

## **Pamala Wiepking (ed): The State of Giving Research in Europe: Household Donations to Charitable Organizations in Twelve European Countries**

**Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam, 2009, 76 pp., €15 (paperback)**

**Leigh N. Hersey**

Published online: 28 September 2010

© International Society for Third-Sector Research and The John's Hopkins University 2010

For years, the United States has dominated philanthropic research, implementing regularly conducted thorough surveys and coordinated research efforts throughout the country. Unfortunately, this American-centric view of philanthropy ignores the rich traditions of other countries and their own important place in the philanthropic landscape. The collective work in this book presents a snapshot of philanthropic research in the European Community and the data sources available to advance the research even further in an attempt to “bring philanthropy to the front of the European stage again” (p. 6). In addition to providing valuable resources for researchers, the editor and authors hope the book proves to be beneficial for fundraisers and grantmakers who are investigating ways to improve their professions, as well as to policymakers in position to create partnerships with the philanthropic sector.

This publication stems from endeavors of the European Research Network on Philanthropy (ERNOP). First meeting in January 2008, this group of scholars began to collectively foster philanthropic research, with the ultimate goal of creating “Giving Europe” which will provide “structured and comparable micro- and macro-economic estimations of the content of the philanthropic contributions...for the (European Community) as a whole” (p. 6). The scholars participating in this initial meeting determined the first step was to collect the information that is currently available, resulting in this first publication by ERNOP.

Nonprofit research synopses on twelve European countries are presented in the book—Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, and United Kingdom—written by scholars from those countries. Each of the countries is outlined with an introduction of philanthropic research in the country, information on data sources available, a

---

Book review editor: Silvia Ferreira.

---

L. N. Hersey (✉)  
The University of Memphis, Memphis, TN, USA  
e-mail: lhersey@memphis.edu

summary of the strengths and weaknesses of these sources, a brief overview of findings already established from the data, and a conclusion of the country's philanthropic research. Some countries abide by this outline better than others, making it difficult to directly compare the research opportunities. The chapter describing philanthropic research in the Czech Republic is particularly helpful in that it provides website information for many of the data sources described. This feature allows researchers to further explore data opportunities when considering future research endeavors.

Although the purpose of this book is to collect data resources rather than to expand theory, several questions can be drawn from the readings. Even though the research is gathered on twelve somewhat similar countries, it is still not clear how a charitable organization is defined. Marta Rey García directly addresses this question in the chapter on Spain. Depending on whether one takes a fiscal law approach, a nonprofit sector approach or a social economy approach to analyzing research in Spain, conclusions could differ. Other authors suggest similar differences when outlining what is considered a charitable organization in their countries. The book also draws attention to the fact that some countries are more advanced in pursuing philanthropic research than other countries. The Netherlands was one of the first countries studied that pursued a systematic survey of philanthropic giving, initiating the "Giving in the Netherlands" study in 1993, which has been regularly repeated and expanded since. However, it is unclear what drove Theo Schuyt to conduct this research. Were funding sources available? Was he inspired by other research, such as "Giving USA"? Did policymakers express a desire for this information? Or was it the charitable organizations themselves that wanted a better overview of philanthropy in the Netherlands? By learning more about what encourages philanthropic research, scholars in other countries could better determine approaches that would improve their own research.

This book provides a wealth of information for those interested in conducting comparative research on charitable donations. In selecting which country or countries to include in the research, one can learn about datasets available and preliminary reports produced. The reference lists provide primary research publications for each country. While this publication is a great first step to foster collaborative and comparative work, it also shows the weaknesses in the current data available. Rarely is the data collected in one country directly comparable to the data collected in another country. This weakness is noted by several authors and one that ERNOP aims to correct. Hopefully this publication will become dated rather quickly. This first publication by ERNOP meets its goals of increasing awareness of philanthropic efforts of Europe. The next step would be to take this information online to make the information easily updated and immediately accessible for researchers. Of course, this next step requires funding, requiring the further goals of the group to fall in place—that this visibility will encourage policymakers and grantmakers to provide the resources for a more cohesive research agenda among different European countries.