across the country. With a total book value of net assets amounting to €42.5 billion, they awarded grants totaling €1.09 billion in 2024 (ACRI, 2025). FBOs promote community welfare by supporting third-sector organizations, institutions, businesses, and individuals engaged in caring for the local community. The main fields of intervention include volunteering and philanthropy, art and culture, scientific research and innovation, education, and welfare.

To achieve their public interest objectives, FBOs build relationships with various stakeholders in both the private and public sectors. These stakeholders include other foundations, associations, religious institutions, volunteer organizations, social cooperatives, local governments, schools, universities, and healthcare organizations. As FBOs promote collaboration between different entities to foster the development of local communities, these public and private actors end up being more than just external stakeholders and become partners in a project.

In FBOs, accounting is a well-developed technical practice. The law and accounting principles establish the rules for measuring, recording, assessing, and reporting information on asset management and philanthropic activities. Legislative Decree No. 153/99 and subsequent legislation outline the requirements for mandatory financial statements, which provide information about an entity's economic and financial performance. A management commentary further explains asset management and provides a mission report that discloses the organization's mission and identity, how assets are used for public interest, and the results of philanthropic activity

Besides its technical nature, FBOs' accounting also has an undeniable social and moral connotation, as outlined in the Charter of Foundations and the ACRI-MEF Protocol. The Charter of Foundations, approved by ACRI (Association of Foundations and Savings Banks) in 2012, is a voluntary but binding self-regulatory code. It establishes common guidelines for FBOs regarding governance, institutional activities, and asset management. The ACRI-MEF Protocol is a memorandum of understanding signed in 2015 between ACRI and MEF (Ministry of Economy and Finance) to initiate a process of self-reform of banking foundations. The goal is to enhance governance, diversify investments, and increase transparency, encouraging foundations to amend their statutes to align with these principles.

As a social practice, accounting impacts decisions, shapes organizational culture, and modifies organizational functioning and development (Carnegie et al., 2023). The governing boards and managers of FBOs use accounting data to support allocative, monitoring, and programming processes. In order to ensure the continued sustainability of the organization over time, the allocation of resources derived from asset management requires adherence to efficiency and effectiveness criteria. This implies having accounting information on the income generated by the investment of the foundation's endowment as well as on the financial requirement for the philanthropic activity. As stated in section 1.6 of the Charter of Foundations, this knowledge enables the balanced allocation of resources among annual, multi-year, and ongoing programs and projects, thus stabilizing grants over time. Accounting information is crucial for monitoring processes, especially those implemented by directors and managers responsible for asset management. According to section 2.5 of the Charter of Foundations, this information supports "the constant monitoring of investments in accordance with defined policies, as well as investment trends and performance". Additionally, it also allows for the control of risk dynamics and the identification of any corrective actions in case of potential issues. As outlined in Art. 2 of the ACRI-MEF Protocol, attention to asset management monitoring is motivated by the need to ensure adequate resources for the foundation's philanthropic activities. Therefore, accounting information is used to define investment portfolios that have the optimal combination of risk, profitability, and liquidity. Finally, accounting information supports the programming processes of both asset management and philanthropic activity. In the first case, Art. 2 of the ACRI-MEF Protocol states that "asset management requires a strategic planning phase to define the investment policy and identify the asset allocation". In the second case, the section 3.3 of the Charter of Foundations requires FBOs to "collect and process information on the initiatives they support to evaluate the results of their philanthropic activities and for future planning purposes". Allocative, monitoring, and programming processes are all supported by accounting information, which thus influences the decisions of internal stakeholders and determines how FBOs contribute to the development of the philanthropic context.

As a social practice, accounting also impacts the decisions of external stakeholders. For example, section 2.1 of the Charter of Foundations emphasizes the importance of informing stakeholders about the process by which initiatives are selected for support, whether third-party or their own, using the methods and tools deemed most appropriate. This information can influence the behavior of nonprofits that are potential beneficiaries of the FBOs' grants by channeling their requests for support toward causes and projects that the foundation has identified as being of interest to the community's development. Additionally, by "promoting the dissemination of information about positive experiences through their own external communication initiatives and by encouraging beneficiaries to share news about what has been achieved" (section 3.4 of the Charter of Foundations), FBOs can stimulate the emulation of good practices. Finally, according to the premises of the ACRI-MEF Protocol, accounting information enables monitoring processes by the external stakeholders. Thanks to them, supervisory authorities can verify that the foundation has implemented sound and prudent management practices and has correctly pursued its institutional objectives. In all these examples, accounting information influences the way external stakeholders think and act.

Accounting is finally a moral practice because it deals with alternative ways of influencing others' actions (Carnegie et al., 2023). Several values underlie the provision of accounting information by FBOs, including transparency, accountability, and accessibility. Transparency is enshrined in Art. 11 of the ACRI-MEF Protocol, which states that "foundations are expected to provide comprehensive information about their activities". Furthermore, the Charter of Foundations extends the demand for transparency to information about governance, future programs, and criteria for selecting projects to support. Because FBOs operate in the exclusive general interest of their respective communities, adherence to principles of transparency is derived from the necessity to be accountable for their actions to a variety of stakeholders who are part of that community. As the preamble to the Charter of Foundations highlights, "foundations represent an original asset in local communities and achieve their institutional goals with responsible autonomy". This duty of responsibility gives rise to a duty of accountability for the purposes of general interest that are entrusted to them and for the activities they carry out. According to the ACRI-MEF Protocol, accountability is demonstrated by sharing statutes, internal regulations, financial reports, planning documents, and board members' résumés. It also involves sharing the selection criteria and procedures for awarding grants, thereby communicating commitment to fairness, non-discrimination, and equal treatment values. Great attention is paid to "using communication tools that provide easy access to information and ensure its widest possible dissemination" among the community (section 1.8 of the Charter of Foundations). The ACRI-MEF Protocol specifically mentions the websites of foundations among the most suitable, usable, and functional tools for promoting the accessibility of information.

5. Implications and concluding remarks

Philanthropy is a global phenomenon, yet the "big picture" is difficult to grasp due to a lack of data about the resources collected, the subjects providing them, their use, and the results achieved. This hinders the full potential of philanthropic action in terms of policymaking, organizational functioning, collaboration opportunities, and research. Recognizing that information about philanthropy informs decisions and shapes perceptions of what is good for the public, forces those involved in this field to reflect on the importance of AfP as a technical, social, and moral practice.

However, approaching it from a multidimensional perspective has several implications for scholars, practitioners, managers, and policymakers in terms of providing a proper definition of philanthropy, identifying the recipients of the information, and reasoning about the logics underpinning the doing of AfP.

Despite the pervasiveness of philanthropy worldwide, "practitioners and researchers active in the philanthropic sector provided consistent warnings of its inherent diversity and complexity" (Venon, 2022, p. 12). Nevertheless, a common agreement on the concept and its determinants (e.g., who the philanthropic actors are, and what resources have to be considered) is necessary to define technical rules related to the doing of AfP, and to fully grasp its implications from a social and moral point of view. For the same reasons, a similar agreement is required about to whom AfP should be informative. Therefore, it is crucial to identify the recipients and balance their often divergent requests for information in order to avoid the risk of "over accounting" (Murtaza, 2012). This impacts not only technical and social issues, but also has moral implications in determining "who really counts" for AfP. Finally, the logics underpinning the implementation of AfP require reflection because they also have technical, social, and moral implications. Financial reasoning imported from the corporate domain considers it possible to assign a monetary value to everything under scrutiny, including philanthropy (Eikenberry and Kluver, 2004; (Grieco et al., 2015; Haydon et al., 2021). This is functional to the assessment of whether resources have been efficiently allocated and strategic objectives have been achieved. However, philanthropic actions are not purely economic transactions intended to maximize monetary returns on capital. Rather, they are intended to pursue public interest (Hodge, 2012). The "mobilisation of the capital available to philanthropic organisations […] is not and cannot be an investment phenomenon, a capital markets trend. It is, and must remain a mission delivery innovation, an additional tool put at the disposal of philanthropy's greatest assets, its people and its knowhow" (Venon, 2022, p.6).

A better understanding of AfP's multifaceted nature would raise awareness of its full potential in terms of monitoring, signaling, and agenda-setting. This would greatly benefit the development of research, public policy, and the management of nonprofit and philanthropic organizations. It is hoped that this greater awareness will result in the realization of a robust data infrastructure that can provide complete, coordinated, and quality information on a regular basis, as many researchers in Europe have called for (Bekkers, 2022; Holzer et al., 2024; Hoolwerf and Schuyt, 2017; von Schnurbein et al., 2021; Wiepking, 2009).

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Communicating Philanthropy in the Digital Age: Sentimental Engagement[1]

Alina Selyanina (University of Geneva), Lucia Gomez (Bern University of Applied Sciences and University of Geneva), Giuseppe Ugazio (University of Geneva)

Abstract

Digital platforms are becoming central to contemporary philanthropic communication, particularly among younger, digitally native audiences who engage with prosocial content in ways that differ markedly from traditional donors. This fast transition leaves open questions about how message design and presentation might shape audience perceptions and sentimental engagement in digital philanthropy communications. While framing theory predicts that structural message cues should trigger differentiated cognitive and emotional appraisals, little is known about whether such mechanisms operate in philanthropic digital media. This study investigates how audiences emotionally respond to two structural framing types in Beast Philanthropy videos (monetary-outcome versus non-monetary-outcome communication) by analyzing comments made in specific time intervals since publication for fourteen YouTube videos sampled from 2021 to 2024. Using a fine-tuned transformer, we map emotional landscapes and temporal dynamics across framing conditions. Across all videos and timepoints, reactions were overwhelmingly positive and dominated by admiration, love, gratitude, and care. Contrary to classical framing expectations, monetary cues did not produce clearly distinct emotional profiles: both framing types elicited a hybrid of scale-appraisal and community-oriented emotions, with admiration emerging as the most persistent signal. Emotional polarity remained consistently high, with only a modest dip as broader audiences entered the discourse several days post-release. These findings suggest that creator identity, parasocial relationships, and channel-level philanthropic norms may override title-level framing effects in digital stunt philanthropy. For practitioners this indicates that emphasizing either monetary outcomes or narrative-driven impact may both effectively foster positive emotional engagement, guiding strategies for communicating campaign success and sustaining donor support.

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1. Introduction

A transformative shift is gradually reshaping how philanthropic organizations (POs) communicate impact, mobilize resources, and engage stakeholders. Increasingly, organizations rely on digital platforms such as YouTube or Facebook, in addition to organizational websites, to reach large, heterogeneous, and younger publics. This is reflected both in the rise of platform-native philanthropic projects and in the sector's growing attention to online engagement metrics and digital fundraising tools. POs still rely heavily on traditional communication channels, such as postal mail or organization of donor community events, as those are effective vehicles for engaging the existing donor pool and slowly and scalable augmenting the donor pool organically (network-based increase). However traditional channels for donor engagement are very costly, and ineffective for a rapid expansion and mobilization of masses, therefore are not resilient for times when diversification is needed and do not work for engaging young generations that engage less traditionally and more digitally (digital natives). Digital channels, on the other hand, promise an advantageous for POs to amplify donor and member pools, especially those of younger generations that are digital natives and engage less with traditional media such as newspapers, or television (Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy, 2025).

A novel form of communicating philanthropy is emerging: platform-native, attention-driven content that blends entertainment and giving, often produced by highly followed content creators and tailored to algorithmic distribution. This trend is exemplified by the Beast Philanthropy ecosystem, which leverages viral formats to produce philanthropic awareness and material impacts, thanks to the substantial donations received from the audience. Mainstream coverage has documented the scale and reach of these efforts, but also academic scholarship on "Digital Stunt Philanthropy" has identified how spectacular, shareable acts of giving operate as contemporary modality of public-facing philanthropy (Lea and Gomez, 2024). Young generations are especially implicated in these dynamics: empirical reports and scholarly reviews show that Millennials and Gen Z disproportionately encounter and act on philanthropic prompts through social media, prefer authentic and narrative-rich digital content, and are responsive to emotional evocative, peer-mediated calls to support causes (Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy, 2025). Experimental and field studies of novel digital fundraising media, such as social media and virtual reality appeals, suggest that digital platforms can intensify affective engagement by increasing physiological arousal and spontaneous giving (Yousef *et al.*, 2022; Sooter and Ugazio, 2023)

It is well established in behavioral economics and psychology literature that how information is framed, irrespective of whether the underlying fact remains constant, can substantially influence how it is perceived, interpreted, and acted upon (Goffman, 1974; Kahneman and Tversky, 1984; Levin, Schneider and Gaeth, 1998). Framing shapes the salience of certain cues, directs attention to specific interpretative pathways, and triggers well-documented cognitive and emotional heuristics (Entman, 1993; Chong and Druckman, 2007).

While traditional framing research, including work on charitable behavior, has predominantly focused on contrasts such as loss vs. gain framing (Metzger and Günther, 2019), the core theoretical insight of framing theory extends far beyond and is applicable to interrogate any structural element of messages capable of altering its interpretative schema: *attention and affective appraisal can be shifted through selective emphasis and narrative structuring* (Levin, Schneider and Gaeth, 1998; Druckman, 2001). Extensions of the framing theory in the literature have emphasized attribute framing, goal framing, and information-format framing, all demonstrating that even subtle variations in how information is presented can meaningfully alter emotional and behavioral responses (Peters *et al.*, 2006). Building on this broader framing logic, we propose to investigate a novel form of message contrast within philanthropic communication: for campaign outcome messages, those communicating the impact achieved with a philanthropic campaign, whether including a monetary figure as highlight elicits differential sentimental responses compared to campaign outcome messages without monetary figures mentioned as highlight.

To our knowledge, this specific framing contrast has not been studied as a dedicated pairing in academic literature. Prior research has examined related, but not equivalent, phenomena. Studies on numerical framing demonstrate that presenting numbers can increase perceived objectivity, credibility, or magnitude, depending on context (Peters *et al.*, 2006), while research on financial transparency cues show that donors respond positively to clear demonstration of cost-efficiency or impact reporting (Saxton and Guo, 2011). None of these pieces examine whether including monetary figures as communication highlights influence audience responses, and specifically the sentimental engagement as per emotional classes represented in the reactions, or the temporal evolution of those.

Existing theoretical and empirical insights render this scientifically grounded question with clear practice implications for philanthropists. From an appraisal-theoretic standpoint, monetary figures in communication titles could act as salience-enhancing cues that foreground the scale and efficiency of philanthropic action, or could further strengthen appraisals related to competence, resource mobilization, or credibility, thereby eliciting emotions such as admiration, gratitude, pride, or optimism. Conversely, prior work in charitable psychology also suggests that numeric cues can sometimes activate skepticism, reactance, or perceptions of over-commercialization if audiences view monetary emphasis as inconsistent with altruistic norms (Saxton and Guo, 2011). It is thus reasonable to predict the existence of differential emotional reactivity associated with monetary framing in philanthropy messages. This investigation extends framing research into linking outcome communication, monetary salience, and discrete emotional categories (arguing on their putatively associated appraisals). Practically and policy-related, as POs increasingly rely on digital platforms for communication where titles perform critical attention-gating functions, discovering whether monetized outcome faming modulates emotional reactivity and valence in audiences, this has implications for message design, donor engagement strategies, and digital fundraising ethics.

