

# The State of Research on Philanthropy in Europe in 2022

Paper prepared for the International Philanthropy Research Conference  
22 and 23 September, Turin, IT

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## Abstract

In Europe, philanthropy is increasingly recognized as an important societal force. Yet the contribution of philanthropic actors to the improvement of society and the well-being of citizens remains unclear. Scientific research on philanthropy – an indispensable tool to measure and accelerate social progress in Europe – is still in an early stage of development. Europe has capable scholars who are very interested in studying philanthropy. Some 250 scholars interested in philanthropy from almost all countries in Europe have united in the European Research Network on Philanthropy (ERNOP). Challenges for the network are the lack of comprehensive and reliable data on philanthropy, and funding limitations for researchers at academic institutions to spend time on research. This memo provides an agenda for research on philanthropy in Europe, describes areas of interest to members of the network, and offers opportunities for collaboration between academics and philanthropy practice.

## Philanthropy

Philanthropy is private action for the public good (Payton, 1988): Private actors such as citizens, corporations, voluntary organizations and foundations invest time, money, and expertise for public benefit, such as health, nature, culture (Hoolwerf & Schuyt, 2017).

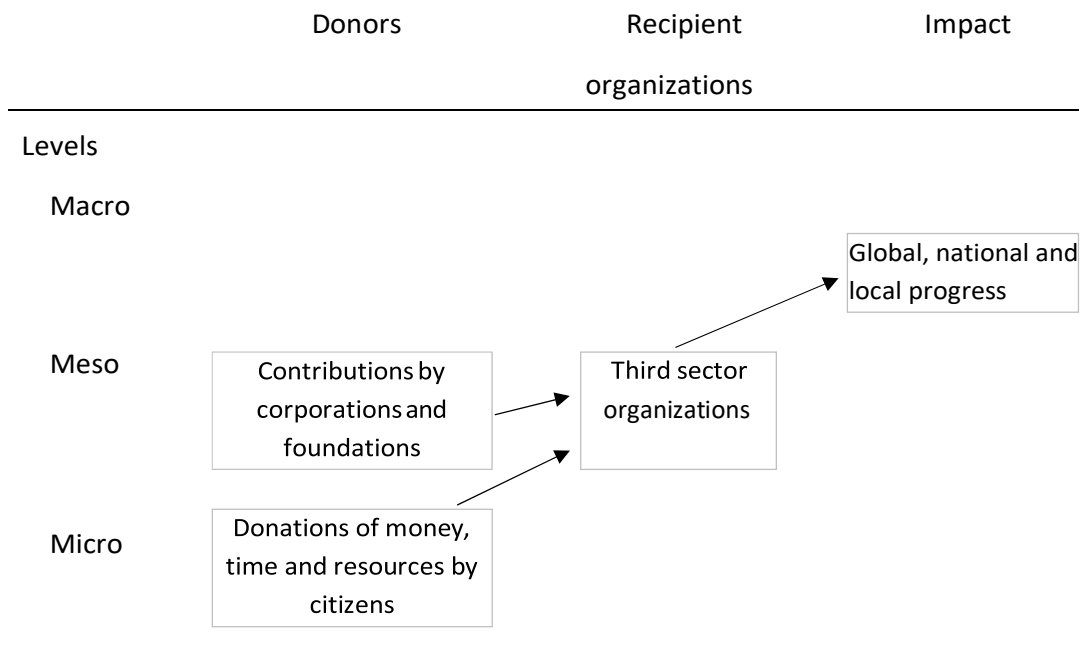


Figure 1. Three levels of philanthropy

\* Paper prepared for the AGAPE conference, September 22-23, 2022 in Turin. Thanks to the institutional members of ERNOP for participation in the survey, and thanks to Barry Hoolwerf, Theo Schuyt, and Michaela Neumayr for suggestions for this text. Contact: René Bekkers, VU Amsterdam, [r.bekkers@vu.nl](mailto:r.bekkers@vu.nl)

Figure 1 shows that philanthropic action is a three-level phenomenon: Resources flow from the micro level of individual citizens and the meso level of institutional donors to third sector organizations, with impact at the macro level (Bekkers, 2018).

The Social Economy Action Plan (European Commission, 2021) mentions philanthropy as a source of funding for social enterprises and as a group of actors enabling social innovation. Philanthropy is much broader. It is not only a source of funding, but a basic cultural phenomenon with a long history in Europe. Historically, philanthropic action has preceded government funded public services (Bremner, 1994). Well before the advent of the welfare state, private contributions enabled the development of public health systems, education and science, the arts, and the preservation of natural and cultural heritage.

