

**The role of women
in building a new culture of giving in
Argentina**

Florencia Roitstein, PhD.

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** Co-founder and Director of Program ELLAS- Women and Philanthropy at CEDES (Center for the Study of State and Society), Buenos Aires, Argentina*

*** Professor at Universidad de San Andres, Buenos Aires, Argentina*

**** Senior International Fellow, The Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society, the Graduate School and University Center, City University of New York, U.S.A*

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1. Introduction and background

It is well known by now that vibrant and strong civil societies are a key pillar of a democratic and open society. But what has not been said clearly is that the degree of development and strength of civil society depends to a large extent on the local culture and traditions of philanthropy; more neglected even is the fact that local philanthropy often relies mainly on women's leadership and power.

Argentina—the geographic focus of this paper—is now ending its third decade of restoration of a political democracy. During these thirty years, the country has changed substantially witnessing a shift between the state and the market as the drivers of development. After a first short period of ebullition, civil society has not developed and grown enough to act as a force that can counterbalance the power of government and businesses to influence about the path of social and economic development. While civil society played a key role in advancing human rights issues during the transition from authoritarianism to democracy owing to international funding and cooperation, it has been losing terrain in recent years due to multiple factors. Among those factors are the weak professionalization of the sector, the increasing limitations to its operations imposed by governmental regulations and the scarcity of funding due to the weakness of local philanthropy. A recent global report on giving (World Giving Index 2013, Charities Aid Foundation, London) shows that only 20 percent of Argentineans give to nonprofit organizations and only 17 percent of Argentineans volunteer.

Our working hypothesis is that such increasing weakness of civil society organizations (CSOs) stems from the absence of relevant efforts to reshape and build a new culture of philanthropy led by women in the region. Although the incorporation of new technologies in the nonprofit sector have allowed for the development of new resources and tools such as crowd funding or e-campaigns, these are far from shaping a new democratic and participative philanthropic culture. Clicking a computer from your couch, even though very relevant to transfer resources from individuals to collective causes, is not enough to build a new spirit of social responsibility, ownership, participation, generosity, compassion, altruism and sense of community.

By exploring this topic, we would like to confront and challenge the conventional wisdom in Argentinean society (and in so many others countries in the global South) that: a) philanthropy is only a matter of the rich giving to the poor; b) philanthropy is elitist; c) philanthropy is almost exclusively about money; d)

philanthropy is a foreign concept; e) philanthropy is paternalistic and irrelevant for social transformation and, f) the role of women in philanthropy is about using their husband's money for charity work.

Why philanthropy? Because for many (historical, religious, political, humanitarian) reasons philanthropy provides the heart and soul of associational life/activity—expressed in simple terms in the donation of time, money and knowledge- and therefore of civil society organizations. In a democratic and open society, philanthropy can be a field for social innovation, experimentation and progress. Philanthropy is not just about the giving by the wealthy but offers the space where everyone can contribute to the progress of society.¹

Why women? Because even before the building of the nation state in Argentina, women have played a leading role in the protection of the poorest groups, in building institutions of social assistance and in shaping public social policies. If these are not sufficient reasons, women today have more control not just of their own assets but also of the household finances; they are closer to the community needs and problems and, globally, they are the ones that give more (World Giving Index 2013). Besides, there is some evidence that women give differently than men. As Debra J. Mesch, director of the Women's Philanthropic Studies at the Center on Philanthropy at Indiana University and author of several studies on the role of gender in philanthropy, argues, research has found that "women tend to score higher on empathy and caring than men, factors that affect giving to charity. Similarly, women have been shown to be more altruistic than men, and their giving is frequently motivated by the desire to make a difference in peoples' lives."²

Based on the assumptions mentioned above, the aims of this paper are:

- To review and highlight the many global innovative contributions to social development of women as philanthropists, in particular of women's giving circles;

¹ The wide variety of philanthropic traditions and practices around the world is well covered in Ilcham, W.F., Kats, S. and Queen II, E., Philanthropy in the World's traditions, Indiana University Press 1998. In particular see Thompson, A. and Landim, L. "Civil society and philanthropy: from religious charity to the search of citizenship", p.355.

² Mesch, 2009

- Explore the viability and appropriateness of such innovations vis a vis how they could be applied to the different and complex contexts of Latin America—Argentina in particular—so as to strengthen the participation of women in philanthropy in terms of more inclusiveness of generations and social sectors³.

2. Methodology

The research design for the current study uses a qualitative framework comparing several types of giving circles. A qualitative design was appropriated since this study explores a new area and seeks to understand processes, outcomes and the value of adaptation to new contexts. Primary data was gathered from a selected sample of giving circle members and staff. The contact information for giving circles was obtained from the New Ventures in Philanthropy as well as from the advice provided by the Center for the Study of Philanthropy and Civil Society at CUNY. Primary data was also gathered through semi structured personal meetings and conversations by telephone and Skype.. Secondary data was collected from several published case studies and from news articles, Web sites, and other documents about giving circles gathered from Google searches. Validation of data was achieved by comparing interview findings with each other and with other studies and documentation. Analysis validation was sought through presentations and discussions of emerging conclusions with colleagues in Paris, Argentina and New York City during the period of the fellowship.