Based on prior research evidence and theoretical considerations, we expect that monetary-outcome framing will amplify emotions such as admiration, gratitude, awe, excitement, optimism, and trust, as numerical cues highlighting the scale of contributions or the magnitude of campaign results serve as salient indicators of competence, effectiveness, and impact (Fehrler and Przepiorka, 2013; Smith, Windmeijer and Wright, 2015). These magnitude cues are likely to enhance perception of organizational efficiency and efficacy, thereby eliciting positive appraisal-driven emotions oriented towards acknowledgement and celebration of success. In contrast, non-monetary-outcome framing is expected to elicit emotions such as compassion, empathy, sadness-relief, care, or love, as the narrative foregrounds beneficiaries' experiences and the cause itself rather than quantitative outcomes (Algoe and Haidt, 2009). Conceptually, non-monetary outcome framing emphasizes problem-focused perception and humanization, which, according to framing theory, is associated with affective appraisals that mobilize urgency and immediate prosocial action, reflecting a motivational pathway oriented toward helping and contributing.

In this study, we explore and report empirical findings on the discrete emotional underpinnings of audience reactions (sentimental engagement) that could underly a differential perception and response given the distinctive structural framing brought by monetary figures. Literature supports that discrete emotions embody differential motivational signatures, consequences, and differentiated appraisal structures that can shape prosocial responses in systematically distinct ways (Nabi, 1999; Lerner and Keltner, 2000) (consult in Appendix 1 the guiding mapping of discrete emotions and literature associated emotional appraisal structures, motivational signatures, and expected consequences in philanthropy). The specific composition of discrete emotions in audience reactions could serve as a diagnostic indicator of which motivational pathway is being preferentially activated by communication framing - putatively: sustained engagement if money is mentioned vs. immediate action if money is not mentioned. Specifically, sustained engagement could be an orientation pathway resulting from the motivation derived from acknowledging the magnitude of campaign's results (Fehrler and Przepiorka, 2013). Conversely, immediate action could be an orientation pathway resulting from the motivation derived from realizing societal needs or unsolved problems (Bolino and Grant, 2016).

To do so, we examine secondary data derived from YouTube videos and audience comments made to Beast Philanthropy channel, the most prominent example of Digital Stunt Philanthropy, with over 28.7 million subscribers and videos showcasing large-scale charitable interventions, regularly garnering over 1.2 billion views across all videos. Created by James Donaldson, better known as MrBeast, in September 2020 with the goal of formalizing his philanthropic content and separating it from his main entertainment channel (*Beast Philanthropy*, no date). MrBeast began his charitable activities in 2017, following his first brand deal, which allowed him to shift his content focus from purely entertainment-based videos to incorporating large-scale giveaways and genuine charitable work through community centers.

In this study we consider that emotions are inherently dynamic and can change over time. Literature indicates that emotionality might change as novelty and attention decay (Ferrara and Yang, 2015), emotional response can attenuate or increase as emotional appraisals are updated (Fredrickson, 2013), and the dynamism of emotional responses is specially marked in digital platforms, as social influence and comment cascades shape emotional evolution (Brans *et al.*, 2013). These known phenomena justify the exploration of the temporal dynamism of the sentimental engagement elicited in philanthropic communications in addition to the examination of the discrete emotional landscape upon monetary framing of outcome informing messages.

2. Methods

2.1. Data collection

All user comments and associated metadata, including view counts, like counts, and other engagement metrics, were collected using the YouTube Data API (Google, no date b) provided by Google. This API allows researchers to programmatically access YouTube content and metadata. Data extraction for this study occurred between April 2 and April 7, 2025, constrained by the API's daily data retrieval limits.

2.2. Data preprocessing

The collected comments were exported as .csv files, each named according to the unique video ID of the corresponding video. Translations were performed using a custom Python script integrated with Google Gemini (Google, no date a), a large language model capable of context-aware translations that preserve semantic integrity. Comments were translated at three key time points: in the first 8 hours after publication, 3 days after publication, and 14 days after publication. These intervals were chosen based on the spikes in comment count across selected videos. An 8-hour interval was chosen over a 24-hour period to more accurately capture the initial audience reaction. Preliminary analysis using a 5-minute interval was performed, however it was disregarded due to the high likelihood of automated or bot-generated activity skewing the results towards extremely positive sentiment. The 8-hour window provided us with a balance between capturing genuine early engagement and minimizing noise from potential bot-generated comments. Moreover, analysis showed that 12 out of 14 videos, ranging from 58.51% to 81.61% of all comments that were made within the first 24 hours happened in the initial 8-hour period. For the 2 outliers, the proportions were 43.85% and 43.95%. The 3-day time point, or the 72 hours, was chosen as most videos see a decline in engagement after that time point. The 14 days, or the 336 hours, interval was chosen as a long-term point, seeing that engagement plateau after roughly 144 hours in 9 out of 14 of the videos. From now on we will refer to 8 hours as Day 0, 72 hours as Day 3 and, lastly, 336 hours as Day 14.

2.3. Sentiment Analysis

Sentiment analysis was conducted using GoEmotions (Demszky *et al.*, no date), a deep learning model developed by Google to identify 27 distinct emotions in short-form text such as Reddit posts. Specifically the SamLowe/roberta-base-go_emotion (Lowe, no date) that implements the RoBERTa's (Liu *et al.*, 2019) optimized language understanding architecture to allow for higher accuracy and sensitivity of the results. These emotions include 12 positive, 11 negative, 4 ambiguous, and a neutral category. The model tokenizes input text at the word level and assigns probabilities to each emotion, providing a more granular understanding of emotional content than traditional sentiment models, which generally classify text into positive, negative, or neutral categories only. Ambiguous emotions, which often appear in short-form text and may reflect situational reactions, were merged with the neutral category for polarity calculations but analyzed separately in the broader assessment of emotional tone and engagement patterns.

2.4. Sentiment Polarity Calculation

For calculating sentiment polarity, only positive and negative emotions were considered, using the formula: (Positive - Negative)/(Positive + Negative) (SESAMm, no date). Approximately 60% of comments were classified as neutral and were excluded from polarity analysis. It was hypothesized that sentiment polarity may vary over time due to changes in the demographics of viewers at different stages of the video lifecycle. Additionally, videos that mention monetary amounts in the title were expected to show lower overall sentiment polarity compared to videos without monetary mentions, due to potentiality of skepticism arising in the discourse.

This methodology provides a detailed framework for analyzing the emotional responses of viewers to charitable content, particularly regarding the influence of explicitly stated donation amounts on engagement and sentiment dynamics over time.

3. Results

To understand the sentimental load that digital stunt philanthropy content elicits in the audience, we retrieved the probabilities of discrete emotional classes of comments made to Beast Philanthropy YouTube videos from May 2021 to December 2024, sampled in temporal pairs as by their structural framing in monetary-outcome or only outcome framing. To do so, we used the YouTube API to extract the comments, then RoBERTa transformer fine-tuned for GoEmotions classification to obtain the emotional outputs and sentiment. (see methods)

3.1. Emotional landscape of audience reactions and its temporal dynamics

We first analyzed the emotional load for each comment across all Beast Philanthropy videos included in the sample, using the GoEmotions transformer for emotion tagging (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Audience emotional reaction to Beast Philanthropy videos through time since upload. A. Top emotions across all videos at 8 hours, 3 days and 14 days. **A'.** Top emotions across monetary-outcome framing videos at 8 hours, 3 days and 14 days. **A''.** Top emotions across outcome framing videos at 8 hours, 3 days and 14 days **B.** Evolution of time-conserved emotions in monetary-outcome framing videos bar plot. days **B'.** Evolution of time-conserved emotions in outcome framing videos bar plot.

A

Top emotions across videos

	0d	3d	14d
1°	admiration	admiration	admiration
2°	love	gratitude	love
3°	care	love	gratitude

A’ **Monetary-Outcome Framing**

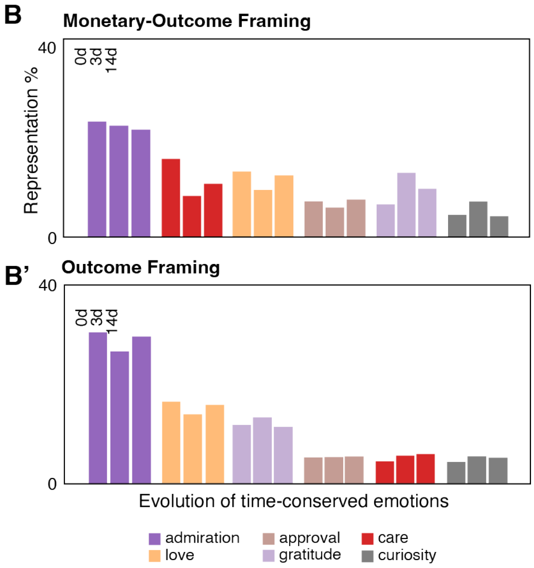
Top emotions across videos

	0d	3d	14d
1°	admiration	admiration	admiration
2°	caring	gratitude	love
3°	love	love	caring

A” **Outcome Framing**

Top emotions across videos

	0d	3d	14d
1°	admiration	admiration	admiration
2°	love	love	love
3°	gratitude	gratitude	gratitude



Across all time points, the audience's response was overwhelmingly positive. *Admiration* consistently emerged as the most prevalent emotion, from the first hours following a video release to 14 days afterward. This suggests that viewers perceived the content as noteworthy and worthy of respect, whether directed toward the philanthropic act itself or toward the creator’s role in it. The second and third ranked emotions showed temporal variation between *love, gratitude, and caring*. Within the first 8-hours after uploading, *love* was the dominant secondary emotion, indicative of strong affection ties between dedicated fans and the creator, followed by a transition to *caring* by day 14. At three days post-upload, *gratitude* temporarily overtook *love*, reflecting a shift as broader audiences, less directly attached to the influencer but appreciative of the philanthropic action, entered the comment stream. By 14 days, *love* once again became the dominant secondary emotion, with *gratitude* falling to third place.

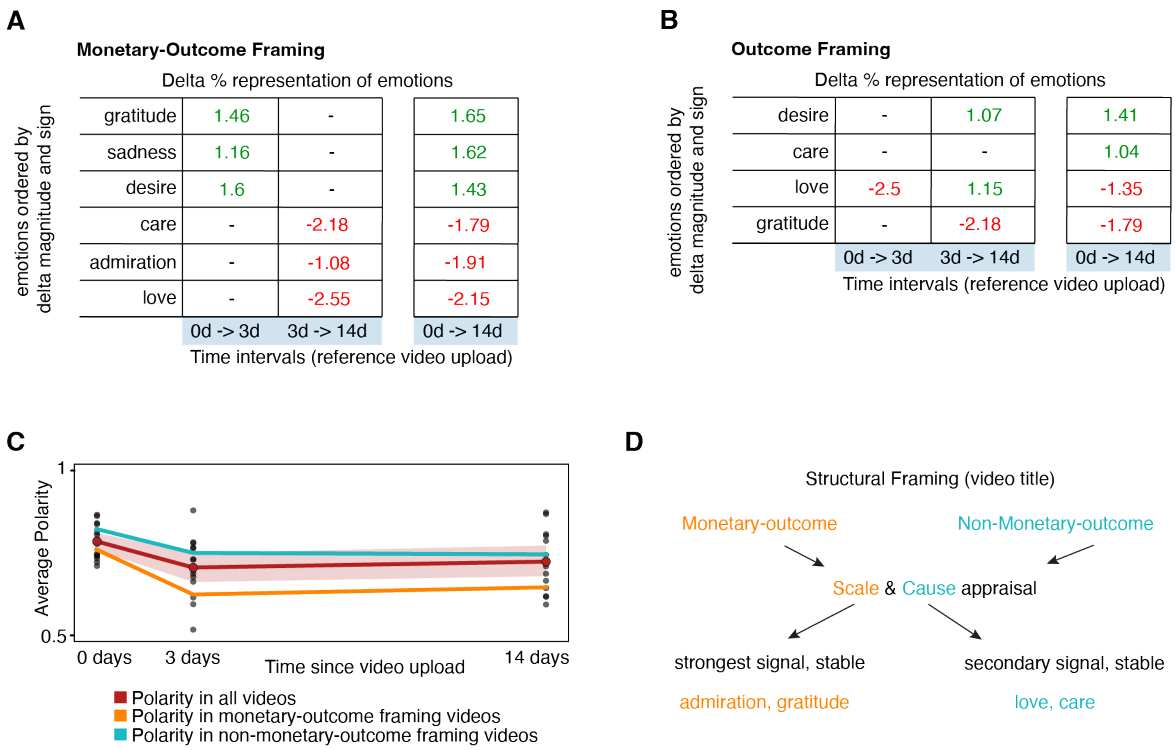
We observe discrete emotions characteristic of both structural framings across the two video types, specifically admiration, care, love, and gratitude. For outcome-framed videos, the three most prevalent emotions remain stable over time, reflecting a combination of appraisal-of-scale emotions, evidenced by the persistent presence of admiration, and community-oriented emotions such as love and gratitude. A comparable pattern is observed in videos with monetary outcome framing, although greater temporal variability emerges. Notably, care shifts to gratitude on Day 3 and subsequently to love by Day 14. Despite these fluctuations, both framing types consistently exhibit exclusively positive emotions among the three most frequently expressed. However, contrary to theoretical expectations surrounding framing dependent appraisal pathways, we do not observe a clear divergence in emotional profiles between the two message framing structures. Instead, viewers express a hybrid constellation of emotions, simultaneously scale oriented (admiration, gratitude) and community oriented (love, care), irrespective of framing. We observe a hybrid of the appraisal of the scale of the videos as well as community sensing emotions. We, equally, do not observe any negative emotions present in the top three emotions across either category. This pattern suggests that audience emotional responses may be shaped less by the structural properties of the message (monetary vs. non-monetary cues) and more by contextual factors such as the philanthropic identity of the channel, the creator's perceived authenticity, or strong parasocial bonds with the creator. Emotions characteristic of perception of scale of outcome appraisal, such as admiration and gratitude, are present in both video framings. Admiration is the overarching emotion type across all videos. Love is the second most prevalent emotion class in non-monetary outcome framing videos, and the third emotional class in monetary-outcome videos, emotion characteristic of cause appraisal. Therefore, monetary framing of video titles is not a strong enough structural feature for defining audience appraisal reaction in a unique manner. We observed admiration as overarching reaction, the scale and grandiosity of Beast Philanthropy campaign outcomes systematically drive audience appraisal.

3.2. Magnitude and directionality of audience emotional temporal dynamics

Emotional reaction landscape is more stable in non-monetary outcome framing, in terms of number of discrete emotions that maintain their representation across time (Figure 2).

Figure 2. A) and **B)** Emotion category delta percentage representation across time for videos of framing type "monetary-outcome" (A) and "non-monetary-outcome" (B). Emotional categories that decrease in representation in given time intervals are highlighted in red (negative delta), while emotional categories that increase in representation at given time intervals are highlighted in green (positive delta). Emotional categories with a delta smaller than a 1% are not represented, or if for specific time intervals, indicated with a dash sign "-". **C)** Evolution of emotional polarity through time and depending on framing type. Polarity curve for all videos is shown in red, for monetary-outcome framing in orange and, for non-monetary-outcome framing videos, in blue. **D)** Interpretation of results based on framing

theory upon monetary signal as frame in video titles, and discrete emotion landscapes identified. Color-coding follows panel C.



