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Will the Revolution Be Funded? An Exploratory Study of Radical Philanthropy in Europe

Carolina Vicente Rodrigues Guedes

Master in Development Studies

Supervisor: PhD Ana Luísa Silva, Visiting Assistant Professor, ISCTE – Instituto Univeristário de Lisboa

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CIÊNCIAS SOCIAIS
E HUMANAS

Department of Political Economy

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For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change.

Audre Lorde

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Resumo

Desde o movimento #ShiftThePower até à "trust-based philanthropy", práticas alternativas que visam abordar as relações de poder na filantropia têm-se tornado cada vez mais comuns desde a década de 2010. Simultaneamente, multiplicaram-se por toda a Europa fundações que adotam estruturas mais horizontais, modelos de tomada de decisão participativos e que articulam uma crítica aos sistemas sociais, económicos e políticos que perpetuam desigualdades. Estas fundações dão prioridade ao apoio a movimentos sociais de base sub-financiados, que trabalham em prol de mudança sistémica e do "combate ao financiamento neocolonialista". Através da sua crítica ao capitalismo, colonialismo e a outros sistemas de opressão, bem como à sua estrutura interna e práticas de financiamento, as fundações radicais propõem-se a contrariar as dinâmicas do desenvolvimento. Se a filantropia radical é crítica em relação ao desenvolvimento, o que está a dizer? E o que está a fazer de diferente? Esta investigação tem como objetivo mapear os principais atores, tendências e práticas da filantropia radical europeia, fornecer uma caracterização preliminar do fenómeno e explorar as perspetivas dos beneficiários sobre as suas relações com financiadores radicais. Assim, o estudo utiliza uma combinação de métodos qualitativos indutivos e dedutivos para caracterizar nove fundações radicais europeias selecionadas através da rede EDGE Funders Alliance, baseada em relatórios anuais, websites e blogs das fundações; além disso, analisa catorze entrevistas semiestruturadas realizadas com organizações beneficiárias das fundações selecionadas. Os dados revelam que, embora ainda existam tensões no modelo das fundações radicais, as relações entre financiadores e beneficiários tendem a ser mais próximas e honestas devido ao estatuto que as fundações radicais assumem e que Susan Ostrander chamou de "movement insiders". Argumenta-se ainda que a filantropia radical, através da sua narrativa e práticas, apoia alternativas pluriversais ao desenvolvimento.

Palavras-chave: Filantropia Radical, fundações, movimentos de base, filantrocapitalismo, desenvolvimento

Abstract

From #ShiftThePower to trust-based philanthropy, alternative practices that aim to address power relations in philanthropy have become increasingly widespread since the 2010s. Simultaneously, foundations adopting more horizontal structures, participatory decision-making models and articulating a critique of social, economic and political systems perpetuating inequality, have multiplied across Europe. These foundations prioritize supporting underfunded grassroots social movements working towards systemic change and "countering neocolonialist giving". Through their criticism of capitalism, colonialism and other systems of oppression, as well as its internal structure and grantmaking practices, radical foundations propose to counter development dynamics. If radical philanthropy is critical of development, what is it saying? And what is it doing differently? This research aims to begin to map out key actors, trends and practices in European radical philanthropy, provide a preliminary characterization of the phenomenon and explore grantees' perspectives on their relationships with radical funders. Thus, the study uses a mix of inductive and deductive qualitative methods to characterize nine European radical foundations selected from the EDGE Funders Alliance network, drawing from foundations' annual reports, websites and blogs; in addition, it analyzes fourteen semi-structured interviews conducted with grantee organizations from the selected foundation sample. The data reveals that while there are still tensions in the radical foundation model, funder-grantee relationships tend to be closer and more honest due to the foundations' status as what Susan Ostrander has called "movement insiders". It is also argued that radical philanthropy, through its narrative and practices, supports pluriversal alternatives to development.

Key words: Radical philanthropy, foundations, grassroots movements, philanthrocapitalism, development

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Glossary of Abreviations

AAAA – Addis Ababa Action Agenda
AC – Activist Council
BIPOC – Black, Indigenous and Other People of Color
CSO – Civil Society Organization
DEI – Diversity Equity and Inclusion
FC – Funders Council
FfD – Funding for Development
GDA – Global Development Agenda
GHG – Green House Gas
HNWI – High Net-Worth Individual
ID – International Development
NAACP – National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
NGO – Non-Profit Organization
NPIC – Non-Profit Industrial Complex
ODA – Official Development Assistance
OECD – Organization for Economic Co-Operation
OSF – Open Society Foundations
PPP – Public-Private Partnership
SCO – Social Change Organization
SDG – Sustainable Development Goals

Introduction

> It is impossible to provide a single definition of development. For many, development is the ineluctable strategy by which poor countries need to modernize; for others, it is an imperial imposition by rich capitalist countries on poor ones, and as such, it should be opposed; for yet others, it is a discourse invented by the West for the cultural domination of non-Western societies that need to be denounced as such, beyond its economic effects; finally, for many common people the world over, development has become either a reflection of their aspirations to a dignified life, or an utterly destructive process with which they have to coexist, and not infrequently both at the same time. Taken as a whole, it can be said that development is a complex historical process with social, economic, political and cultural aspects. (Demaria *et al.*, 2023, p. 59)

In her article *Dismantling Development: Towards an Abolitionist Theory of Development*, Raghavan (2024) mentions two impulses that inform her definition of development: "(i) the feminist epistemological insistence on recognising all knowledge as situated, partial, and motivated (Haraway 1988); and (ii) relinquishing preoccupations with what a concept *is* in favour of understanding and characterizing what it *does*" (*ibid*.). As such, she proposes a simple definition of development as a "a dominant, powerful discourse on, as well as a set of institutions and practices engaged in addressing the causes of and solutions to the most pressing socio-economic-political challenges of our times" (*ibid*.). And as the dominant narrative, institutions and practices that aim to solve current global issues, it is failing to do so: multiple reports expose the world's growing wealth gap (Oxfam, 2025), ecological systems are surpassing tipping points that could prove irreversible (Readfearn, 2025), countries are not reducing greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) at a fast enough rate to avoid further climate collapse (United Nations Environment Programme, 2024).

The notion of sustainable development coined in the Brundtland report in 1987 and later reaffirmed in the Rio+ 20 Conference on Sustainable Development in 2012, assumed a vision where 'sustained economic growth' was a prerequisite for a 'green economy', the system that would be able to tackle the climate crises and still deliver on development goals (Hickel and Kallis, 2020; Demaria *et al.*, 2023). In *Is Green Growth Possible?,* Hickel and Kallis (2020) investigate green growth's (and therefore sustainable development's) assumption that it is possible to decouple economic growth (measured through the Gross Domestic Product) from greenhouse gas emissions and resource use. The authors find that empirical projections do not show decoupling happening, arguing instead that the "objective could be to find ways to decouple prosperity and development from growth (e.g. Jackson, 2009,O'Neill et al. 2018) rather than to continue to chase the phantom of green growth" (Hickel and Kallis, 2020, p.

483). The limit of 1,5º C of warming to prevent further climate collapse is quickly being surpassed with 2024 as the first year to exceed it (Copernicus, 2025), but there are no widespread and serious discussions of redefining sustainable development and its goals. As the authors put it,

> It seems likely that the insistence on green growth is politically motivated. The assumption is that it is not politically acceptable to question economic growth and that no nation would voluntarily limit growth in the name of the climate or environment; therefore green growth must be true, since the alternative is disaster. (Hickel and Kallis, 2020)

This sentiment is echoed in development's logics. Development has been able to position itself "as necessary, self-evidently positive and unquestionable, even in the face of mounting evidence to the contrary" (*ibid*.) or, as Escobar (1995) argued, "achieved the status of a certainty in the social imaginary" (*ibid*., p. 5). What is more, the narrative of sustainable development "appeals to states, institutions, agencies, grassroot organizations, as well as individuals - which should be proactive, dynamic, apolitical, technically skilled, entrepreneurial, and free to take on the responsibility for their own development" (Garcia-Arias and Mediavilla, 2023, p. 174). But in the face of increasing climate disasters, wealth accumulation and persistent social problems, how can development and economic growth's assumptions remain unquestioned?

This research started from a desire to engage with critical development perspectives and practices. Through my experience as part of a climate justice collective[1] based out of Lisbon, Portugal, I was introduced to the work of social movement organizing and its various dimensions, one of them being looking for ways to fund the organizations' work. I was new to organizing but quickly began to understand that funding for small grassroots collectives, like mine, was very limited. Since there were little to no state funds for grassroots groups and, when they existed, tended to prioritize groups with a more reformist approach, foundation grants were a good source of funding. However, even with private philanthropic funding there were pressures to conform to certain standards, to be less explicitly politically engaged, to focus on activities that could "raise awareness" and "empower" people to change behaviours, to speak a certain way and to provide measurable outcomes. I quickly became skeptical of philanthropy's promise of social change and democratic participation. That was until a colleague told me about some European funders with a different approach: foundations that were funding grassroots organizations, had a critical vision of philanthropy and social change and were adopting a more horizontal model by giving the power to make grant decisions to

[1] I joined Linha Vermelha (Red Line) at the end of 2023 and I'm still an active member at the time I'm writing this research. Linha Vermelha is a climate justice collective that knits red lines to fight for the 1,5º C limit of global warming. We provide information and organize climate education in sessions in community organizations of the periphery of Lisbon.

activists. What started as personal curiosity became the possibility to research an emerging subject that has not received much academic attention and that touches on crucial points in the development paradigm: the need to support alternative approaches towards systemic change. Thus, I chose to research radical philanthropy in Europe, its premises and possibilities.

Radical foundations and funding projects have multiplied in Europe since the 2010's: the Edge Fund was born in 2012, Guerrilla Foundation in 2015, FundAction in 2017, FemFund in 2018, Marius Jacob Foundation in 2019, the Dalan Fund in 2022, just to name a few. They have funded groups working on issues such as climate justice, LGBTQIA+ rights, migrant justice, housing rights, and anti-racism issues, supporting different strategies like organizing, campaigning, capacity building and education, local politics, media production, and more. Across different grant sizes, thematic areas and internal structures, it is possible to find common characteristics that join together these foundations: they are focused on social movement and grassroots funding, participatory decision making is central to their internal structures, and they share a common critique of the socioeconomic systems, the philanthropic field and the path to systemic change. Being located in and supporting organizations in Europe means more than "thinking globally, acting locally": the organizations and the foundations propose to think and act systemically in order to address the root causes of issues, which they identify as capitalism, colonialism, racism, and patriarchy, connecting not only local but other struggles in other regions to these systems. As Guerrilla Foundation states:

> Europe is extremely far from having attained equitable prosperity and ecological balance since people far away are paying the price tag for this seemingly enviable continent to keep operating far beyond the planetary boundaries of consumption – the boundaries we should really be taking seriously. Therefore, until our home region, Europe, doesn't radically clean up its act regarding social and environmental injustices that keep originating here, and echoing disastrously across the globe, often with more harmful consequences much further afield, we will keep on funding grassroots activists building movements on European soil. (March, 2021)

To understand radical philanthropy it is necessary to look at the current dynamics in philanthropy, which have come to be dominated by visions of win-win market solutions to social issues, even international development problems: philanthrocapitalism. It is in this context, and in the midst of efforts to localize aid and to "Shift the Power" in international development funding, that radical philanthropy emerges, proposing redistributive models as "a tactical undermining of capital's temporality, an insistence that another world is not only possible but already being built in the cracks" (Guerrilla Foundation, 2024). Through its explicit critiques of capitalism, colonialism and other systems of oppression, as well as its internal structure and grantmaking practices, radical foundations critique and counter development dynamics. If radical philanthropy is critical of growth and development what is it saying? And what is it doing

differently? Is it possible to understand it as an alternative practice on the path for undoing development?

The paradigm of sustainable development expressed in the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) promoted not only a vision of continual economic growth, but also a financing model that has become increasingly dependent on private funding (Garcia-Arias and Mediavilla, 2023). Philanthropy has been an essential part of that, as the increasing weight of philanthrocapitalist institutions like the Gates Foundation in development projects demonstrates. And with the announced closure of USAID[2] and decreases in Official Development Assistance (ODA) projected to continue in 2025, philanthropy could establish its position even more. Considering the rise of private philanthropic funding in development financing, studies of philanthropy in its interaction with development are timely for the development studies discipline. Beyond academia, investigating grassroots movements' funding in Europe becomes especially important in a political context where social movements are facing more scrutiny and repression both in criminalization of protests but also through cracking down on foreign funding, as Foreign Agents laws illustrate. Far-right movements are also rising across the region with funding for conservative movements accompanying that trend (Datta, 2025). Thus, studying radical philanthropy addresses the need to critically examine philanthropy's current impact on development and social movements, while also investigating alternative emergent practices.

With all these considerations in mind, this research aims to begin to map out key actors, trends and practices of European radical philanthropy, as well as provide a preliminary characterization and reflections on the trend. Additionally, considering radical philanthropy's focus on grassroots movement support, grantee organizations' are interviewed to assess their perspectives on the trend as a whole, on their experiences with philanthropic funding and on their experiences when it comes to the relationships they establish with radical funders. As a result, after discussing the study's methodology (Chapter 1), the research sets out to: first, trace the historical evolution of philanthropic foundations and their relationship with social movements and international development, in order to understand the context that underlies current dynamics in these fields (Chapter 2); secondly, characterize the main trends in European radical philanthropy, with a focus on radical philanthropy foundations, their narratives, structures and grantmaking practices (Chapter 3); and lastly, to explore the perspectives of grantees funded by radical foundations on funding, philanthropy, and funder-grantee relationships (Chapter 4).

[2] United States' Agency for International Development.

1. Methodology

1.1. Aims and Research Questions

This research aims to explore European radical philanthropy and its interactions with grassroots organizations. As an exploratory study, it starts by describing the context in which the modern conceptions of philanthropy as foundations developed, adds to discussions on radical philanthropy's definition by analyzing European radical foundation's structures, visions and practices and collects qualitative data on grantees' perspectives on the trend. "Philanthropy" and "social movements" can be approached in different ways and include a variety of institutions, organizations and actors operating in each of these fields. The research focuses on two main actors - philanthropic radical foundations and grassroots organizations - with special focus on their relationships as "funder" and "grantee", that is, funding entity and funded organization.

The academic literature and even the philanthropic sector itself register a diversity of use of similar concepts like "social justice philanthropy", "social movement philanthropy", "trust-based philanthropy", among others, each emphasizing a particular aspect of a many times larger and similar tendency. Sometimes these concepts are used interchangeably, and most times lack a clearly defined meaning shared by researchers, philanthropic practitioners and activists. Paarlberg et al. (2022) supports these arguments, finding that academic literature focused on philanthropy that advocates for fundamental institutional and systemic transformation is fragmented and lacks "conceptual coherence". While the concept will be further developed in the following sections, there is a need to justify the choice to use the concept of "radical philanthropy" to describe the trends and the foundations this research focuses on. For one, there are instances where the studied foundations explicitly mention and characterize themselves as "radical funders", "radical philanthropy" (Guerrilla Foundation, no date) or "radical participatory grantmaking" (Edge Fund, no date). And while others may not refer to themselves as radical, preferring expressions like "participatory grantmaker" (FundAction, no date), they share many similarities with those who call themselves radical foundations. Additionally, the concept of radical philanthropy aims to embody more than just participatory decision making practices, it includes a critique of social, economic and political systems that perpetuate inequality and oppression, proposing supporting grassroots movements acting for systemic change as a means to address the "root causes of the issues". Thus, radical philanthropy was considered more encompassing and better able to illustrate the different vision of rupture with the philanthropic *status quo* the foundations in focus propose.

Considering this context, the research intends to answer two main questions:

1. Is there a trend in European philanthropy towards a radical philanthropy and how can it be characterized?

2. What are the grantees' perspectives on the radical philanthropy trend and on the relationships they establish with radical foundations?

Question one calls for the investigation of several proposals for a power shift in the philanthropic field, beyond those that call themselves radical, in order to understand broader transformations and how they might share similarities with what is being called a “radical philanthropy trend”. It also allows for the proposal of a characterization that adds to the academic conceptualizations of radical philanthropy. Question two aims to understand the perspectives of grantee organizations on a trend that is based on the idea that they hold the power to solve social issues. Additionally, it dives deeper into funder-grantee relationships in practice with the goal of confronting radical foundations’ claims with grantees’ lived experiences in order to better characterize these foundations. Overall, the goal of this research is to contribute to a better understanding of radical philanthropy discourses and practices in Europe and to shed light on the possibilities and tensions the type of funding arrangements they promote bring up.