3. Women´s innovations in global philanthropy: Giving Circles

Global philanthropy has been changing dramatically during the last decade. Some of the main features of this change are:

- The emergence of new players like: global millionaires and billionaires, investment companies, banks, new generations, racial and ethnic minorities, and sports and show business celebrities;

³ The ELLAS program on Women and Philanthropy adopts four different perspectives: 1) women as philanthropists; 2) women as professionals in philanthropy; 3) women as the focus of philanthropy and, 4) women as beneficiaries of philanthropy. In this paper we are concentrating on women as philanthropists in particular.

- New technologies being applied to the field like: big data, smartphones, crowdfunding, online giving platforms, online portals with information on funding flows; and
- New institutional forms that foster collaboration among actors, social enterprises, specific funds focused on single issues (e.g. environment, media and journalism, human rights, women, etc.)

Among all those changes, one of the most important for us is the increasing and evolving role of women in philanthropy. In January 2014, the Web site **Inside Philanthropy** published an article titled, “Meet the 15 Most Powerful Women in U.S. Philanthropy“ by David Callahan. The article opened by stating:

Women are a fast-rising force in philanthropy. More women are making their own fortunes than ever before and women are also exercising growing leadership in family philanthropy, shaping how wealth made by spouses or earlier generations is given away. Women are also emerging as the top networkers and catalysts in modern philanthropy, bringing people together to mobilize huge resources for different causes.

Too often, though, the quiet power of women philanthropic leaders is overlooked. Again and again, famous rich men are afforded the lion's share of the credit for big gifts or initiatives actually masterminded by their wives or daughters. Meanwhile, some of the most influential networkers in philanthropy operate well outside the limelight. That has to change not just because it's unfair, but because to understand today's big philanthropy, you need to know the women who are so often behind the new mega giving⁴.

The growth in women's philanthropy is a key trend in 21st century philanthropy. As women create and control a growing share of wealth, their presence and influence in philanthropy is becoming more evident and powerful.

Women have always contributed time and talent to their communities. For instance, the giving circle movement in the U.S. grew in part at the end of the 20th century because women had capacity as never before. This expanded capacity arose because of women's increased income, education, and inheritance from

⁴ <http://www.insidephilanthropy.com/home/2014/2/25/meet-the-15-most-powerful-women-in-us-philanthropy.html>

families and marriages. Perhaps most significant, women had gained control of their finances—of their wealth and consequently of their philanthropy. Women began to appreciate how they could make the world a better place through their giving. Women’s philanthropic potential, has created an unparalleled capacity to give.

One feature of this new women’s philanthropic landscape is the proliferation of women’s networks. In some cases, institutions create specific initiatives to engage female donors. In other situations, women themselves create a network to engage other women. In doing so, they have created a “women’s movement”, and not another philanthropic organization only. Angela Eikenberry, Professor at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, suggests that these women’s giving networks are the “democratization” of the traditional philanthropy and a means to engage new and diverse audiences and generations in giving, all of whom work towards similar goal: improving their communities.

This process of democratization of philanthropy demanded more leadership and engagement opportunities for women than in more traditional philanthropic settings, and may have had better impacts on the communities in which they are donating. To achieve the current level of development of the women’s philanthropic movement, several initiatives, organizations, leaders and knowledge needed to emerge. The present landscape is rich in women’s foundations, women researching on women’s philanthropy in academia, women’s philanthropy institutes, networks of women donors, women’s funds and women’s giving circles.⁵

The growth in visibility of women’s philanthropy responds in part to the fact that women control more of the financial pie than ever before. (They control more than half of private wealth in the U.S.) and their wealth tends to rise. However, Kathleen D. McCarthy has documented the pivotal role played by women philanthropists throughout the history of the United States. She points out that long before they had the right to vote, women were involved in a variety of reform movements— from moral reform to abolitionism to suffrage—designed to effect fundamental changes in American society and American government. In addition, American women of all racial and ethnic backgrounds have long been engaged in issues of

⁵ Although dated in 2006 we recommend the readings of Eikenberry, Angela “Giving Circles: emerging grassroots philanthropy” in Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly, vol 35, nr 3, September 2006, and of Mesch, Debra, Women and philanthropy: a literature review, Working papers, Indiana University, Lilly Family School of Philanthropy, 2009

public interest and, in particular, have done socially minded work at the grassroots level to ensure community survival and success⁶.

As more women give, they are likely to change not only what is funded,⁷ but how they raise money because female philanthropists often prefer to raise money in a group. This is perhaps the main reason why the most innovative funding mechanism that has emerged within this new environment was named the “giving circle”.⁸ A giving circle has been described as a cross between a book club and an investment group and entails individuals “pooling their resources in support of organizations of mutual interest”.⁹ More than this, giving circles include social, educational, and engagement components that seem to connect participants to communities, perhaps to a greater degree than other forms of philanthropy.

However, whether the giving circles in the U.S. are “new” or “innovative” or just resurgence of old forms of collective philanthropy is a matter of discussion. For instance, Tracey Webb in an article in *Black Enterprise* states: “Did you know that black philanthropy has roots in the 19th century? As Harriet Tubman led thousands of slaves to freedom in the Underground Railroad, her success was largely due to black charitable giving. Volunteers, mutual aid societies, Quakers and other groups joined together to donate money, shelter, food, and supplies along the way to ensure a successful operation that spanned a decade. This form of collective philanthropy still exists in the form of a growing trend, called giving circles. A **giving circle** is a philanthropic vehicle in which individual donors pool their money and other resources and decide together where to give them away. Just as Tubman was a leader in spurring charitable giving then, philanthropist Darryl Lester is leading the charge in today’s African American giving circle movement.

