



New Philanthropy and the Disruption of Global Education

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NORRAG Special issue (NSI) is an open-source periodical. It seeks to give prominence to authors from different countries and with diverse perspectives. Each issue is dedicated to a special topic of global education policy and international cooperation in education. NSI includes a number of concise articles from diverse perspectives and actors with the aim to bridge the gap between theory and practice as well as advocacy and policy in international education development.

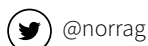
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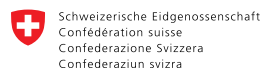
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New Philanthropy and the Disruption of Global Education

Guest editors

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Foreword

Whereas the terms *philanthropy* and *philanthropists* have their origins in Greek and Latin meaning love or benevolence to man or mankind and the related actors, the practice of using private wealth to alleviate problems of less well-off individuals or groups is documented much earlier, for example in ancient China and in Hindu scripts. In the 12th century, rabbi and philosopher Moses Maimonides articulated a hierarchy of charity that has strongly influenced notions of giving until today¹. In the sixteenth century, charitable responses to urban poverty were theorized by Juan Luis Vives and Francis Bacon in Europe. Contemporary philanthropy emerged prominently in the last quarter of the nineteenth century in the United States and in cosmopolitan Geneva, where a clearer distinction emerged between charitable giving and philanthropic efforts to contributing to changing structural problems, and therefore the common good². This modern philanthropy is inextricably intertwined with the industrial revolution and contemporary capitalism³.

A second wave of philanthropy has grown exponentially over the past twenty-five years, during which time some three-quarters of foundations have been established. In fact, between 2013 and 2015, USD 24 billion were spent by philanthropies on development, education remaining one of the most funded sectors⁴. Still perceived as the “key to individual opportunity and the engine of national economic prosperity”⁵, one-third of philanthropic foundations conducts educational initiatives. A notable feature of contemporary philanthropy is the lack of most foundations (58%) to collaborate with each other or in fact with governments. While a few US philanthropies dominate the public imagination and indeed size of their giving (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundations, e.g.) the landscape is changing rapidly as foundations in China and India, for example, emerge. Most foundations invest in particular endeavours for less than five years, contrasting with public spending.

While some philanthropic institutions have played important roles in contributing to the distribution of public goods, there remain questions and concerns related to equity, accountability, neutrality, effectiveness, and efficiency. Several trends in giving and functioning have led to debate about the “new philanthropy,” that has notably some focus on results-based philanthropic giving, as well as the vision of “disruption” and innovation as promoted by technology-focused philanthropies.

NORRAG’s work in the area of philanthropy in education seeks to facilitate greater understanding and collaboration between philanthropic organizations, national policymakers, representatives of international organizations and academics working in the field of education. The symposium series *Philanthropy in Education: Global Trends, Regional Differences and Diverse Perspectives* is an initiative launched in 2016 and co-sponsored by NORRAG, the Sheikh Saud bin Saqr Al Qasimi Foundation for Policy Research, the Open Society Foundations and the Graduate Institute, Geneva⁶. To date, NORRAG coordinated the series of regional events in Switzerland, South Africa, China, India, the United States, Brazil (May 2020) and the United Arab Emirates (will take place in May/June 2020), each in collaboration with local partners. NORRAG Special Issue (NSI) 04 aims to restore part of the discussions and debate around New Philanthropy and the Disruption of Global Education, bringing together actors and stakeholders involved, thus to celebrate the work done in Philanthropy in Education (PIE).

NSI 04 highlights global and national level experiences and perspectives on the participation of new philanthropy in education, as well as local idiosyncrasies. The issue is divided into four parts: **part 1** looks at shifting roles and paradigms in new philanthropy and global education development, **part 2** sheds light on emerging trends, including profit, disruption,

impact and scale, **part 3** focuses on new relationships and frontiers between the public and private spheres, and **part 4** provides a state of New philanthropy and innovations in development financing.

NORRAG Special Issue is an open-source periodical launched in 2018. It seeks to give prominence to authors from different countries and with diverse perspectives. Each issue is dedicated to a special topic of global education policy and international cooperation in education. The first NSI was on the *Right to Education Movements and Policies: Promises and Realities*, the second edition focused on *Data collection and evidence building to support Education in Emergencies* (Spring 2019), and NSI 03 relates to *Global Monitoring of National Educational Development: Coercive or Constructive?* (Fall 2019). Exploring key and debatable thematic, NSI aims to bridge the gap between theory and practice and to reflect advocacy and policy in international education development.