In addition to these conserved emotions, less frequent but growing emotional categories emerged at later timepoints. Notably, *curiosity*, *caring*, and *approval (e.g., expressions of* wishful thinking such as appeals for future philanthropic interventions) increased between day 3 and day 14. This diversification of emotional responses indicates that as the video diffuses beyond the core fan base, engagement becomes more heterogeneous and future oriented. To quantify these transitions, we calculated the relative change (delta) in emotional categories across intervals (Figure 1B). The largest changes were observed for the emotion of love, which over time decreases by -1.75% between days 0 and 14. An explanation could be due to the non-subscribers joining the discourse around 3 days to share their opinions on the video. However, as they do not have the same emotional investment with the creator, as early-viewer fans, they might refrain from using intense emotional expressions of warmth and leave a more casual comment. Moreover, it could equally signal the fading of novelty of the video people might be still approving of, however with much less enthusiasm.

Another notable change is an increase in desire by +1.42% by the end of the 14th day. This emotion is defined as “A strong feeling of wanting something or wishing for something to happen" in the GoEmotions documentation. Indeed, the comments that are labeled as such represent this desire either to something they want themselves or wish for MrBeast to perform next. The audience is moving from emotional investment to motivated aspirations.

Finally, we grouped emotions into positive and negative classes to derive an average polarity score (Figure 1C). Polarity was highest in the first hours after release (≈0.79), reflecting overwhelmingly positive reactions (driven by the fan community that receive direct notification of video release), dropped modestly at three days, and then stabilized by day 14 at slightly lower than initial, but still strongly positive levels (≈0.73) . The temporal dip likely corresponds to broader audience entry (at the 3-day point, newer audience begins to comment on the videos, through organic finding or driven by the recommendation system), introducing more varied and critical perspectives, but the persistence of high polarity underscores the generally supportive reception of philanthropic communications. Moreover, we have observed that monetary outcome framing videos demonstrate an overall lower polarity than non-monetary-outcome videos, however the exact mechanism behind this difference is still unclear. We propose that it might be due to an overall increase in sadness (Figure 1 A, B) in the monetary outcome framing videos by +1.62%, compared to the non-monetary-outcome framing videos, where there is no observed increase in sadness.

Taken together, these results indicate that audience responses to Beast Philanthropy videos are characterized by a consistently positive and predominantly stable emotional profile. They are marked by persisting and ever-present admiration and shifting combinations of love, care, and gratitude across time. More importantly, the emotions do not diverge meaningfully between monetary and non-monetary outcome framings, suggesting that viewers as a whole are not directed by the content through discrete cognitive pathways predicted by classical framing theory.

4. Discussion

This study examined how audiences emotionally respond to digital stunt philanthropy through a large-scale analysis of YouTube comments across Beast Philanthropy videos. Contrary to predictions derived from classical framing theory we find no clear separation between the emotional landscapes of the two framing types (monetary and non-monetary cues present in video titles communicating campaign outcomes). We have observed that the structural framing of the videos can both signal scale or cause appraisals, with admiration and gratitude being the strongest signals of the former and love and care of the latter. Neither of the structural framings express signals uniquely leading to scale or cause appraisal in the audience, instead demonstrating a presence of both in audience reaction as a whole. Further work is needed to understand whether a differential set of comments carrying specific emotional loads exist depending on framing type and with different representation patterns.

Taken as a whole, rather than activating skepticism or strongly differentiating between scale- and cause-oriented emotions, monetary cues did not produce a clear-cut divergence in appraisal either. Instead, both monetary and non-monetary outcome frames consistently elicited a hybrid emotional profile dominated by admiration, love, gratitude, and care across all observed time points. This suggests that viewers may not interpret creator-generated philanthropic content through discrete cognitive pathways tied to message structure, but perhaps through broader appraisal mechanisms linked to the channel or the creator himself. Here analyzed content, similarly, could theoretically trigger celebratory, high-valence appraisal, consistent with admiration or gratitude, because they present psychologically meaningful goal-achievement milestones to viewers. This is compatible with our finding that polarity remains strongly positive regardless of framing, and with the fact that Beast Philanthropy's core audience consists largely of dedicated fans who receive direct release notifications and share a parasocial investment in the creator's achievements.

Future research should aim to establish more fine-grained correlational or causal relationships between specific video content and the emotional landscape it elicits in comments, moving beyond the framing in the title to consider a narrower analysis of the content. Subsequent work should treat each video as a discrete unit of analysis. Topic modeling applied to video transcripts and comment sections, supplemented by TF-IDF enrichment against lexicons for specific framing strategies, would allow a more precise contextualization of elicited emotions. This would clarify whether hybrid appraisal patterns arise from narrative elements within each video or from generalized perceptions of the channel's philanthropic identity. Controlled experiments could further isolate the causal influence of title-based framing by holding video content constant while manipulating only the presence or absence of monetary figures in titles. Embedding identical videos within platforms that obscure original metadata would disentangle content-driven from title-driven effects. Together, these strategies would produce a more rigorous foundation for assessing whether and how structural framing shapes emotional responses in digital stunt philanthropy.

Data and Code Availability

Data and Code for replicating this study are available upon justified request to authors at https://osf.io/nmg48, as this project is work in progress (data will be made fully open as soon as the project is concluded).

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Appendix A. Discrete Emotions

A.1. Discrete Emotions in the GoEmotions Taxonomy and Literature Expected Motivational Consequences in Philanthropic Communication Upon Structural Framing

Emotion	***Appraisal Structure***	***Motivational Signature***	***Expected Consequences in Philanthropy***	***Reason for association***
Admiration	Recognition of excellence or moral virtue in others	Social learning; aspiration; elevation	Enhances trust and perceived legitimacy of the organization; encourages emulation and positive engagement	Financial achievements signal competence, efficiency, excellence.
Love (=care) (sense of affection)	Warmth, closeness, communal bond	Affiliative prosociality; approach motivation	Increases generosity and supportive comments; reinforces community cohesion	Human-focused content generates affiliative emotions and warmth towards beneficiaries and causes.
Gratitude	Recognition of received benefit; appreciation of benefactor	Reciprocity; sustained cooperation	Strengthens donor loyalty and long-term engagement; positive evaluations of impact	Viewers appreciate transparent financial reporting. Viewers express gratitude for meaningful change in people's lives and the cause.
Compassion (=care)	Appraisal of others' suffering and need	Approach-oriented helping; empathic concern	Drives immediate donations, sharing, supportive commenting	Even outcomes videos may contain reminders of prior suffering, eliciting compassionate concern.
Pride	Sense of efficacy or achievement related to action or group identity	Reinforcement of costly prosociality; self-efficacy	Strengthens identification with the cause; increases advocacy and message dissemination	Donors feel proud of contributing to a financially significant collective accomplishment.
Optimism / Hope	Positive future expectancy; belief in achievable improvement	Future-oriented engagement; perseverance	Enhances confidence in organizational competence; supports recurring donation behavior	Financial capability reinforces belief that future interventions will be successful.
Amusement / Joy	Pleasantness; low-arousal positive affect	Social sharing; positive evaluation	Strengthens platform engagement; increases likelihood of positive virality	Positive news about funds raised or money successfully allocated creates celebratory affect.
Surprise (positive or neutral)	Novelty, unexpectedness	Attention; appraisal update	Boosts engagement and click-through behavior; can redirect emotional orientation depending on content	Large amounts or unexpected financial efficiency generate astonishment and re-evaluation.
Sadness	Loss, suffering,	Withdrawal or	May increase sympathy-	When outcome

	helplessness	mood-repair helping	based giving; can reduce engagement if overused	videos reference the initial hardship to contrast with the positive outcome.
Anger (including frustration)	Perceived injustice, norm violation	Approach motivation; corrective action	Increases demand for accountability; can mobilize activism-oriented engagement	If the narrative reveals past injustice.
Fear	Threat, uncertainty	Avoidance; information-seeking	Can suppress donations but increase reliance on trusted actors; enhances attention to solutions	No clear association with neither of the structural framings
Disgust	Moral violation; contamination	Rejection; avoidance	Can motivate support for sanitation/health causes but reduce engagement with the communicator	No clear association with neither of the structural framings
Confusion	Ambiguity, unclear causality	Cognitive dissonance; elaboration	Reduces willingness to act; increases need for clarity or explanation	Financial data can introduce ambiguity or cognitive overload.
Curiosity	Information gap; interest	Exploration; information seeking	Increases watch time and engagement; may lead to deeper understanding of the cause	Audiences seek more detail about how funds are used and what financial metrics imply.

Constraints of Collaborative Governance in a Statist Welfare Regime during Crises A Slovak Case[1]

Boris Strečanský (Institute of European Studies and International Relations, Comenius University)

Abstract

The New Public Management (NPM) and collaborative governance aim to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of public service delivery by moving beyond traditional hierarchical bureaucracy. They emphasize decentralized approaches and a complementary relationship between the state and civil society, where nonprofits are considered partners with the government in providing public goods funded by public resources. There is a gap in understanding how these decentralization-supporting frameworks operate in countries with patterns of delayed democratization or statist civil society development. The paper demonstrates how the statist tendencies in public governance are in an asynchronous relationship with the self-organizing capacity of civil society, which, presents elements of new governance and indigenous agency. The disconnect between the state and civil society became visible during the COVID-19 pandemic and the War in Ukraine which provided the empirical background for the paper. The case examines the role of civil society in responding to crises. It explores patterns of its self-organization, pro-social organizing, philanthropic activity, interactions with the state, and policy formulation. It deploys three complementary lenses to explain the persistence of statist elements in Slovakia's governance – historical institutionalism in public administration, social origins of civil society theory, and welfare regime theory. It suggests network institutionalism as a possible way to explain the nature of civil society agency in Slovakia during crises. It argues that, in the context of delayed democratization, the NPM paradigm takes on hybrid forms influenced by persisting statism, avoiding a complementary relationship with non-state actors.

Keywords: Statism, Collaborative governance, Crisis, New Public Management, Network Institutionalism

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[1] *Recommended citation:*
Strečanský, B. (2026). Constraints of collaborative governance in a statist welfare regime during crises: A Slovak case. In *ERNOP Conference Proceedings 2025* (pp. 184–206). European Research Network on Philanthropy.

1. Introduction

This paper presents the case of Slovakia to show that in times of crisis, welfare production emerges from the interplay between structural legacies—shaped by welfare regime type and the institutional trajectory of public administration—and the adaptive capacity of civil society, which can open space for selective New Public Management (NPM) practices. The analysis argues that in a predominantly statist welfare environment, the third sector's role in public service provision becomes more pronounced during crises, drawing on the NPM elements embedded within the PA system. Yet these elements are not systematically institutionalized; instead, they surface contingently, depending on the political constellation of the moment, and remain constrained by enduring historical–institutionalist structures. The NPM in PA emphasizes the importance of market-based approaches, third-party engagement in public services, and, in its newer variation, multi-stakeholder governance and public-private sector partnerships.

This case presents a contradictory picture, showing that while there is evidence of the NPM repertoire at various levels of government in contracting with nonprofit organizations, it appears more a result of externally conditioned necessity (EU funding conditionality) than an intentional policy. Suppose crises are a natural experiment in public administration and civil society studies. In that case, it can be assumed they provoke responses that allow natural qualities and characteristics to emerge. Crises also stimulate the intrinsic agency of civil society.

The first part examines the institutional landscape comprising three components of welfare production in Slovakia: public administration, welfare regime type, and civil society pattern. It does so through the historical institutionalist lens of their evolution over recent decades, placing Slovakia within each component's typology. The second part focuses on the responses of civil society to two crises (COVID-19, War in Ukraine), with particular emphasis on the state-NGO relationship.

2. Theoretical considerations

This paper combines a historical–institutionalist perspective with insights from welfare regime theory and the social origins approach to civil society to analyze the evolving configuration of state–society relations in Slovakia. Historical institutionalism emphasizes how path dependence and critical junctures structure the long-term trajectory of PA, allowing us to trace how statist legacies persist across successive reform waves (Pierson 2000; Thelen 1999).

WRT provides a framework for situating Slovakia within broader comparative typologies of welfare production, highlighting the extent to which state, market, and community actors share—or fail to share—responsibility for social welfare provision (Esping-Andersen 1990; Fenger 2007). The literature suggests that the typology, primarily based on the Western development path, does not accurately fit the development in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). Some authors define a distinct ideal-typical group of welfare regimes for post-communist transitional countries (Aidukaite, 2009; Aidukaite, 2011; Fenger, 2007). The welfare regime analysis matters because each influences public service motivation, professional practices, and public support for redistribution (Houston 2011; Nygren et al. 2018; Jaeger 2009). Each welfare regime also has unique institutional arrangements that shape governance practices, including participation and the extent of stakeholder involvement.

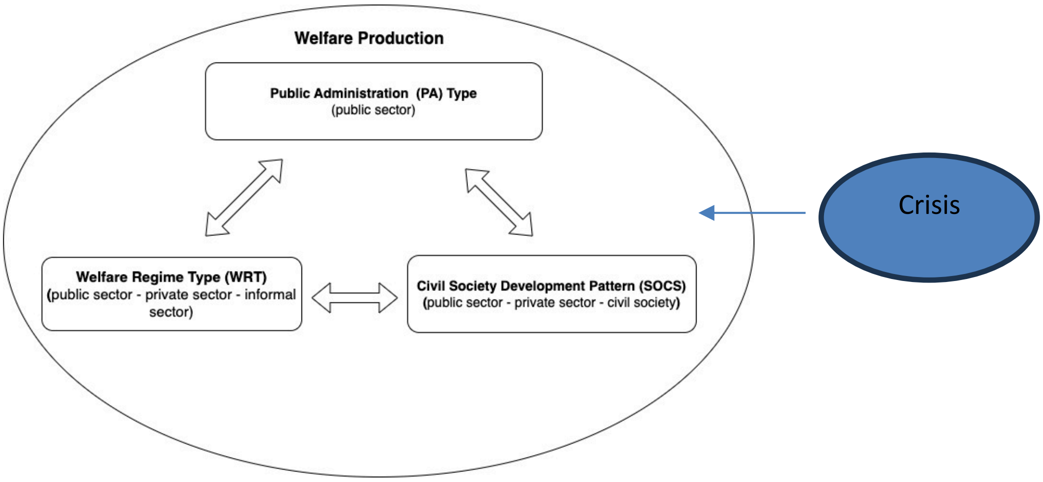
Complementing this, the social origins theory of civil society conceptualizes how nonprofit sectors emerge and are shaped by historical welfare arrangements and state strategies (Salamon and Anheier 1998). The theory posits that civil society constitutes a distinct organizational space, separate from the government and the market. It complements them, filling the gaps and working with them through collaborative governance models or welfare partnerships to achieve more effective and holistic solutions in public well-being (Anheier & Salamon, 2006; Salamon & Sokolowski, 2017). Together, these three perspectives allow for an integrated analysis of the welfare production space, revealing how enduring statist elements within PA condition both the development of welfare provision and the institutional environment for civil society actors.

