Is there space for community philanthropy within the Portuguese civil society landscape? 
Benchmarks and scenarios for the role of private and independent foundations in fostering the community philanthropy agenda 
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Abstract

Hugo Luís Martinez de Seabra considers the potential roles that strong private and independent foundations can play to strengthen a country’s culture of giving at the regional and local levels over the medium and long term. His research considers, for example, the potential for promoting and piloting bottom-up participatory decision-making processes offered by Portugal’s Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, which has more than 60 years of experience as a grantmaker and a strong leverage ability. He also considers the possibilities for engaging local apolitical champions and supporting emerging ones to boost community philanthropy.

Following an introduction to the civil society landscape of Portugal—including nongovernmental organizations, foundations, corporate social responsibility, community philanthropy and individual giving—the author discusses approaches taken and benchmarks set by independent private foundations in Spain, Italy, Belgium and Germany to foster community philanthropy. Subsequently, de Seabra argues that elements of Gulbenkian Foundation’s legacy, combined with learnings from the discussed approaches elsewhere in Europe, could help shape a strategy to place community philanthropy on the national agenda. Participatory co-ownership tools—like challenge grants, Vital Signs, giving circles and youth banks—adapted to the Portuguese context, could be incubated and piloted strategically and could benefit from the positive reputation and convening power of established private foundations. In addition, these tools could target higher engagement and harness the trust of a range of societal stakeholders, including the Portuguese diaspora. Lastly, he suggests that former recipients of foundation scholarships could be challenged through this strategy to give back with their talent, resources and time to the specific local communities with which they are associated. This strategy would allow large national philanthropic organizations, like Portugal’s Gulbenkian Foundation, to be more present at the grassroots, decentralized, regional and local levels.

For the full version of the paper, please click here.