There is also a potential dark side to philanthropy: The riches of some of the most illustrious philanthropic actors were based on exploitative business; philanthropy is increasingly viewed as connected to the wealthy elite; and philanthropic action may sustain or even worsen existing social inequalities. In many European countries including France (Gautier, 2019) philanthropy has become a contested concept. In the past five years, criticism of philanthropy has increased in the UK (McGoey, 2015; Maclean et al., 2021) and in the US (Reich, 2018; Giridharadas, 2019).

Most recently, philanthropic actors provided funding for initial COVID-19 vaccine development, some of which was conditional upon patent protections limiting the spread of vaccinations while ensuring corporate profits (Savage, 2021). Such singularities easily capture the public's attention and may backfire by reducing the willingness of the wealthy to give (Breeze, 2021). A strong media focus on single, powerful individuals creates an association between wealth and philanthropy that does not characterize the majority of philanthropic actions in practice. The general public's response to the COVID-19 pandemic provides examples of widespread philanthropic actions by citizens and organizations that contributed to the societal resilience of Europe (Tageo et al., 2021). We've seen collective solidarity with the sick and the elderly during the pandemic in the form of volunteer work, donations of food, blood and plasma, and monetary donations to charities and direct forms of giving to the needy (Wiepking, Chapman, & Holmes-McHugh, 2021).

Philanthropic action relies not only on the availability of resources, but also prosocial motivations, effective fundraising and grantmaking, political and economic freedom, and reliable institutions (Bekkers, 2020). The European legal infrastructure presents hindrances to cross-border giving that can be resolved (Fici, 2021; Müller & Fernandes, 2021).

## Our research questions

The promise of philanthropy is that it makes the world better: Philanthropic action may contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals, to the well-being of nations and citizens beyond their GDP, and to social progress. Well, does it? To what extent is philanthropy actually making a difference when it comes to improving the lives of people? This is the biggest question about philanthropy in Europe.

To answer this question, it is important to obtain answers to a series of smaller questions. How much philanthropy is there in Europe these days, roughly speaking? How generous are

Europeans? To which causes are philanthropic actors contributing? Which societal, legal and political conditions enable philanthropy in Europe, and to what effect?

How many philanthropic foundations, fundraising organizations and non-profit organizations have been established in which countries, and what are they doing? Which societal needs and sustainable development goals are philanthropic sector organizations addressing? How is philanthropy collaborating with governments and corporations, and what forms of collaboration work best?

Since the 1980s, the academic and public debate on philanthropy has been dominated by US scholars and topics. This continues to be the case, but we are progressing on this in Europe. In what ways is philanthropy in Europe different from philanthropy in the US and elsewhere?

### Lack of data

The biggest problem in research on philanthropy today is that there are virtually no data that allow researchers to answer these questions. Support for a strong data infrastructure is required. An essential first step in creating such an infrastructure is the collection of data to describe the size and composition of the sources, channels and destination of philanthropy at the macro level of societies, the micro level of citizens and the meso level of philanthropic organizations, including local, national and international foundations, NGOs, and voluntary organizations. The Social Economy Action Plan published by the European Commission in December 2021 states (page 20): “Data is also lacking 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.” The diagnosis that data are lacking dates back to 2009 (Wiepking, 2009).

Currently, national statistical offices do not collect data on philanthropy in a coordinated manner. They should begin to do so. Philanthropy researchers currently work with data collected by others, with little knowledge about philanthropy. For instance, the European Social Survey and the Eurobarometer incidentally included a few questions on charitable giving by individual citizens.

Some countries do have national surveys that include questions on charitable giving, such as the Netherlands, the UK, and Austria. With the exception of the Netherlands and the UK, these surveys have been conducted irregularly. As a result, researchers face difficult decisions and a lot of work in ex post harmonization of the available data (Wiepking & Handy, 2015).

Without a decent infrastructure for thorough measurement and analysis, research on philanthropy is confined largely to anecdotal evidence, case studies, convenience samples, and findings from fairly superficial surveys. The results of case studies and convenience samples cannot be generalized to other cases and countries. Studies based on surveys with only a few questions provide a severely limited picture of philanthropy. Funding is required to coordinate the collection of comprehensive and accurate data on philanthropy in Europe.