The third theoretical strand is network theory. Networks offer the possibility of achieving relational, contextual, and systemic understanding of phenomena studied (Borgatti, 2003). Networks can be studied as explanatory goals (i.e., the research looks for causes of their formation or of their quality) and as explanatory mechanisms when the research studies the consequences of networks. The latter gets greater attention. Networks can be approached from the structuralist perspective and, in this sense, represent a contextual constraint or opportunity for an actor. On the other hand, the connectionist understanding of networks emphasizes the relational *embeddedness* of networks and the contents of ties and flows within them. (Borgatti, 2003). In line with this approach, the activities of civil society actors in Slovakia during the crises could be seen as an expression of the preceding relations among them. The approach of 'network institutionalism' (Ohanyan, 2012) views the realm of civil society organizations as a network of state and non-state actors that interact and influence one another, thereby increasing their effectiveness. They expand their engagement areas, enhance mobility, and improve overall performance (Ohanyan, 2012). The paper considers the network approach as a possible explanatory mechanism of the active social presence and significant agency of civil society in the statist welfare and traditional PA regime.

3. Research methodology

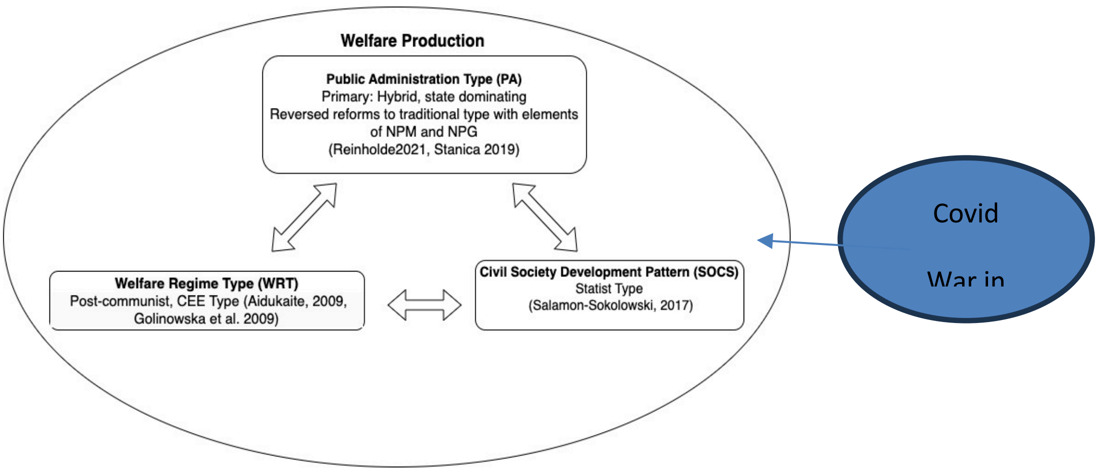
The framework for the analysis considers three elements that are in a mutual relationship: PA, civil society and welfare regime. See Figure 1.

Figure 1: Analytical Framework



All three elements are essential to the production of welfare and represent relational spaces connecting various sectors, actors, and their capacities. The crisis is an external factor that puts the system under duress, and provokes the system to respond. When the unexpected crisis occurs—such as war in a neighboring country or a pandemic—what happens to the above elements of welfare production? How does the system respond? This paper analyzes what occurred in Slovakia in the context of the crises outlined above.

Figure 2: Welfare production in Slovakia as an interrelationship of specific public administration, welfare regime, and civil society development pattern.



Slovakia was shaped in the 2010s into a hybrid form with a strong path dependency pattern. The SOCS literature identifies Slovakia as a statist case of civil society development. The PA has been reversed reformed, and the welfare regime is specifically post-communist CEE type. Hierarchical and centralized approaches in traditional public administration are the norm, although they are being blended with modernization efforts that emphasize transparency and the quality delivery of public services. The PA incorporates elements of the NPM and NPG paradigms, which emerge inconsistently and are driven through post-accession EU funding conditionalities.

Countries with a statist pattern of civil society development, like Slovakia, tend to adopt top-down approaches to modernization through power structures, as shown by the SOCS. In this kind of regime, civil society has limited space. The nonprofit sector is also small in size, with fewer workers and volunteers. The government offers minimal support for civil society. The welfare partnership model, exemplified by Germany, is marked by a large nonprofit workforce, substantial government funding, and a service-focused sector with strong involvement from church-based organizations. One key challenge with this classification is that it is based on a snapshot of data representing a specific stage in the country's development. The data used in the SOCS typology reflect Slovakia's situation in the early 2000s. Since then, not only Slovakia but the entire group of post-communist CEE countries has experienced significant changes.

Based on the above, having civil society as the third element in the production of welfare next to PA and welfare regime, the paper explores the effects of crises on the NPM elements in the statist context and proposes the following hypotheses:

H1: Slovakia's civil society has strengthened its hybrid features, combining statist approaches with welfare partnership patterns, a stronger service function, and heavy government support. This is due to the development trajectory of PA, with traditional PA mixed with elements of NPM, under post-accession conditionality and the welfare regime's statist tendency. This hypothesis is explored through three variables: the percentage of the economically active population (EAP) in the non-profit sector, the percentage of volunteer work in the EAP, and the share of government revenue from non-profit sector income.

H2: The crises led the PA to greater flexibility, using the NPM repertoire in its engagement with civil society. It addressed the new situation through higher levels of contracting, performance-based management, increased resource flows, and new mechanisms of coordination and governance.

The variables explored are:

a) The presence of collaborative governance mechanisms in response to crises – emerging forms arising from crisis-induced situations.
b) The contracting of NGOs by the PA, especially before and during the crises, the number of contracts and their volume.
c) PA contracting of NGOs and mechanisms of governance and cooperation – through secondary quantitative and qualitative data in available studies and reports obtained through documents review of relevant actors (reports, websites, and academic studies)

Different types of quantitative and qualitative data are used. The data include national accounts statistics from the Statistical Office combined with quantitative and qualitative data from available studies and reports on PA contracting with NGOs. It also includes qualitative data on mechanisms of governance and cooperation obtained through document reviews of relevant actors (reports, websites, and academic studies).

The network approach is considered as a possible explanatory mechanism of the active social presence and agency of civil society in the hybrid and statist welfare and traditional PA regime.

4. Analysis

4.1. Trajectory of Evolution of Public Administration in Slovakia since 1989 and NPM

The development of PA in Slovakia since 1989 has gone through several phases. Randma-Liiv & Drechsler (2017) define four distinct periods of PA development in CEE. The period of post-communist transition (1989-1996), pre-accession or the conditionality period (1996-2004), post-accession period (2004-2017), and the period of public sector innovation (PSI) since 2017. This periodization can be applied to Slovakia with some variations.

In the early transition, a major step in PA reform was the re-establishment of local self-government. This enabled local elections at the municipal level and created a new set of authorities within a separate institutional framework, distinct from the state administration. The formation of self-government was a progressive step, but the communist legacy has marred the overall PA. Despite several failed attempts to restructure the territorial administration, the patronage and nepotism patterns and overstaffing continued (Staroňová, 2017). The PA has remained highly politicized. After the initial decentralization, it was further centralized, with a tendency to strengthen the state administration's powers relative to local authorities (Henderson, 1999). The PA reform followed an incremental and legalistic path until 2004. During this period, the NPM elements became more visible within the reform approach, especially towards the end of 2001 and after 2002. This was when the radical NPM changes, including decentralization and performance financing schemes, were implemented. (Nemec, 2010) These changes were driven by the reformist orientation of the two governments of Prime Minister Mikulas Dzurinda (1998-2002, 2002-2006), especially the second, which was inspired by NPM. In late 2001, Slovakia took the initiative to reform the civil service and adopt new decentralization policies. It also established the second layer of regional self-governments, composed of eight self-governing regions. In 2004, Slovakia took the decisive step of implementing fiscal decentralization, granting local governments and regional self-governments the power to generate revenue and strengthen their autonomy. (Nižňanský, 2010).

The post-accession period (2004-2014) in the CEE was characterized by diversification in PA reform trajectories, driven exclusively by domestic political constellations. (Meyer-Sahling, 2011). This is also true of Slovakia. Some countries maintained the reformed PA and continued with reforms. Others, including Slovakia, reversed some of the reforms adopted under conditionality. The period after 2006 in Slovakia can be characterized as a return to a state-dominated paradigm in the delivery of public functions. NPM elements in PA were not fully dismantled, but diluted. For instance, the program performance budgeting initiative introduced earlier was implemented in a hierarchical, bureaucratic manner that only increased costs. (Nemec, 2010) The progressive civil service reform was reversed, and the chance of building a professional civic service was halted. The politicization of the civil service and the practice of politicians making discretionary decisions in HR have become the norm. (Staroňová, 2017).

After 2010, the elements of NPM remained integral to the reform ambition. These included pro-client orientation, cost-effectiveness, quality public service provision, and modernization. However, there was a greater emphasis on strengthening internal processes and systems. This led to strengthened institutional capacity and the implementation of transparent public procurement. (Ministry of the Interior, 2015). The influences from outside through the EU funds conditionality and some loci in the PA (Office of the Plenipotentiary of Government for the Development of Civil Society, Ministry of Finance) were encouraging participatory processes, including the involvement of various stakeholders, multilevel governance, and accountable ways of public management, including public value determinations (value for money)[2]. However, the PA reform in Slovakia has focused mainly on implementing ICT in administration and public service delivery, with less attention paid to participatory elements in service delivery.

A review of current Slovak PA systems reveals that they remain closed and that hierarchical, vertical approaches of traditional PA continue to prevail (Stănică, 2019). Klimovsky and Nemec (2021) make a compelling argument that there is a lack of political will for real collaborative governance. This is mainly due to a lack of trust in other non-state actors, which is most evident at the national level. At the local level, municipalities are pursuing various innovative initiatives that include collaborative models with social economy actors and NGOs (Murray Svidroňová et al., 2022).

Hence, the Slovak PA incorporates a diverse range of approaches and practices which indicate the continuation of mixed models and hybridity. The reasons for these tendencies are structural and institutional. The analysis suggests that NPM elements are present in Slovak PA, yield some positive outcomes. These include formalized procedures for CEO selection in municipally owned enterprises, social entrepreneurship development, and public sector contracting out to the private sector and NGOs for public service provision. Furthermore, the elements of NPG are evident, particularly at the local and municipal levels (participatory budgeting, local-level partnerships) or in digital governance (e-procurement). However, these elements are not consistently applied. The underlying structure remains the traditional PA with a state-dominating paradigm. (Sloboda and Sičáková-Beblavá 2020; Sloboda et al. 2023;

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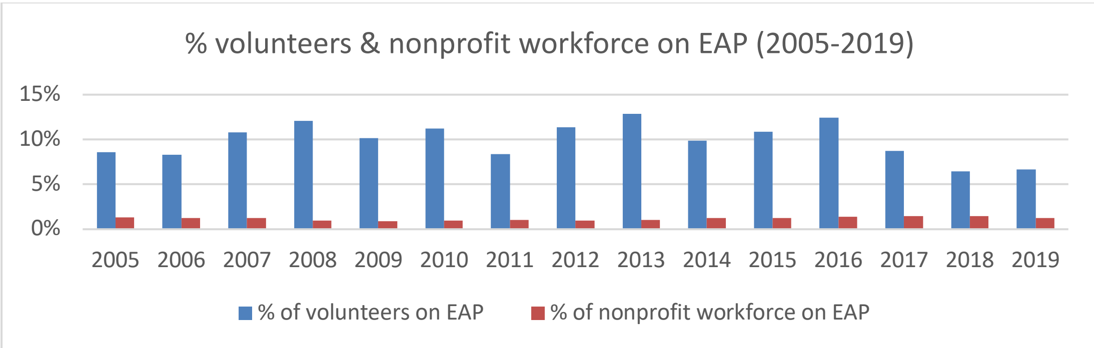
[2] These tendencies can be seen as elements of the New Public Governance (NPG) paradigm, which modernizes traditional PA while avoiding the pitfalls of the NPM. The NPG emphasizes pluralistic, communitarian, and participatory elements in a governance regime with interdependence and collaboration of actors. (Osborne, 2006). The principles of NPG prioritize openness, transparency, anti-corruption, social justice, and social responsibility. They also recognize the vital role of non-governmental organizations in providing public services (Reinholde et al., 2021). Similar is the Public Value Management (PVM) approach that emphasizes the network governance of deliberation and delivery as its main tool in achieving public value in a relational space of key stakeholders. (Stoker, 2006). PVM emphasizes the public value through outcomes of public services rather than outputs and also through the deliberation and consultation mechanism. The above elements subsumable under the NPG paradigm could be identified in Slovakia since 2014, however, they have not become embedded in the PA "DNA" and remained externally driven through the EU structural financing.

Murray Svidroňová, Nemeč, and Vaceková 2022; Placek et al. 2021; Staroňová 2017; Svidronova and Mikus 2015).

4.2. Slovakia in SOCS: statism with NPM elements?

The Johns Hopkins Non-Profit Sector Comparative Research Project places Slovakia in the statist pattern of civil society development, which postulates less than or equal 4,5% non-profit workforce of EAP, less or equal than 38% volunteer share of workforce and less or equal to 36% of government share of revenues in the nonprofit sector (Salamon and Sokolowski, 2017). The data show that in the first decade of the 2000s, the non-profit sector workforce accounted for 1.0% of the EAP, with volunteers making up 27.7% of the workforce. The government's share of revenue from the nonprofit sector was 22.1%. More recent data (Figure 3) show that the Slovak non-profit sector workforce share on the EAP is stagnant and oscillates between 0,9 and 1,45%. The same applies for the volunteer share on EAP, which seems to be declining from 10-12% to 6-7%.

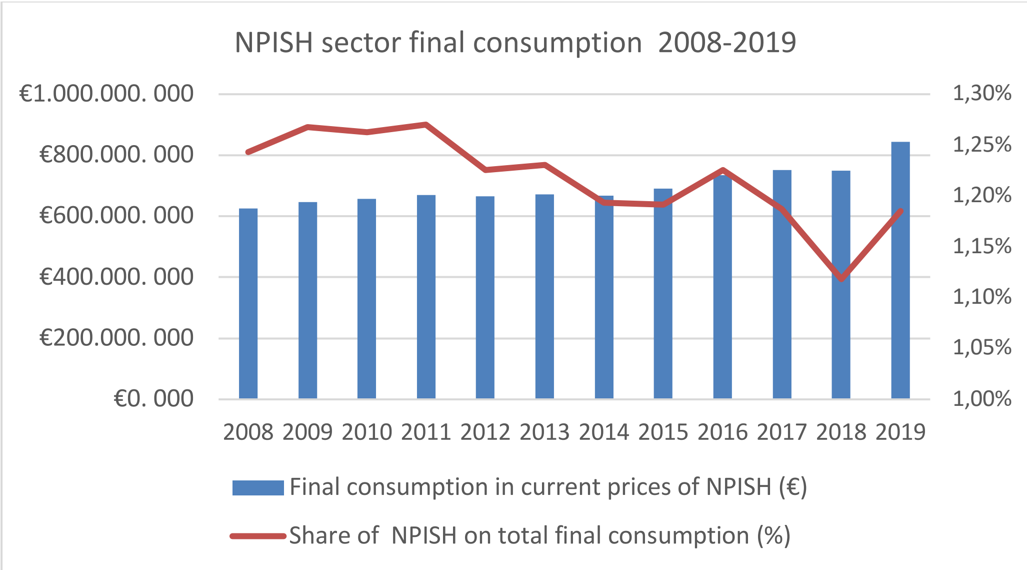
Figure 3: Percentage of volunteers and nonprofit workforce on economically active population (EAP) 2005-2019. Source: The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic (Questionnaire NSNO1-01)



However, contrary to the statist cut-off level, the government's share of revenue from the nonprofit sector's income has increased from 22.1% in 2005 (Salamon, 2017). In 2013, the share equaled 38% (Strečanský et al., 2017), and in 2019, it reached almost 50%, (Svidroňová and Jakuš Muthová, 2022). This increase indicates a greater government-civil society partnership. The data are also indirectly supported by a study by Sloboda et al. (2023), who reviewed the service delivery in which non-governmental organizations (NGOs) replace, complement, or cooperate with PA. The average number of contracts signed per year nearly doubled, from 4,500 in 2012 to 8,800 in 2022. The volume of euros covered through these contracts ranged from €150 million (2014) to €400 million (2019), demonstrating an upward trajectory over time.