NSI 04 was developed thanks to the tremendous effort carried out by Marina Avelar, NORRAG Research Associate, and Lara Patil, NORRAG Advisor, co-editors of this issue. **Marina Avelar**, PhD, is a Research Associate at NORRAG. Her research is focused on privatization, globalization, and the growing engagement of private actors in education, with

special interest in philanthropy and innovative financing. She has published journal papers and book chapters in these topics, and is the author of the book “Giving with an agenda: how new philanthropy advocates for the corporate reform of education” (forthcoming, 2020). She has professional and academic experience working with public and private institutions in Brazil and the UK, and completed her PhD at the University College London – Institute of Education, with a research visiting period at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB), Spain. **Lara Patil**, Ed.D, is an Advisor to NORRAG. Her research in the area of donor logic and the role of non-state actors in educational development builds upon academic and professional experience with technology industry giving. She has professional and academic experience working with multi-stakeholder partnerships for education as both an Education Strategist for Intel’s Corporate Affairs Group where she worked, on behalf of Intel, as the coordinator of the Private Sector and Foundations Constituency, and is a member of the Country Grants and Performance Committee for the Global Partnership for Education, and researcher at the Teachers College, Columbia University on the institutional rationale of transnational technology corporations in development.

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Endnotes



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2. Amorim, L. & Mazurczak, M. (2002). When did it all start? in *Community Philanthropy, Alliance*, 7(3). <https://www.alliancemagazine.org/feature/when-did-it-all-start/>
3. *Ibid.* In Geneva, philanthropy is constitutive of numerous initiatives led by elites convinced that poverty is a major cause of unsustainable economic development and social cohesion. See David, T. & Heiniger, A. (2019) *Faire société. La philanthropie à Genève et ses réseaux transnationaux autour de 1900*. Coll. Histoire contemporaine, Éditions de la Sorbonne, Paris.
4. Johnson P. (2018). *Global Philanthropy Report: Perspectives on the global foundation sector*. Hauser Institute for Civil Society at Harvard University.
5. *Ibid.*
6. See the “Series Update – Philanthropy in Education: Global Trends, Regional Differences and Diverse Perspectives” to consult the list of events and activities in PIE: <https://www.norrarg.org/series-announcement-philanthropy-education-global-trends-regional-differences-diverse-perspectives-2/>

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Philanthropy in Italian Education: Networks, Hierarchies and Markets in PPP

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Summary

Mincu analyses the work of a large philanthropic actor in Italy, a key player in education policy making and one of the richest in Europe, as an exemplary case of networked governments and the promotion of these arrangements in education. Mincu argues, however, that an exclusive focus on networks tends to abstract from the ways in which these networks interact with pressures from hierarchies and market forces.

Keywords

Italian education policy
Network governance
Philanthropy
PPP
Markets and hierarchies

The Italian system of education combines centralisation at the national level with weak school autonomy. At the school level, teacher autonomy is not balanced by school policies as cohesion mechanisms, leadership or teacher's collaboration. One of the major reasons is that teachers' working contract refers just to the effective time of teaching in school, so that the margins to coordinate and collaborate are essentially very low. Moreover, the presence of strong unions associated to political disagreement about how to reform the system are endemic obstacles to improvement. In this context, the role of one major non-governmental organisation (NGO) is indicative of a changing scenario and of the possible inputs offered to the government about the direction to follow. The hierarchical top-down logic linked to the lack of coherence inside the schools as organisations are approached by network governance mixed with market mechanisms promoted by philanthropies, with potential benefits and dangers. It has to be noted that the parents are the major (hidden) private investors in public education and that the school world is strongly unfavourable to any interference from the private area.