## Lack of research time

An important second step is the creation of research capacity at universities. Data are essential, but time for research is required to analyze them and provide useful insights. Academic institutions across Europe do employ experts on most aspects of philanthropy. The time that employees at these centers have for research on philanthropy is limited. Research is only one of their activities in addition to teaching and management responsibilities. At most universities, employment is based on teaching in a disciplinary program that rarely contains a focus on philanthropy. There is only one master's program in philanthropy in Europe, at the University of Kent. University professors can sometimes buy out of teaching with external funding for research. Usually such funds are allocated through competitions with success rates lower than 15%. There are no programs designated to fund research on philanthropy. As a result, progress in research on philanthropy is halted. Qualified researchers cannot spend much time on research. The solution to this problem is earmarked funding for research

### The European Research Network on Philanthropy

Since its establishment by VU Amsterdam in 2007, the European Research Network on Philanthropy has expanded strongly. Today, about 250 researchers across almost all countries in Europe have organized themselves in the [European Research Network on Philanthropy](#).

Research centers designated for the study of philanthropy are established at the University of Oslo, the Copenhagen Business School, Hamburg University, the universities of St Andrews, Birmingham, Kent, Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Maastricht, Liege, Heidelberg, the ESSEC Business School, the University of Basel, the University of Geneva, the IMD Business School, the Vienna University of Economics and Business, Masaryk University in Brno, the University of Belgrade, and Esade Business School. Each center employs between 3 and 8 fte.



The centers are based in Departments of Business Administration (8), Sociology (4), Economics (2), Public Policy (1), Political Science (1), Management (1), Law (1), Philosophy (1) or in departments combining several disciplines. There are also researchers on philanthropy at other universities. In fact, the majority of researchers at academic institutions interested in philanthropy work in relative isolation within a specific discipline, such as economics, management, business administration, or sociology.

## To advance, coordinate and promote excellence in philanthropic research in Europe

To achieve its mission to advance, coordinate and promote excellence in philanthropic research in Europe, the European Research Network on Philanthropy provides opportunities for research and organizes meetings to exchange ideas, data, methods and insights from research. The meetings are open to scholars of all disciplines and institutions. One of the key strengths of research on philanthropy is its multidisciplinary approach. Philanthropy should be studied not only as an economic activity involving marketing, fundraising, and grant making. Philanthropy is also a value-driven activity, based on ideals of democracy, solidarity, and fairness. It is based on social and psychological principles such as reciprocity, empathy, and altruism. In addition, philanthropy is a form of institutional action, with alignment to government and market initiatives making it more productive.

The ERNOP actively seeks collaboration with the European Commission and with stakeholders from the philanthropic sector such as [Philea](#). The network convenes both academic and non-academic partners. At its biennial research conference, scholars present their latest research and discuss ideas for future research with each other and with practitioners from the philanthropic sector (see Von Schnurbein, Rey-Garcia & Neumayr, 2021 for a snapshot). Communities of practice contain a lot of practical knowledge and expertise on philanthropy (Gautier et al., 2021).

## Achievements in research on philanthropy in Europe

Members of the European Research Network on Philanthropy have collaborated with each other in five major multinational research projects.

Giving in Evidence (Schuyt et al., 2011) investigated success factors in fundraising by European Universities. Activities by the DG Research & Innovation (European Commission, 2006, 2008, 2020, 2014) strengthened the collaboration between the European Commission and foundations in Europe.

The Expert Group on Foundations, Venture Philanthropy and Social Investments (Schuyt & Gouwenberg, 2018) examined possibilities to unleash the potential of R&I foundations and other providers of capital and expertise, such as venture philanthropists and social investors.

The EUFORI Study (Gouwenberg et al., 2016) quantified and assessed the level of financial support by foundations to research and innovation in the EU.

The ITSSOIN Project (Anheier, Krlev & Mildenerger, 2018) examined the Impact of the Third Sector on Social Innovation.

Third Sector Impact (Enjolras et al., 2017) sought to quantify the size and composition of the third sector, and its socio-economic impact. The study concluded that “No reliable recognized systems are in place to generate systematic comparative data on even the most rudimentary features of the scale, scope and impact of the third sector and volunteering, and therefore to assess its contributions to European economy and society.”

The Giving Europe feasibility study (Hoolwerf & Schuyt, 2017) was conducted without funding by the European Commission by members of the ERNOP to estimate the size and composition of philanthropy in Europe, counting contributions by living households, by deceased individuals through bequests and legacies, and by corporations, charity lotteries, and foundations.

The study concluded that data on philanthropy are incomplete, and that estimates can only provide lower bounds. The study focused on the year 2013, for which the largest number of data sources were available at the time. With this caveat in mind philanthropic contributions in Europe were estimated to be at least €83 billion. Now that almost 10 years have passed, it is high time for an update.