The first phase of the research consisted of literature review that allowed for the contextualization of the main actors and questions of the research, as well as the formulation of hypotheses. In the second phase, these hypotheses were confronted and expanded on during the inductive-deductive analysis of the grantee interviews. Thus, considering the research questions and the academic literature review, it was hypothesized that:

1. Power is still present in funder-grantee relationships between radical foundations and grassroots organizations, but foundations practices might help in attenuating the power discrepancy;

2. Radical foundations can be seen as movement insiders (Ostrander, 1995), making them more aware of their grantees’ needs and struggles, as well as making them less likely to try to co-opt or influence grassroots organizations;

3. Grassroots organizations use philanthropic funding strategically, informed by the history of foundations influencing and co-opting social movements, which means that they might not report significant differences between radical and non-radical funders;

4. From another perspective, if grassroots organizations understand their radical funders as movement insiders, they may be more likely to feel that the foundation has a better understanding of their context, and thus build closer relationships with those foundations.

1.2. Research Methods

The research assumed a combination of inductive and deductive qualitative methods, relying on extensive literature review, reports, document analysis and semi-structured interviews. The academic literature review complemented by the latest Global Philanthropy Tracker report (Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy, 2023) and the OECD report on philanthropy and development (OECD, 2021) provided the basis for tracing the evolution of philanthropy and its relationship with social movements and development. In order to analyse current trends in philanthropy and characterize radical philanthropy, the research relied fundamentally on document analysis and information made publicly available by foundations, philanthropic networks and grassroots organizations' statements, websites, blogs, annual reports and other relevant documents. Finally, a set of semi-structured interviews with European radical foundation's grantees took place as a means to collect data on funder-grantee relationships and acquire further insight into grassroots movements' perceptions of the trend.

As some authors argue, radical philanthropy encompasses a diversity of practices and concepts and as such it might be counterproductive to close its definition to the validation of a strict set of criteria or to measure particular foundations against those criteria (Herro and Obeng-Odoom, 2019). However, in line with the goal of characterising European radical foundations and understanding grantees' perspectives, it was necessary to establish a set of criteria in order to determine a sample of foundations to investigate. In line with the insights provided by the academic literature review of Paarlberg et al. (2022) and Herro and Obend-Odoom's (2019) definition of radical philanthropy, a set of criteria was established to select radical foundations (see Chapter 4). These criteria were applied to the members of the EDGE Funders Alliance network available on the online directory as of May 2025 that were based in Europe and awarding grants in the region. The EDGE Funders Alliance is a network of donors, foundations and other philanthropic practitioners and institutions committed to values of equity and justice in philanthropy and to global social change. As is explained on the website, EDGE "supports the broader global movement to dismantle extractive funding systems while working to align resources with the priorities and visions of social movements to drive systemic change and justice" (EDGE Funders, no date). The network is made up of "500 donors, foundation officers, trustees and advisors in more than 40 countries" and has been organizing yearly conferences since 2012 (*ibid*.). Considering the large global membership, the history of the organization and its work in providing spaces to discuss and propose radical philanthropy alternatives, the network was chosen as a starting point through which to select foundations.

From the 112 members publicly listed on the website, consultancy corporations or other organizations that were not foundations or awarding grants were excluded. Nine foundations

were found to fit the conditions[3]: Guerrilla Foundation, Marius Jacob Foundation, Edge Fund, FundAction, Safe Passage Fund, Mama Cash, HetActiefonds, FemFund Poland and the Dalan Fund. From these, some of them only award funds nationally (Foundation Marius Jacob in Belgium, Edge Fund in the United Kingdom, FemFund in Poland), some focused on underfunded regions (the Dalan Fund focuses on Central and Eastern Europe, Caucasus, Central and North Asia) and the remaining award grants all over Europe. Given the interconnected nature of social movements, the choice was to include foundations even if they only funded specific countries or regions within Europe.

The selection of radical foundations not only served to add to radical philanthropy's understanding with concrete practices but also allowed for sources from which to select grassroots organizations for the semi-structured interviews. The foundations' websites and annual reports were consulted and a selection of past grantees were contacted via email with a brief explanation of the research objectives and an invitation to discuss their experiences with philanthropic funding in general and with their radical funder specifically. Due to limited time, resources, and the exploratory nature of the research, only grantees from five foundations were contacted (Guerrilla Foundation, FundAction, Edge Fund, Safe Passage Fund, FemFund Poland). These resulted in thirteen completed online interviews and one email response across different organization types, intervention areas, activities and funding experiences.

The interviews took place in June and July 2025 virtually through Zoom and the audio was recorded with the participants consent for transcription and analysis purposes. The interviews were analyzed with the assistance of MAXQDA software using a grounded theory approach to code and interpret the interviews (Urquhart, 2017). This approach was chosen due to its mix of open and selective coding with theoretical coding, allowing themes to emerge from the interviews but also to confront theoretical insights gathered from the literature review with the data (*ibid.*). The analysis was further supported by discussions on qualitative data analysis such as Holliday (2013) and Alvesson (2023).

Participant's citations were reproduced with little to no edits in order to preserve their meaning and sentiment. The text was only slightly edited to remove filler expressions to make reading more fluid and to remove specific references to other funders, organizations or places. Organizations have been anonymized to preserve participant's privacy and to allow them to more freely share experiences and opinions without fear of being identified and harming the

[3] A few other foundations fit most criteria but either were not based in Europe or were found to be ambiguous regarding one or more criteria and thus were not selected. This was the case of The Carmack Collective, Semia Fondo delle Donne Ente Filantropico, Numun Fund, Multitudes Foundation and FRIDA The Young Feminist Fund. Foundations had to fulfill the three points of the criteria simultaneously. Those that did not fulfill one of them were immediately excluded from the selection.

relationship with their funders. In the research, they are referenced by their main area of activity and region of Europe: for example, Feminist organization from Eastern Europe.

1.3. Limitations and Positionality

This study's exploratory nature allows it to begin to expose key practices, dynamics and ideas, but has significant limitations. Firstly, there is a lack of data on European philanthropy and literature on philanthropy and social movements in the region is similarly scarce. This made the characterization of the philanthropic European context more difficult and meant the study had to rely on academic literature from the United States for its investigation of the tensions in foundation funding for social movements. Secondly, the radical foundations' characterization would benefit from a framework that would allow for a more systematic comparison and be able to consider the diversity and complexity of each participatory grantmaking model. Considering a broader sample of foundations that might not fit all the defined criteria would also add to a better and more complex characterization of the phenomenon. Similarly, a larger sample of interviewed organizations would further the understanding of their funders' practices and the tensions that arise in that relationship. Finally, due to its focus on characterizing the trend and inspecting the funder-grantee relationships in practice, the research is not able to capture relevant dimensions like the internal perspectives of staff and activists or the work of radical foundations trying to influence the philanthropy field to redistribute its power.

It is relevant to consider my positionality regarding the research topic and the impact it had on the design of the study, data collection and analysis. In studying a context in which I am an insider - grassroots social movements - and a phenomenon I came to know through that experience - radical philanthropy -, my thoughts and experiences shaped several choices in this research. I believe my background in grassroots organizing allowed me to better understand social movements' and grassroots organizations' contexts, challenges and ways of working, to formulate hypotheses more informed in grassroots realities, but also to establish a deeper connection with the interviewees that allowed them to go further in sharing their experiences. Through the whole investigation I have tried to remain aware of my biases and to assume a curious attitude. I also believe my skeptical position regarding philanthropy's influence on social movements has provided me with the ability to consider the inherent tensions transforming funder-grantee relationships and trying to change the philanthropic field. It is also worth disclaiming here that the climate justice collective I joined at the end of 2023 has received funding from the Guerrilla Foundation in the past. Lastly, on a more practical note, there was a choice not to contact and interview Portuguese organizations due to my personal connections to the people and movements, which might have interfered with the interview results as well as our relationships in the activist spaces we share.

2. Philanthropy, Development and Social Movements

This chapter presents the main themes and questions that inform the study and contextualize the research problem along three main dimensions - philanthropy, development and social movements. Each section contextualizes an important piece of the setting in which radical philanthropy has emerged and established itself, but also helps to characterize key actors, tensions, and challenges. Thus, the chapter is divided in three main sections: in section 2.1. "Foundations", the origins, evolution, characteristics and criticisms of foundations as philanthropic institutions are investigated; in section 2.2. "Philanthropy, Development and the Rise of Private Funding" provides insights on how philanthropy has evolved alongside development (and vice versa), conceptualizes philanthrocapitalism and its practical effects and analyzes the "neoliberal development agenda"; finally, section 2.3. "Social Movements and Philanthropy" sets key definitions of civil society, social movements and grassroots organizations, investigates the main tensions in foundation funding for social movements and reflects on current challenges for European social movements.

2.1. Foundations

2.1.1. Scientific giving and the birth of foundations

While charitable giving has always been an important part of many societies, "large-scale, organized philanthropy, as embodied in the notion of "scientific giving" and in the institution of foundations, is a uniquely American phenomenon" (Arnove, 1980). Emerging in the beginning of the 20th century by the wishes of some of the most prominent millionaires at the time, foundations can be seen as a result of and responding to specific conditions of capitalist industrialization, liberal democracy and visions of progress.

In the United States, after the Civil War (1861-1865), in addition to religious institutions, organizations controlled by local elites started to proliferate and provide charitable assistance as a palliative response to the rise in poverty and the breakdown of community bonds at a time of accelerating industrialization. These organizations aided "deserving" populations like widows and children, focusing on individual assistance, excluding impoverished workers and overlooking systemic conditions producing poverty (INCITE!, 2007). At the turn of the 20th century, the US's economic, political and social context was witnessing the accumulation of the first industrial fortunes; the rise in poverty as a result of the new social relations of production introduced by industrialization; the preference for scientific expertise and rational planning in social interventions; and the need shared by government, corporations and a more

conservative wing of the labor movement to address social issues in the face of more radical change (Arnove, 1980). At this point there were still no restrictions on gift-giving as well as few taxation requirements at a federal level (Howe, 1980), which proved to be the right conditions for the establishment of the 'philanthropic foundation', a new kind of charitable organization to be endowed with part of the millionaires' fortunes and distribute them in favor of the "social good". These organizations were established with the intention of organizing the charitable distribution of the endowed fund, as opposed to providing direct assistance to individuals (*ibid.*).

Barbara Howe (1980) looks at the history of the first years of the Rockefeller and Carnegie foundations, established 1910 and 1911 respectively, among the first to be established in the US[4] and with a prominent role in philanthropy to this day. As they were originally envisioned by Andrew Carnegie[5] and John D. Rockefeller[6], foundations were created as a means to realize their vision of "scientific giving" (*ibid.*, p. 28) that is, of rationalizing the distribution of private funds for "social good". In fact, "it is the notion of a "scientific" endeavor that distinguishes the United States philanthropic foundation from its precursors" (Arnove, 1980, p. 26). Foundations meant to fulfill what philanthropists like Carnegie saw as an obligation of their position: giving away their fortunes for the benefit of public good. In his famous essay *The Gospel of Wealth*, he argued:

> Those who have surplus wealth give millions every year which produce more evil than good, and really retard the progress of the people, because most of the forms in vogue to-day for benefiting mankind only tend to spread among the poor a spirit of dependence upon alms, when what is essential for progress is that they should be inspired to depend upon their own exertions. (Carnegie, 1889, p. 23)

Carnegie was critical of the previous methods of giving (mainly charities) arguing that they were not only inefficient in alleviating poverty, but worsened the problem by making beneficiaries dependent on aid. In turn, foundations' principle of scientific giving was better suited to solve social issues because it proposed to solve issues at their core and articulated the "right" vision of transformation. Thus, foundations were established with a defined scope of activities, funding arrangements and beneficiaries that agreed with a specific vision of how social problems should be addressed and what kind of society those solutions would contribute to. It is interesting to note how Carnegie's criticism of charity has been reproduced throughout the iterations philanthropy goes through: philanthrocapitalists of the 2000s criticized traditional philanthropy for the same reasons Carnegie criticized charity - inefficient and ineffective - while

[4] The first foundation was established in 1907, the Sage Foundation (Howe, 1980).

[5] Andrew Carnegie (1835–1919) was an industrialist and philanthropist best known for his gifts of free public library buildings. https://www.carnegie.org/interactives/foundersstory/#!/

[6] John D. Rockefeller (1839-1937) was the founder of Standard Oil. https://www.britannica.com/money/John-D-Rockefeller

promoting the same solutions - self-help as “empowerment” and or “entrepreneurship” (Howe, 1980; Kohl-Arenas, 2016; Haydon, Jung and Russell, 2021).

Thus, based on the Foundation Library Center’s[7] definition,

> The foundation is often defined as “a nongovernmental, nonprofit organization having a principal fund of its own, managed by its own trustees or directors, and established to maintain or aid social, educational, charitable, religious, or other activities serving the common welfare.” (Howe, 1980, p. 26)

Foundations began by funding research centers and universities in the fields of health and social sciences, as well as disseminating information to better the living conditions of lower classes (INCITE!, 2007). Research funding fit the prominence given to science and technology and “the doctrine of independent institutions efficiently administering surplus wealth in the public interest accorded with the American belief in pluralism and a thriving private sector” (Arnove, 1980, p. 4). Since their inception, foundation funds have been understood as:

> the venture capital of philanthropy, best invested in activities requiring risk and foresight that are not likely to be supported either by government or private individuals. The usual purpose is not relief or even cure; it is prevention, research, and discovery (F. Emerson Andrews cited in Arnove, 1980, p. 3)

The scientific approach to philanthropy was not unique in society, but a general trend fitting with modern ideas of technical and scientific solutions to social issues. Development and philanthropy narratives supported similar conceptions of poverty and assistance. As Escobar (1995) notes, “the nascent order of capitalism and modernity relied on a politics of poverty the aim of which was not only to create consumers but to transform society by turning the poor into objects of knowledge and management” (*ibid*., p. 23). This called for interventions in health, education and other areas of social life with some authors arguing that it resulted in the birth of a new domain of research and intervention based on social work, “the social”, which culminated in the welfare system of the 20th century (*ibid*.). The creation of an apparatus of managing poverty is what Rahnema (cited in Escobar, 1995) understands as the first break in conceptions of poverty, which was followed by a second break, in 1945, with the birth of development as a project that constructed the Third World as poor and underdeveloped (*ibid*.). Foundations played a role in both these reconfigurations, as will be explored in the sections ahead.

Foundations were not without its critics, first coming under scrutiny by the Commission on Industrial Relations in 1915-16, following the repression and murder of striking workers of a mining company partially detained by Rockefeller. The hearings and the reports produced by

[7] The Foundation Library Center was a US based non-profit organization providing information on philanthropy and different types of philanthropic giving. In 2019, it merged with GuideStar and is now Candid https://candid.org/about/

the commission served as a forum for the debate of foundations' role in society, with opinions split between those that argued foundations represented a dangerous accumulation of power and influence that could subvert democratic processes and others that said they could be beneficial to society (Howe, 1980). Despite the unanimous support for congressional regulation, that would only happen with the tax reform of 1969, which means that for most of the 20th century foundations in the US had no restrictions on the amount of principal and its accumulation or even an obligation to submit an annual financial report (*ibid.*). Barbara Howe argues that having survived the scrutiny of the commission, the American foundations were able to crystallize themselves as autonomous institutions by the 1920s in the form the public knows them by today.

2.1.2. Foundations in the 20th Century

In the period of the Great Depression and World War II, US foundations' influence declined due to economic crisis, but regained prominence post-war with the emergence of new institutions like the Ford Foundation, created in 1936 (INCITE!, 2007). The rise of foundations was accompanied by the rise of formal 501(c)(3) non-profit organizations, since foundations could make tax-deductible donations to formal non-profits. It is relevant to note that the 501(c)(3) status forbade organizations from having a direct involvement in political advocacy (*ibid*.) which could be seen as contributing to the depoliticization of social movements.

In the US, foundations continued to support research centers, universities, cultural and artistic initiatives like theaters and museums, health and education services provided by NGOs as well as other activities promoting social welfare (INCITE!, 2007). In the 1960s they also started to fund social movement organizations, as was the case of the Ford Foundation and the Garland Fund's support of the civil rights movement (the impact of these relationships will be further discussed in section 2.1.4.). While foundations grew, maintaining more or less the same structures and fundamental assumptions, other trends emerged. Conservative foundations, public and community foundations as well as social change philanthropy used the institutional form towards other goals and, in some cases, tried to address issues in traditional philanthropy by adapting its structure. This means the foundation, as an organizational form, has been appropriated and changed according to groups and funders specific needs. As will be explored ahead, radical foundations are another episode in this history.