“Giving circles are a resurgence of an old tradition of generosity and caring that is making an impact all across the country,” says Lester, president of HindSight

⁶ Mc Carthy, Kathleen, *American Creed: Philanthropy and the Rise of Civil Society, 1700-1865*, University of Chicago Press, 2003.

⁷ For example, the Global Fund for Women, unlike most grant-givers, accepts handwritten proposals of any length and in any language, and is unusually open to grants for general purposes rather than specific projects. It also funds meetings to create networks of women activists.

⁸ 10 Innovations in global philanthropy. Concepts worth spreading in the UK. Plum Lomax and Rachel Wharton, October 2014, NPC (New Philanthropy Capital).

⁹ Schweitzer, C. “Building on new foundations”, *Association Management*, October 2000, p. 32.

Consulting, Inc., a research and development company that designs tools and services for institutions and communities. “They provide an opportunity for individuals to join others through collective charitable giving. There is something exciting about people pooling their resources and making joint decisions on how to give grants to improve life in their community.”¹⁰

Eikenberry (2009) has identified three major types of giving circles in the USA. These include small groups, loose networks, and formal organizations. Small groups consist of a small number of people who tend to pool funds in equal amounts ranging from \$50 to \$5,000, though there are several small groups where the amount paid into the fund is left to the personal decision. In giving circles, which are generally groups with limited membership it is typical for everyone to be involved in agenda setting, discussion, and decision making, and leadership is often shared. The two major foci of small-group giving circles are social and educational activities. The social aspect is emphasized through informal group interaction and discussions. The educational aspect is relatively informal, taking place through the grant-making process, site visits, meetings with nonprofit staff, and information sharing among group members. Through this in-depth participation, members are generally thoughtful, focused, and strategic in their giving inside the giving circle. This is the case primarily because the members begin to see their giving in the context of issues and real needs in the community in which they want to have some impact, and their donations are more targeted.

Professor Angela Eikenberry, and consultant Jessica Bearman collaborated on a report, “The Impact of Giving Together”. They found that when women participate in giving circles they give more than when not in a circle, give more strategically, and are more knowledgeable about their community. By their nature, giving circles seem to allow everyone a place at the philanthropic table¹¹.

4. Women and philanthropy in Argentina

a. A brief overview of the state of philanthropy

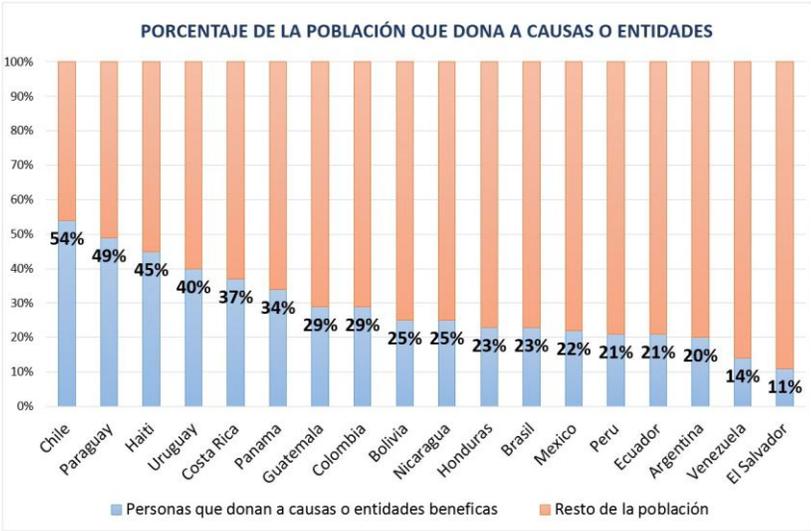
¹⁰ Nonprofit Insider: How to Start a Giving Circle. <http://www.blackenterprise.com/small-business/nonprofit-insider-how-to-start-a-giving-circle/>. On this topic see also Giving Together: a national scan of giving circles and shared giving, Forum of Regional Associations of Grantmakers, 2005, p.18-21

¹¹ For the methodology used to come to this conclusions view full report.

Argentina is a country that during the last decade has had severe problems in building and publicly disseminating consistent data in various fields. Evidently, this applies also to philanthropy and nonprofit organizations. The few efforts in this field have been produced by the nonprofit sector in a scattered way or by foreign organizations. One clear example is about giving where the only updated source is the World Giving Index (WGI)¹². In the WGI Argentina ranks very low globally (77th among 135 countries) and, even more relevant, low within the Latin American context (16th among 18 countries). As Chart 1 reflects, only 20 percent of the population gives to causes or nonprofit organizations. This figure contrasts with Argentina’s wealth where it ranks among the top five Latin American countries in terms of its GDP (Gross Domestic Product) according to the International Monetary Fund. Several “poorer” countries give much more in relation to percentage of the total population, such as Haiti (3rd) or Guatemala (7th) These figures question the idea that the level of wealth of a country has a direct relationship to the level of giving. In this sense, the scope of a culture of giving seems to be more related to other drivers than wealth.