From a theoretical perspective, policy making in education has increasingly become a matter of network governance, and this can be seen as "a shift in the fundamental structures of the real world" (Jessop, 1998 in Avelar & Ball, 2017). In other words, individuals, communities of social actors and organisations can create networks and thus engage in "policy conversations, policy influence and service delivery in the public sector" (Ball & Junemann, 2012). On one hand, the public space for such conversations has enlarged to include new actors, in particular philanthropic organisations, that have become centre stage in policy making. In addition, new arrangements of hierarchies, networks and markets offer a fruitful approach to investigate the alliances between public and private in education. On the other hand, an advocacy of networks (e.g. Hill 2011) in education has been on the rise, particularly as school networks in England, based on the claim that these will be motivated by a 'moral imperative' in the public interest. Such networks are asked to work with the government in partnership or in a contracting model. And this presents various paradoxes, such as that PPP (Verger & Mos-

chetti, 2017; Robertson & Verger, 2012) and the contracting model have opened the provision of schooling to individuals, organisations and networks whose experience, beliefs and practices are rooted in fields beyond education (Ball and Junemann, 2012), with unintended consequences.

It is a matter of fact that philanthropy prefers networking arrangements. However, as Mincu and Davies (2019) have argued, an exclusive focus on networks tends to abstract from ways in which these networks interact with pressures from hierarchies and markets. This article addresses two projects designed and financed by this Italian NGO, in order to suggest that a peculiar mix is always at work. At the same time, the larger NGO is “service provision” and its *modus operandi* follows a PPP model, its education agency is traditionally connected, through key actors, to the central hierarchies and thus influencing the policy making process. At the territorial level, there is full partnership with the State to deliver better services, to propose ways ahead for local policy making, to promote cultural and scientific enterprises as innovative models for the State.

This case study presents one of the largest philanthropy in Italy, which is a key player also in education and one of the richest in Europe. The Foundation aims to support social cohesion and regional development in a large geographical area of Italy, in partnership with various local institutions. However, it can also choose to provide finance outside this area, such as to a large university in another part of Italy, or more recently to development projects in Africa. The areas of activity are arts and culture, research and health, social politics and cultural innovation. At the same time, knowledge, education, school, university and research are major priorities.

Its profile is that of a corporate social responsibility (CSR), a philanthropy operating private donations to public institutions and schools (Ball & Youdell, 2007). Its internal organisation is based on a variety of specialized bodies that act more or less autonomously in relation to the major superposed steering body. In fact, the main NGO operates directly through programmes defined at the central level or through its instrumentalities or internal bodies dedicated to school, to social support for families, art and culture, social and economic research as university attached centre and other more recent bodies related to innovation and health and that are expected to become financially more independent. The relationship with its traditional “arms”, such as the one dedicated to education can vary depending upon the politics of the moment decided at the administrative level of this philanthropy. For instance, the educational foundation used to be quite autonomous in its decisions about which activities to be prioritised or financed; its own administrative council was granted decisional autonomy. More recently, the vision put forward by the larger NGO has been to focus on one larger project in

education that was granted substantial finance from the top. This went hand in hand with less autonomy for its specialised body. Subsequently, the central level decided to manage this flagship initiative directly, with possible implications in terms of more autonomy but less finance overall to its specialised educational agency. The relationship between its arms and the main NGO headquarters fluctuates between more or less integration, as well as that with various initiatives jointly developed with other local partners: some external autonomous cultural enterprises may become “incorporated” into the NGO or vice-versa.

The material, the relational and the discursive logic of power that characterise the *modus operandi* of German NGOs (Kolleck in Verger, 2019) can be suitable do describe this major Italian NGO, too. Even if founded by a major bank, it is not attached to the market logic *per se*, or to a specific political agenda. Its steering committee is nevertheless the expression of both local and larger politics. However, its way of functioning is rather by-partisan in its orientation and guided by a constant drive towards modernisation and innovation. For example, these declared aims can be related to new ways to promote inclusion through education, school architecture modernisation initiatives or the introduction of internet connection in a network of some hundreds of schools. Other examples can be related to some of its new special agencies, oriented to develop innovative research in the medical field, or to hard-core traditional activities such as cultural innovation and digital modernisation.