Public and community foundations may be the first innovation on the traditional foundation structure with the first being established as early as 1914. The Cleveland Foundation is regarded as the first public philanthropic institution to hold funds for and be managed by a particular community (Hodgson, 2020). Public and community foundations are concepts oftentimes used interchangeably, but that can also be understood as different types of

institutions. Despite not having a specific legal definition, public foundations in the US are broadly understood to be foundations, established with or without an endowment, that can raise funds for their activities and grantmaking from a diversity of sources: other foundations, individuals, corporations, or public entities (Council on Foundations, no date). When it comes to community foundations, Dana R. H. Doan from the Global Fund for Community Foundations defines:

> Community philanthropy is both a form of, and a force for, locally driven development that strengthens community capacity and voice, builds trust, and most importantly, taps into and builds on local resources, which are pooled together to build and sustain a strong community. (Doan, 2019, p. 7)

Community foundations have diverged from the hierarchical and outcome focused visions of traditional foundations. Instead, "rather than focusing on the delivery of projects, the emphasis becomes one of helping to put in place credible, long-term, systems and structures which allow communities to manage their own development and reduce dependency on external money and agendas" (Hodgson, 2020, p. 104). In Europe, the first community foundation was established in 1975, with the model spreading further in the 1990s and 2000s, according to the European Community Foundation Initiative (James Magowan, Francesca Mereta, and Kamil Szlosek, 2024).

In the 1970s, a new wave of community foundations emerged in the US as pioneers in what Ostrander, Silver and McCarthy (2005) defined as social change philanthropy. Rooted in philanthropy supporting grassroots collective organizing for systemic change and focusing on the root causes of social issues, "social change philanthropy aims explicitly to facilitate the changing of societal institutions so they don't produce the very problems that 'charity' tries to alleviate. (*ibid*., p. 10). Foundations like the Haymarket People's Fund, Crossroads Foundation and other community foundations part of networks like the Funding Exchange[8] were committed to local leadership development, inclusiveness and self-determination of communities, adopting participatory grantmaking practices by entrusting decision-making power to boards of experienced activists and community organizers. Their goal was to address power imbalances in philanthropy, both in grantmaking decisions and in funder-grantee relationships, by building more democratic and equitable internal structures. These foundations were created by affluent individuals that participated in the social movements of the 1960s (anti-war, civil rights, feminism), which shaped their political vision and made them seek to connect the redistribution of their wealth to social movement activism (Silver, 1998).

[8] The Funding Exchange was "as an umbrella organization for a network of local funds" created in 1979 in New York City, operating under the motto of "Change, not Charity". The network was dissolved in 2013 (Theodora Lurie, 2016).

The Haymarket People's Fund started funding community organizing in the New England region in 1974 under the slogan "Change Not Charity" (Haymarket People's Fund, no date), which became a shared vision with similar foundations that emerged in the same period and later of the Funding Exchange network. They prioritized funding community and grassroots organizing instead of direct services or advocacy, which were mostly being done by professionalized and better established NGOs with a more reformist approach to social change. Foundations like Haymarket incorporated a more critical vision of the political and economic systems, counteracting the apolitical and depoliticising vision of traditional philanthropy. Haymarket described its mission as:

> to create, through its grants and its own internal structure, a democratic system based on collective ownership and control of resources; an equitable distribution of wealth and power; an end of all exploitation of some people by others; and freedom from oppressions of class, race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation. This is the change Haymarket defines as "progressive" or "radical". (Ostrander, 1995)

Supporting and funding social movements and grassroots organizations is seen as the best way to accomplish this vision. Given their vision, decision-making structure for grants as well as their goals, foundations like the Haymarket People's Fund could be seen as the precursors to current day radical foundations.

Conservative foundations also emerged and were very successful in moving the US's public and policy discourse further to the Right by funding conservative think tanks like the Heritage Foundation (Ahn, 2007). As Christine E. Ahn explains "these foundations were effective because they focused their grantmaking programs on shaping ideas by building strong institutions and granting general operating support, as opposed to project-specific grants" (*ibid.*, p. 69). They supported grantees across different sectors and strategies sometimes over decades, providing the long-term structural support that many progressive organizations continually struggle to get. As Ruth Wilson Gilmore explains,

> And while the activist right (...) regularly attacks the few dollars that go to anti-abandonment organizations, it has loads of funds for core operations; as of the end of the last century, the Right had raised more than $1 billion to fund ideas. How core can you get? (Gilmore, 2007, p. 47)

When it comes to foundation funding of social movements, it is crucial to mention the Open Society Foundations (OSF). First established in 1979 as a fund to help black South Africans attend university, OSF opened its first chapter in Hungary in 1984 (Correa-Cabrera, Núñez and Ludwig, 2021). In a cold-war setting, George Soros founded OSF inspired by Karl Popper's open society ideals and intent on promoting liberal democratic societies. Focusing on funding typically excluded or marginalized groups, OSF has supported a multitude of organizations all over the world, including grassroots organizations, having awarded over

50.000 grants and spent over 23 billion dollars, according to their website (Open Society Foundations, no date). OSF critics have argued the foundations fund “protests and mass migration movements, destabilizes nations, and has influenced electoral processes or the formation of social and political movements to stir chaos and obtain extraordinary financial gains” (Correa-Cabrera, Núñez and Ludwig, 2021, p. 3). In 2023, the foundation announced it would cease operations in Europe and rearticulate its strategy and priorities, leaving grantees surprised and worried about their future (Beaty, 2023), considering OSF provided significant support to European organizations and helped pave the way for other funders to support grassroots organizing (Correa-Cabrera, Núñez and Ludwig, 2021).

2.1.3. Foundations in Europe

Philanthropy in Europe dates back to Judeo-Christian traditions of charity and to practices of community and mutual support that have been found across the world. The modern form of philanthropy as foundations is a growing phenomenon in Europe beginning in the 1980s (Observatoire de la Fondation de France and CERPhi, 2015). European philanthropy’s late development, when compared to the United States, might be attributed to the model of the welfare state being widespread after the II World War, to widespread religious charities and to other specific socioeconomic factors. The lack of research and academic literature on the topic make it difficult to characterize European philanthropy. As the 2015 report by the Fondation de France found,

> behaviours in terms of individual giving are extremely disparate, given the wide variety of historic and cultural backgrounds, socio-economic factors, state models and taxation rules. There is no one-size-fits-all portrait of the European philanthropist or donor, nor are there dominant models. (Observatoire de la Fondation de France and CERPhi, 2015)

In an analysis of 34 countries Philea estimates there are 175,000 public-benefit foundations across Europe, holding over 500 billion euros in assets and with a total annual expenditure around 76 billion euros (Philea, 2025b). Public benefit foundations are defined as:

> independent, separately-constituted non-profit bodies with their own established and reliable source of income, usually but not exclusively from an endowment, and their own governing board. They distribute their financial resources for educational, cultural, religious, social or other public benefit purposes, either by supporting associations, charities, educational institutions or individuals, or by operating their own programmes (Observatoire de la Fondation de France and CERPhi, 2015)

In several studies, Philea reports limitations in their research due to the fact that “foundation” has different definitions across European countries and sometimes is not even formally defined in the country’s legal code. Additionally, foundation’s financial data is many

times not available, as some countries do not require the publication or submission of annual reports, there is a lack of aggregated data, there are different sources making it difficult not to overcount data and and there are periods for which there is no information available, among other obstacles (Philea, 2025b).

With the limited data available, the Fondation de France report finds provides key insights into European foundations: they are characterized by their youth and vitality, presenting with a variety of models and structures, and often mobilize other resources in addition to their initial endowment (fundraising/donations) as opposed to the model of capital stock predominant in the United States (Observatoire de la Fondation de France and CERPhi, 2015). Similarly to the US, the decline of public funding in various social areas may have benefited foundation growth in Europe since the end of the 20th century. Besides cuts in welfare, neoliberal ideology has also been successful in promoting foundations as important actors in civil society that benefit pluralism and democratic participation, positioning them as important partners in social projects and essential to invest in areas the state is not able to. The creation of new legal forms, as was the case in France, the ability to set up a foundation with no initial capital and the allocation of public subsidies, in the case of Spain, benefited the growth in the number of foundations (*ibid*.). The report also highlights an emerging trend of concentration and fragmentation in the foundation sector: small and medium-sized foundations, which make up most of the sector, hold a small portion of total assets, while few large corporate foundations hold most of the assets. Finally, European foundations are found to spend a higher portion of their assets annually when compared with American foundations, emphasizing their vitality (*ibid*.).

European philanthropy is organized in networks that connect funders and provide data, research and support. This is the case of Philea, the Philanthropy Europe Association, created in December 2021 through the merger of the European Foundation Centre and the Donors and Foundations Network in Europe (DAFNE). Initiatives like the Transnational Giving Europe have made it easier to donate in the absence of common mechanisms and legislation (in the case of EU countries) by creating a partnership of major foundations across 17 European countries that allow donors to benefit from the tax breaks in their own country when they support a public benefit organisation in one of the other partners. Other networks like the European Community Foundation Initiative, hosted by the Association of German Foundations since 2016, aggregates community foundations and aims to facilitate growth, stimulate collaboration and share knowledge on community philanthropy in Europe (James Magowan, Francesca Mereta, and Kamil Szlosek, 2024).

2.1.4. Criticism

From their inception, foundations have been criticized for several reasons. Already in the Commission for Industrial Relations of 1915, critics argued they were "nothing more than corporate appendages" (Howe, 1980, p. 33) and others questioned their ability to maintain a "scientific disinterest" (*ibid*.), that is, not trying to promote outcomes favorable to the founders' businesses. One of the more fundamental criticisms is that foundation's funds are a result of what Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2007) calls "twice-stolen wealth", that is, wealth that results from the exploitation of labor under a capitalist system of production and from the tax-exemption the state grants the foundation, which depletes already underfunded public services like health, education and social welfare. In fact, philanthropy's channeling of private funds towards public services can erode support for governmental spending on those areas in the context of neoliberal predominance (McGoey, 2015).

Robert Arnove (1980) summarizes some of the key criticisms directed at foundations: 1) foundations can have a negative influence on democracy, 2) are mostly unregulated and unaccountable, 3) are able to establish an agenda influencing society and policy and 4) their reformist approaches delay and prevent more radical structural change. When it comes to its interaction with the democratic system, Christine E. Ahn (2007) argues "foundations are made partly with dollars which, were it not for charitable deductions allowed by tax laws, would have become public funds to be allocated through the governmental process under the controlling power of the electorate as a whole" (*ibid*., p. 65). This reflects a problem in philanthropy's decision making structures and accountability mechanisms: decisions regarding grantmaking, programmes, areas of intervention and the foundations' strategy, which purport to impact society as a whole, are made by a board of (most of the times) middle-aged upper-class white men that have not been elected by a broad constituency and thus, are able to avert demands for accountability (*ibid*.). While participatory programs and tools became more widespread in development and other areas beginning in the 1990s (Chambers, 1994), the ultimate decision on projects and funding are not made by the communities and groups they aim to benefit, but by the foundation's board. To make matters worse, mechanisms for foundation accountability are scarce, with the promise of working for good seemingly enough to guarantee accountability. As Beer, Patrizi and Coffman (2021) argue, it is mostly grantees that are required to be accountable to the foundation, with the foundation being presumed to hold itself accountable. Evaluation is focused on grantees ability to deliver the results the application promises and rarely is the foundation itself, its practices and strategies, subject to evaluation and scrutiny. There are little to no mechanisms for communities and societies as a whole to demand that foundations' actions meet certain standards, deliver on their promises or even be required to make reparations for harm they may have caused. Finally, as a product of the

capitalist system, foundations tend not to challenge the *status quo*, promoting reformist solutions that avoid political transformation (Paarlberg, Walk and Merritt, 2022). This perspective agrees with gramscian critiques that denounce philanthropy as a means to produce social consent through cultural hegemony, averting radical change and maintaining the *status quo* (Arnove, 1980; McGoey, 2015; Kohl-Arenas, 2016). For Kohl-Arenas (2016),

> Cultural hegemony can be understood as a system of ideological power managed through a set of worldviews, such as the dominant self-help philosophy, imposed on poor and oppressed people. Cultural norms and values promoted by foundations become "hegemonic" when they appear to be natural "common sense," inevitable and even beneficial to everyone, though in reality they only preserve the status quo" (*ibid*., pp. 10-11)

Finally, studies such as Megan Ming Francis (2019) research on the Garland Fund's grants to the NAACP[9] and Robert L. Allen's (1969) book on the Ford Foundation's impact on the Black Power movement, showed how foundation funding influenced movements to adopt less radical goals and strategies. Francis describes movement capture as "the process by which private funders use their influence in an effort to shape the agenda of vulnerable civil rights organizations" (Francis, 2019, p. 276). In the case described by the author, foundation grants influenced the organization to shift the agenda towards desegregation in the education system and away from ending racial violence (*ibid*.). While the described experiences refer to the civil rights movement in the US, concerns with co-optation are felt in other movements and geographies as the case of the farmworkers' movement illustrates (Kohl-Arenas, 2016).

2.2. Philanthropy, development and the rise of private funding

2.2.1. Philanthropy and Development

Philanthropic foundations and development interact in multiple ways, sharing similar underlying ideas, dynamics and practices. While philanthropy can be seen as an instrument of development, as a way to resource and fund development interventions, they often reinforce each other under common narratives.

Kumar and Brooks (2021) shed light on how US foundations adopted different philanthropic approaches and imaginaries in their interaction with development by identifying three distinct periods of interaction: an era of scientific development (1940s–1970s), an era of

[9] The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was born in 1909 with the mission "to ensure the political, educational, equality of minority group citizens of States and eliminate race prejudice". https://naacp.org/about/our-history

partnerships (1970s–2000s) and, lastly, the present era of philanthrocapitalism (2000s–present). In the period of scientific development, foundations funded disciplines of power production (economics, sociology and behavioural sciences), endowed institutes and centers of scientific research with ample resources and invested in training programmes to provide individuals with skills useful in laboratories, offices and factories (Kumar and Brooks, 2021). The authors argue this period was characterized by "satellite creation" as the primary mode of intervention which meant replicating the institutional forms foundations had first established domestically in development projects. This strategy can also be exemplified by the Green Revolution, a programme of agricultural modernization implemented in South and Southeast Asia supported by the Rockefeller and Ford Foundation and modeled on Rockefeller's earlier (1930s through 1950s) agricultural programmes in the US and Mexico (*ibid*.). Thus,

> By defining the new project of development according to its parameters of scientific philanthropy established domestically, the foundations were thus asserting a causal connection between the transfer of knowledge, skills and technologies required to build a modern capitalist economy with peace and prosperity in the Third World, and protection of US national security and economic interests. (Kumar & Brooks, 2021, p. 329)

In the second period, starting in the 1970s, in a context where neoliberalism was gaining prominence and foundations like Ford were experiencing a fall in their assets, large-scale foundation investment and technical assistance programmes decreased while initiatives in partnership with community and grassroots organizations grew. NGOs became service providers and "microfinance became attractive to donors and foundations alike as the 'missing piece' that could transform poor people into self–reliant microentrepreneurs" (ibid., p. 333). The language of partnership became widespread with the increased importance of civil society in philanthropy and development, but the authors argue that from the late 1990s there was a shift "in which the term partnership referred to increasingly complex arrangements in which private sector actors, rather than civil society organizations, were now the central players in interlocking networks of development institutions" (*ibid*., p. 333). Hence,

> This rearticulation of partnership as a mode of philanthropic intervention was itself part of a new set of interdigitating agendas and interests that formed an emerging post–Washington Consensus. If development in the Washington Consensus years of macroeconomic adjustment was framed in terms of a simple 'market versus the state' binary, in the post–Washington Consensus this was resolved by concluding that state intervention was necessary to support the market if it was to deliver desirable outcomes (Kumar & Brooks, 2021, p. 333)

In this setting, the roles of the various development actors were rearranged: beneficiaries became entrepreneurs, philanthropic organizations became embedded in the network of partnerships with an increased influence (despite their monetary decline), connecting the

public, the private and the non-profit; and the state became “just one of many partners in this patchwork quilt of complex alliances” (Mitchell & Sparke, 2016, p. 734 cited in Kumar & Brooks, 2021). In the 2000s and 2010s context of the 2030 Agenda, private financing came to be seen as necessary, desirable and, in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis, as a way for traditional donor countries to maintain commitments to international development funding. At the same time, an argument for the need of public finances to “leverage” resources from the private sector became mainstream, with the authors arguing that the role of traditional development agencies was recast as that of “de-risking development in order to facilitate the flow of private finance” (Kumar and Brooks, 2021, p. 336).