Chart 1

Percentage of total population who give to nonprofit organizations and causes by country in Latin America

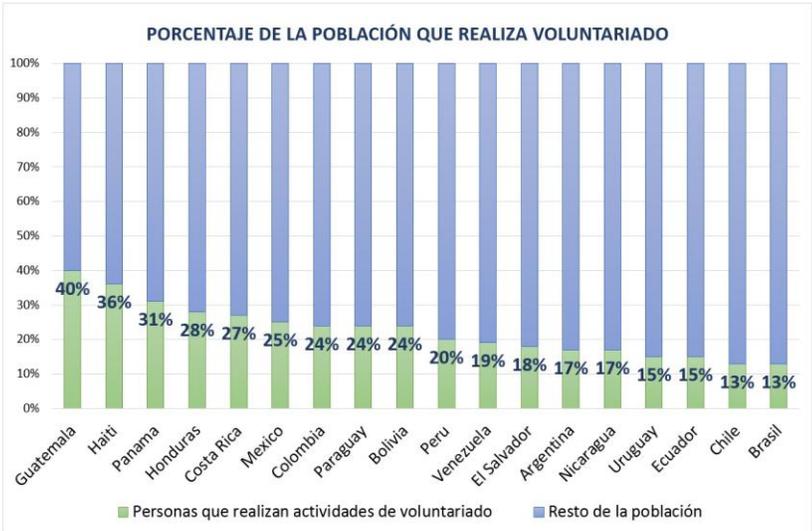


World Giving Index 2013, CAF

¹² World Giving Index, Charities Aid Foundation, London, 2013.

The WGI data also reinforces the picture of low participation of Argentines in the voluntary sector. A very low percentage (17 percent) of the population contributes with time or talent to voluntary organizations, as seen in Chart 2.

Chart 2
Percentage of people who volunteer in Latin America by country



World Giving Index 2013, CAF

These two figures, related to the giving of money, time or talent are expressions of the current reality, as well as to the challenges to improve the situation of civil society in Argentina.

At the level of the “third sector” (or civil society organizations [CSOs]) the most comprehensive study relates to data collected in 1995. At that time that 51,750 formally registered organizations were in existence in Argentina.¹³ Since then there has been no systematic study of the size of the sector although there are several indications that its size has decreased due to governmental regulations and a reduction in international funding (not compensated by domestic resources). However, it is possible to say that while the number of formally and legally constituted CSOs has decreased in the last decade, this decrease has led to a

¹³ Roitter, M., Rippetoe, R. y Salamon, L. Descubriendo el sector sin fines de lucro en Argentina: su estructura y su importancia económica, CEDES, 2000, Buenos Aires.

growth in informal grassroots activism and networks and associational life to cope with poverty and related factors, including hunger, environmental degradation, violation of rights, etc.

According to the Argentine profile described by Civicus,

...Electoral processes are deemed to be broadly free and fair and there are guarantees of political rights and freedoms. However, freedom of access to public information is restricted, media freedom has some limits and there are some abuses of political authority. Consequently, only 43% of CSO representatives surveyed believe the legal and political environment for CSOs is enabling and nearly a quarter report having experienced attacks or illegitimate restrictions on their operations from local or central government within the past 10 years. CSOs report particular grievances about access to and transparency of government funds, laws and policies on donations, tax exemptions and labour rules, and procedures for gaining legal entity status.¹⁴

To reinforce our reading of the current situation, the above-mentioned Civicus report adds:

Participation and membership in CSOs is low, with participation in socially-oriented CSOs higher than in politically-oriented ones: only 26% of Argentineans consider themselves an active member of a social CSO and only 11% of a political CSO. Volunteering for such organisations is even lower than membership. Volunteering as a whole experienced a noticeable decline from 2002 (32%) to 2008 (19%), although it recovered a little in 2010 (22%). This remains, however, lower than world and regional averages. Regarding the diversity of civil society, while women are well represented – 57% of the CSO workforce is female - poor people and the rural population are not. Informal participation is higher: around 43% of people report participating in informal associational activities, while 32% take part in individual acts of political activism.¹⁵

¹⁴“Civil Society Profile: Argentina”. <http://socs.civicus.org/CountryCivilSocietyProfiles/Argentina.pdf>. Accessed [date?]

¹⁵“Civil Society Profile: Argentina”. <http://socs.civicus.org/CountryCivilSocietyProfiles/Argentina.pdf>. Accessed [date?]

b. Women, philanthropy and civil society

Women have played a key historical role in developing philanthropy and civil society in Argentina. According to Landim and Thompson (1995) “voluntary action, the giving of time and money and not-for-profit undertakings have been common features along the Latin American history since colonial times. However, one can say that charity in Latin America has not began at home. These practices were brought up by the Spanish and Portuguese colonization of the region which left the footprint for the development of philanthropy for more than four centuries, perhaps with the only exception of Uruguay. The main features of this development were the close association between State and Church during colonial times; the role of women in shaping charitable initiatives and voluntary organizations after independence; the mutual-help bonds built up by migrants at the beginning of the century; and the influence of populism and authoritarianism in recent times”.¹⁶

The same authors note that as for women in particular, “the Sisterhood of the Saint Charity (founded 1727) was at the core of charitable work. Members of this organization were leading activists during the colonial period (until 1820), combining religious evangelization with social assistance. The Sisters of Charity received not only the economic support of the Church, but also the help of private charities, represented by the upper classes. The elites of colonial society involved themselves in these activities by providing funds and lands, as well as moral and political support and personal engagement. The association between the Church, the colonial state and the elites was at the core of all the charitable and philanthropic institutions that developed in Latin America for almost three centuries. They combined the provision of social assistance to the needy with the control and exploitation of the indigenous people.