When this finding is contextualized by placing it in the context of the overall economic size of the non-profit sector—viewing it in terms of its share of final consumption—it relativizes government income growth. The share of nonprofit institutions serving households (NPISH) on final consumption has a declining trend at a nominal growth (Figure 4). The data suggest that, despite rising nominal income from public funds and philanthropy, the nonprofit sector's share of the Slovak economy has been decreasing because economic growth outpaced the nonprofit sector's growth.

Figure 4: Final consumption of nonprofit institutions serving households as a share of total final consumption in current prices (€, %) (2008-2019) The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic.



In the decade 2010-2020, Slovakian politics focused on social and economic development. The conditionality of the EU structural and cohesion funds replaced the pre-accession conditionality. It can be argued that the government was providing more funding to the nonprofit sector as a result of these pressures. However, the relationship between the state and civil society during this period was mixed and ambivalent with instances of adversarial behavior mixed with occasional elements of partnership. The relationship overall reflected a lack of belief in the role of civil society in the welfare development process. This characterization aligns with the public's sentiment. A representative public opinion survey in 2018 revealed that 56% of respondents support the statement that "private and NGO organizations are not able to provide social services in the same quality as state (public) providers and therefore they should work in addition to publicly provided social services" (Focus, 2018).

The ambivalence was demonstrated in a willingness to cooperate with non-state actors through policy engagement mechanisms, as, for example, evidenced by the government's involvement in the Open Government Partnership (Žuffová, 2019) or the Plan for Recovery and Resilience adopted in 2021 that included NGOs as possible recipients of support from the EU funds in community care or early child care (Ministerstvo práce, sociálnych vecí a rodiny Slovenskej republiky, 2024).

The ambivalent relationship is mutual. Civil society actors perceive the central government as having a strong and negative influence on civil society's development, compared to the local and regional levels, which are perceived as having a mixed (positive and negative) influence and moderate strength (Strecansky, 2017). This view was supported by a case study that identified drivers and barriers to collaboration between CSO actors and municipal governments. Drivers conducive to collaboration were found in cases where solutions driven by CSOs did not require legal or regulatory changes or necessitate significant financial investments and could be implemented through the soft side of governance mechanisms, such as working groups. Another key driver was the commitment and dedication of civil society actors to their mission and beneficiaries. Among the barriers were the officials' competencies, mistrust, unwillingness, and a lack of resources. (Svidroňová, 2019).

There are differences between the levels of government. As Toepler (2019) observed, the government/nonprofit relations within a given country differ not only between government levels but also by field of activity. Indeed, there is substantial evidence of these differences (Svidroňová, 2019). There is sensitivity to the level of government that shapes perceptions of the quality of the state-civil society relationship. The lower the level of government interaction with civil society, the less negative influence the government is perceived to have over civil society (Sloboda et al., 2023; Vaceková and Murray Svidroňová, 2016).

Organizational and resource fragility limit the potential of civil society to play a bolder role in addressing government and market failures and offering viable alternatives to the country's problems. However, even in its modest profile, it has been supplementing the government in meeting demand for public goods that the government has ignored or addressed insufficiently, including education, care, culture, and anti-corruption efforts. (Strečanský et al., 2017). The neighboring Hungary and the Czech Republic were categorized in the 'delayed democratization' pattern by the SOCS theory. It was suggested that given the growing share of government revenue on their income, they evolve in an evolutionary path from the statist pattern informed by their communist legacy towards the welfare partnership model (Cook 2015; Salamon and Sokolowski 2017). Despite the Slovak state's mixed signals to civil society, the rising share of government revenue may suggest that Slovakia may be moving in the same direction[3].

5. Case 1: COVID-19 pandemic in Slovakia

After the unexpected victory in the parliamentary elections in February 2020, the new government, led by pro-European anti-corruption populist Igor Matovič, entered office in mid-March 2020 with a clear mandate to normalize the situation and correct the previous government's wrongdoings, especially in the areas of the rule of law, judiciary, corruption, and abuse of state institutions. However, a coherent program of reforms was not prepared. In mid-April 2020, the new government adopted its manifesto for 2020-2024, which demonstrated civil society's support in several areas. ("Programové vyhlásenie Vlády SR," 2020). The government made a commitment to the principles of active citizenship, open

[3] The welfare partnership model requires that the government allocate over 50% of its revenue to the nonprofit sector and that at least 4.5% of its workforce be employed in EAP.

government, and public participation in policymaking. It also expressed a clear intention to support mechanisms allowing access to information, volunteering, and private giving. Also, it committed to maintaining existing spaces for dialogue between civil society and the state. However, the pandemic coincided with the new cabinet taking office and posed a significant challenge. From the very beginning of the pandemic in Slovakia, a wave of solidarity has emerged among citizens, companies, and both organized and informal civil society groups. Slovakia has taken swift and decisive action to combat the spread of the virus. Thanks to its relatively slow uptake of infections, the country has been able to adopt stringent measures with minimal disruption. With some luck, Slovakia has navigated the first wave of the pandemic with a low incidence of cases and related fatalities.

5.1. Response of civil society

The response from civil society and the corporate sector was significant (Batková et al., 2020; Hlas, 2020). There were hundreds of initiatives producing and distributing face masks, as well as crowdfunding and fundraising efforts (for protective equipment to support health and social care facilities), totaling over € 6 million. There were also volunteer coordination and organization of support for lonely and vulnerable people (helping with food supplies, etc.), information and awareness-raising in marginalized communities (in Roma settlements, homeless, drug users). Civil society's efforts were also evident in activities that went beyond direct assistance provision. These initiatives included organizing spaces to identify solutions, hosting hackathons, and developing apps for prevention. Additionally, efforts were made to inform the general public, prevent hoaxes, and combat disinformation.

Many individuals from diverse backgrounds stepped up to contribute to fundraising calls and to volunteer for activities organized by civil society, offering their time, expertise, and support through the distribution of material supplies or care. Online fundraising tools were widely used, and the response was overwhelming, totaling over €6 million. The private sector has joined forces with civil society to run fundraising and assistance distribution initiatives (Kto pomôže Slovensku, 2020). The response was not limited to charitable and humanitarian aspects. Civil society activists and leaders were also engaged in policy advocacy and promoting innovation by seeking solutions to specific situations (Batková et al. 2020). Grassroots volunteers did more than just provide direct assistance. They also produced knowledge, including organizing spaces for solutions, developing apps for disease prevention, and taking action against hoaxes and disinformation.

Some domestic philanthropic institutions, such as corporate foundations, with flexible resources, have made notable changes to standard practices. Some repurposed budgets, while others topped existing budgets, established crisis funds to support the core costs of civil society organizations impacted by the pandemic, and adjusted conditions of existing contractual grant relationships (Nadácia Orange, 2020). Other existing domestic philanthropic institutions, especially independent intermediary grant-making foundations (Ekopolis Foundation, Pontis Foundation, Carpathian Foundation, Children of Slovakia Foundation, and others) and community foundations (CF Healthy City Banská Bystrica, Nitra Community Foundation), took the initiative to utilize their experience in grant-making practice and contacts with local-level partners to distribute financial resources to various non-profits whose activities were constrained by the pandemic, but whose beneficiaries' often urgent needs were left unaddressed.

5.2. Elements of collaborative governance

The COVID-19 crisis demonstrated that while state institutions must provide coordinated and robust support to mitigate the spread of infection, this is not sufficient. The public's cooperative and pro-social attitude was instrumental in the almost immediate change in population behavior, with the adoption of face masks and compliance with social distancing. These factors were crucial in preventing the pandemic from spreading widely.

The new situation also created a new context for the relations between the state and civil society. The government announced several compensation packages to support small and large businesses, including the First Aid Assistance Package and the Second Aid Assistance Package. However, they deliberately excluded civil society organizations. The nonprofit sector viewed this as clear evidence that the state prioritizes the business sector over the nonprofit sector. Despite these signs of neglect, civil society played a crucial complementary role in organizing and delivering assistance at the municipal and community levels.

In the first half of 2020, several CSO platforms, which were members of the Chamber of Nonprofit Nongovernmental Organizations, established a Coordinating Crisis Committee of the Nonprofit Sector. The Crisis Committee had 23 members eager to participate in 3 working groups. The working groups addressed three key areas: (a) Effectiveness of humanitarian assistance, (b) Impact of the pandemic on the CSO sector and the needs of CSOs, and (c) Cooperation of foundations, subsidies, and European funds. These groups developed their agenda and took the initiative to act upon it. The work was organized as a voluntary engagement, with a commitment from the organizations themselves, based on or affiliated with them. In response to the public debate about the government's response to the crisis, the Chamber has published a Memorandum titled "We shall overcome (the crisis) only together." The Memorandum demanded that the public and the government accept the support of nonprofit organizations in areas where they can deliver effective solutions based on multi-year experience and fieldwork. It also demanded that the government improve its communication with civil society organizations and ensure a more efficient flow of information among government units. The Crisis Committee wrote letters to the Ministry of Economy, the Minister of Labor, Social Affairs, and Family, and the Ministry of Finance on specific matters of CSOs' concern due to the impact of COVID-19, including proposals related to the income tax law to extend the time window during which the tax designation percentage can be used. (Ministry of Finance of Slovak Republic, 2020).

5.3. Policy initiatives by civil society to address the COVID-19 crisis

The Crisis Committee was drawing the government's attention to the contribution of nonprofit organizations. Based on input from dozens of contributors, a smaller team working with the Crisis Committee compiled a document called "The Contribution of Nonprofit Non-Governmental Organizations and Civic Initiatives to the Solution of Corona-Induced Crisis."

This document captured the nonprofit sector's response and contributions to the COVID-19 pandemic in Slovakia and organized them into 9 categories. a) Mobilization of private financial and in-kind resources, b) Mobilization and coordination of volunteers, c) Mental health counseling, d) Crisis intervention for battered women and children, e) Social services and support services for children and adults with health conditions, f) Community social work for endangered communities (low income groups, drug addicts, homeless), g) Humanitarian and social care support for marginalized Roma communities, h) Humanitarian and support services for marginalized migrant communities, i) Education, learning and leisure.

In each of these categories, the authors identified the specific contribution of nonprofit organizations, described the needs in each segment and/or group of beneficiaries, and pointed out areas of need that were neglected or inadequately addressed. They then proposed specific changes in practices and made a particular recommendation to government policy (Batková et al., 2020). However, the document focused only on specific, substantive thematic areas, and the cross-cutting issues relevant to civil society as a whole were not addressed. A second document was prepared with the title "Proposals for Measures Related to Non-Governmental, Nonprofit Organizations in the Context of the Coronavirus Crisis." This was a working document for comments. The document included dozens of proposals organized into two groups.

The first set of proposals addressed the immediate drop in income. They included ideas for repurposing and extending existing subsidies, as well as "first aid" measures that would benefit small businesses and employees. These measures should be made explicitly available to eligible nonprofits. They included the establishment of a fund to bridge the funding gaps caused by the lockdown and to compensate for the expected funding gap later in 2020 and 2021. The fund was proposed to be administered by independent Slovak foundations, not by a central government authority. This would allow for greater flexibility and access, and avoid the bureaucratic red tape that is typical of Slovak governmental agencies.

Regarding indirect support from public funds, it was proposed to postpone the mandatory payments for social insurance and qualify humanitarian assistance expenditures as tax-deductible from the corporate and individual income tax base. It was also proposed that the tax-exempt ceiling for unrelated earned income of nonprofit organizations be temporarily abolished to allow them to breathe and engage in other economic activities. Other sets of suggestions included proposals for long-term systemic measures to improve the resource environment for civil society.

The document also called for the immediate launch of a national volunteering scheme as the most effective way to further develop the nationwide network of volunteering centers and strengthen communities' resilience. Nonprofits were also proposing to modify various administrative regulations on the use of state subsidies to enable multi-year and core support funding from public funds, in contrast to the one-year and project-based funding that has been standardly used. The state responded to some of these proposals with some delay in the Action Plan for the Concept of Development of Civil Society for 2022-2026, adopted in September 2022, and maintained a passive and state-centered position overall.

6. Case 2: Russian aggression in Ukraine

Before the COVID-19 pandemic ended, another crisis emerged: the Russian War in Ukraine in February 2022. Since then approximately one million Ukrainians have crossed the Slovak-Ukrainian border, with the number of individuals remaining in Slovakia under temporary protection reaching 119,000 by April 2024 (Eurostat, 2024). In the initial weeks and months, this created a humanitarian crisis that prompted a response from the government, the private sector, and civil society. It included in-kind material support (food, urgent shelter, hygiene, medical support) and services (psycho-social, legal, transport, housing) that were needed primarily at the border and subsequently inside the country. Over time, the focus shifted to addressing the integration and inclusion needs of refugees, with a particular emphasis on women with children and the elderly.

6.1. Response of Slovak civil society

Immediately following the invasion, CSOs and the private sector played a crucial role in responding to the crisis. CSOs focused on providing assistance in three main areas: first, humanitarian support at the border with Ukraine, which was critical. Secondly, humanitarian aid was provided to refugees inside Slovakia. Thirdly, the inclusion of refugees and Ukrainians was facilitated through the provision of integration services, including social, educational, and employment services. The humanitarian support was financed through various public collections and crowdfunding drives ("Azylový dom pre Ukrajinu," 2022; "Kto pomôže Ukrajine," 2022; Človek v ohrození, n.d.) and private-sector contributions, as exemplified by Medvec (2022). A multitude of civic groups and initiatives were engaged in fundraising efforts to directly address the needs in Ukraine (Post Bellum SK, 2022). These efforts have been visible in the media and actively communicated. In addition to direct support, some civic initiatives offered know-how and ideas, which can also be considered a form of giving. They provided the government suggestions to improve and facilitate the integration of refugees into society (Teraz.sk, 2022).