From this periodization it is possible to see philanthropic foundations and development institutions have a long history of interaction, concurring in strategies and aiming for similar outcomes. Foundations have provided models for social interventions the development apparatus was able to replicate mostly in the Global South and have been able to solidify their standing as a crucial agent in development by positioning themselves as funders, brokers and members of civil society. Foundation’s influence in international development has only increased over the years. Today, the “California Consensus” based on the vision of applying technological innovations and modern management methods to solving the world’s problems, shared by new philanthropists who earned their wealth from Silicon Valley and the “dot.com boom”, seems to have taken hold in the development field (Morvaridi, 2012). Philanthrocapitalism appears in the 2000s as the latest reconfiguration of philanthropy promising, as scientific philanthropy also promised, to be more effective than charity (even of ODA) and better able to solve development problems through market methods and public-private partnerships (*ibid*.). Understanding philanthrocapitalism is crucial to understand the influence foundations currently have in international development, their underlying assumptions, what outcomes those help produce and, in the context of this research, what it is that radical philanthropy is trying to set itself against, transform, and abolish.

2.2.2. Philanthrocapitalism

The term “philanthrocapitalism” was initially coined by Matthew Bishop (2006) in an article published by The Economist highlighting “leading new philanthropists” who prefer “social investing” as an avenue for doing good as opposed to inefficient foundation funding and grantmaking. The article summarizes criticisms of contemporary foundations which include high administrative costs, little effort in measuring impact, lack of information and transparency, being shielded from competitive standards by its perpetual existence, elitism, inefficacy, among others. Unlike Rockefeller and Carnegie who were able to think big, have clear goals and invest in the long-term, big foundations of the 2000s were unable to deliver the social

change they promise due to short-term grants, “too much emphasis on funding individual programmes and too little on the sustainability of the non-profit organisation running the programme” (*ibid*.). The new philanthropists were looking to do things differently: they wished to “invest” in projects that would maximize “social return”, not taking issue with combining non-profit pursuits with for profit investments. Bishop highlights the Gates Foundation as a success story in setting clear areas of intervention for better results and reports many new philanthropists are looking into making their investments portfolio more “ethical” (*ibid*.).

Bishop’s article uses philanthrocapitalism as a concept encompassing various transformations in the philanthropic field, which is consistent with the way it continued to be used. In a review of 186 academic articles about philanthrocapitalism, Haydon, Jung and Russel (2021) present the main definitions and perspectives on the concept and emphasize tensions in its conceptualisation resulting from the two terms that make up the notion - philanthropy and capitalism - being contested terms in themselves. Taking into account the different conceptions present in the literature, the authors propose a definition of philanthrocapitalism as “the integration of market motifs, motives and methods with philanthropy, especially by High Net-Worth Individuals (HNWIs) and their institutions” (*ibid.*, p. 366). They explain the practice is based on a top-down model of neoliberal capitalism which can be seen in “market-based language, themes and imagery” (*ibid.*, p. 366), on the narratives promoting reputational and financial benefits for philanthrocapitalists and on the application of corporate management methods to social projects and interventions (*ibid.*).

Philanthrocapitalist approaches often focus on the capitalist leader’s expertise and skills, which are seen as better suited to the resolution and management of social issues. These leaders are seen as being independent from political pressures such as elections and better able to “think long term, to go against conventional wisdom, to take up ideas too risky for government, to deploy substantial resources quickly when the situation demands it—above all, to try something new” (Bishop and Green, 2008, p. 12). Bishop and Green make explicit a critique to traditional philanthropy and philanthropists similar to the one Carnegie and Rockefeller articulated in the early 20th century: just giving money away is not effective or efficient. Older foundations are seen as prioritizing supporting non-profits’ capacity building, which do not always yield high impact results, while philanthrocapitalist foundations are results-oriented, seeking large-scale change (Haydon, Jung and Russell, 2021).

As Bishop and Green (2008) admit, philanthrocapitalism developed not only in response to critiques of foundations’ inefficiency, but also in a neoliberal economic and political context.

> Philanthropy does not exist in a vacuum. Throughout history, wealthy philanthropists have had to define their role in relationship to the state. Each of the past philanthropic golden ages ended with the state ratcheting up its role in society, crowding out some of the philanthropists. In part, it is the recent attempt in many countries to roll back the borders

> of the state through privatization, deregulation, tax cutting, and attrition that has made space for the philanthrocapitalists of the fifth golden age. (Bishop and Green, 2008, p. 27)

As deregulation and privatization promoted by neoliberalism took place, so did the dismantling of the welfare state and its social programs. The retreat of the state, both in terms of material support but also in terms of adopting a minimal role, means other agents take up the space previously occupied by it: private actors and civil society. While the state's reduced role might be an illusion since the privatization, deregulation and protection of wealth require the state's active intervention, there is a clear promotion of the market and private sector's role in providing solutions for social issues. This has also meant non-profit organizations taking on more responsibility in providing essential social, health and education services (INCITE!, 2007).

However, despite its promise of transformation, Linsey McGoey (2015) argues that business approaches to giving are not a philanthrocapitalist innovation but a fundamental characteristic of philanthropic foundations present since its inception in the early 20th century. As Barbara Howe (1980) makes explicit, Carnegie and Rockefeller's original ideas were to organize giving through a structure and method similar to their corporations. McGoey (2015) claims that what is new in philanthrocapitalism is its scale and the explicitness with which donors admit that their philanthropy is a vehicle for prestige and return on investment. In fact, "not only is it no longer necessary to 'disguise' or minimize self-interest, self-interest is championed as the best rationale for helping others" (*ibidI.,* p. 20). The openness with which philanthrocapitalists admit profiting from giving "collapses the distinction between public and private interests in order to justify increasingly concentrated levels of private gain" (McGoey, 2012, p. 187) and reinforces the moral advantages of capitalism.

In their analysis of philanthrocapitalism in academic discourse, Haydon, Jung and Russel (2021) identify three cultural frames resulting from philanthrocapitalist visions: 1) development issues as scientific problems, 2) beneficiaries as entrepreneurs, and 3) philanthropy as a social investment. In development interventions and other social projects, technological fixes are preferred to public policy measures that might entail redistribution of resources, reinforcing social safety nets or reorganizing production. This depoliticizes development and commodifies projects to be compatible with market-based standardized solutions. At the same time, beneficiaries are cast as economic agents with "untapped" potential to contribute to the market, which shifts development problems from the macro - community, state and world - to the micro level - individuals that can be "empowered" to develop their own business solutions. While reframing beneficiaries as entrepreneurs instead of victims is a recent trend, the researchers point out that it is reflective of past notions of "deserving" and "undeserving" poor (*ibid*., p. 16). This concurs with the notion that philanthropy has always created parameters for who it wishes to serve or include in its proposal for transformation and who it does not. The same could be

said for development: individuals willing to adhere to the entrepreneurial vision are deserving of help through projects that "empower" them and help them achieve their potential, those that don't are cast to the margins. Philanthrocapitalists are also reframing donations as social investment - "a more sustainable model of aid that avoids the culture of dependency created by traditional donations" (*ibid*., p. 17) - which contributes to an increased pressure for the funded organizations to yield measurable results.

The philanthrocapitalist narrative shows that the self-help vision proposed by early philanthropists like Carnegie was able to survive and is still a fundamental assumption of mainstream philanthropy today. This vision rejects an understanding of poverty and social issues that considers the relations of production and other structures, which reinforces the priority philanthropy (and development) gives to technical and scientific apolitical approaches. For philanthropists, self-help is understood from an individual perspective, but in other contexts it has meant self-determination, collective action and communities building their own infrastructures and services in order to resource themselves in the face of adversity. As Kohl-Arenas (2016) explains, "self-help can mean consciousness-raising, self-determination, and organizing against dominant power structures, as demonstrated in the people's education, food justice, and community service programs of the historic Black Power movement and the early years of the farmworker movement." (*ibid.*, p. 6). However, in the context of foundation programmes self-help is depoliticized by narrowing its definition to individual "empowerment" or "entrepreneurship" and firmly excluding collective action such as strikes, boycotts, workers' and/or immigrants' rights, and advocacy that demands political accountability.

2.2.3. Neoliberal development agenda

In the present period of philanthrocapitalism, authors like Garcia-Arias and Mediavilla (2019, 2023) have been arguing that development's agenda and its financing mechanisms are a product of and reinforce a neoliberal development agenda. Philanthropy and philanthrocapitalism are a significant part of that agenda, strengthening the importance of private financing and public-private partnerships (PPPs), but also promoting the hegemonic framework of development as a universally applicable linear path based on economic growth to improve human life. According to the authors, a neoliberal development agenda became normalized in the 1990s with the Washington Consensus and the implementation of restrictive fiscal policies, market liberalization, privatization and deregulation (Garcia-Arias and Mediavilla, 2019). In response to the devastating impacts of the structural adjustment programmes and its shortcomings in achieving development goals, a Post-Washington Consensus attempted to broaden the role of the state and incorporate governance, equity, inclusion, environmental and social issues in its framework, which coincides with the shift to

partnerships Kumar and Brooks (2021) describe. Even though it enabled some advances in the international development system, the authors argue that the Post-Washington Consensus ended up consolidating the neoliberal practices previously introduced and “denaturalizing and assimilating critical discourses through hegemonic strategies” (Garcia-Arias and Mediavilla, 2023, p. 860).

The 2030 Agenda, supported by the Sustainable Development Goals, the Paris Agreement and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, as the fundamental framework for today's international development (ID) discourses and practices, proposed to “usher in a new era in ID determined by a more complex and deeper vision” (*ibid*., p. 857). The 2030 Agenda would be more universalist and horizontal than the previous paradigm of the Millenium Development Goals by setting the same goals for all countries, as well as be more diverse and inclusive by acknowledging multiple stakeholders, financing mechanisms and different “cognitive, cultural, technological and socio-economic narratives” (*ibid*., p. 858). This intended to overcome the traditional development binaries of developed/developing, donor/recipient, North/South, and to “leave no one behind” (*ibid.*, p. 858). However, the authors argue the Agenda “is in large part limited to a declaration of intent, without relevant concrete policies implemented nor adequate financing and sanctioning mechanisms to allow for these objectives’ achievement” (*ibid*., p. 860). The same could be said for the Addis Ababa Action Agenda (AAAA), the Funding for Development (FfD) framework, as it is also considered insufficient, incapable of providing enough resources to finance climate change solutions and unable to question the model of financial liberalization that is at the root of many development issues, nor propose any reform. The authors point out several elements of the AAAA to support their critique:

> the unjustified pre-eminence trust given to private financing, and fundamentally to PPPs and philanthrocapitalism; the absence of supranational financial and tax coordination mechanisms; its uncritical view of the current international trade system, including global value chains implications for developing countries; the lack of innovative financing instruments related to supranational taxation; the serious lack of real progress regarding indebtedness and tax evasion/avoidance in developing countries, or the fight against illicit capital flows; or its uncritical view of developed economies’ fiscal competition (*ibid*., p. 870)

Philanthrocapitalism, under the 2030 Agenda and the AAAA, is a “kind of Trojan Horse” (*ibid*., p. 870): it presents itself as a technical instrument to facilitate financing for development but “pursues social, political and ideological objectives related to power, hegemony, financialization and commodification of ID” (*ibid*., p. 870).

Using a critical discourse analysis analysis of the *Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness*, the *Accra Agenda for Action*, the *2030 Agenda* and the declarations and official messages of

five philanthrocapitalist institutions' websites[10], Garcia-Arias and Mediavilla (2019) found that the texts considered showed: "a single-version, monolithic and homogenizing discourse (Wilkinson, 1997), that attempts to transmit a univocal and uncontested image of ID" (*ibid*., p. 864); public-private partnerships are prominent; that a "a dialogic relationship of donor/recipient, developed/developing, North/South is reinforced" (*ibid*., p. 867); and that the international organisations and philanthrocapitalist institutions act together to generate terms, definitions and problems that fit the financing and marketized solutions proposed by the neoliberal development agenda. The authors summarize the impacts of the growing importance of the private sector in ID:

> This process attempts, through a hegemonic discourse, to inoculate in the collective imagination the message that 'inclusive and sustainable' development implies assuming the dominant role of the private (...) And accepting a neo-developmentalist and neoliberal system that, through the depoliticization of ID, assumes the existence of universal 'development' schemes, and in which neoliberal and financialized capitalism is not questioned at its root, but, at most and with extraordinary caution, is limited to being regulated, modified, nuanced and – marginally– redirected by public intervention. In sum, what is presented as a model of 'sustainable and inclusive' ID actually entails a profoundly neoliberal political, cultural and ideological worldview, which is therefore hardly compatible with equity, sustainability and development itself. (Garcia-Arias and Mediavilla, 2019, p. 871)

Recent events in development funding do not seem to point in the direction of a change in the neoliberal agenda paradigm. With USAID's funding cuts and announced closure, private actors, among them foundations, will most likely be called to take on more responsibility in financing development projects (Fraser, 2025). Additionally, with a drop of 9% in ODA in 2024, the OECD (2025) projects a 9 to 17% drop in 2025 due to the announced cuts from France, Germany, United Kingdom and the United States. The organization predicts ODA cuts will impact the poorest countries and vital services the hardest and suggest "diversify partners, pool resources, catalyse private sector investment where appropriate, and support the mobilisation of domestic resources" (OECD, 2025, p. 1). This will likely reinforce private funding's role, further emphasizing foundations' prominent position as well.

There is a gap in the available data which does not show how philanthropic giving has evolved post-2020. The latest OECD report on *Private Philanthropy for Development* is from 2021 and uses data collected from 205 foundations between 2016 and 2019. The report finds that philanthropic funding for development in that period reached 42.5 billion dollars (OECD,

[10] Rockefeller Foundation, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Walk Free Foundation, Walton Family Foundation, Broad Foundation and the consulting group Philanthropic Intelligence.

2021). The organization further concludes that more than half of the philanthropic cross-border flows come from the United States, with the Gates Foundation accounting for 38% of total philanthropic funding for developing countries and that private philanthropy has remained modest in comparison with ODA, representing only 7% of the total ODA between 2016 and 2019 (*ibid*). The 2023 report of the Global Philanthropy Tracker presents data from 47 countries in 2020, which given the changes witnessed since then and the specific context of the Covid-19 pandemic and social justice movements may be outdated. Still, the report showed that philanthropic outflows represented 8% of total cross-borders flows (ODA represented 21% and remittances accounted for 70%), amounting to a total of 70 billion dollars (Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy, 2023). More up to date data is urgent to be able to better access the state of global philanthropy and its weight in development funding.

2.3. Social Movements and Philanthropy

2.3.1. Defining Civil Society, Social Movements and Grassroots Organizations

Social movements and grassroots organizations interactions with philanthropic funding are complex and multidimensional. Given the complexity and diversity of movements and in order to better set the context of the grantees radical foundations tend to support, it is worth clarifying which organizations and movements the research focuses on and what have their experiences with foundations been like. Thus, first a definition of civil society and social movements is provided, followed by a clarification on what is understood as grassroots organizations in the context of this research. This is followed by a discussion of the main tensions in social movement funding and finally a reflection on the political and funding context of European social movements today.

Civil society is often understood as “a sphere of uncoerced human association between the individual and the state, in which people undertake collective action for normative and substantive purposes, relatively independent of government and the market” (Michael Walzer cited in Edwards, 2011, p. 4). However, ideas of what civil society is and does diverge. As Michael Edwards explains, it can be understood as forms (organization types), norms (often as a synonym of “good society”) or spaces (where citizen participation happens) (*ibid*.). For the purposes of this research, some key aspects of the diversity in comprehensions of civil society stand out. First, how civil society and its organizational forms (social movements, grassroots organizations) have been incorporated as a natural component of the systems of representative democracy can be seen as contributing to its depoliticization. Secondly, the vision of civil society as the “good society” or as “the place where liberatory politics necessarily

unfold" (Gilmore, 2007, p. 51) is false: there are also conservative and far-right grassroots organizations and movements. Thirdly, as with philanthropy's self-help narratives, the market language has oftentimes been able to override the concept's liberatory potential to emphasize its economic role. As Edwards argues,

> What began as an additional category to the state and the market - a distinct source of both value and values - has been relegated to the status of a residual - something that exists only because these other institutions have blind spots and weaknesses, greatly reducing its potential to act as a force for structural or systemic change. (Edwards, 2011, p. 5)

These points are worth keeping in mind in order not to simplify complex realities and to contextualize reflections on the dynamics of grassroots organizations, social movements and philanthropy.