The Sisters of Charity used their words and actions to develop a rationale for social service based on love, help and moral precepts, assuming active roles in society as nurses and social workers. At that time, most women worked in the domestic sphere. Religious ideals (beyond personal needs) were the only accepted arguments which allowed women to participate in the public world. Many women preferred to be "nuns"

¹⁶ Landim, L. and Thompson, A. “Civil society and philanthropy in Latin America: from religious charity to the search of citizenship” in Ilchman, Katz and E. Queen, Philanthropy in the World’s Traditions (Indiana University Press, 1998).

instead of agreeing to an arranged marriage or remaining in their original family” (Thompson and Landim, 1998).

The creation of the Society of Beneficence (SB) in 1822 is perhaps one of the most outstanding cases of “patrician” philanthropy combined with heavy state support and led by women. The creation of the SB was a fundamental milestone in the development of philanthropy and in the history of the Argentine third sector. Until the mid-20th century, under private management and with public funds, it was in charge of the main tasks of beneficence and social assistance. Although this subject has been vastly researched and written about, it is important to highlight certain aspects of the SB's activities, which are of great importance to the current debates (theoretical and practical) on the role of philanthropy in Argentine society.

The work of this society led to the feminization of philanthropy in Argentina, where the fundamental objective of the SB was the *“moral perfection, the cultivating of the spirit in the beautiful sex, and their dedication to what is called industry, which results in the combination and exercise of those qualities”*(Thompson and Landim, 1998). In the SB, secularization and feminism went hand in hand, for women not only controlled charity activities, but were performing these tasks in the name of the State. It is interesting to note that throughout its existence, the SB had very ambiguous relations with the State. Although the SB acted in the name of the State, the relationship had continuous problems, which can be seen as a modern manifestation of State-NGO relations. The development of this relationship went through many stages. In the beginning, its creation served the purpose of taking control away from the Church, and also acting in place of the State, which was unable to act in this area. This was then transformed into an autonomous and private institution which was completely funded by the State. The irony of this relationship is that once the SB was functioning as an institution, the members continued to fight for full autonomy from the State; while at the same time never rendering State funds. On the contrary, they continued demanding State support.¹⁷

The SB had a monopoly of beneficence activities in its first 30 years of creation. While still in existence, from 1950 on, its role diminished and was replaced with another quasi-governmental private institution: the Eva Peron Foundation.

¹⁷ See A. Thompson and A. Viladrich, “From charity to development: four models of government/third sector relationships in Argentina, *Voluntas*, 1996. See also Donna Guy. *Women Build the Welfare State: Performing Charity and Creating Rights in Argentina, 1880–1955* (Duke University Press, 2009).

Several books have been written on Eva Perón and the foundation she created so we will not describe it or analyze it in this paper. The most interesting thing is to note that the social construction of the poor (images and social representations) is different in Eva's approach from that of traditional charity. For the traditional beneficence (epitomized in the Society of Beneficence) poverty was attributed to individual conditions such as laziness, addictions and indifference. Charity gave poor people the opportunity of a better life (e.g. the ability to work) and educational opportunities. The main idea behind traditional charity was that social differences were conditions of nature that could not be changed. The duty of rich people was to help the poor to get out of their social and moral subjugation. The poor were considered responsible for their plight.

For Peronists, poverty was the result of social injustice which originated in the unequal distribution of money and goods in society. Poverty was not a natural state of affairs but rather the result of the historical exploitation of people. Evita argued that the poor should change their social conditions by fighting against the rich aristocracy. The biggest contradiction in Evita's personality was between what she practiced and what she preached. She claimed to provide a redistributive justice (portraying herself as a latter day Robin Hood) but in fact she actually created a massive beneficence. Instead of giving a lot to a few people, she gave little to many. She created hundreds of schools, hospitals, asylums, houses, pensions, etc. The main result of all these actions was not to empower the poor with control of their own destiny, but instead, create another form of assistance.

Both Evita's activities and traditional beneficence were a means of social control. Traditional beneficence used the idea of sacrifice and the promise of reward in heaven. The Catholic church emphasized the idea of obedience and respect for paternal authority. Similarly, Evita's image reinforced the Catholic ideals of sacrifice and redemption after death.

Parallel to these disputes among the political and philanthropic elites a series of feminist groups were formed in the country starting in the mid-19th century. Many of these groups, whether related or not to political parties, were later transformed into CSOs and focused their activities on more specific gender issues like health and reproductive rights, abortion, women's trafficking, women's rights and so on. Just a few of these groups relied on private domestic philanthropic funding and often looked for state support. The Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, fighting for the truth and justice of their disappeared relatives during the military dictatorship (1976-1983) are the most outstanding example.

It is worth noting that historically philanthropy was not restricted only to the upper classes and the wealthy. There are numerous examples of grassroots philanthropy in particular among the migrant communities (Spaniards, Italians, and East Europeans) that developed mechanisms to cope with problems that arose in their attempts to integrate to the new society.

At the same time, the tradition of the “philanthropic elite” continued to downsize. As of today, only a few groups of upper class women—usually company owners—continued to do traditional philanthropy on behalf of their families and with a charitable, top-down approach.

c. Emerging models of women’s philanthropy

As seen in the previous sections, philanthropy in Argentina has been characterized by the attempts of different groups (Catholic Church, religious orders, state elites, upper class groups, immigrant collectives) to monopolize the private assistance to the poor and underserved populations. Guided by a variety of ideological and moral reasons and with women often playing the role of protagonist, all these initiatives disputed the available private and public resources to put in practice their ideas, implement programs and projects and build charitable institutions of assistance. Although the list of achievements of philanthropy could be considered very extensive, their contributions towards creating a more equitable and democratic society has been almost absent in their legacy. Through their top-down approach it is not a surprise that the common public understanding of what philanthropy is always refers to elitist charity, preservation of the unjust status quo and control of power. The aim of building a democratic culture of giving for the common good has been absent in those efforts.