By early April 2022, over 6,600 volunteers had been engaged, and over €11 million had been mobilized by various platforms and online giving systems for material, humanitarian, and health support to Ukraine through various collections and fundraising drives. By the end of February 2023, the total amount raised by non-governmental organizations from domestic sources (individuals and companies) had reached over €17 million, with over 7,000 volunteers participating in various forms of assistance. The material (in-kind) support exceeded 13,700 tons, while the monetary value of the volunteer work was estimated at €4.3 million (ÚSVROS, 2023). In addition, civil society engaged in advocacy for social change. Informal initiatives and CSOs organized demonstrations and marches in support of and solidarity with Ukraine, contributing to the public discourse and influencing public policies and government activities through communicative action. Another area of CSOs' activity was combating disinformation of anti-systemic and extremist politicians and influencers.

These activities were important because, according to comparative indices, Slovakia is less open and welcoming to immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. The Migration Integration Policy Index (MIPEX) assessment of Slovakia indicates that policies that treat immigrants as threats lead more people to perceive immigrants as threats in general and to treat them in ways that harm integration. The implementation of restrictive policies has been associated with elevated levels of xenophobia and Islamophobia among the general public, accompanied by a reduction in social trust. This has resulted in a reduction in contact and positive experiences with immigrants (MIPEX, 2020).[4]

6.2. Response by the state

In response, the state implemented policy and regulatory adjustments pertaining to the provision of assistance to refugees and the utilization of existing recovery instruments from the ongoing COVID-19 crisis to address a novel challenge. In response to the influx of individuals from Ukraine, the state initiated a project entitled "Assistance to Persons from Ukraine in Their Entry and Integration on the Territory of the Slovak Republic – Local Government." Nevertheless, the primary focus of state activity was directed towards local governments, which were the most vulnerable and overwhelmed. The program provided support to municipalities in the provision of housing, employment assistance, and social and health care services, with the objective of addressing the needs of refugees. The financial resources were not derived from the state budget, but rather from the European Social Fund and the European Regional Development Fund. (Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Family 2022)

The work of NGOs was of great importance for the immediate management of the crisis at the border with Ukraine and for later integration of refugees. However, there was no state mechanism in place to finance these organizations' activities. Consequently, both civil society organizations and local governments financed these activities from their own resources or from contributions from international development organizations (e.g., UNHCR, UNICEF).

In 2023, a new project was initiated with the title "Assistance to Persons from Ukraine in Their Entry and Integration on the Territory of the Slovak Republic - NGOs." This initiative was a collaborative effort between the Slovak state and the civil sector in response to the crisis. It was developed through a process of cooperation between various public authorities, including the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family, the Office of the Plenipotentiary for the Development of Civil Society, the Ministry of the Interior, and representatives from the non-governmental sector[5]. The project funding was specifically allocated to NGOs to offset a portion of the costs they have incurred since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, which have continued to accrue in 2023 for work with refugees from Ukraine. A total of €9.5 million in funding was provided to 110 NGOs and church-established organizations, which employed

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[4] The period since February 2022 has been remarkable by the growing confrontation and polarization of narratives regarding the War, its causes, and the attribution of responsibility for it. The fragmentation of the public discourse due to the influence of social media becoming the news source contributed to shaping public opinion. 69% of Slovaks believe that Ukrainian refugees receive support at the expense of Slovak citizens from weaker and socially vulnerable, that need it more. 59% believe that Slovakia needs to continue supporting Ukrainian refugees because they are fleeing the war. (Globsec, 2023)

[5] The project was implemented by a consortium of six independent foundations. The leader of the consortium was the Open Society Foundation Bratislava and its members were the SOCIA Foundation, the Foundation for Children of Slovakia, the Ekopolis Foundation, the Pontis Foundation and the Foundation of the Centre for Philanthropy. The foundations redistributed funding money to other organisations that have helped refugees from Ukraine.

1,700 individuals and assisted 72,000 individuals on a monthly basis. (OSF, 2024). The project represented a singular opportunity to recover funds for past endeavors to assist Ukrainian refugees, while simultaneously expanding its scope and enhancing the quality of future integration activities.

6.3. Elements of collaborative governance

In November 2022, the Minister of the Interior signed a MoU with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to provide assistance in addressing the emergency situation in Ukraine. The rationale for the Memorandum's enactment was the experience gained during the initial stages of the crisis in early 2022. Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, several deficiencies became evident that the state was ill-prepared to address. The Memorandum delineated the respective roles and responsibilities of the Ministry of the Interior and NGOs, including the coordination and provision of humanitarian assistance, the recruitment, training, and coordination of volunteers, material and technical assistance from the Ministry, and the sharing of information on individual activities and plans that are aligned with the government contingency plan adopted in October 2022 (Ministry of Interior of Slovak Republic, 2022). The plan identified areas where the role, responsibility, and required capacity of NGOs are delineated and described in the context of a crisis situation at border crossings, points of initial contact, or the "last mile" (Vláda SR, 2022). The Memorandum was signed by humanitarian and developmental aid organizations, including five church-based organizations (ADRA, the Slovak Samaritans Association, People in Peril, n.o., Evangelical Diakonia ECAV in Slovakia, IPčko, Maltese Aid Slovakia, Mareena, Slovak Humanitarian Council, Slovak Catholic Charity and Slovak Scouting, o. z.).

7. Discussion

Some studies have found convergence between Central and Eastern European countries and former Soviet Union countries, as both embrace government-NGO partnerships, despite their different post-communist development trajectories. While some countries move towards welfare partnerships with broadly defined frameworks and corporatist elements, other East European countries strengthen the role of government by defining the common good more strictly and limit the autonomy of civil society organizations in defining it. (Aasland et al., 2020; Cook, 2015). This is the case in Slovakia as well.

By reviewing hypothesis H1, it can be concluded that Slovakia’s pattern of civil society development has indeed strengthened its hybrid features, combining statist approaches, but it is not moving towards welfare partnership patterns, a stronger service function, or heavy government support, as the analysis of the macro-level suggested. Even if the rising share of public income in nonprofit sector revenue over the last 10-15 years indicates a strengthening trend in government-NGO partnerships, the nonprofit employment growth between 2010 and 2019 was minimal and did not align with the increase in government funding. The stagnant, slightly declining levels of volunteering on EAP indicate that the propensity to volunteer has reached its peak. Low levels of volunteering and employment are typical of a statist pattern. Furthermore, even if the government’s funding share in the nonprofit sector income was rising in both absolute and relative terms, the overall share of the nonprofit sector on the country's total consumption remained limited and small (Strecansky, 2020)**.** Slovakia is thus not moving towards the welfare partnership because other necessary components (a more robust employment share) are missing. Cook's insight may be correct by proposing that the accession process transposed the welfare partnership model of Salamon to new member states of CEE – including Slovakia, due to their overall Eurocentric nature. (Cook, 2015). However, in Slovakia, the underlying structures and patterns shape the overall outcome, which appears hybrid and mixed with strong statist patterns.

On the hypothesis H2 that the crises led the PA to greater flexibility in its engagement with civil society, using the NPM repertoire, it can be concluded that it is partially confirmed. It was shown that there are higher levels of contracting, performance-based management, increased resource flows, and new mechanisms of coordination and governance. However, the strength of each of these elements varies and has not been convincing. The levels of contracting and its volume have increased, but there is little data to suggest that it will grow further. New mechanisms of coordination and governance have been developed during the second crisis, but their continuation remains an open question. The analysis did not review the performance-based management in the contractual relations.

The review of the actions of civil society during both crises shows that civil society in Slovakia performed the following functions based on its own, bottom-up initiative:

a) providing assistance and services to vulnerable populations (a variety of social services, call centers, distribution of material support, food, shelter, first contact, orientation)
b) mobilizing resources (financial, material, in-kind, services, people, coordination of volunteers)
c) raising awareness (cognitive landscape)
d) promoting social cohesion (for example, by integration support, combating erosion of public trust, supporting self-help of refugees in communities)

Civil society plays a crucial role during crises, as evidenced by research across various contexts. The pandemic crisis stimulated government-nonprofit cooperation in all nonprofit regimes. (Benevolenski et al., 2023). In the refugee crisis, civil society actors and volunteers are essential in maintaining humanitarian standards and effective crisis management (Simsa, 2017).

In Slovakia, hundreds of CSOs and many private sector entities were engaged in these activities. Philanthropic and civil society responses had a distinct social presence and visibility in the media. This finding is not unique. Crises galvanize civil society to express its self-organizing potential and agility. The self-organizing potential of civil society expressed itself through establishment of temporary coordination bodies (The Crisis Committee of the Non-Profit Sector during the Covid crisis) allowing to formulate positions and demands towards other societal partners (PA, government officials) and to be engaged in policy advocacy in crisis related agendas (suggestions for improvements of existing policies, drawing attention to impacts on civil society).

Civil society organizations that self-organized in response to the COVID-19 crisis can be viewed as nodes within a relatively horizontal network. The civil society network's past connections provided its actors with trust and social capital that enhance its performance, even if the network's structural characteristics (in its macro-level socioeconomic parameters) were not conducive to effective performance. The civil society network interacted with other networks – one being the public administration at national and local levels, others being communities in different areas who benefited from services and activities, and others being volunteers and other collaborators. Government institutions, as networks, have also interacted with civil society actors during the crisis, and these interactions have produced policy and development outcomes.

CSOs have called for a collaborative governance approach, but the government has not provided a clear response. CSOs also formed an inter-organizational coalition that acts as an institutional entrepreneur, through which new patterns of governance emerge (Ohanyan, 2012). Civil society's collaborative organizing and engagement in policy dialogue with the government have also strengthened its agency. The case study revealed that collaborative governance mechanisms emerged during the second crisis (Memorandum) rather than during the first. It is difficult to determine whether this shift can be attributed to institutional learning, personal preferences, political leadership (there was a change in the cabinet and the PM), or to some other underlying factor.

Reviewing the hypothesis H2 that crises catalyzed processes leading the PA to greater flexibility in using the NPM repertoire in its engagement with civil society, addressing the new situation, the findings are conclusive, although not strong.

The approach of 'network institutionalism' views the realm of CSOs as a network of state and non-state actors that interact and influence each other, thereby increasing their effectiveness. Borrowing from that suggestion, it can be applied to the case of Slovak civil society organizations in the context of this article, helping to view the increased self-organization of civil society despite being conducted in a social and political context marked by the residues of the statist pattern. The self-organization of civil society during the COVID-19 crisis can also be seen as an outcome of previous network relations that enhanced trust and facilitated information and resource flows, thereby improving the network's performance. As a result, the civil society agency was embedded in the institutional network environment (Ohanyan, 2012).

8. Conclusions

Slovakia remains constrained by a statist approach to policymaking, implementation, and the dominance of the service delivery system. (Osborne, 2006). The relatively low levels of government funding in the nonprofit sector's income (given the nonprofit sector's small share of the economy) may have contributed to the state's neglect of civil society, but they may also have restrained welfare production. The relationship between the state and civil society in Slovakia can be described as one that has persistent elements of statism and weak elements of welfare partnership.

In a statist system, the state administration assumes a dominant role, maintaining control, centralizing power, and functioning as a hierarchical network. This is as much a problem of political leadership, political culture, and state formation in East Central Europe as it is a characteristic of public administration. The politicization and centralization of public administration in post-communist Central Europe increased rent-seeking (Grzymala-Busse, 2003) and hindered the advancement of innovative governance strategies for welfare provision, despite efforts by civil society organizations.

Interactions between organized civil society and the state suggest that the Slovak PA has been embedded in a hybrid NPM paradigm, which continues to employ centralized, top-down approaches to governance while promoting evidence-based decision-making and business-style management. (Salamon and Toepler, 2015). However, it is hesitant to move towards a more complementary relationship with the non-state actors. It struggles with the bottom-up, pluralistic approaches of the new version of the NPM and the new governance paradigm (Osborne, 2006). The new governance paradigm views public management (policymaking, service delivery) as a collaborative process within pluralistic networks (Brandsen et al., 2017), drawing on a flexible, holistic toolbox. Despite the EU's encouragement of a partnership approach to public sector management, these practices have only recently begun to emerge.

The statist tendencies in public governance are in an asynchronous relationship with the self-organizing capacity and agility of civil society, which emerged especially during crises. The case presented above can be understood as the interaction of the structural pattern (hybrid statism) in interaction with the autopoietic and social-relational characteristics (Granovetter, 2017) of the networked civil society, both of which, in combination, generate civil society sector agency. The crisis created opportunities that the networked civil society could have embraced; however, it was unable to fully develop them due to structural constraints.

Further investigation is needed to understand why increased government funding does not result in higher employment levels and why volunteering levels are declining. A deeper analysis of the EU funding conditionality may also provide some clues. Another issue is the quality of the data from the national accounts.

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You belong with me
Empirical research on normative distance between faculty and fundraisers[1]

Aline Tanno (University of St.Gallen)

Abstract

In times of declining public funding, fundraising is vital also for public universities. Collaboration of fundraisers and faculty members has been found crucial to improving fundraising results: Faculty members have a high level of legitimacy to advocate for the university, numerous contacts with prospects and have relevant knowledge on the case for support. However, collaboration of faculty and fundraisers often proves challenging: faculty members find working with fundraisers time-consuming and ineffective, whereas fundraisers feel hindered by status differentials. How can this crucial collaboration be improved? I address this question in my qualitative study via three in depth-case studies in the US, UK/Ireland and Switzerland. To this end, I build on organizational distance theory, i.e. the distance that arises between groups due to organizational conditions, and social distance theory, or more precisely, normative distance, i.e. the perceived distance between the two groups. First, my qualitative study finds that the impact of organizational distance on collaboration beats that of social distance. Second, it shows that semi-decentrally organized fundraising is more successful than central or decentral fundraising structures. Third, it contributes to the comparative analysis of philanthropy that is underexplored in current philanthropy scholarship.

Keywords: Fundraising, higher education, social distance, collaboration, fundraisers, faculty

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1. Introduction

Successful collaboration of faculty and fundraisers is crucial for fundraising results, for good reasons: Faculty members have a high level of legitimacy when advocating for the university (Weinstein & Barden, 2017), numerous contacts via service contracts who can be approached for fundraising (Eddy, 2010; Shaker, 2015), and relevant knowledge for targeting and communicating funding projects because of their insights and needs (Elliott, 2006; Shaker, 2015). Thus, convincing faculty to collaborate is an important task of fundraisers. Nevertheless, many fundraisers find it difficult (Pray, 1981). Yet, how can collaboration be improved? Should it be addressed at the level of the actors? Should fundraisers make more of an effort to engage with faculty members? Or should faculty members be contractually obliged to support the institution, e.g. via fundraising? Or is it an organizational question at universities, such as the optimal reporting line for fundraising staff; should fundraising be organized centrally or decentrally – or in a mixed form?

The first level of this study is that of the actors. Fundraisers serve as a support service for the organization, they are not involved in direct value creation as is faculty. Furthermore, they are subject to clear hierarchies: in expert organizations, experts have a higher status and more power than non-experts (Mintzberg, 1979). Fundraisers are exposed to faculty members who enjoy considerable autonomy and power at the university. While some universities, e.g. in the United States, require commitment to the institution via certain service components in their work contracts, faculty members at most universities enjoy considerable freedom from instruction, which is based on the fundamental principle of freedom of research and teaching (Karran, 2009; Vrielink, Lemmens & Parmentier, 2011). This imbalance of power between faculty and fundraisers reflects on their collaboration: if faculty members are unwilling, fundraisers have little leverage to demand their contribution (Svenningsen-Berthélem, Boxenbaum & Ravasi, 2018).