Social movements can be defined as "a distinct social process, consisting of the mechanisms through which actors engaged in collective action: are involved in conflictual relations with clearly identified opponents; are linked by dense informal networks; share a distinct collective identity" (della Porta and Diani, 2009, p. 20). Since the 1970s, social movements have, as some researchers argue, increasingly distanced themselves from the working-class and nationalist movements of the end of the 19th and the biggest part of the 20th centuries (della Porta and Diani, 2011). "New" social movements like those focused on environmental issues, women's rights, LGTQIA+ rights, and other human rights causes, "focused their action on areas and issues that did not relate directly to the struggle for state power, but aimed instead at increasing the autonomy of individuals in relation to various political and institutional spheres" (*ibid.*, p. 71). With this shift, social movements came to be seen as playing an important role in socializing political participation (della Porta, 2022) and as incorporating a permanent component of democratic societies - civil society (della Porta and Diani, 2011).

Social movement literature since the 1980s has emphasized the withdrawal from protest and argued movement organizations have become more structured and professionalized, able to acquire material resources (in which foundations played their part) and replaced protest with advocacy (*ibid.*). With the growing separation from political parties and trade unions, social movements began to defend the autonomy of civil society, thus contributing to a separation of political (class) struggles from non-profit organizations and citizens. As della Porta and Dianni (2011) argue:

> Since the 1980s, a de facto division of tasks between parties and movements has been noted, and often approved of. While social movements, civil society organizations, and NGOs retreated to or constituted the social sphere, political parties (especially on the Left) represented some of their claims in political institutions" (*ibid.*, p. 74).

However, since the 1990s and through the 2000s there has been a "resurgence of interest in social issues" (*ibid*., p. 73), i.e. issues that look more closely at the political economy, as a reaction to globalization and "hegemonic neoliberalism" (*ibid*., p. 73), as well as "a return to politics in the street" (*ibid*., p. 75). This shift aims to hold multiple issues in consideration (capitalism, patriarchy, racism, colonialism) and assume forms that recognize issues of representative democracy today (decline in political parties affiliation, retrenchment of the state, globalization) (*ibid*.). This makes progressive social movements today "as characterized by a combined attention to social justice and positive freedom and an orientation to the empowerment of underprivileged groups and their inclusion in society and politics" (della Porta, 2022, p. 2). More than just asking for transformation from the democratic institutions, they propose forms of more direct participation as well as grassroots egalitarian forms of organizing for social change, with participation as a way to prefigure the world they envision (*ibid*.).

Similarly to the point made regarding civil society, not all social movements propose progressive agendas and aim to "democratise democracy" (della Porta, 2022, p. 4), some challenge democratic institutions and principles, as is the case of far-right movements which have been regaining prominence across Europe since the 2010s. Castelli Gattinara, Froio and Pirro (2022) find that "far-right protest mobilisation has increased sharply between 2008 and 2013, only to decrease in 2014 and reach new heights in 2015, substantiating the guiding assumption of this article, that is, that far right protest mobilisation has increased in recent years" (*ibid*., p. 1028). The authors "advance hypotheses on the drivers of far-right protest mobilisation based on grievances, opportunities and resource mobilisation models" (*ibid*., p. 1020) contesting the idea that social movements and protests are necessarily a field dominated by the political left. As Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2007) argues, "there is no organizational structure that the Right can not use for its own purposes" (*ibid*., p. 50).

While several terms and definitions could be used to designate the organizations in focus in this research, there was an option to use grassroots organizations or social movement organizations, since these are the terms most radical foundations used when referring to their grantees. It is worth making clear what these terms imply. For the purposes of this research, grassroots organizations are understood as the combination of Kunreuther's (2011) definitions on grassroots and social change organizations. Grassroots organizations are "groups where people come together voluntarily to advance a concern or interest, solve a problem, take an action, or connect with each other based on something they share in common" (*ibid*., p. 55-56). They tend to be characterized by "more democratic and less hierarchical forms of governance and accountability, the predominance of volunteers as opposed to paid staff, and a local focus, factors which distinguish them from nonprofit, staff-driven organizations" (*ibid*., p. 56). Conversely, "social change organizations (SCOs) are voluntary associations in local communities that address systemic issues in order to increase the power of marginalized

groups, communities, or interest" (*ibid*., p. 60-61). Considering both of these notions emphasizes the voluntary and horizontal character of the groups, distinguishing them from more professionalized and hierarchical NGOs, and affirms a common purpose to achieve change in their community (and beyond) by addressing systemic issues.

2.3.2. Tensions in funding social movements

As McCrea and Finnegan (2019) reflect in regards to community development, funding is a key mechanism in the creation and mediation of power relationships. More than an external influence upon the community, enabling access to certain resources, funding is constitutive of and part of the relationships in the community or movement. Thus, funding relationships, in this research's case between foundations and grassroots organizations, can shape how change happens and affect social movement dynamics beyond the provision of resources. Looking at literature on the interaction between social movements and philanthropic foundations, it is possible to find tension and conflict between foundations' and organization's visions.

One of the main tensions with foundation funding for social movements is the possibility of foundation influence and co-optation. Studies such as Megan Ming Francis (2019) research on the Garland Fund's grants to the NAACP and Robert L. Allen's (1969) book are some of the main sources on this question. Two examples in the analyzed literature help elucidate dynamics and tensions in funder-grantee relationships of progressive social movements: the California farmworkers movement studied by Kohl-Arenas (2016) and INCITE!'s (2007) experience with the Ford Foundation.

In the farmworkers movement interaction with foundations, Kohl-Arenas (2016) reports that, at times, both sides articulated similar visions of empowering the poor to address their problems which allowed for productive collaboration. However, more often this middle ground was constrained by what the nature of the foundations demanded and allowed: grant support required professionalized management of the projects, measurement of impact and reporting that redirected resources from other organizing activities (*ibid.*). This is one of the main hindrances organizations find in foundation funding and a dilemma they need to consider: time and effort dedicated to meeting measurement, management and reporting requirements oftentimes is taken away from organizing activities, strategic planning and other organization priorities, or it becomes an added burden to the organization's staff. Essentially, "distracted and bogged down by professional management and partnership requirements, short-term foundation-funded programs replace the day-to-day engagement required to organize people in movement building" (*ibid.*, p. 8). In addition to the operational requirements, the foundations impacted the farmworkers movement through the activities they chose to support. This meant

that direct services were supported but labor organizing, strikes and actions demanding accountability from the agricultural industry were not. Thus, despite communicating openness to communities and asking for movements' active participation, authors argue foundations tend to define a limited scope of activities they are willing to support that almost always excludes activities that challenge the *status quo* and or that take on a political form, narrative or goal (*ibid*.).

INCITE!'s[11] case makes clear the limits foundations create to who and what is possible to support. The organization, which had turned to foundation grants as a way to avoid state funding and its interference and co-optation, had their 100.000 dollars Ford Foundation grant withdrawn following a statement INCITE! issued in solidarity with Palestine. This experience led them to reflect on the impact the NGOization and foundation funding have had on progressive and leftist movements in the US by organizing the conference "*The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex (NPIC)*" in 2004, which later resulted in the publication of an anthology of essays by the same title (INCITE!, 2007). In the book, various activists question the impact of the "non-profit industrial complex (NPIC) (...) a system of relationships between the State (or local and federal governments), the owning classes, foundations, and non-profit/NGO social service and social justice organizations" (ibid., p. xiii) on social movements. The non-profit industrial complex is seen as contributing to a context where social movement organizing is more and more synonymous with organizing through a professionalized non-profit structure and with the provision of social services the neoliberal state no longer provides. Dylan Rodríguez argues in his essay that "forms of sustained grassroots social movement that do not rely on the material assets and institutionalized legitimacy of the NPIC have become largely unimaginable within the political culture of the current US Left" (Dylan Rodríguez, 2007).

Ruth Wilson Gilmore's (2007) essay *In the shadow of the shadow state* adds the perspective of grassroots groups and their dilemmas inhabiting the in-between spaces of service providers, movement organizers and advocates for radical change. Gilmore builds on the concept of the "shadow state" developed by Jennifer Wolch to describe the rise of the non-profit sector that became more involved in service provision until then done by state agencies and cut back by neoliberal policies of the 1980s and 1990s (*ibid*.). If NGOs are the shadow state, grassroots groups are the shadow of the shadow state:

> They are not direct service providers but often work with the clients of such organizations as well as with the providers themselves. They generally are not recipients of public funds although occasionally they get government contracts to do work in jails or shelters or other

[11] INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence is "a network of radical feminists of color organizing to end state violence and violence in our homes and communities" https://incite-national.org/

> institutions. They have detailed political programs and deep social and economic critiques. Their leadership is well educated in the ways of the world, whatever their level of formal schooling, and they try to pay some staff to promote and proliferate the organization's analysis and activity even if most participants in the group are unpaid volunteers. The government is often the object of their advocacy and their antagonisms - whether because the antistate state is the source of trouble or the locus for remedy. But the real focus of their energies is ordinary people whom they wish fervently to organize against their own abandonment. (*ibid.*, p. 47)

In the shadow of the shadow state, grassroots groups have a difficult time accessing funding which is usually short-term and restricted to specific projects rather than long-term and unrestricted in order to support core activities (*ibid*.).

Of course, reality is complex and always changing and not all organizations or activists share the same perspectives when it comes to social change and the role philanthropy plays in it. As Kohl-Arenas (2016, 2017, 2019) evidences, “certain framings, positions, identities and interests are never fixed or complete but rather grow contingently - and often strategically - in the course of struggle” (Kohl-Arenas, 2019, p. 29). The role of foundation staff, for instance, is a complex place where the tension to fit board priorities coexists with staff’s similar goals and values to social movement activists. In fact, many foundations have chosen to specifically recruit leaders from grantee communities and people with experience in activism and collective organizing (Ostrander, 1995; Silver, 1998). These people are seen as better able to understand community needs, how organizations operate and bridge the gap between grantee and foundation board. For the activists, entering the philanthropic environment can be a means to direct resources to their communities and social movements and enact their values and visions for change. However, research shows that “while foundation programme officers broker political opportunity for grassroots organisations, they more commonly generate consent” (Kohl-Arenas, 2017, p. 29) and reproduce institutional structures of power. In the study conducted by Kohl-Arenas (2017) six programme officers from New York foundations were interviewed. While all the interviewees believed that the root causes of issues their foundations hoped to address were a result of entrenched inequality in the economy, schooling, housing, justice and political systems, they understood they needed to be able to translate their concerns and the work of grantees into a more acceptable language (to foundation boards) that didn’t directly challenge the economic and political systems. Instead, the programme officers reported using tropes of “individual mobility, civic participation, and innovation” (*ibid*.) as a way to fit “idealized theories of change that do not upset the integration, self help, mobility, and public safety narratives foundations are most comfortable with” (*ibid*., p. 20). Regarding the conflicting space foundation staff can inhabit, Ananya Roy proposes the idea of an ethics of ‘doubleness’ “such that the center of power can also be a profound edge of negotiation and

contestation, a consciousness of crisis" (Roy, 2006, p. 24). This also resonates with the role of staff in development interventions, which reaffirms the similarities between development and philanthropic dynamics and tensions.

Despite the obstacles organized philanthropy created in liberation movements, which Gilmore (2007) points out as dependency and accommodation, philanthropy did not destroy them. She argues that critics like Ira Reid, who published an article exploring the impacts of philanthropy in the African American community's movements as early as 1944, allowed for activists and organizations to think critically and act to solve or minimize the impact of foundations on social movements. In fact, "the problems were not absolute impediments, especially insofar as the recognition of them produced the possibility for some organizations - and their funders - to see each other differently and more usefully" (Gilmore, 2007, p. 48). The innovative grantmaking models that community foundations like the Haymarket People's Fund inaugurated are evidence of this statement: their founders understood there was a need to address power centralization in philanthropy while supporting grassroots movements. Thus, social movement philanthropy was born and, more recently, radical philanthropy has emerged as a response to philanthrocapitalism.

2.3.3. Challenges in European Social Movements Today

Social movements in Europe since the 2010s have been shaped by key moments like the anti-austerity protests in response to the 2008 financial crisis, debates on "fortress Europe" over "refugees welcome", feminist and LGBTQIA+ movements' crucial achievements and increased popularity and new movements like municipalism and the right to the city movement. However, the recent rise in far-right movements is undermining many of the previous progressive movement's achievements (Cristina Flesher Fominaya and Ramón A. Feenstra, 2020). As the authors state,

> In Europe, struggles over democracy unfold around competing visions of Europe itself. It is possible therefore to speak of Europe in the singular, an imagined community to which Europeans belong, and in the plural, as the many competing visions and subfamilies of Europe: East/West, North/South, Left/Right, Elite/Populist, Christian/Secular, Open/Fortress, etc. (Cristina Flesher Fominaya and Ramón A. Feenstra, 2020, p. 2)

There is ample evidence that progressive social movements have been facing increasing state repression, in Europe and all over the world: a Civicus Monitor report analyzing civic space trends between 2019 and 2023 found that "there is a discernible rise in the closure of civic space worldwide" (Civicus Monitor, 2024, p. 5) and Suparna Chaudhry (2022) finds that in the last 30 years more than 130 countries have suppressed NGOs through violent or administrative measures. Europe is no exception to these trends, with a narrowing of civic

space being particularly attributed to growing restrictions on protest rights and the criminalisation of activists (Civicus Monitor, 2024b). Other concerning points that stand out are the detention and arrest of protesters to prevent, disperse and punish protesters and the use of laws to restrict civil society organization's activities (*ibid*.).

The climate justice movement has been especially targeted and criminalized. Research by Greenpeace has found that out of the 600 arrests for conspiracy to cause public nuisance the Metropolitan Police has made in London in the last 6 years, only 2,8% have resulted in charges (Thompson, 2025). The increase in numbers of arrests has been accompanied by court convictions: in the case of Just Stop Oil[12], activists have been facing increasingly longer prison sentences for non-violent protests, with a group of five people convicted in 2024 of up to five years in prison for planning a road blockade (Gayle, 2024).

Looking at the data from 2024, the situation did not improve. The Civicus Monitor reports that "almost ten percent of all civic space violations recorded this year by the CIVICUS Monitor related to Israel and the OPT[13] (see MENA section) and the expression of solidarity with Palestinian people" (Civicus Monitor, 2024a, p. 14). When it comes to the Palestinian solidarity movement, they add

> In some cases, university donors have pressured institutions to prevent protests and penalise students, and those taking part have been smeared as antisemitic. Some universities have suspended their students' chapters of Students for Justice in Palestine, prohibiting them from holding activities, receiving funding or posting on social media. Many organisations fear for their funding and continued existence. (Civicus Monitor, 2024a, p. 14)

Beyond arrests, criminalization, legal restrictions and police violence, as the statement makes clear, funding restrictions have been another means to target social movement organizations across the world and, particularly, in Europe. Following a model introduced in Russia in 2006, "foreign agent laws" were proposed more recently in Hungary (Kassam, 2025) and put in effect in Georgia (Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe, 2025). In Russia, the law "forced organizations receiving foreign funding and engaging in political activities to register as foreign agents, a term intended to stigmatize NGOs" (Chaudhry, 2022, p. 550). In the case of Hungary, a legislation proposal that "would allow the government to monitor, penalise and potentially ban organisations that receive any sort of foreign funding, including donations or EU grants" (Kassam, 2025) was introduced in May, but the parliamentary vote was postponed in June 2025. Any organization seen to be threatening "the

[12] "Just Stop Oil is a nonviolent civil resistance group in the UK. In 2022 we started taking action to demand the UK Government stop licensing all new oil, gas and coal projects. (...) Just Stop Oil ended its street campaign in 2025, whilst we continue our resistance in the courts and prisons." https://juststopoil.org/

[13] Occupied Palestinian Territories.

sovereignty of Hungary by using foreign funding to influence public life" could be targeted under the proposed legislation (*ibid.*).

In another move to target organization's funding, the European Commission put forward the "Defense of Democracy" Package at the end of 2023, a legislative proposal "to tackle the threat of foreign interference with more transparency, while at the same time encouraging civic engagement and citizens' participation in our democracies" (European Commission, 2023). The legislation would require organizations receiving foreign funding to register in a directory, which civil society organizations called out as a measure to narrow space for civil society (European Civic Forum, 2023). Philea also criticized the proposal emphasizing it would "place an additional reporting burden on already open, transparent civil society organisations, while failing to advance its primary aim to identify and address covert influence in policy making" (Philea, 2024). Chaudry (2022) argues states are more likely to undertake administrative crackdown measures such as funding restrictions as a long-term strategy to suppress NGOs. Violent repression is most effective in the short-term, usually to suppress protests already taking place, but administrative crackdown can be used to prevent collective action from happening in the first place and will most likely receive less pushback since it can be seen as regulation instead of repression (*ibid*.).