Today, almost no country lives in isolation and the wave of modernization of philanthropy in order to address the most urgent concerns of humanity and achieve greater degrees of social justice and peace is contagious. Several Latin American countries, including Argentina, also serve as an example of this global trend.

It has been in the last few years and under the influx of global movements that women have taken the lead and started to build new models of philanthropy that contrast and contest the historical legacy. For instance, the so-called “women’s funds” have grown in several countries of Latin America with the idea of “women investing in women and girls”.

In Argentina, for instance, it is worth mentioning the *Fondo de Mujeres del Sur* (FMS). The FMS is a foundation that mobilizes financial and technical resources in order to promote women's rights in Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay. Its mission is to channel funds in support of women's initiatives and projects which aim to advance gender equality as a tool for social change. The FMS aim is to be a fund that builds bridges between those that have money and those that have the power to implement changes. They aspire also to be a nationally and internationally recognized fund with regular individual and institutional donors and to be able to increasingly provide more support to women's groups in Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay.

The FMS emerged in 2007 in response to a lack of resources for women's organizations and feminist movement organizations in Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay, and in particular a lack of funding for grassroots organizations. FMS aims to mobilize resources from various national and international donors in support of small organizations and women's groups that have limited access to funding yet have innovative projects to increase women's full participation in all aspects of society.

More recently a new initiative emerged on the landscape of women's philanthropy in Argentina: the ELLAS program. ELLAS started in 2014 with the initial purpose of providing visibility to the role that women are playing in philanthropy as philanthropists, as social entrepreneurs and professionals in the field, as well as advancing the gender perspective within traditional philanthropy. ELLAS carries out its activities through the generation of knowledge, networking and learning, outreach and communications, and the promotion and support of women's giving circles. After exploring various alternatives and strategies, ELLAS decided to start by producing a book to showcase outstanding examples of the current and next generation of women philanthropists and by developing and supporting new mechanisms to channel social investment by women.

ELLAS's vision is to build a new culture of giving and philanthropy based on trust, horizontal, participative, empowerment, capacity-building, ownership, people-based and democratic principles in which the process of giving (deliberative, collective, collaborative) is as important as its outcomes (social justice and sustainable change). Based on these principles, the mechanism of women's giving circles (WGC) as implemented in several countries, but in particular in the United States, was adopted in order to test their feasibility and adaptability to the Argentine context.

As previously explained, WGCs are currently an important renovated form in the field of philanthropy, but none have been identified in the region prior to ELLAS

recent efforts¹⁸. Giving circles are a powerful way for small groups to make big changes: to give together proactively and strategically, to build community with each other, and to connect to excellent potential grant recipients who are changing the world in a variety of ways. Recent research has shown that giving circle members give more money, give more strategically, and engage more deeply in their communities than non-giving circle members. They are also more likely to tell other people about the organizations their giving circle supports (as compared with their own personal charitable donations)—thereby creating ripple effects that go far beyond the circle itself.

Giving circles are:

- **Accessible:** Anyone at any giving level, at any age, in any place, with any funding interest, can start a giving circle. There need be no minimum contribution level and no barriers to entry.
- **Hands-on:** In addition to active engagement with philanthropic decision-making, some giving circles also offer members a chance to volunteer with or provide *pro bono* professional assistance to grantees.
- **Collaborative:** Members make decisions together as equals and peers.
- **Communal:** Members connect with each other and with their communities, building meaningful relationships with each other and with those they are supporting.
- **Empowering:** Members leverage their dollars to do something bigger—and perhaps better—than they could on their own.
- **Educational:** Members learn about the needs of their community or focus area, and can be intentional and proactive about how they give to the causes they care about.
- **People based:** Members define initiatives on the basis of meeting the real needs of communities.
- **Social capital builders:** Through building relationships and developing networks

The purpose of building women's giving circles is to learn and demonstrate in practice the answers to the main questions raised above (p. 4): women do give more and differently; it is possible to transform individual giving into collective action; philanthropy is not just for the rich but for every member of society independent of religious, social or political orientation.

¹⁸ 10 Innovations in global philanthropy. Concepts worth spreading in the UK. Plum Lomax and Rachel Wharton, October 2014, NPC (New Philanthropy Capital).

Two WGCs, each with ten members, are currently developing in Argentina as result of the ELLAS program. The women are from different social classes and ages. One of the circles, more homogeneous in its members' religious beliefs, in a very short period of time (6 months) was able to design a strategy, identify a grantee, negotiate with the grantee the purpose of the donation, attract additional economic support from a well-known visual artist who donated two pictures that were sold, articulate its donation with an international organization that provided know-how and materials, and, finally, make the donation. This is a real success story for a group of women who did not know each other and met for the first time to create the giving circle. Moreover, the group evolved from women donors to practitioners. While in the first meeting the discussion was about how much money to invest, after several meetings the focus shifted to the problem to be addressed and how to approach it. A new initiative was created and new economic resources were gathered.

The other circle, more heterogeneous in its members' religious and political beliefs, is moving at a slower pace. The members realized that they need to invest more time to build trust within the membership. In addition, a series of personal issues among its leaders made it more difficult to maintain the initial dynamics and enthusiasm.