The collaboration between the actors takes place within the university organization. The second level of this study therefore also deals with organizational considerations. When fundraising is decentrally organized, fundraisers work more closely with faculty members. However, fundraising outcomes then mainly benefit decentralized units, and less so the institution at large. Some universities have therefore decided to organize fundraising centrally (von Schnurbein & Fritz, 2014). This enables them to link the organization's strategic priorities directly to fundraising efforts. Yet, this form of organization can make collaboration between fundraisers and faculty more difficult. Research has dealt with this issue in detail (Eddy, 2010; Elliott, 2006; Shaker, 2015; Weinstein & Barden, 2017). To the best of my knowledge, however, there are no studies that examine the respective perceptions of faculty members and fundraisers.

The third level this study addresses is societal. As research shows, culture impacts fundraising results: Countries with a higher institutionalization of philanthropy are likely to realize higher fundraising donations (Wiepking et al., 2021). When it comes to raising funds for higher education, the perception of responsibility for higher education also plays an important role in the acceptance of fundraising for universities: As Haibach explains, the decisive factor is whether the financing of education is perceived as a public or private task (1998). In the US, fundraising for higher education dates back to the 1930s (Burk, 2013). In Europe, on the other hand, the structural and strategic orientation of university fundraising has been largely lacking to date, because universities here are traditionally financed mainly by public funds (Pérez-Esparrells & Torre 2012: 56; von Schnurbein & Fritz 2014). Due to cultural differences, American approaches cannot simply be copied across into European situations. Instead, it is necessary to formulate European approaches. Learnings from the U.S. can serve as an important guide in this process.

In this qualitative study, I draw from organizational distance as well as social distance theories. Data was collected in three in-depth public university case studies: one in the U.S. with high, one in in Switzerland with low, and a third one in UK/Ireland with medium level of fundraising success. 24 semi-structured interviews with faculty members and fundraisers and a keyword-sorting inspired by William Stephenson were conducted. This way, both the organizational as well as the social distance dimension was captured.

The contributions of this study are threefold, both theory- and practice-related: Regarding the former, while contributing to research on social distance, the study also contributes to the comparative analysis of philanthropy that is underexplored in current philanthropy scholarship. Practice-related, I show that the quality of collaboration depends primarily on organizational conditions that can only be changed to a limited extent by the actors involved. Second, the study shows that fundraising organized in a half-decentralized setting beats both centrally as well as decentrally organized fundraising in public universities.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: In the next section, I point to the relevance of distances in organizations and the respective theory with focus on organizational and normative distance as part of social distance. What follows is the methodology section; then, the case selection and data collection are presented and explained. The results section provides a summary of the findings of the study, which are discussed in the subsequent section. The study concludes with practical pieces of advice for university management on how to improve the collaboration of fundraisers and faculty members.

2. Theory: Distances in organizations

Social space between humans can be physical or cultural. It includes “the extent to which people experience a sense of familiarity (nearness and intimacy) or unfamiliarity (farness and difference) between themselves and people belonging to different social, ethnic, occupational, and religious groups from their own” (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2014). Distances within organizations determine the quality of collaboration between actors. It is generally presumed that distances within organizations have a negative impact on information flows and collaboration (Akerlof, 1997; Dolfsma & van der Ejki, 2016), while proximity has a positive effect, which is expressed in propinquity (Byrne, 1961; Napier & Ferris, 1993; Triandis, 1960).

Research has identified many different dimensions of distance in organizations. This has also led to some confusion in terminology. Among other things, research distinguishes between organizational distance, i.e. distance between different units (Dolfsma & van der Ejik, 2016), hierarchical distance (Banet et al., 1976; Napier & Ferris, 1993), functional distance, i.e. for instance the distance between headquarters and affiliates (Alessandrini et al., 2009), cultural distance (Hofstede et al., 2010), psychological distance or social distance, the physical or personal distance between actors (Karakayali, 2009). Actors are exposed to a combination of them, which are determined by organizational factors such as hierarchy or number of units. Others, such as elements of social distance, can be influenced by actors. This raises the question of whether collaboration can be improved by changing certain elements of social distance. In relation to fundraisers, this could mean, for example, that if they try to make a concerted effort to get to know the faculty, they would actively reduce social distance. This study will examine whether this approach has a productive effect on collaboration or whether collaboration depends primarily on organizational distance.

2.1. Organizational distance

The specialization of organizations leads to the formation of individual departments or units (Blau, 1970). However, this can have a negative impact on collaboration across units by hindering the flow of information (Reagans & McEvily, 2003). Dolfsma and van der Ejik refer to this type of distance as "organizational distance" (2016). Gatekeepers and boundary spanners are personnel to overcome barriers within organizations (Tushman, 1977).

Research on higher education fundraising has debated intensely whether fundraising should be centralized or set up in decentral units (Haibach, 2008; Tanno, 2019; von Schnurbein & Fritz, 2014; Weinstein & Barden, 2017; Worth, 2017). The decentralization of fundraising carries with it the risk of a lack of coordination: donors may be contacted by different departments at the same time (Weinstein & Barden, 2017), which may ultimately lead to a reduction of the donated amounts (Haibach, 2008). This is probably the reason why most universities recently swapped to centralizing their fundraising departments (Von Schnurbein & Fritz, 2014). Yet, for the collaboration with faculty, a decentralized approach seems more promising than a centralized one (Worth, 2017). For my study, I therefore chose three different organizational settings of fundraising departments: One decentralized, one centralized, and one in a mixed setting.

2.2. Social distance

The concept of social distance originates from Simmel's 1908 text "Space and the Spatial Orders of Society" (1983). I define it according to Magee and Smith (2013: 159) as "a subjective perception or experience form of another person or persons". Simmel explains that social interactions are both embedded in outer and inner space in parallel, not necessarily in a synchronized manner: Thus, inner closeness is possible despite external distance (Simmel, 1983: 482). Simmel goes one step further emphasizing that distance can also be constitutive of closeness, as is shown by the example of friendship: "There are probably very few relationships of friendship which do not interweave some kind of distancing into their closeness" (1983: 483). Park supplements the two spaces with four dimensions of (inner) distance - affective, normative, interactive and cultural distance (1924). Research posits that distances influence each other (Karakayali, 2009; Lopez, 2021). However, empirical studies of this presumption are currently lacking. For my study, the normative distance is particularly relevant: It is based on "collectively recognized norms about membership status in a group" (Karakayali 2009: 541). Norms determine membership of social systems in different degrees and thus structure collaboration (Karakayali, 2009). Norms are supra-individual but must be subjectively reflected at the actor level, probably affecting the affective distance between actors. If norms contradict subjective feelings of belonging, either norms or groups will lose their very existence (Karakayali, 2009).

If we apply Simmel's finding on the asymmetry of distance to these two social distances, it becomes clear that actors must navigate a network of distance relationships. The right balance between proximity and distance is crucial for collaboration: "In the distant relationship understanding is lost; in the close relationship the professional loses his objectivity" (Kadushin, 1962: 517). In general, scholars tend to conceptualize the dimensions of social distance as symmetric between actors (Simmel, 1983; Karakayali, 2009). However, there is no compelling reason to presume this in general. It is precisely a specific feature of social distance that it depends on the perception of the actors. This almost inevitably implies that two actors perceive the distance between themselves differently. Magee and Smith (2013) for instance show that perceived distance between actors is related to their power position: Powerful actors tend to perceive their counterparts as more distant, whereas powerless actors perceive themselves as closer to their counterparts.

3. Method

To answer the research question, it was necessary to compare normative and organizational distances with each other. This required a method that could operationalize both types of distance. To this end, I used Stephenson's Q-Sort technique (1956), which I adapted slightly. Q-sort asks individuals to sort keywords according to their stated preferences. It allows for various instructions to be given before sorting (Müller and Kals, 2004). Thus, in the present research, it was possible to carry out the sorting twice with the same subjects but with different instructions.

Q-Sort sorts a selection of items according to certain criteria such as attitude or thinking behavior (Stephenson, 1956). Developed in the 1960s, the method has been used in behavioral sciences and business management (Furnham, 1990; Chatman, 1991; Sung and Choi, 2018). In Q-Sort, many items are sorted interdependently by a small number of participants (Stephenson, 1956). Müller and Kals distinguished between naturalistic, ready-made, and standardized Q-samples according to the origin of the statement (2004). The keywords used in this study were developed by two experts as naturalistic Q-samples. Each keyword was printed on a sorting card with its definition on the back to increase the consistency of understanding among respondents.

In its original form, the Q-Sort technique requires participants to sort keywords or statements according to their preferences on at least 10 levels (Stephenson, 1956). I slightly modified this method for the present research. I had participants rank the keywords top-down in a pyramid configuration, with five priority levels of decreasing relevance. One keyword was to be put on the first level, three on the second, five on the third, seven on the fourth, and nine on the fifth. This resulted in a maximum contrast of the top keywords, which could then be compared between actors. Additionally, this made the sorting easier for participants because the distribution was intuitively understandable. I used a five-point ordinal scale, which was both easy to complete for the participants and at the same time provided sufficiently detailed data for the subsequent analysis.

This study compares organizational distance with normative distance between the actors. My study evolved in three steps. Step one: Sorting of the keywords by participants according to the relevance to their own daily work. A comparison of the two groups revealed how different their activities are, i.e. their organizational distance. In Step two I then used the same method to determine the normative distance: Here I asked the participants to sort the keywords according to their expected relevance for the daily work of the other group. In the second round, the fundraisers sorted from the perspective of the faculty members and the faculty members sorted from the perspective of the fundraisers. A comparison with the sorting in the first round shows how close the actors feel to each other, i.e. their normative distance. This yields two distance values per relationship – instead of only one had social distance been conceptualized symmetrically. In Step three of the analysis, I then compared the normative distance with the organizational distance between the actors.

3.1. Case selection

According to Yin, cases should either yield the same results or contradictory theoretical results that are predictable (2018). Cases were selected by holding the variable of sponsorship constant; culture of the institution, organization, the power and age of the fundraising department comprised the dependent variables.

Sponsorship: The relevance of fundraising departments is much greater in private than in public universities. In public universities, funds generated through fundraising are mainly used for strategic priorities and not daily operations, thus only supplementing public funding. Therefore, the power differential between fundraisers and faculty members is particularly large in public universities. For consistency, in this study, only public business universities were selected for case studies.

Culture: Research has shown that fundraising underlies cultural and institutional impacts (Wiepking et al., 2021). To take this into account, three business schools were selected as institutions that are comparable between themselves but located in different countries: In the U.S., in UK/Ireland and in Switzerland.

Organization: The organization of the fundraising department has a strong effect on how fundraisers work with the faculty. It is of great interest to practitioners, especially university management, to thoughtfully position fundraising departments within the university organization. Therefore, three cases with different fundraising organizations were selected for this study: one fully centralized, one fully decentralized and one mixed.

Fundraising success: As research shows, fundraising success is a result of the effective collaboration between faculty and fundraising (Weinstein & Barden, 2017; Eddy, 2010; Shaker, 2015; Elliott, 2006). Thus, I used the portion of the overall university budget attributable to fundraising proceeds as a proxy for the quality of collaboration of the fundraisers with the faculty. Care was taken to select cases with different proportions of the university budget coming from fundraising.

Age of the fundraising department: It can be assumed that the duration of fundraising efforts influences how they are perceived by the faculty. Therefore, three universities were chosen whose fundraising departments had been in existence for different lengths of time. The youngest fundraising department also had the least fundraising budget share, while the oldest department had the highest.

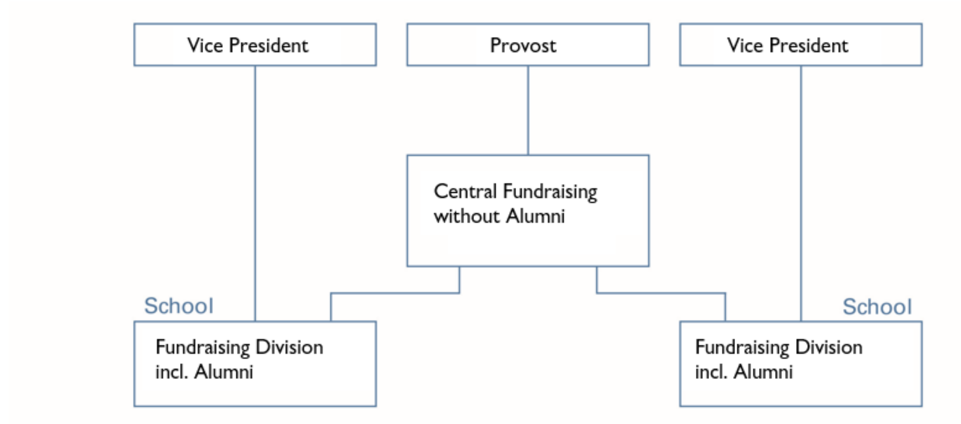
Case 1

Case Study 1 was a medium-sized US-university (15,000 to 25,000 students). The university had at that time been involved in fundraising for over 30 years. Five years prior, the university had undergone a major organizational change. The Business School was reorganized and brought under new management. This also had major consequences for its fundraising. The university had a total budget eight times larger than that of the Case 2 university, which had the second-largest budget of the three universities studied here. The Case 1 share of budget coming from fundraising was the largest of the universities studied, around 10%.

The organization of fundraising, which also includes alumni relations, presents itself in a mixed form: Certain simpler tasks such as thanking donors, organizing events and the like are handled centrally, while contact with donors is decentralized. The fundraisers report to the respective vice presidents as well as to the central fundraising department, which in turn reports to the provost, also an academic position. This leads to a double subordination for the decentralized fundraisers.

The decentralized fundraisers share office space with the fundraisers of other departments and those fundraising for the university as a whole. They maintain a close exchange with all their colleagues and with the dean of the school, but not with the faculty, which is quite surprising given their organizational anchoring.

Figure 1. Mixed organized fundraising in case 1

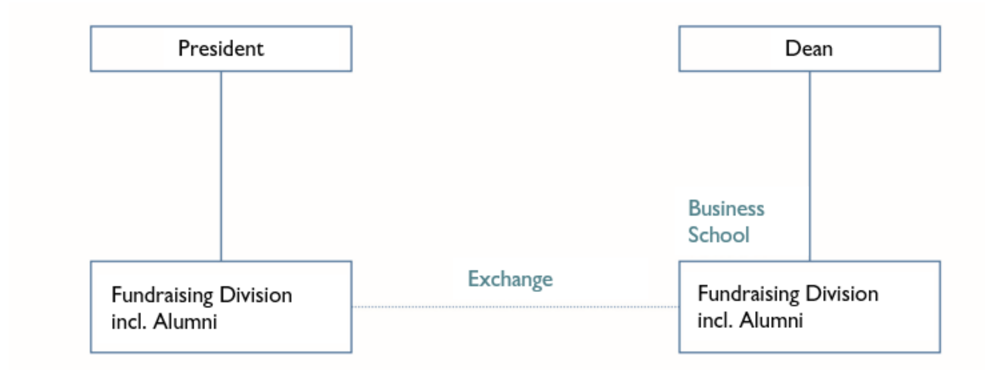


Case 2

The university in Case Study 2 is based in UK/Ireland and was the largest of the three universities studied here (25,000 to 35,000 students). Their fundraising office had a history of more than 20 years. During that time, there had been minor reorganizations and leadership changes, but none that were fundamental. The budget was about one-eighth that of the Case 1 university and twice that of the school in Case 3. The share of the budget raised through fundraising efforts was less than 5%.