At the same time that funding is increasingly being used as a strategy to target civil society organizations, threatening progressive grassroots organizations, funding for conservative movements is increasing. *The Next Wave: How Religious Extremism Is Reclaiming Power*, a European Parliamentary Forum for Sexual and Reproductive Rights report shows how conservative and anti-gender groups funding has increased between 2019 and 2023 and is now "equivalent to a total of US$1.18 billion generated by 275 organisations", among these, foundations (Datta, 2025).

As this section shows, European social movements are facing increasing difficulties that threaten its ability to protest and organize, with a surge in violent repression and criminalization. Additionally, restrictions on funding are concerning in light of Chaudry's (2022) theorization of states using administrative strategies to restrict civil society organizations in the long term.

3. New phenomena in philanthropy: towards a radical philanthropy?

3.1. Changes towards a radical philanthropy: Shifting the power, the summer of 2020 and where we are today

3.1.1. #ShiftThePower, Trust-Based Philanthropy and the year of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

Community foundations were some of the first advocates for a model of philanthropy based on the communities' needs and for supporting grassroots and social movements, as the cases of the Haymarket People's Fund and Crossroads Foundation illustrate (see section 2.1). More recently, mostly since the 2010s, initiatives like #ShiftThePower from the Global Fund for Community Foundations and concepts such as trust-based philanthropy, relational philanthropy and participatory grantmaking, highlight how discussions about power discrepancies between funder and grantee, North and South, have become widespread. The mentioned frameworks illustrate what issues are in the center of the conversation - power redistribution and systemic change - and the multiplication of concepts clearly shows a growing preoccupation that can be seen as building towards a more radical philanthropy. These frameworks were accompanied by the establishment of radical foundations beginning around the mid-2010s, and while a specific analysis of these foundations is present in the following section, it is worth mentioning here their connection to the EDGE Funders network, participatory philanthropy and trust-based practices.

The Global Fund for Community Foundations is an organization working on global community philanthropy since 2006. The GFCF brings together foundations and NGOs across the world to build networks of organizations working for "people-led development" (GFCF, no date a). In 2016, the GFCF introduced the hashtag "Shift The Power" to promote their upcoming conference and start a discussion about "the need and the ways to move away from top-heavy and top-down systems of international development and philanthropy towards a flatter and more equitable paradigm of people-based development" (GFCF, no date b). Since then two more international conferences took place, the last one in 2023 with more than 700 participants from 77 countries. An online space was also created to continue the discussions around power in global philanthropy[14] and various community foundations contributed towards a "Manifesto for Change" (*ibid.*). The manifesto articulated a vision of transformation in international development's power structure, a need for centering communities' needs,

[14] https://shiftthepower.org/

perspectives and solutions and the desire to “embrace a vision of a ‘good society’ built around core values of equality, democracy and sustainability (#ShiftThePower, no date). The “Shift The Power” initiative

While #ShiftThePower expresses a critique of global development and philanthropy dynamics, the Trust-Based Philanthropy Project focuses on the power dynamics between funders and grantees. In 2020, the project was born as “a funder-to-funder advocacy initiative to make equitable grantmaking and community accountability the standard of practice for effective philanthropy” (Trust-Based Philanthropy Project, no date), but the concept of trust-based philanthropy is not limited to and has spread beyond this initiative (Petzinger and Jung, 2024; Maradeix, Gautier and Pache, 2025). The project was a result of The Whitman Institute’s “trust-based philanthropy” approach inspired from grantee input over the previous ten years. They present a framework based on four key dimensions of organizations - culture, structures, leadership, and practices - that should be based on values such as working for systemic equity, redistributing power, centering relationships, embracing learning, building partnerships and practicing accountability (Trust-Based Philanthropy Project, 2021). The Trust-Based Philanthropy Project’s framework for funders is based on six practices for trust-based philanthropy: 1) provide multi-year and unrestricted funding; 2) do the “homework” of getting to know the grantees instead of putting that onus on grant applicants; 3) simplify and streamline paperwork; 4) be transparent and responsive; 5) solicit and act on feedback; and 6) offer support beyond the check (Trust-Based Philanthropy Project, 2023).

Other global networks of foundations like the EDGE Funders Alliance also formed in the 2010s, with the first EDGE conference taking place in 2012 and annual conferences following. With a community of “almost 500 donors, foundation officers, trustees and advisors in more than 40 countries”, EDGE aims to organize funders to “disrupt the power dynamics inherent in philanthropy and create new systemic and anti-extractive funding practices” as well as create spaces where funders can learn from movement leaders and move towards systemic change (EDGE Funders, no date). Similarly to the GFCF, EDGE maintains a blog and other online spaces to continue the reflections on how to transform philanthropy.

The push for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) policies in corporations, institutions and all kinds of organizations have been increasing for some time with a Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity report stating there was “more than a fivefold increase in the number of funders investing in racial equity and racial justice in the US over the past decade” (Cyril *et al.*, 2021). But it was in 2020 that commitments to address these concerns reached a peak (Beer, Patrizi and Coffman, 2021; Cyril *et al.*, 2021). In a context of increased precarity, poverty and uncertainty due to the Covid-19 pandemic, following the assassination of George Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer in the US, global anti-racist protests erupted (Gottbrath, 2020). In a period of reckoning with structural racism, funders across the world (but mostly in the US)

pledged millions of dollars for racial justice efforts, to Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) communities and a review of internal practices perpetuating harm and inequality (Daniels, 2020; Beer, Patrizi and Coffman, 2021). This further popularized discussions regarding justice and equity in philanthropy and increased pressure for foundations to adopt concrete policies and grantmaking practices to address these issues. However, there is evidence that despite foundations committing around 8 billion dollars for racial justice in 2020, preliminary analysis of that year's data found that only "$3.4 billion in funding for racial equity work and $1 billion funding for racial justice work" had been awarded (Cyril *et al.*, 2021). This "mismatch", as the title of the report indicates, between foundation commitments and their actions is a warning sign that points to foundations understanding they are being asked to support progressive or radical transformations, but not often following up with on their word.

Considering the #ShiftThePower and trust-based philanthropy's frameworks, as well as DEI commitments, there is a lack of evidence regarding concrete transformations in foundation's practices. However, with over 500 responses from foundation professionals, Trust-Based Philanthropy Projects' 2024 Grantmaker Survey provides some self-reported data on the sector's transformations. Respondents reported a widespread understanding of the concept of trust-based philanthropy, as well as concrete actions towards operationalizing the concept: 77% of respondents claimed their foundations adopted measures to support organizations beyond the check, 74% reported streamlined applications and 73% reported soliciting grantee feedback (Trust-Based Philanthropy Project, 2024). Internal changes ranked the lowest in reported changes, which can show foundations tend to prioritize changes in grantee relationships and external behaviors over internal organizational and or structural transformation (*ibid*.). Lastly, the report found that boards seem to be increasingly embracing trust and the need to learn from grantees, which is an important shift given that board resistance used to be one of the main barriers to adoption of trust-based philanthropy (*ibid.*). While an external evaluation of foundation practices would be best, this self-reported data provides some insights into how critical discussions around power, participation and decision-making are becoming widespread in philanthropy and the extent to which philanthropy's practices are changing.

Shifts at a more mainstream level can also be seen in Philea's May 2025 report *Philanthropy and Equality: A framework for sharing power and addressing inequalities*. The framework aims to engage with "questions of equality, power, justice and inclusion" and sets out to provide a series of concepts, reflections and questions around four dimensions: "internal practices, relational approaches, redistribution of capital and applying systems lenses" (Philea, 2025a) to a broad scope of philanthropic organizations, with power highlighted as a "cross-cutting theme throughout the framework" (*ibid*., p. 4). The report is careful in exposing a context of increasing wealth inequality and poverty in Europe mentioning the influence of

"financialisation and the growing power of capital and global elites", "lack of effective regulation and oversight" of global corporations, "lack of financial transparency and ineffective global tax governance" and "the skewed structure of global trade" (*ibid*., p. 14) as drivers of inequality. The report also makes reference to some of the main criticisms aimed at philanthropy today - that it does not address the root causes of issues, is driven by a small elite group, enjoys disproportionate influence, lacks accountability and more (*ibid*., pp. 15-17). The framework proposes ways to operationalize equality, justice and inclusion in each of the four dimensions mentioning trust-based philanthropy, localization, participatory philanthropy, spending down strategies, among others, and providing examples of efforts foundations members of Philea have made towards equality. While admitting that each foundation is on their own "journey" towards a more equal philanthropy, this report shows a clear concern with power, equity and justice issues in mainstream European philanthropy. The report also provides examples in order to show foundations have been changing to adapt to this trend. Of course, more independent research would be necessary to understand to what extent more well established and bigger foundations are changing internal structures, practices and relationships in order to understand if the framework captures changes in practices or in narrative.

3.1.2. Radical Philanthropy in the Academic Literature

Despite an abundance of investigations and articles on philanthrocapitalism (Haydon, Jung and Russell, 2021) and some literature on trust-based relationships in philanthropy (Petzinger and Jung, 2024), accountability (Beer, Patrizi and Coffman, 2021), participatory grantmaking (Ostrander, 1995; Silver, 1998), and foundations supporting grassroots movements (Faber and McCarthy, 2005), there is not much academic literature focusing on radical philanthropy. Herro and Obeng-Odom's (2019) article is one of the first to propose a definition of radical philanthropy and highlight foundation practices. While Paarlberg, Walk and Merritt's (2022) focus on broader transformations in philanthropy that hope to address structural inequalities, their framework highlights aspects that are relevant for a conceptualization of radical philanthropy.

Paarlberg, Walk and Merritt's (2022) article claims that, in the face of pushes for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Justice (DEIJ) in philanthropy, the lack of a common conceptual framework of what "justice philanthropy" might be is an obstacle to effective transformation in the field. As such, the authors reviewed the definitions of DEIJ concepts in philanthropy categorizing them according to the main mechanisms each concept focuses on as a means to address systems of inequality: "structures" emphasizes efforts to reimagine institutions that perpetuate inequality such as economic and political structures; "(re)distribution" which underscores the reallocation of resources to amend prior disparities and "community/public

engagement" relating to efforts to prioritize people and communities' perspectives and actions to address inequality. The following figure makes clearer the diversity of concepts aiming for similar goals, their intersecting nature, as well as the key dimensions the proposals address.

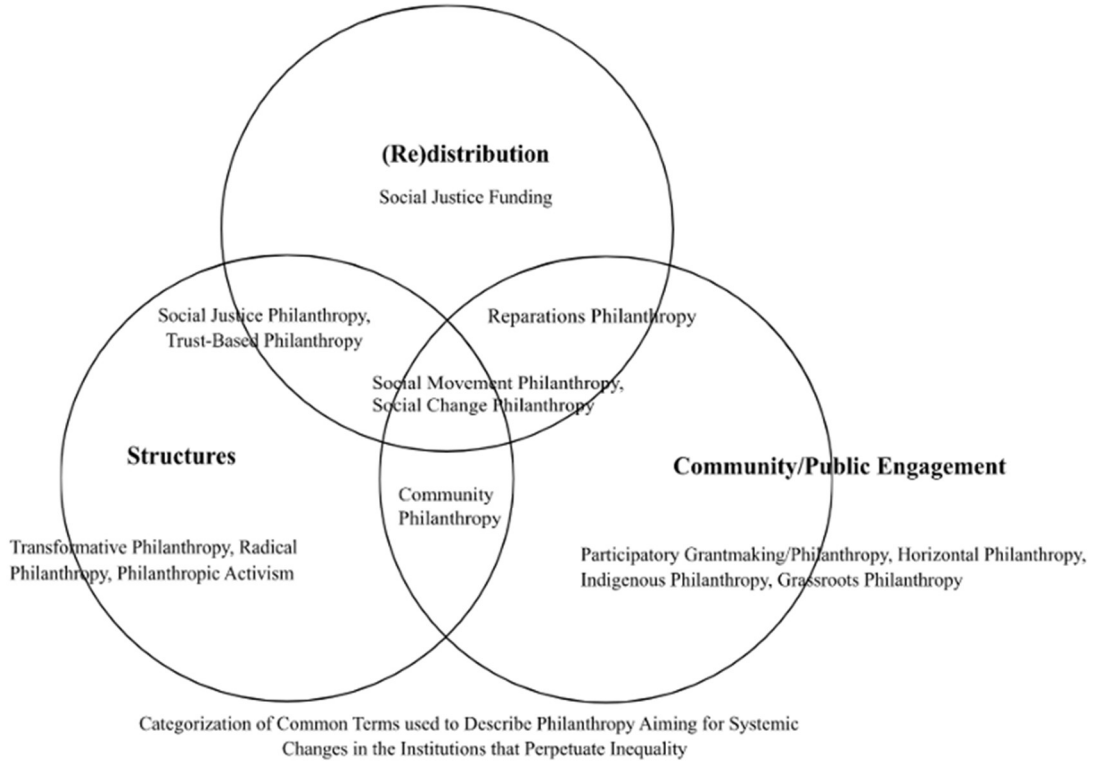

Figure 1. Categorization of Terms Used to Describe Philanthropy Aiming for Systemic Changes in Institutions that Perpetuate Inequality. (Paarlberg, Walk and Merritt, 2022)

The authors thus propose "justice philanthropy" as a means to encompass these practices in a common framework and to describe the broad phenomenon of philanthropic initiatives aiming for structural changes in the systems that perpetuate inequality, given the multiplication of concepts and practices with those objectives since the 1990s[15]. Justice is seen as "inherently a normative concept based on a shared value of 'human rights,' which provides strong ethical statements of rights and responsibility" (*ibid.*, p. 354). This perspective has a significant impact on accountability and power dynamics in philanthropy:

> Similarly, in a rights-based approach to philanthropy, the recipient moves from "a supplicant in a position of gratitude" (Illingworth, 2020, p. 159) to a grantee asserting the cultural, economic, political, and social rights that all people have by virtue of being human. A rights-based approach imposes an obligation on those people and institutions who

[15] The article includes an appendix "Common Terms Used to Describe Philanthropy Aiming for Structural Changes in the Institutions that Perpetuate Inequality" that lists the concepts definitions and the year when the term was introduced in publication.

control and possess resources to achieve equitable and just outcomes. (Paarlberg, Walk and Merritt, 2022, p. 354)

The authors propose as a definition for justice philanthropy:

Contrary to philanthropic efforts which seek to address the immediate symptoms of social and environmental issues (what is often described as charity), justice philanthropy seeks to address the 'drivers of the situation' by pursuing long-term structural changes in economic and political systems that perpetuate inequality, focusing on the reallocation of political and economic power. The pursuit of these societal outcomes involves changes in foundations' internal practices and their relationships with constituent communities and deploying diverse philanthropic tools. (Paarlberg, Walk and Merritt, 2022, p. 361)

Herro and Obeng-Odoom's (2019) article *Foundations of Radical Philanthropy* highlights alternative radical models of philanthropic giving the authors argue are absent from the academic discussion which mostly focuses on philanthrocapitalist critique. The authors state,

radical philanthropy (...) recognises the centrality of the cumulative and interconnecting forces of free-market capitalism, colonialism, neo-colonialism, and imperialism in making and maintaining global poverty. It also recognises that poverty has other cross-cutting dimensions, including the intersectionality of race, class, and gender. (Herro and Obeng-Odoom, 2019, p. 882)

Radical philanthropy sets itself in opposition to philanthrocapitalist logics by affirming a critical perspective that understands social struggles in their political and economic context. This means first the recognition of worldwide structures that perpetuate inequality - capitalism, colonialism, patriarchy, extractivism and more - and then the support of acts of resistance to these forces and alternatives from grassroots initiatives. As the categorization of the concept in Paarlberg, Walk and Merritt's (2022) article suggests, radical philanthropy's activities or support of groups is always engaged in a deeper critique of the systems that perpetuate inequality, in dismantling them and in supporting alternatives. Other aspects stand out: the authors argue that participatory grantmaking is central to radical philanthropy because it is a way of redistributing power and reorganizing funder-grantee relationships. Susan Ostrander (1995) already emphasized how the Haymarket People's Fund participatory structure made up of activists - movement insiders - "transforms - socially reorganizes - typical philanthropic relations" (*ibid.,* p. 6). This reorganization can have an impact that goes beyond the particular funder-grantee relationship considering McCrea and Finnegan's (2019) argument of how funding relationships become part of the movements/communities dynamics as a whole.

As with everything, there are challenging aspects and contradictions in the radical philanthropy concept and especially for radical foundations, which is why Herro and Obeng-Odoom (2019) reject "testing single organizations against the conceptualization of radical philanthropy" and instead note that "Radical philanthropy is better placed to realise its potential,

if pursued as a set of principles to reshape philanthropy. As a cluster of meanings." (*ibid*., p. 888). Lastly, they emphasize how radical philanthropy is inherently political since it looks at political and economic structures as responsible for perpetuating inequality instead of individual failings, or, as explored before, self-help narratives (Kohl-Arenas, 2016).