Due to its innovative approach, the ELLAS program immediately attracted the attention of the media, international donors and local NGOs.¹⁹

d. Lessons learned

Since the very beginning of ELLAS, we were aware that as a social innovation in the context of Argentina and we needed to approach the WGCs as an experiment with a learning perspective in order to be able to improve their performance, replicate and upscale them. As a result of the learning process we have identified a series of "tensions" that need to be considered for their successful implementation;

¹⁹ The ELLAS program was featured in one of the most important Argentinean newspapers and was invited to give a TED talk in Uruguay. The ELLAS program is based at the Center for the Study of State and Society (CEDES) in Buenos Aires, Argentina. CEDES is among the most important nonprofit research centers in Argentina with a long tradition of involvement in research and action on the nonprofit sector and philanthropy. See: <http://www.cedes.org/ellas-mujeres-y-filantropia.php>

some refer to practical issues, while others are of a more strategic nature. These are:

- a) **Language:** The use of certain language reflects how people name and describe things. For instance, we use the term philanthropy to describe a whole range of activities that involve the private giving of time, talent or money for the common good, in order to establish a dialogue with the international arena. However, philanthropy, as understood in the majority of English-speaking countries, is not a term or a concept that is used among practitioners of the nonprofit sector in Argentina. “Solidarity” or “social investments” are most commonly employed to describe these kinds of activities. Although we know that all the terms used do not have the same meanings in various languages, we needed to be flexible in order to be easily understood without compromising our aim of building a new culture of giving. There is a wide gap in moving from a culture of charity, assistance and beneficence from the top downward to one where the key concepts are citizenship, empowerment, horizontal relationships, collective decisions and democratic decision-making.
- b) **Process vs. outcomes:** From the very beginning, we articulated that the creation of a “new” culture of giving should be related to changing the practices of philanthropy as they were deployed for almost two centuries. As a result our emphasis during the formation of the WGCs was built into the process itself:
- Autonomy and democracy in decision-making instead of centralized, top-down decisions;
 - Arriving at consensuses instead of voting;
 - Fostering collaboration and dialogue instead of arriving at decisions hastily;
 - Evolving from a group of individuals sharing a common space in a given time towards creating a collective;
 - Incorporating a learning approach both regarding tools and content;
 - Prioritizing the objectives of social change of the WGC before talking about money. Although these objectives were achieved—not without conflicts—it still remains open to question as to whether this democratic development hinders or strengthens arriving at positive outcomes in terms of social change. These we will only be able to evaluate in the long run.
- c) **Social objectives vs. Investment:** From our research, the point of departure for many WGCs in the United States is deciding how much money each one of the members is going to invest during a certain period of time and then the objectives,

projects and grantees are sought and developed. In our case, we started by prioritizing the discussion about the target population, the issue or problem to be addressed, the search for an institution with whom to co-design the project. Thereafter the project was evaluated and budgeted. If the group could fund the entire project, we moved ahead and if not, additional resources were sought by the group.

Our approach clearly prioritized the social change objective instead of the amount to be invested. It is not right or wrong to go one way or the other, but we believe that our decision was more coherent in relation to what we understand as a “new culture of giving”.

- d) **Institutionalization vs. informality:** As per our research, most of the giving circles in the United States are hosted by institutions as a component of their fund raising strategies.²⁰ However, the groups being formed in Argentina are autonomous from any institution. This approach stems from the fact that informality is an important characteristic of Argentine society in terms of the economy, the role of institutions or public policy rules and procedures. In that sense, the formation of WGCs tend to play under these “rules of the game” since they can be formed quickly, act quickly and adapt easily to the personal circumstances of its members. However, we foresee that if the WGCs continue their development and growth, the discussion around their formalization or institutionalization will necessarily emerge and new tensions will arise. Issues related to the tax laws, transparency and accountability, and legal registration will be obviously part of the agenda.
- e) **Beneficiaries:** Our initial approach when launching the ELLAS program and the WGCs was putting women in a leadership role in a movement of “women investing in women and girls”. While the leadership of women was easily understood and put into practice, the gender focus of their grant-making was often questioned by some members. Some members argued that people in need cannot be separated by their gender, while other members advocated for a focus on women given their special underprivileged situation. A similar situation arose with the WGC formed by Jewish women as to whether to focus exclusively in the Jewish community or not. For us, it is still early to advocate for one or the other direction. Early decisions could compromise the success and expansion of the initial undertakings. Again, flexibility and close monitoring are essential to understand and accompany these processes. As per our research, these same tensions about whether or not to

²⁰ Although we do not ignore the large amount of informal circles in the U.S

choose in advance the target populations are also regularly present in the practices of giving circles in the US.