Fundraising for the Business school differs significantly from fundraising for other schools at the university: the Business School's fundraising, including alumni relations, is organized completely decentrally, reports to the dean of the Business School and is strongly oriented towards its own organizational unit, while contacts with central fundraising are rare. The other fundraisers of the university are centrally organized and report to the President. The fundraisers of the business school have their offices in the same building as the faculty members, with whom they work closely together.

Figure 2. Decentrally organized fundraising in case 2

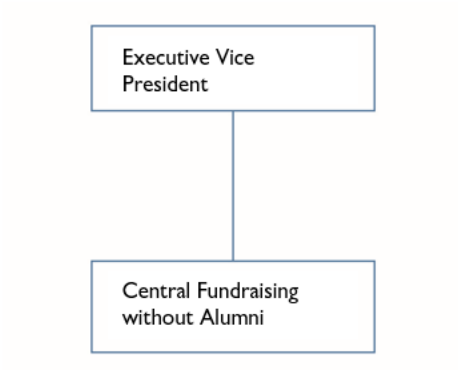


Case 3

Case Study 3, the Swiss university, was the smallest of the three universities (5,000 to 15,000 students). Until 12 years previous, all fundraising activity was done by faculty members. At that time, a central fundraising office was created. After that point, there was very little collaboration with the faculty. The faculty, however, also continued to carry out its own fundraising efforts. The budget for this university was the smallest of the three, about half the size of the next highest (Case 2). The share of funds raised via fundraising, including those raised by faculty members, was less than 5%.

The faculty of this school generates the largest share of third-party funds through practice collaborations. The fundraisers' workplaces are on campus, but in a different building from the faculty. Fundraising reports to the Executive Vice President, which is the highest ranking non-academic position in the university hierarchy.

Figure 3. Centrally organized fundraising in case 3



3.2. Data collection

A total of 24 interviews were conducted, eight per case study. Four fundraisers and four faculty members were interviewed per case. For the sake of completeness, all seniority levels were covered for both fundraisers and faculty members. Organizational settings are reflected in participants of both central and decentral fundraising departments: At the two universities with decentralized and mixed fundraising structures, I interviewed fundraisers from both centralized and decentralized fundraising departments, whereas at the university with centralized fundraising, I was only able to interview centralized fundraisers.

Table 1. Number of interview partners per function

Functions	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3
Decentral fundraiser	2	1	
Decentral fundraising manager		1	
Central fundraiser	1		1
Central fundraising manager	1	2	3
Junior faculty member	1	1	
Senior faculty member	2	1	2
Senior faculty member, university manager	1	2	1
Senior faculty member, former university manager			1

4. Results

4.1. Step 1: Organisational distance

First, the self-perceptions of the two groups were assessed in the three cases. To do this, I add up the ranks (1-5) that a keyword received. Keywords with low sums are thereby more significant, while keywords with higher sums are less important. The additions were made per case and across cases. Thus, I determine the profiles of the groups. By comparing them, I can measure the organizational distance between the two groups in the three cases. I therefore formed the difference of the absolute amounts, again, per case and across cases. It shows, the two groups differ significantly in all three cases.

The greatest differences were found in the keywords Relevance to practice, Relationship management, Freedom of research and teaching, Third-party funding, Scientific publications, Teaching and Ensuring the financial resources of the university with a numerical deviation of 18 to 25. The groups rate the following as most similar: University self-government, Conferences, Collegiality, Truth, Reputation, and Professionalism with a deviation of 1 to 4.

My study also allows for evaluation on a case-by-case basis, enabling comparison between institutions. Organisational distance is lowest in Case 1 at 60, followed by Case 2 at 78, and highest in Case 3 at 92.

Table 2. Values per keyword per case and in total

	Self-Perceptions per Case, in total and in difference									Normative distance per Case, in total and in difference									
Keywords	Fundraiser				Faculty				|Δ|	Fundraisers to Faculty					Faculty to Fundraisers				
	1	2	3	∑	1	2	3	∑		1	2	3	∑	|Δ|	1	2	3	∑	|Δ|
Talent development	14	14	16	**44**	14	13	11	**38**	6	17	18	18	**53**	15	19	18	14	**51**	7
University self-governance	19	20	16	**55**	20	17	17	**54**	1	16	18	15	**49**	5	18	19	18	**55**	0
Relevance to practice	20	19	20	**59**	12	16	13	**41**	18	15	17	11	**43**	2	16	13	11	**40**	19
Conferences	20	19	17	**56**	20	19	19	**58**	2	18	14	16	**48**	10	20	20	19	**59**	3
Relationship Management	9	9	10	**28**	15	15	19	**49**	21	19	17	15	**51**	2	12	9	15	**36**	8
Collegiality	14	14	15	**43**	15	14	16	**45**	2	17	18	19	**54**	9	16	18	19	**53**	10
Freedom of Research and Teaching	19	20	16	**55**	11	10	12	**33**	22	6	10	11	**27**	6	18	19	16	**53**	2
Knowledge	16	16	17	**49**	14	12	13	**39**	10	8	10	13	**31**	8	18	15	15	**48**	1
Truth	12	10	13	**35**	12	13	14	**39**	4	18	18	17	**53**	14	19	19	19	**57**	22
Organizational robustness	15	16	15	**46**	17	19	19	**55**	9	18	19	19	**56**	1	18	16	13	**47**	1
Equal opportunities	15	16	17	**48**	15	20	17	**52**	4	17	17	19	**53**	1	20	18	18	**56**	8
Compliance with rules	15	17	11	**43**	17	19	19	**55**	12	19	19	18	**56**	1	17	19	16	**52**	9
Reputation	13	13	17	**43**	13	15	14	**42**	1	11	15	8	**34**	8	12	12	18	**42**	1
Own income	18	16	19	**53**	14	16	16	**46**	7	19	18	10	**47**	1	14	17	19	**50**	3
Third-Party funding	9	14	11	**34**	19	17	18	**54**	20	17	15	14	**46**	8	10	10	10	**30**	4
Scientific publications	20	20	19	**59**	17	8	9	**34**	25	11	12	13	**36**	2	20	16	20	**56**	3
Teaching	18	19	20	**57**	15	12	9	**36**	21	9	7	17	**33**	3	17	19	17	**53**	4
Professionalism	16	12	13	**41**	15	12	13	**40**	1	13	17	14	**44**	4	13	15	15	**43**	2
University cohesion	18	15	14	**47**	18	18	20	**56**	9	19	18	20	**57**	1	14	19	15	**48**	1
Ensuring the financial resources of the university	8	13	16	**37**	16	19	20	**55**	18	19	17	20	**56**	1	5	11	8	**24**	13
University positioning	16	12	14	**42**	15	18	16	**49**	7	18	10	17	**45**	4	8	6	8	**22**	20
Total amount									**220**					**106**					**141**

4.2. Step 2: Normative distance

In the second step, normative distance was measured. Additionally, it was compared to the organizational distance in the first sorting round. The normative distance for fundraisers (106) is significantly lower than that for faculty (141). The cases show that the normative distance varies between 56 and 70. It is greatest among fundraisers in Case 1 (70) and smallest among both groups in Case 2 (56 each). Fundraisers (58) and faculty members (63) of Case 3 lie in between.

Table 3. Organizational and normative distances per case

Keywords	Case 1			Case 2			Case 3		
	|Org. distance|	|Norm. Distance Fundraiser-Faculty|	|Norm. Distance Faculty-Fundraiser|	|Org. distance|	|Norm. Fundraiser-Faculty|	|Norm. Distance Faculty-Fundraiser|	|Org. distance|	|Norm. Distance Fundraiser-Faculty|	|Norm. Distance Faculty-Fundraiser|
Talent development	0	3	5	1	5	4	5	7	2
University self-governance	1	4	1	3	1	1	1	2	2
Relevance to practice	8	3	4	1	1	6	7	2	9
Conferences	0	2	0	0	5	1	2	3	2
Relationship Management	6	4	3	6	2	0	9	4	5
Collegiality	1	2	2	0	2	4	1	3	4
Freedom of Research and Teaching	8	5	1	10	4	1	4	1	0
Knowledge	2	6	2	4	0	1	4	0	2
Truth	0	6	7	3	2	9	1	3	6
Organizational robustness	2	1	3	3	5	0	4	0	2
Equal opportunities	0	2	5	4	0	2	0	2	1
Compliance with rules	2	2	2	2	2	2	8	1	5
Reputation	0	2	1	2	0	1	3	6	1
Own income	4	5	4	0	2	1	3	6	0
Third-Party funding	10	2	1	3	2	4	7	4	1
Scientific publications	3	6	0	12	4	4	10	4	1
Teaching	3	6	1	7	5	0	11	8	3
Pro-fessionalism	1	2	3	0	5	3	0	1	2
University cohesion	0	1	4	3	0	4	6	0	1
Ensuring the financial resources of the university	8	3	3	6	2	2	4	0	8

University positioning	1	3	8	6	8	6	2	1	6
Total amount	60	70	60	78	56	56	92	58	63
Delta amount Org. Distance – Norm. Distance		10	0		22	22		34	29

4.3. Step 3: Comparison of organizational and normative distance

In the third step, organizational and normative distance can be compared with each other. This allows the accuracy of the normative distance of the two groups to be compared with each other depending on the case. Here it can be seen that both groups feel closer to each other than they organizationally are: With one exception (fundraisers in Case 1), the normative distance is always smaller than the organizational distance. The delta between organizational and normative distance is greatest in Case 3 (34 for fundraisers, 29 for faculty), followed by Case 2 (22/22) and smallest in Case 1 (10/0).

5. Discussion

The assessment of organizational distance shows that the two groups are significantly different. Organisational distance is greatest at the Swiss university, where fundraising is organized centrally. This is not surprising: Since the faculty is decentralized, there is a big difference in this case of a centralized fundraising organization. The university with the smallest organizational distance between fundraising and faculty is the one in Case 1. This was not to be expected, as this university has a mixed fundraising structure. It therefore appears that the mixed form is superior to the two distinct forms not only for managerial reasons, because it eliminates their disadvantages, such as the complex coordination of fundraising (Weinstein & Barden, 2007), but also because it has a positive effect on the organizational distance from the faculty compared to the centralized organization. Additionally, other factors, such as the culture of the country where the university is located and the age and success of the fundraising department, might impact the organizational distance between the two groups (Wiepking et al., 2021). This includes the fact that university fundraising in the U.S. has a long tradition dating back almost 100 years (Burk, 2013), which has also led to a high level of acceptance among faculty members.

The analysis of normative distance showed that Case 2 not only has the smallest normative distance between the groups but also boasts an unexpected symmetry: the fundraisers and the faculty perceive each other as being very similar, numeric results are exactly the same. The symmetrical conception of distances corresponds to the position of research (Simmel, 1983; Karakayali, 2009) but contradicts expectations: social distance is determined and perceived by actors. Only in exceptional cases can it be assumed that their mutual perceptions correspond. The fact that this is the case for fundraisers and faculty in Case 2 shows the high level of alignment between the two groups., which may be helped by the decentralized organization of fundraising in Case 2.

In general, organizational distance has no impact on normative distance – neither in a positive nor in a negative sense. It is noteworthy that fundraising success is also not reflected in normative distance, because otherwise the normative distance in Case 1 would have had to differ from that in Case 2 and even more significantly from that in Case 3. There is consensus in research that fundraising success is a result of collaboration between faculty and fundraising (Weinstein & Barden, 2017; Eddy, 2010; Shaker, 2015; Elliott, 2006). Fundraising success could therefore be conceived as an expression of interactive distance. If the success of fundraising is not reflected in normative distance, this means that normative distance is not influenced by interactive distance. This contradicts current research assumptions on social distance (Karakayali, 2009; Lopez, 2021) and should be further investigated in further empirical studies.

A clear difference emerges when comparing the normative distance between the two groups: fundraisers perceive faculty members as significantly closer than faculty members perceive fundraisers. This confirms the findings of Magee & Smith (2013), who show that social distance is dependent on power structures: powerful actors feel more distant from those with less power than vice versa.

Furthermore, this study allows for a comparison of normative distance with organizational distance, thereby assessing the accuracy of the actors' perceptions. These are most accurate in Case 1 and least accurate in Case 3, which are likely due to differences in organizational distance. It is therefore clear that organizational distance, which results from the location of the fundraising department within the university organizational structure, is reflected in normative distance and thus has an impact on cooperation and fundraising success. This underscores the importance of careful organizational positioning of fundraising, a noteworthy insight for university management when structuring or reorganizing fundraising departments. However, there is hope for better cooperation between the two groups: overall, it can be seen that, apart from the fundraisers in Case 1, the normative distance is always smaller than the organizational distance. This shows that actors are making an effort to move closer to each other.

6. Findings

This study examines and compares the organizational distance and normative distance between fundraisers and faculty members at business universities to find ways to improve their collaboration via three in-depth case studies in the U.S., UK/Ireland and in Switzerland. It has shown that the normative distance between the groups is smaller than the organizational distance in all three cases. This is a positive sign for collaboration: the actors seem to care to get along with each other and do not distance themselves from one another. When comparing the two groups, fundraisers show less normative distance from faculty members than vice versa. This is also an expression of the fact that fundraisers try to engage with faculty. Overall, it was found that the degree of organizational distance is a stronger predictor of successful collaboration between the two groups than normative distance. Normative distance, in turn, appears to be influenced by organizational conditions such as the placement of the fundraising department at the university. Notably, interactive distance was found to have no influence on normative distance. Lastly, it turns out that the long tradition of fundraising in Case 1 and its cultural anchoring had a positive effect on the collaboration between the two groups by reducing the organizational distance between them.

6.1. Implications for practitioners

The study shows that the quality of collaboration cannot be improved by fundraisers and faculty simply by “getting to know each other better”, as the two groups already feel closer than they actually are. Instead, the focus should be on reducing organizational distance, which is a crucial task for university management. The study suggests that fundraising departments for public business schools should be organized in a mixed set up. Furthermore, the study shows that fundraisers benefit from the acceptance of their profession, as is the case in the U.S. Therefore, any measures to improve the faculty's perception of fundraisers should be supported — which eventually may lead to higher fundraising results.

6.2. Limitations and further research

The number of interview partners was relatively small, with a total of n = 24. It would therefore be worthwhile to conduct a similar study with a higher n-value. Additionally, participants were interviewed at only one point in time, which is why this study can only provide a snapshot of the greater situation. It would be of interest to conduct such a survey repeatedly over time to also explore longitudinal developments. This study consists of three in-depth case studies, whereby the cases include four dependent variables. In order to determine their individual effects on fundraising success, a follow-up study is needed. From the perspective of social distance theory, this study provided initial evidence that normative distance may not be influenced by interactive distance, as previous research has suggested. Empirically testing this finding would also be a noteworthy task for a follow-up study.

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