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Notes from a

Colloquium on international comparative philanthropic research

Session convenors:
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Dr. René Bekkers (Assistant Professor in Sociology, Director of Research at the Department of Philanthropic Studies, VU University Amsterdam, the Netherlands).
Prof. Michael Hall (Professor in Social Psychology, Vice President of Research at Imagine Canada, Toronto, Canada).
Prof. Myles McGregor-Lowndes (Professor of Business Law, Director of the Australian Centre for Philanthropy and Nonprofit Studies, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Australia).
Prof. Una Osili (Professor in Economy, Interim Director of Research at the Center on Philanthropy at Indiana University, Indiana, USA).
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Colloquium on international comparative philanthropic research

The colloquium focused on international comparative philanthropic research. To make matters less complex, we solely focused on charitable (or philanthropic) giving. We discussed how a comparative study of the growing body of international research can be used to make *theoretical* and *methodological* progress in the field.

Introduction:

A case for theoretical progress?

How can interdisciplinary cross-national research help to test existing explanations and develop new explanations for philanthropic behavior?

Much is known about individual characteristics that promote charitable giving. More generous people are for example found to be higher educated, older, more often religiously affiliated, and to have a higher income (Bekkers and Schuyt, 2008, Brown and Ferris, 2007). But are the individual characteristics that promote giving across countries consistent? And what can we learn from similarities or differences between donors in different countries?

Are people in countries with greater educational expansion more generous because of their higher educational level, or because a more highly educated population also correlates with a stronger democracy or a higher welfare state level? Do contextual (country level) differences in governmental subsidies, fiscal policies, and legal requirements affect which people donate how much to charitable organizations? What are the policy implications of differences?

In most research on philanthropy, theoretical advancement is strikingly lacking (Bekkers and Wiepking, 2007, Halfpenny, 1999). Testing hypotheses derived from interdisciplinary explanations for philanthropic behavior in different countries can result in theoretical advancement. When a specific explanation for charitable giving holds in different contexts, this can be considered a strong explanation for philanthropic behavior.

Measuring philanthropy cross-nationally?

How can we develop reliable and valid measurements for (predictors of) philanthropic behavior for application in cross-national research?

For many countries, (commercial) population surveys on individual or household charitable giving are available. Countries with survey studies on private donations are for example Australia (ACOSS, 2005), Canada (Hall, et al., 2006), France (Giving France, 2009), Hungary (Czakó, et al., 1995), Ireland (Centre for Nonprofit Management, 1999), Japan (Yamauchi, 2003), Korea (The Beautiful Foundation, 2005), the Netherlands (GINPS07, 2007), the United States (PSID-COPPS, 2005), and the United Kingdom (CAF, 2007, NCVO/CAF, 2007). In addition, there are three cross-national surveys that measure incidence of giving to different charitable subsectors: the Eurobarometer study 68 (Eurobarometer, 2007), European Social Survey (Jowell, 2003) and the Gallup WorldView Study (Gallup 2008). However, many of these survey studies lack internal consistency over time, and they certainly vary considerably in research methodology, including concepts of 'giving'.

The various country level datasets differ to great extent in the measurements of philanthropic behavior. This is a logical result, as the *concept* of philanthropy will have different meanings in different countries and cultures. One example is the relative importance of formal and informal philanthropy. In Asian countries, informal philanthropy is much more important than formal philanthropy, while the reverse holds for European and North-American countries. Even more variation exists in questions concerning areas of giving (such as for example giving to religious organizations or organizations in the field of international relief). The multiple classification systems used for areas of giving in the different country level datasets illustrate this.

There is also the issue of appropriate metrics for cross-country comparisons. For example should one try to make the dollars comparable in terms of purchasing power, or should one use % of GDP? Another interesting topic refers to the demographic area (e.g., country, region, municipal level) on which incidence and level of giving is measured. In larger countries national estimates may mask large regional variations.

In this colloquium we will discuss different options for studying giving in cross-national comparison (including options for a joint classification system for areas of giving, and the types of socio-economic and psychological characteristics and values to be included).

The colloquium

During the colloquium participants were asked to take part in one of the discussions, based on their own interest:
1) General theoretical aspects on international comparative philanthropic research (facilitated by Dr. René Bekkers)
2) Methodological aspects of international comparative philanthropic research (facilitated by Prof. Micheal Hall)
3) Philanthropy and law in a comparative perspective (facilitated by Prof. Myles McGregor-Lowndes)
4) Theoretical aspects related to giving to international relief and gender dimensions of giving in international comparative philanthropic research (facilitated by Prof. Eleanor Brown and Prof. Una Osili)

For each of these topics, we asked the participants to discuss the following questions:
1) What is the current state-of-the art knowledge
2) How can this current state-of-the art knowledge be used to conduct interdisciplinary comparative philanthropic research
3) What are potential problems?
4) What are possible solutions to these problems?

Each topic will be introduced by the colloquium convener, and discussed by the participants. During the last 30 minutes of the colloquium, we will have a plenary discussion summarizing the answers the different groups came up with.

Below you find a reflection of the discussions held in the four different groups.

For more information, please contact Pamala Wiepking

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Notes from the discussion on theoretical aspects on international comparative philanthropic research

Facilitator: Dr. René Bekkers (Assistant Professor in Sociology, Director of Research at the Department of Philanthropic Studies, VU University Amsterdam, the Netherlands)

Present at this discussion were: Chris Einolf (DePaul University), Anne Pessi (University of Helsinki), Edith Bruder (Cerphi), Márton Gerő, Steven Ayer (Statistics Canada), Einat Raviv (Ben Gurion University), Barb Duffy (Helen Bader Institute), Susan Chambre (Baruch College, CUNY), and Seong-Gin Moon (Grand Valley State University).