3.2. Characterizing radical foundations: vision, structures and practices

This section analyzes European radical foundations characteristics and practices by looking at publicly available data such as foundation's websites, blog posts, annual reports and other publicly available documents. Some foundations have easily available annual reports on their website that provide information on internal finances, sources of funding and grants allocated through that year. Others did not have publicly available reports, which made it difficult to gather information on the types of grants being awarded, their amounts, to whom they were being awarded to as well as information on funding sources. Some share more insights into why they work the way they do, what they have learned through the years and how they have changed to incorporate learnings. This is the case of Guerrilla, who are very reflective on their annual reports and also regularly update their blog, sharing updates on their journey on participatory grantmaking. Because there is more information on certain foundations, this is necessarily reflected in some being more mentioned than others, and thus in an incomplete characterization regarding those which do not share so much. A different study with more access to the foundation's internal processes would be required to provide a full characterization. This analysis serves not only as a contextualization of the foundations whose grantees were interviewed (Chapter 4), but also hopes to add to the discussion on what radical philanthropy is (initiated in the previous section), as well as contribute to a better understanding of radical philanthropy in practice.

Keeping in mind Herro and Obeng-Odoom's (2019) advice not to make foundations fit a strict definition of radical philanthropy, it was still required that a minimal criteria be established in order to be able to select foundations for this study. Building on Paarlberg, Walk and Merritt's (2022) emphasis on radical philanthropy's internal (to the foundation's structure and practices) and external (in the relationship with grantees) transformations and on Herro and Obeng-Odoom's (2019) attention to radical philanthropy's recognition of structures that perpetuate inequality and support of grassroots initiatives, the following criteria were defined:

1) the foundation awards grants to grassroots social change organizations;

2) the foundation has participatory mechanisms that give decision making power to social movements' organizations and/or activists, in an effort to counter power imbalances in philanthropic giving;

3) the foundation recognizes historical conditions of oppression, injustice and power imbalances, in philanthropy and in society, and the need for systemic economic, political and social transformation in order to address them.

The application of this criteria to EDGE Funders Alliance registered members based in Europe and awarding grants in the region resulted in the selection of nine foundations: Guerrilla Foundation, Marius Jacob Foundation, Edge Fund, FundAction, Safe Passage Fund, Mama Cash, Het Actiefonds, FemFund Poland and the Dalan Fund[16]. The remainder of this chapter illustrates, using the data analyzed, how these foundations fulfil the above mentioned criteria. It is necessary to reiterate that there is no one definition of "foundation" in Europe, not even across European Union countries. Legal requirements vary and "foundation" may not even exist in the country's legal code. What is common is the existence of a registered non-profit organization that is able to distribute funds to other non-profit organizations and has an internal structure that supports a decision-making process regarding the allocation and distribution of funds. This means there is some variation and distance from the original 19th century US conception, and while it may be questionable if the organization should still be considered a foundation or would better be described as a mutual fund or something else[17], this research addresses them as foundations.

3.2.1. Vision and Mission

Radical foundations recognise and name social, economic and political structures that perpetuate inequality and oppression. In their statement "Our Politics", Edge Fund (no date) summarizes the main critiques:

> Our current economic system (capitalism) puts profit before people and the planet and allows a small number of people to become wealthy at the expense of others. With wealth also comes power. Our current political system (representative democracy) forces us to choose someone to make decisions for us, rather than allowing us to speak for ourselves. There are also systems that give people power over others and lead to discrimination, for example, those based on factors such as race, ability, sexuality, class or gender (white supremacy, disablism, heterosexism, classism, transphobia and patriarchy). There are systems of power throughout society which often reinforce each other. (Edge Fund, no date)

[16] Even though nine foundations fit the radical foundation criteria and were thus analyzed,there was a bigger focus on the five foundations whose grantees participated in the interviews that appear in chapter 4, that is, Guerrilla Foundation, Edge Fund, FundAction, Safe Passage Fund, FemFund Poland.

[17] For example, the Edge Fund says it is a "membership-led organisation, not a foundation" (Edge Fund, no date).

Radical foundation's understanding of the world tends to assume an intersectional approach, recognizing that the mentioned systems of power exist simultaneously and result in compounded and specific effects that impact different communities in different ways. This means responses to these issues must also consider how different problems are connected, which explains why radical foundations fund across a variety of issue areas emphasizing intersectional approaches. To be specific, while some foundations like Safe Passage Fund and FemFund focus on migrants rights and feminist movements, respectively, often their grantees work on intersecting issues: Safe Passage supports feminist migrants groups, FemFund supports reproductive rights and LGBTQIA+ feminist groups, to give some examples (FemFund, no date; Safe Passage Fund, no date). However, most radical foundations tend to support organizations across a broad range of issues like climate justice, borders and migration, racial justice and decolonization, LGBTQIA+ rights, housing rights, land rights and more. Guerrilla Foundation mentions supporting activists and grassroots movements "in line with frameworks such as the Just Transition, the Great Transition, Buen Vivir, intersectional thinking, new municipalism" (Guerrilla Foundation, no date) and Het Actiefonds mentions supporting a various movements "because we believe that all these themes are connected and we can only achieve our goals if change happens in all aspects" (Het Actiefonds, no date).

Radical funders also prioritize supporting underfunded groups, areas of intervention and/or regions. The Dalan Fund is one such example: the foundation was established in 2022 as an "activist-led multi-regional intersectional fund" to redistribute resources to "intersectional movements, registered organizations, unregistered collectives, and networks led by historically and currently excluded communities" in Central and Eastern Europe, Caucasus, and Central and North Asia (CEECCNA) regions (Dalan Fund, no date). Guerrilla Foundation chooses to prioritize groups with no prior foundation funders, underfunded organizations (setting a limit to annual budgets up to 150,000€) and underfunded regions such as "Southern, Central, and Eastern Europe as well as historically marginalised groups and frontline communities in Northern and Western Europe"(Guerrilla Foundation, no date). Finally, the Edge Fund only supports groups with an annual budget up to 5,000£ and that are an unregistered grassroots group (i.e. are not registered as an NGO) (Edge Fund, no date).

Supporting grassroots social movements is a fundamental characteristic of radical foundations and an essential assumption of their theory of change. Marius Jacob Foundation's vision statement illustrates this: "we believe that what will change the world we live in, profoundly and lastingly, are grassroots social movements and the collective energy of people who want to play a role in building other societies[18]" (Marius Jacob Foundation, no date). While the supported organizations can range from horizontal collectives, networks and coalitions,

[18] Translated from french to english through Google's website translation tool.

mutual support groups or NGOs, they share a connection to broader social movements and work within their communities with a systemic change perspective. The focus on systemic change is visible in the projects and groups foundations choose to support. For example, Safe Passage explicitly says they do not fund groups working on service delivery or migrant integration without connecting those activities to a theory of systemic change (Safe Passage Fund, no date).

Another essential aspect is that in recognizing structural issues, radical foundations propose action on a systemic level - economic, social and political. In a blog article, Guerrilla Foundation argues "If most funders are funding symptoms, at least a handful need to be swimming Upstream and targeting the root causes of globalised pathologies" (March, 2021). "Swimming upstream" reflects the radical foundation's own theory of change: in recognizing that social, economic and political systems are perpetuating inequality and oppression and that funders are supporting superficial or temporary solutions that do not threaten those structures or the *status quo*, radical foundations set out to support groups that target global structures. Ultimately, in working to change the structures that perpetuate inequality and that created the conditions that birthed the philanthropic foundation, radical foundations work "to create a world where there is no need for Foundations to exist in the first place" (March, 2017). Additionally, as Guerrilla Foundation explicitly states, for radical European foundations, acting at the root causes of issues is directly tied to supporting European grassroots movements and "countering neocolonialist giving" (March, 2021):

> (...) until our home region, Europe, doesn't radically clean up its act regarding social and environmental injustices that keep originating here, and echoing disastrously across the globe, often with more harmful consequences much further afield, we will keep on funding grassroots activists building movements on European soil. (March, 2021)

Working towards systemic change reflects also in efforts to influence the wider philanthropic landscape. Besides being members of EDGE Funders Alliance some of the foundations mention being part of other networks with the goal of influencing broader change. Romy Krämer, managing director of Guerrilla Foundation is part of the European Steering group of EDGE Funders and collaborated in the working group to revamp the alliance's governance structure (Guerrilla Foundation, 2024). Guerrilla also set up FundAction and continued supporting it through the years, as well as the Leap Collective[19] and Collective Abundance[20] (Krämer, 2024).

[19] Leap Collective joins together "activists, social entrepreneurs, foundation staff, and philanthropists working towards systemic change in philanthropy". https://leapcollective.org/

[20] Collective Abundance is a "movement-building initiative that engages philanthropic funding as a tool to help strengthen the climate justice ecosystem across Europe. https://www.collectiveabundance.org/

3.2.2. Structure

The foundations' structure is deeply connected to the participatory mechanisms of grant decision making and can be reflective of the foundation's commitment to addressing power imbalances in philanthropy. While for their country's legal requirements they may be obliged to have a board of trustees or directors, this analysis focuses on the operational structure the foundations share.

All the analyzed foundations have staff members responsible for operational tasks such as managing grant transfers, communications with grantees and partners, checking applications and forwarding them to the decision making bodies, producing the annual reports, etc. However, in some cases, staff participate in grantmaking decisions as in the case of Guerrilla Foundation. Their smaller Reflex grants are reviewed and decided on by staff members who are also responsible for doing a first screening and meeting with Action grant applicants and later forwarding it to the Activist Council for reviewing and deciding (Guerrilla Foundation, no date).

Foundations like Marius Jacob, FundAction and Edge Fund's structures are based on activists and organization's membership. In the case of Marius Jacob, regular contributors are part of a general assembly from which members are randomly selected to make grant distribution decisions (Marius Jacob Foundation, no date). Additionally, operational tasks are distributed among various cells or working groups of the foundation and a coordination group ensures all is working well between the various cells and activities (*ibid.*). In FundAction, individual activists are admitted as members and can then submit project proposals from their organizations, discuss other proposals and vote (FundAction, no date). Finally, Edge Fund's past grantees are considered members of the foundation with a group being called to make up the decision making committee for each specific round of funding (Edge Fund, no date).

Safe Passage and Guerrilla both put grant decisions in the hands of an Activist Council of experienced activists from European social movements. In the case of Safe Passage, the council renovates every two years to ensure participation and different perspectives have their chance at contributing to the redistribution process (Safe Passage Fund, no date). Guerrilla has an additional Funders Council that is focused on organizing funders and reflecting on their roles in radical philanthropy (Krämer, 2022b). Guerrilla Foundation inaugurated the Activist and Funders Councils in the beginning of 2022 when they began their participatory grantmaking trial and since then have shared updates on the journey, reflections and what has changed[21]. Mama Cash, while following a more traditional structure of Supervisory Board plus

[21] More recently Guerrilla Foundation shared insights from an evaluation to their participatory grantmaking, which will be discussed in sections ahead. https://guerrillafoundation.org/why-participation-matters/

staff teams, also has a similar council of eleven activists, the Community Committee, making decisions for their Resilience Fund and contributing to the general grantmaking programme by "providing thematic, issue, regional, linguistic and other context analyses in case of need, and by reflecting on the participatory grantmaking programme as we go to learn how to improve our processes" (Mama Cash, no date). Finally, FemFund has a team and Audit Committee and its participatory mechanism that does not significantly affect the foundation's structure: applicants to the Minigrant and Power grants read each other's proposals and decide collectively on funding (FemFund, no date).

3.2.3. Grantmaking

From emergency funds to larger flexible grants, radical foundations provide a diversity of grants to be able to meet grassroots organizations' needs. Often foundations emphasize support beyond the grant funds such as building the organization's priorities and strategy together, sharing other funding opportunities, connecting their grantees through trainings, meetings and networks, sharing organization's events and activities in their communication channels, and more. Generally, the funding provided is flexible, which means foundations are not too strict when it comes to demanding organizations meet their initial budget plan and can allocate the funds to various areas (i.e. salaries, materials, travel expenses, physical space costs) without many restrictions. Despite the flexibility, foundations like Guerrilla, FundAction and Safe Passage still ask for plans for a specific project the grant would help implement, which means they are not officially core support grants. While foundations fund some organizations more than once, multi-year and long-term funding does not seem widespread, which does not necessarily mean foundations are not interested in providing multi-year funding. Mama Cash already focuses on long-term funding and foundations like Guerrilla assume it as a goal, mentioning in their 2024 report "our aspiration is to grow our budget, fast-track more groups into ongoing funding and generally move towards resourcing movement ecosystems with a systemic long-term funding approach" (Guerrilla Foundation, 2024; Mama Cash, no date). Further investigation would be needed to understand the obstacles standing in the way of radical foundations providing multi-year funding, but their small size compared with other more established foundations and focus on supporting multiple underfunded grassroots groups may be some of the conditions making it harder.

When it comes to the types of grants foundations offer, foundations like Edge Fund and Marius Jacob provide small grants around 1.000£/1.000€ most likely due to their smaller budgets, a result of their funding model (Edge Fund, no date; Marius Jacob Foundation, no date). While they may create a special fund to respond to a specific situation (for example, Marius Jacob Foundation created the Brussels for Palestine in 2023), they offer smaller grants

in order to support grassroots collectives. With similar small grants, Het Actiefonds funds protests and campaigns up to 2.500€ with regional boards of activists deciding on applications (Het Actiefonds, no date). FundAction and Guerrilla have two main grants: a smaller one, between 2.000€ and up to 5.000€ in the case of FundAction's Rethink grant and 9.000€ in the case of Guerrilla's Reflex grant; and a larger one from 10.000€ to 20.000€. These grants tend to be project specific but flexible, with a timeline for implementation up to one year (FundAction, no date; Guerrilla Foundation, no date). With similar conditions and decision making process to Guerrilla, Safe Passage funds up to 10.000€ grants with decisions being made by an Activist Council "with lived or frontline experience of migration and displacement" (Safe Passage Fund, no date). Additionally, several foundations provide urgent/rapid response grants that range from 250€ (Het Actiefonds) to 2.000€ (FundAction) and that are meant to be used for quick responses to the organizations and communities' needs (for example, for an urgent protest) with foundations responding to the application within a few days or weeks (FundAction, no date; Het Actiefonds, no date). Finally, foundations like Guerrilla and Mama Cash also fund other foundations: Mama Cash has a dedicated fund to support other feminist and women's funds (Mama Cash, no date) and Guerrilla has supported FundAction (Guerrilla Foundation, no date).

3.2.4. Funding

The radical foundations investigated set themselves apart from the traditional foundation model from the start in how they are funded and how they fund, but one essential characteristic is that they are not established with large endowments that continue generating income through investments. This means these foundations must yearly and continually raise funds in order to be able to maintain its activities. Three models of funding were identified: funding by high-net worth funders, funding through foundation grants, donations and regular contributions from supporters.

Guerrilla Foundation funds itself through contributions from high net-worth individuals. Having been founded by Antonis Schwarz[22] who provided the funding and participated in grant decisions, starting in 2022 the foundation began a two year trial of a new model of participatory governance that put decision making power in the hands of an Activist Council (Krämer, 2022a). The new model also welcomed more funders into the foundation who established the Funders Circle, a self-organized funders collective that provides strategic advice to the

[22] "Antonis Schwarz is an activist, philanthropist and impact investor of Greek-German descent (...) He has used his inherited wealth (that originated from the selling of pharmaceutical company Schwarz Pharma) to support a variety of social causes since 2011." From "Our Funders" https://guerrillafoundation.org/our-people/funders-circle/

foundation (without making grant decisions) and aims to influence other funders to embrace radical philanthropy (Krämer, 2022b).

In the case of the Edge Fund, Marius Jacob Foundation and Het Actiefonds, regular contributions and donations make up a common fund that is later redistributed. In their latest report, the Edge Fund admits applying for other foundation grants in order to make up for a declining financial situation (EFJ Limited – Edge Fund, 2025), which means there are also instances where foundations have a mix of funding sources. The same happens with FemFund which also collects monthly donations and has been supported by Guerrilla Foundation, Mama Cash and other non-radical foundations (FemFund, no date). FundAction is mostly funded by grants from other foundations such as Fondation Un Monde par Tous, Lush Foundation, Porticus and Guerrilla Foundation, who have supported them since their establishment, but has also received large donations from single donors (FundAction, 2023). Mama Cash is also supported by foundations and other organizations as well as government agencies like the Dutch national lottery and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Irish Aid and the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Mama Cash, 2024, no date).