- f) **Scale:** Our initial aim, as expressed in the mission of the ELLAS program, is to create a philanthropic movement led by women of all ages and economic conditions to foster strategic and participative social investments. (See: <http://www.cedes.org/ellas-mujeres-y-filantropia.ph>.) Strategically, we considered WGCs the preferred means to fulfilling our mission. After a short period of implementation, the question about scale (movement) emerged. How many WGCs form a critical mass to be considered a movement? What other tools should be incorporated in order to move from individual experiments to a widespread movement, such as communications, supporting materials or leadership training for example? As per our research in the United States there are several organizations that aim to create a movement of giving circles²¹. This is not yet the case in Argentina where the ELLAS program is the only initiative attempting to do so.
- g) **Sustainability:** Social change and development only occurs in the long run. As described above, one of the great advantages of WGCs is that they can operate easily, are flexible, and do not need a lot of investment in their management. The other side of the coin is that these “pros” can also be their “cons”. Given their low degree of institutionalization they can be easily dissolved thus putting at risk their social change objectives. How to avoid dissolution is a complex issue that cannot be ignored. The main questions related to this challenge point to how to circumvent the risks by fostering leadership development, long-term commitment by members, accountability about investments and results, satisfaction related to impact and maintaining a high level of engagement and trust among members.
- h) **Women donors vs. women practitioners.** The literature reviewed for this research highlights that one of the powerful features of giving circles, besides engaging women as donors in a collective way, is their direct engagement and involvement with community issues. This could be done through volunteering or by providing *pro bono* professional assistance to their grantees. From our observations of the field it stands out that both roles—as donors only or as both donors and volunteers—heavily depend on the nature of the circle. The more locally based in small communities and the smaller in size the higher the chance that the circle can fulfill both roles. On the contrary, the larger the size, the

²¹ For instance, Natan among the jewish community, Women Moving Millions, Giving Circles Network or Community Investment network.

community and the circle, the more difficult it is to fulfill both roles at the same time. The larger circles tend to professionalize their management and procedures and become grant-making organizations thus limiting women to the role of donors, while the smaller ones maintain strong ties to the community. Moreover, smaller circles tend to maintain more “esprit de corps” than larger ones.

- i) **Diversity vs. homogeneity:** The great potential of WGCs is that they can include women from diverse social segments, professional backgrounds, ages and races or ethnic origins. We have confirmed this by observing the landscape of WGCs in the U.S. and through our interviews. Nevertheless, it becomes rather clear that while the richness of WGCs as a new field of action in philanthropy needs to be nurtured by the diversity of experiences in their own local contexts, they tend to have higher levels of performance when there is more internal consistency in terms of the profile of its members.
- j) **Redistribution of resources vs. new resources:** A common concern about giving circles has been that they may divert money away from causes and organizations that are already supported. Our research shows that WGCs in the U.S. tend to give more and give more broadly as a result of member’s participation rather than shifting their giving.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

In this paper we have analyzed and highlighted the major trends in global philanthropy with a focus on innovations where women are taking a leadership role, in particular in the creation and expansion of women giving circles. When analyzing the specific case of Argentina both from a historical perspective and the present picture, we described and explored new ways in which women are addressing their needs and those of the communities in which they live through new mechanisms.

Women giving circles are an emergent strategy that does not attempt to oversimplify complex problems, nor does it lead to a “magic bullet” solution that can be scaled up. Instead, they give rise to constantly evolving solutions that are uniquely suited to the time, place, and participants involved. The model helps women funders be more relevant and effective by adapting their activities to ever-changing circumstances and engaging others as partners without the illusion of control often found in already existing institutions like foundations, for example.

Giving circles are messy and challenging but very realistic about the role they can play in social progress as a collective force.

Based on our analysis, we presented in section 4 some tensions and challenges to take into account at the time of propelling WGCs in the complex context of Latin America—Argentina in particular—so as to strengthen the participation of women in philanthropy. In summary they relate to the language and concepts used; the emphasis on process and/or outcomes; the balance between social objectives vs. investment; the dilemma between institutionalization vs. informality; the selection of beneficiaries; the question of scale; the challenge of sustainability; the complex role of donors and volunteers; the problem of diversity vs. heterogeneity; and the big question about attracting new resources or redistributing the existing ones.

Considering these challenges, we believe that WGCs have the potential to be adapted to any scenario and culture so as to play a decisive role in activating a regional movement towards innovative philanthropy and thus to foster civic participation and engagement for social change.

It makes no sense to reinvent the wheel when the wheel has been already invented. It is about learning and exploring how to adapt the wheel to meet the needs of the different settings and cultural needs. A wheel is always a wheel: it varies in size, texture, material and strength depending on the environment and the purpose for which is going to be used. Finally, the choice of a particular wheel depends on human needs and the ability of leadership to respond to them.

We believe that the women's giving circles could be the wheel to propel a new philanthropy in Argentina to enhance the development of a robust civil society and a more participatory democracy.

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INTERVIEWS (hold during March 2015 from NYC, USA)

Name	Position	Organization
Kathleen Mc Carthy	Professor	The Graduate Center City University of New York
Andrés Thompson	Director ELLAS program	CEDES
Bernie Dolley	Director	Ikhala Trust
Rita Thapa	Funder & Board member	TEWA
Joanna Catherine Fultz	Program Officer	Winnipeg Foundation
Angela Eikenberry	Associate Professor	University of Nebraska Omaha
Debra Mesch	Director of the Women's Philanthropy Institute (WPI) at the School of Philanthropy	Indiana University Lilly Family
Felicia Herman	Executive Director	The Natan Fund
Cristina Parnetti	Senior Program Manager .Grant Making Support Group	Open Society Foundation
Surita Sandosham	Senior Director	The Synergos

	Global Leaders Programs and Networks	Institute
Shannon E. St. John	Director, Global Philanthropists Circle	The Synergos Institute
Martin Abregu	Vicepresident	Ford Foundation
Merril Sovner	Program Officer	Americas Society Council of the Americas
Aida Rodriguez	Professor	New School for Social Research
D. McManus & F. Eberhart	Members	NYC women's giving circle