We started the discussion with a brief round of introductions. Attendants talked about the topics in their own research, and identified the theories used to explain cross-national differences in these phenomena in comparative research. The round made very clear that there is an abundance of theories, hypotheses, ideas and concepts around that are or may be used to explain cross-national differences. Attendants mentioned the following factors as important:

Acculturation
Socialization
Culture – Hofstede's dimensions
Social capital – trust, norms and networks
Religious traditions – world view, social cohesion
Social pressure, social information, and imitation
Self-identity and role theory
Mobilization through social networks
Economic security – GDP
Economic insecurity – unemployment, resume building
Diffusion of innovations
Crowding in/crowding out
Welfare state typologies
History: path dependency and social origins of institutions
Professionalization of nonprofit management staff and education
Fundraising techniques

During this discussion, we also talked about problems in the theories. Common problems in many theories were:

- Generalization:
    - Limited applicability to specific historical periods, geographic areas;
    - Theory is limited to a specific phenomenon.
- Micro-macro bridges:
    - Theories developed at the micro level may not be translated easily to the macro level
    - Context effects may be mere composition effects.
- Supply and demand
    - Most theories depart from supply side explanations (who gives/volunteers); demand side explanations (who asks, influence of fundraising practices) are needed as well
- Timing:
    - Theories that answer a research question leave another explanandum; they shift the problem back in time. E.g., institutions, culture, history.
    - Theories developed to answer a cross-sectional research problem may not be suitable to answer the same research problem from a longitudinal perspective.

Notes from the discussion on methodological aspects of international comparative philanthropic research and survey design

Facilitator: Prof. Michael Hall (Professor in Social Psychology, Vice President of Research at Imagine Canada, Toronto, Canada).

Present at this discussion were: Beth Breeze, Lesley Hustinx, Femida Handy, Woitek Sokolowski, Laurie Mook, Jane Hudson, Hagai Katz, Silke Michalski, and John Wilson.

Why do comparative research?

- Track changes
- Inform public policy
- Provide data for theory development and testing
- Understand factors that drive variations

Methodological Issues with data gathering

- Issues with sample representativeness – hard to get the very rich and the very poor (e.g., homeless)
- Issues with scope of construct – For example:
    - Does one include giving to place of worship (mutual benefit
    - Product purchases (cause marketing)
    - Charity lotteries
    - Political contributions
- Research approach: survey, diaries, interviews, participant observation
- Terminology – "charitable" giving or donations

Issues with the comparative aspect of the study

- Need to take into account:
    - Legal frameworks
    - Language (comparable terms in different languages) – need a culture fair approach.
    - Meaning of giving (differences/similarities in giving to organizations, to individuals and within households or kin networks)
    - Capacity to give (countries differ in prevalence of institutions one can give to, relative wealth or income)
    - Need measure that addresses relative amount being given- e.g. the population in some countries may tithe 10% as the norm – how does one compare this in a meaningful way with other countries where tithing is not the norm.
    - Differences in taxation and the role of the state in the provision of services (some countries finance social services via taxation, others via charitable giving – is one more generous than the other?
    - Boundary / definition of family – some cultures have extended kinship networks would giving to kin be considered charitable even if they are not close relatives)
    - How to compare the unit of giving (US dollars vs. GBP etc)

Notes from the discussion on philanthropy and law in a comparative perspective

Facilitator: Prof. Myles McGregor-Lowndes (Professor of Business Law, Director of the Australian Centre for Philanthropy and Nonprofit Studies, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Australia).

Present at this discussion were: Debra Morris, Oonagh Breen, Julie Fisher Melton, and Ben Lough.

Topics discussed on philanthropy and law in a comparative perspective:

- What is consistent is that lawyers are a breed apart from all other researchers – they talk a common different language

- Difference with legal definitions – limitations
    - Tax expenditures – UN
        - Tax revenues foregone
    - Reforms and regulations
        - In the US two types of tax expenditures statements

- Fear for funding terrorism
    - Driving regulations and guidelines
    - Restrictions and liability exposure

- Remittances are currently under the radar

- Research into what foundations funded in different countries could be useful – what is happening there?

- USIG project with basic framework expansion (International Grantmakers)
    - Summary of income tax exemptions, expand on this
    - Trying to find the law
    - Where do departments regulate – not centralized

Notes from the discussion on theoretical aspects related to giving to international relief and gender dimensions of giving in international comparative philanthropic research

Facilitators: Prof. Eleanor Brown (James Irvine Professor of Economics, Pomona College, Claremont, CA, USA) and Prof. Una Osili (Professor in Economy, Interim Director of Research at the Center on Philanthropy at Indiana University, Indiana, USA).

Present at this discussion were: Katie Misener, Debra Mesch, Mandy Sharp, and Ye Zhang.

This group first defined interesting topics worthwhile studying from an international perspective:

- International relief giving, which is the same everywhere
  - Diaspora philanthropy
- Giving to disasters
- Time dimension
- Giving back/reciprocity
- Role of gender/who decides –household surveys should take this into account
- Need to take into account country/cultural differences in household structure
- Measure giving as well as receiving generosity
- Social networks, neighborhood and community context matters.

In this type of research there is a role for narratives and field experiments.

Current state of knowledge is lacking research into social networks and who in households decides on philanthropic behavior.

Problems with international comparative research are:

- Expensive
- Existing data sources are limited
- Contextual information necessary
- How to compare different forms of formal and informal philanthropy across cultures

Possible solutions to overcome problems:

- Step by step
- Combine qualitative and quantitative research

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