### Recent research areas

In April 2021, a conference with members of the European Parliament and the ERNOP opened by commissioner Margaritis Schinas examined philanthropy from the perspective of European values, as a force for good in the COVID-19 pandemic.

In October 2021 we distributed a survey among all sixteen institutional members of the ERNOP housing research centers on philanthropy and received ten responses. We asked members what topics they had studied in the past. The most commonly mentioned topic was charitable giving, mentioned by six members. The second most common set of topics were all mentioned three times: volunteering, corporate philanthropy, foundation grant making, and the financial health of charitable organizations. Neuroeconomics and tax incentives were mentioned by two members. Venture philanthropy, fundraising, social movements, and civil society were all mentioned once.

Relevant insights from these studies that deserve attention include the following:

- Foundations do not only differ in terms of the source of their resources, but also with respect to size, life stage, and strategy (Jung, Harrow & Leat, 2018).
- Regulatory frameworks for foundations and other civil society organizations in Europe are no longer attuned to current practices (Anheier, Lang & Toepler, 2019).
- Countries in Europe have strongly different philanthropic practices and traditions (Wiepking & Handy, 2015).
- A comparative approach is needed to study foundations (Anheier, 2019) and charitable giving (Bekkers, 2020).
- Households rarely reduce donations when government funding increases, as predicted by the “crowding out” hypothesis (De Wit et al., 2018).
- Households do shift their giving to areas where the state provides less funding (Pennerstorfer & Neumayr, 2017).
- Crowdfunding is a new channel for philanthropic giving (Salido-Andres et al., 2021; Van Teunenbroek, Bekkers & Beersma, 2020).

- In Sweden (Vamstad, 2020) and in the Netherlands (Bekkers & Van Teunenbroek, 2020) giving is widespread and viewed as a worthy practice.
- When income increases, giving does not increase proportionally (Neumayr & Pennerstorfer, 2021).
- Among the elderly, volunteering maintains and may even improve health (De Wit, Qu, & Bekkers, 2022).
- Among those out of work, however, volunteering does not improve well-being (Kamerāde & Bennett, 2018).
- Episodic volunteers are a new group of volunteers that require new management styles (Compion et al., 2022).
- Social innovation is a very complex social process that typically starts with non-profit organizations but also involves government and corporate partners (Anheier, Krlev & Mildenerger, 2018). A social needs orientation, external organizational openness and local embeddedness are necessary conditions for social innovation (Krlev et al., 2017).

Finally, ERNOP members published a review of the research on corporate philanthropy (Gautier & Pache, 2015), a reader with classic texts on philanthropy (Moody & Breeze, 2016), and four handbooks, one covering all aspects of philanthropy (Jung, Phillips & Harrow, 2016), and three on specific topics: comparative research (Wiepking & Handy, 2015), corporate foundations (Roza, Bethmann, Meijs & Von Schnurbein, 2020) and on taxation and philanthropy (Peter & Lideikyte Huber, 2021).

## Opportunities for research on philanthropy

Three engines for progress in science are the availability of accessible data, the development of new technology, and collaboration among researchers.

### Data

A consistent data infrastructure, with coordination in data collection and public access will greatly enhance progress in research on philanthropy in Europe. Seven out of the ten respondents in the survey among institutional members of the ERNOP mentioned data as the most important condition for progress: We need more data and better data, preferably from longitudinal panel studies. The data should include information on contributions by all actors. First: Data on households can be based on national surveys modeled after the Giving in the Netherlands Panel Survey, which is currently the most extensive survey available. Second: Data on spending by corporations on philanthropy, corporate engagement in partnerships with non-profit organizations, and Corporate Social Responsibility programs can be collected through a combination of data from surveys and analysis of annual reports. Third: Data on revenues, funding decisions, and spending of foundations, and data on collaboration between foundations and grantees can be collected through a combination of data from surveys and analysis of annual reports. Fourth: Data on bequests can be extracted from register data kept by tax authorities, and in some countries perhaps from annual



reports of recipient organizations. Fifth: Data on donations by charity lotteries can be obtained from the annual reports of the lotteries.