Typically, this NGO supports a consolidated network of external smaller civil society organisations, charities and foundations and lead the way ahead of a social, cultural and educational agenda. The universe of myriads of local charities and volunteer associations are kept alive by recurrent mechanisms of finance from the major donor. For instance, when the budget is decided, requests from the local charities can be accepted if their activities are aligned to the priorities of the foundation. Such requests are examined at the headquarters’ level but also at the lower level of its specialized autonomous bodies. Many of such small initiatives are kept alive thanks to traditionally consolidated links with this major NGO that comply with the numerous requests of finance sometimes quite modest. The annual budget of the specialised agency in education can include the finance of internally designed projects, as well as countless grants to local charities that are variously active in education, out of school activities etc. The main criteria to decide how to allow grants is an already consolidated relationship with other charitable organisations from the “territory”, rather than the quality of new proposals from new institutional partners, and charities are priorities over institutional actors, e.g. research oriented.

Some of these small associations may merge with the larger foundation on certain circumstances and with different benefits: a more stable environment for the small association, and a symbolic operation for the main donor. At the same time, the internal logic of prestige and power of some of its members and as well as their personal views about the way ahead are equally important elements. Therefore, this NGO appears as an exemplary case of network governance operating through partnerships to open up schooling to public-private collaboration.

First, there is a landmark project – “Digital Innovation” that has been running for several years, which combines technological development – high speed internet connection – with building requalification to this purpose and subsequent innovation of the learning environments. It concentrates most of the financial resources granted by the larger NGO to its special agency in education, with the explicit ambition to represent a unifying major initiative across the board. It aims to limit what is perceived to be as past *modus operandi* that produced dispersion of resources in smaller initiatives. The project has the ambition to pilot such requalification in one metropolitan area of the country, on behalf the Ministry of Education. The schools volunteer in this project and they represent the public. The private NGO’s explicit aim is to indicate the government the way forward. It has the role to open a way forward to much needed national actions of digital modernisation of the public schools. In order to pilot this complex Digital Innovation initiative, a network of volunteer schools has been created, as well as a network of other external economic partners that are commissioned to help with the structural requalification process. An external network of partners made of multinational or local businesses related to providing internet connection facilities act as commissioned third parties. This follows a market logic, in spite of some defensive discourses about the preferential prices made to this NGO. Global philanthropies, such as NESTA, are involved with the desire to acquire prestige and visibility and some of these have also opened local offices over the past couple of years. At the same time, the effective use of the internet facilities inside the classrooms implies a complex relationship to private publishing houses and other providers of on line learning tools, whose services are bought by the NGO and thus entering a private-private relationship. Selected teachers from these schools are offered on a cascade model pedagogical laboratories on the use of the ICT in the classrooms. The educational implications of the “Digital Innovation” initiative looks rather marginal in financial terms and the engineering nature of the project is prevailing. This goes beyond the typical activities of the small agency dedicated to the improvement of education. It should be added that in the network of partners collaborating to the Digital Innovation, the local public Engineering School is involved in various ways, also a commissioned partner on technical aspects.

Key actors inside the NGO have close relations to this public institution. The logic of the network of institutions, both local and international, economic and philanthropic, relates to an internal hierarchical logic. In fact, in this case and momentum the operational way is seen by its internal actors to be rather characterised by a centralising logic, compared to the past way of support to a plurality of smaller projects.

A second example is about a school improvement initiative. In this case, the project design draws upon the idea of networks of schools not just as a methodological element to trial the initiative, but as a proposed new idea in education, of institutional collaboration between schools. In fact, a deliberate school-to school support element on the English model is at the heart of this initiative, whose aim is to promote the benefits of networks in education in a traditionally centralised and bureaucratic education system. This stays for an emblematic case in point of the possibility to promote improvement and organizational changes at the school level in a reform averse context (Verger, 2019) through softer forms of power, such as networks and discursive capacities.

In the case of the current arrangements that are typical of the Italian system of education, persuasive strategies of a discursive, material and relational type may be seen by some as the only tools to promote innovation. In spite of twenty years of school reform promoting institutional autonomy, the Italian schools are rather characterised by strong teacher autonomy and weak levels of school leadership. Some important innovations at the school level, such as the introduction of school self-evaluation reports and improvement plans, are not fully effective to reach the pedagogical culture of those working inside the classrooms: *hic sunt leones*, as a high official recently expressed on a public occasion about the strong teachers’ autonomy. What was traditionally considered to be a “non-reformable system” at least at its secondary school level is now pushed to reconsider its direction through networks as a preferred tool. But one should not idealise the morality or effectiveness of such alliances to opening up hierarchical long standing modes of operation or corporative power, when new market logics related to finance and institutional competition are in place.

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