### Technology

The development of computational social science harbors a wealth of opportunities for research on philanthropy (Ma et al., 2021). Computational social science analyzes “Big Data” that were not designed for research by those who created the data. Automated text analysis and machine learning based on annual reports of non-profit organizations enable researchers to classify organizations and measure phenomena that previously required individual survey reports, such as the diversity of board members and contributions to the SDGs. Researchers in the Czech Republic, Switzerland, Austria and the Netherlands are developing computational social science tools to study foundations and civil society organizations (e.g., Hladka et al., 2020; Bekkers et al., 2021; Litofcenko, Karner & Maier, 2020). The most recent ERNOP Conference best paper award was given to a paper employing computational social science tools to map the foundation sector in Switzerland (Ugazio & Gomez Teijeiro, 2021).

### Collaboration

The unique feature of the European Research Network on Philanthropy is its diversity. Members look at philanthropy from all relevant disciplinary perspectives: from legal, historical, economic, sociological, anthropological, psychological, and management perspectives. ERNOP members collaborate with each other in research on fundraising, foundation governance, volunteering, and legal aspects of philanthropy. The network is also diverse in its cultural and national composition. Members come from almost all countries in Europe. Finally, the network of scholars has developed strong ties with networks of practitioners. The network is ready to collaborate in joint research projects.

Two aspects of collaboration deserve further attention: vocabulary and dissemination. While the definition of philanthropy is clear, the connotations of the term in political debates and in the general public’s understanding make it a difficult term (Wiepking, 2021). An inclusive study of philanthropy should use more commonly used terms for giving that do not have controversial connotations. The ERNOP is in an excellent position to provide an exhaustive lexical description of giving practices that is sensitive to the local context.

To disseminate research, academic scholars have relied on peer reviewed journals. Since the 1990s, the number of publications on philanthropy shows an exponential growth (Bekkers & Dursun, 2013; Ma & Konrath, 2018). Four peer reviewed academic journals regularly publish academic research on philanthropy: *Nonprofit & Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, *Voluntas*, *Voluntary Sector Review*, and the *Journal of Philanthropy and Marketing*. The first two are based in the US, and the latter two in the UK. There is no journal focusing on philanthropy in Europe. Researchers from Europe are successfully publishing in the leading journal in the field, *Nonprofit & Voluntary Sector Quarterly*. Acceptance rates of manuscripts submitted to NVSQ are well above the average.

None of the journals are free to read by practitioners: Costly subscriptions are required to access most of their contents. With the appointment of a *research to practice editor*, NVSQ

has sought to increase the awareness of research published in the journal among practitioners. The initiative has not been a success because it called upon researchers to provide easily accessible summaries of their research. Though they are very interested in practical impact, producing summaries does not fit their already overburdened work schedules.

There is scope for a new journal, focusing specifically on philanthropy, for a European audience, including practitioners. Such a journal should be free to read by anyone, and should provide a space for practitioner's questions and insights.

### A research agenda

A first priority for research is the production of well documented, publicly accessible data on philanthropy. New micro data on contributions of citizens, corporations and foundations should be collected. Relational databases should be compiled based on existing data on collaborations between and among non-profit organizations, foundations, government and corporations.

A second priority for research is the accumulation of research questions from the philanthropic sector. Which questions are philanthropic sector organizations most interested in? In order to best serve the needs of practitioners, a bottom-up process can generate a priority list of questions that endowed foundations, fundraising organizations, and organizations working with volunteers have.

A third priority is the actual research based on the data collected. The survey among institutional members of the ERNOP also asked about topics that research centers find important for future research. Three centers mentioned foundation grant making and decision-making. Two mentioned the relation among philanthropy, inequality, and democracy. Topics mentioned once included the effects of COVID-19 on giving, volunteering and organizations, the benefit of philanthropy for society, and the financial health of charities.

The survey also specifically asked about topics that institutional members of the ERNOP are working on and which they think are of particular interest to foundations. Three members mentioned impact investing (e.g., Fritz & Von Schnurbein, 2015, 2019; Schober et al., 2017; Millner, Moder & Resch, 2017). Two members mentioned impact measurement (e.g., Bekkers & Verkaik, 2015; Von Schnurbein, 2016). Foundation governance was also mentioned twice (e.g., Bethmann, Von Schnurbein & Studer, 2014). Endowment management, grantmaking, fiscal sponsorship, relations between staff and boards were all mentioned once (e.g., Lideikyte Huber & Peter, 2020).

### Conclusion

Europe harbors the capacity to advance, coordinate and promote excellence in research on philanthropy. The European Research Network on Philanthropy has the scholars and the technology in place to advance philanthropy in Europe. Funding for the collection of new data and research time is required to measure the extent to which philanthropy in Europe fulfills its promises and to improve the practice of philanthropy.

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