It is difficult to understand how the remaining foundations fund themselves due to lack of publicly accessible information: Safe Passage Fund was set up with funds from a crowdfunding campaign meant to pay for legal fees of activist Carola Rackete, who was unlawfully arrested for supporting migrants on route to Europe (Safe Passage Fund, no date); and there is no publicly available information on the Dalan Fund's funding sources as of October 2025.

In conclusion, radical foundations are experimenting with different structures, decision making models and funding schemes under similar critical understandings of social issues and theories of change - supporting grassroots movements advancing systemic change. They also embody their vision of power redistribution and more democratic collective decision making in their internal structures by functioning as assemblies or putting the power to make grant decisions in the hands of experienced activists. Additionally, they come together in networks like the EDGE Funders Alliance and support each other through collaboration and funding. This means radical foundations aim to transform typical philanthropic dynamics on multiple levels: in who they support, how and for what end (grassroots organizations working for systemic change through trust-based relationships); in their internal structures and practices; and in influencing the broader philanthropic field.

4. Hearing the grassroots: perspectives of grantee organizations on radical foundations and radical philanthropy

Having analyzed recent proposals for transformation in philanthropy, radical philanthropy definitions and radical foundations' characteristics, this chapter brings grantee organizations' perspectives into focus. Investigating grantee perspectives allows not only to gain insight into what radical philanthropy is for the groups it supports, how the direct "beneficiaries" experience that support, or, as Raghavan (2024) emphasizes, to understand what a concept *does*, but also to better understand radical foundations. Knowing what radical foundations say regarding their grant practices and relationships with grantees, what are grantee organizations actually experiencing? What difference does it make if a funder is "radical"? Additionally, what can grantees' experiences tell us about radical philanthropy's strengths and tensions?

In this research it was possible to interview fourteen[23] members of grantee organizations of Guerrilla Foundation, Edge Fund, FundAction, Safe Passage Fund and FemFund Poland. Participants were selected through annual reports and past grantees listed on the foundations website and after 119 contacts, 14 organisations accepted the invitation to participate in the study. The interviews followed a general structure where the participants described the organization and its main activities, their sources of funding and general experience with philanthropic funding, then discussed their experience with the radical funder(s) and lastly shared more openly their opinions on the interaction between philanthropy and social movements.

After characterizing the organizations that participated in the study (section 4.1.), the analysis aims to make explicit how radical foundations' practices and relationships with grantees reflect (or don't) the radical foundations' claims: their critique of systems of inequality, their advocacy for systems change and their support of alternative practices. The analysis is organized along two main points: section 4.2. "Grantee's perspectives on the relationship with radical funders" focused on the impact of radical philanthropy on funder-grantee relationships; and section 4.3. "Insights on radical philanthropy" reflecting on broader tensions in the radical philanthropy trend.

4.1. Characterizing participant organizations

Among the participants, there were two Edge Fund grantees, eight Guerrilla Foundation grantees, four from the Safe Passage Fund, two from FundAction and one from FemFund Poland[24]. There was diversity among the main areas of activity, which enriched the analysis:

[23] Thirteen online interviews and one written response.
[24] Among these grantees, three had experience with two of the studied foundations.

the most common area of intervention was on migrants' rights and borders (the three Safe Passage grantees), but organizations also focused on climate justice, land rights, indigenous rights, sex workers' rights, gig workers' rights, community support and solidarity, reproductive rights, feminism, anti-racism, left-wing political organizing and political ecology. Among these themes there were varied forms of action: from campaigning, protesting and engaging in civil disobedience; advocacy; education and training; researching and sharing resources; strategic litigation cases; organizing fairs, community kitchens and workshops; providing open community spaces; producing podcasts, newsletter and other journalistic pieces; and providing emergency assistance. There were participants from several regions of Europe with four from southern Europe, three assuming a transnational scope and the others were spread across north, central and western Europe, the Balkans, the United Kingdom (the Edge Fund grantees) and Poland (the FemFund grantee). There was also a mix of organization types: two journalist projects, one consortium of organizations, one foundation[25] and some smaller collectives.

While most were registered as NGOs, the organizations did not have highly professionalized structures and easy access to resources. On the contrary, most of the organizations did not receive large grants but had a small but organized core group of members of around three to five people, with some being able to engage a larger network of volunteers for activities. Some organizations were able to have a paid coordinator, but most were only able to have part-time staff or on and off paid positions, depending on their ability to secure funding. In general, the organizations struggle in that regard and are used to having to be resourceful in the face of their perpetual underfunding, "stretching" budgets and working with few resources. The participant from the migrants' rights consortium was employed as a coordinator and mentioned that in order to cover the expenses for that full-time position they "worked in a really patched up manner to be able to finance the basic thing in our work which is coordinating all of this" (Consortium of Organizations for Migrants Rights from Southern Europe). They added that their most recent FundAction grant had been an emergency grant to bridge a gap in their budget. A participant from another organization explained:

> If I go off the salary for at least three, four months, we can stretch the money for longer. And why would I go off the salaries for three, four, five months? Because I got some other consultancy that I'm bringing up. You know, I mean, that's the lifestyle. (Transnational Migrants Rights organization)

[25] The foundation was a grantee of FemFund Poland. While it was not possible to fully research this question due to time constraints and the scope of the investigation, it seems that some groups opt to register as a foundation instead of an association/NGO. It is estimated that Poland has around 21,000 foundations, according to the latest Philea (2025b) report, making it the second country with the most foundations in Europe.

Organizations also contended with funding dilemmas: it is not just a question of who is willing to support them, but also who they are willing to receive funding from. As one participant shared:

> We have had a lot of meetings and discussions about where should we apply and what kind of funding should we ask for. We have tried to be very reflective and not just strategic about it, but also, of course, apply for funding that reflects our values, our way of working. (Feminist organization from Eastern Europe)

Participants shared reflections regarding funder dependency and what can happen when organizations start growing their budgets or take on certain activities. One person explained that because the organization had registered in their country as "law advisors" to be able to give feedback on legislation being proposed in parliament, they had to hire a lawyer that could write "properly" and provide informed suggestions. This meant they needed funding to afford to pay that lawyer. They explained what other organizations also echoed: funding allows organizations to do more and once they are able to do more they want to keep up with those activities.

> We can also function without money, like, it can be free time, after work activity, where we maybe spend our money. And it was happening for a couple of months. Like, we could do it, we know that we could do it without money. But once you get the money from charities, and so on, you can do more things, and then it gets addictive in a nice way (...) You can help more people, you can help people in more sustainable ways. (Migrants Rights and Border Monitoring organization from Northeastern Europe)

However, some large grants also showed to have its downsides as some participants reported: they require the organization to have a structure that can manage the budget and the reporting requirements large grants tend to have; they can be overwhelming when it's the organization's first big grant and the foundation provides little support; and when the funding ends organizations may not be able to keep up with their budget and have to lay off workers.

The interviewed organizations mixed a variety of funding sources: from foundation grants to donations and crowdfunding, EU programmes, some corporate donations and even, in certain countries, tax money that can be awarded to non-profits. State funding was not common, with many organizations rejecting it altogether and others not being able to access it due to the nature of their work. As INCITE! (2007) highlighted, the state has incentives to co-opt organizations in order for them not to disrupt the *status quo*. Still, one migrants' rights and border monitoring organization reported receiving funding from the foreign ministry of their country to be able to organize integration activities.

For the studied organizations, funding from the radical foundations ranged from 1.000€ to 20.000€: grants up to 8.000€/9.000€ tended to cover gaps in their budget, in-person meetings and events for their community as well as strategic planning gatherings; grants over 10.000€

tended to cover bigger and more structural expenses such as staff salaries. Being able to pay for salaries seemed to be important for the interviewed organizations and philanthropic funding facilitated providing full or part-time contracts to some people or to pay freelance lawyers, media specialists, trainers, etc. Paying for labor also values people's time and effort, which is important for people who share a critical vision of economic systems and exploitation. Typically, less flexible grants might set a specific limit to staff salaries or even not allow the funds to be used for those purposes.

4.2. Grantee's perspectives on the relationships with radical funders

4.2.1. Application, reporting and grant conditions

Through the participants' accounts, it was possible to understand that most of the grants radical foundations provided had a timeline of one year and were project based, which meant organizations had to submit a proposal for how they would use the grant funds in their activities. In practice, despite being project based, because most radical funders do not check receipts or impose tight restricted budgets for spaces, salaries, materials, etc., organizations reported using the grant without many restrictions. One participant even stated they saw the grant as core funding, due to its flexibility and lack of restrictions when comparing with other smaller grants with more conditions attached from non-radical funders.

Generally, organizations spoke of simple application procedures and simplified reporting when it came to radical funders. In some cases, small grants like those awarded by the Edge Fund did not require formal written reports, with organizations meeting with the foundation to give feedback on what they were doing instead. This practice shows how trust is present in the radical foundation's relationships with their grantees, illustrating a commitment to building relationships with the grantees and subverting typical dynamics of funders requiring measurable outcomes and extensive reporting. One Edge Fund grantee elaborated on the foundation's follow-up practices:

> They don't ask many questions. They offer the opportunity for you to tell them what you're doing and to publicize what you're doing in their newsletter, which is great. (...) Edge Fund has been very good because they just leave you to it, you know? A thousand pounds helps, but doesn't dominate. (Land Rights organization from the UK)

Grantees of Guerrilla Foundation mentioned delivering a written report but not needing to provide receipts of expenses and Safe Passage grantees explained their reporting required online meetings, email updates, a grant survey, receipts and a project report. Despite the need to produce a formal written report when it came to most of the analyzed funders, organizations mentioned feeling they could be more open and honest regarding their learnings, failures and

accomplishments, as well as communicating delays or unexpected changes. In one case, due to its activist membership structure, one participant argued:

> FundAction members understand that its members do not have the time and the capacity to write interim reports and full reports and all this. So it keeps things simple because it has built a strong community of members with trust between each other. And all the internal procedures lead so that the people trust each other and they don't have to prove themselves, let's say. (Community Support and Solidarity organization from Southern Europe)

One could assume that in the cases of foundations with an activist membership structure as FundAction, grantees would feel understood and build closer relationships since they are interacting with fellow activists. However, almost all grantees spoke of a deeper understanding of their context, challenges and needs when it came to their radical funders. The FemFund grantee organization echoed the previous statement's sentiments:

> We do submit reports, but we love the fact that they know the reality of a small CSO in Poland, especially in Poland. The context is ever changing, it's very volatile. We often need to adapt to new circumstances, so our plans do change, maybe not a lot, but yes, they change. And [radical funder not based in Europe] and FemFund, they definitely understand that which is great. So there is not a lot of explaining going on, which is also helpful. (Feminist Foundation from Poland)

Indeed, the interviews echo Ostrander's observation that radical foundations understand organizations' struggles and context because their grantmaking structure based on putting power in the hands of activists makes them movement insiders (Ostrander, 1995). This funder status thus shapes funder-grantee relationships and "challenges the sharp division between movement insider-activists and outsider-funders that prevailing movement theory assumes as a major basis for co-optation of activists by funders" (Ostrander, Silver and McCarthy, 2005, p. 283). Most participants tended to affirm seeing radical foundations as part of social movements (with some considering them to be supportive of movements but not active participants), which corroborates the movement insider status.

Still on the topic of reporting, one interviewee from a feminist organization mentioned their non-radical funders reporting requirements had "no way to report on intersectionality". This brings up the question: what do organizations want to report on? What could reporting on intersectionality, to mention the example used, help make clearer? This brings up a topic radical funders could explore with their grantees: how can application and reporting practices be further reorganized to reflect radical philanthropy's values?

Grantee experiences of receiving funding in multiple years varied. Both Edge Fund grantees had received more than two grants from them and Safe Passage, FundAction and FemFund grantees also reported being supported by the foundation more than once. There

were more instances of Guerrilla Foundation grantees having received funding for only one year and not having their grants renewed. While there is not sufficient data to understand if Guerrilla tends to renew less grants than the other foundations, it is worth looking at Guerrilla's grantees experience in that regard. Only two out of the eight Guerrilla grantees interviewed received funding more than once, at least three reapplied and were rejected and two inquired about the possibility of collaborating further and were not successful. Of the three grantees who reapplied and were rejected, one reported being rejected because the foundation considered they would be able to find funding elsewhere. Another mentioned the foundation considered they had not done enough to solve an issue with a local partner of the organization. Finally, in the third case, the interviewee shared that the foundation did not consider their work "systemic enough" (this case will be discussed in the following sections). Regarding multi-year funding and grant renewal, Guerrilla Foundation seems to understand there is a need for long-term support and shows interest in making that support possible, but recognizes limitations:

> We see an enormous demand for funding in the ecosystem. Our grantee pipeline is filled with eligible requests that we are unable to process due to budget constraints. Therefore, our aspiration is to grow our budget, fast-track more groups into ongoing funding and generally move towards resourcing movement ecosystems with a systemic long-term funding approach. (Guerrilla Foundation, 2024)

Radical foundations have a relatively small budget[26] when compared with large and well established foundations with budgets reaching the millions, which can account for limitations in multi-year support.

From the grantees' reports it is possible to understand that radical foundations have simplified application and reporting procedures, which alleviate organization's workload. What is more, due to its movement insider status and flexible funding, organizations report feeling more understood and less pressured to justify budget alterations. Finally, even though foundations mention the desire to provide long-term support, there are still cases when it is not possible and grants are not renewed.

4.2.2. Communication and feedback

When it came to communication, most grantees spoke of their radical funders as offering opportunities to be in contact through grantee meetings, workshops and gatherings, but not pressuring them to do so. The Safe Passage Fund grantees reported the foundation had recently asked for feedback from their grantees. In a feedback session with them, one of the

[26] In the last few years, Guerrilla's grant budget has reached around one million euros (Guerrilla Foundation, 2023, 2024).

participants reported pressing the foundation to self-reflect and be accountable regarding their practices:

> We had a really good self-accountability kind of conversation with Safe Passage, with their first grant, which now they were like “oh, we want to give you more”. We're like, red flags! You gave us money for material costs to bring people together in this community. The space was amazing… (...) And yet, like, do you get it, Safe Passage, that we did all the labor for free? (...) You invisibilise that reality. So we had a big chat with them around that, and they were like, “you're damn right, you're getting a second trench of money that is for your activities”. (Transnational Migrants Rights organization)

When asked if they thought these kinds of exchanges would be possible with other non-radical funders, the interviewee said they didn’t think so. With their radical funders, organizations are able to share critiques in ways that build trust between the funder and grantee, does not punish organizations for speaking out and pushes foundations to consider their practices and what they should do differently if they are committed to changing power dynamics in philanthropy.

Similarly, grantees mentioned communication with radical funders was more honest and straightforward. One interviewee said that with “Safe Passage, we have something, like, no bullshit attitude. You don't need to bullshit too much in your application, it's just, like, the answers can be short and simple, to the point” (Migrants Rights and Border Monitoring organization from Northeastern Europe). This touches on a common dynamic in typical funder-grantee relationships where grantees feel pressured to meet funders’ visions and expectations, which can influence what is communicated and how, an issue that is particularly visible in application and reporting. As one grantee put it,

> (...) normally, when you apply for a project, you pretend you have it all figured out, that's how you get the money. You are very like, okay, these are the activities, this is what we see, this is the etc. So you pretend like it is a bit of a game that you're playing, that you know everything and that you are the best at everything. (Anti-Racist organization from Western Europe)

Besides less pressure to “have it all figured out” in the application, reporting failures, delays, unexpected expenses or unforeseen circumstances becomes less difficult when foundations are open and flexible. One participant said about the instances when they need to ask for extensions from their funders:

> Things like no-cost extensions have to be, like “I'm sorry that things are taking more time…” You know, like, I'm not sorry! We need all the time we need for the right work, you know? I'm not sorry. I'm sorry that you've created a reality in which people lie in your face. That your understanding of success and impact make people lie about their own failures. We're failing all the freaking time! (Transnational Migrants Rights organization)

When it comes to radical funders, organizations spoke of mutual understanding and “affinity”, of a willingness to take on feedback (as the Safe Passage grantee exemplified) and of open channels of communication, which reduced pressure to perform and allowed them to adopt this “no bullshit attitude”. Considering these examples, radical foundations’ relationships with their grantees seem to be characterized by an ability to have more open and honest communication, which extends beyond direct interactions with staff to the application process, reporting and feedback sessions.

However, there were also reports of miscommunication that can hint at deeper tensions with radical foundations. In this regard, one experience stood out: an organization that had their grant renewal denied by Guerrilla Foundation. The interviewee said they had been surprised with having to reapply through the same procedure as their first time application and later being rejected, because they had understood from informal talks with the foundation they would get multi-year funding since “this is also something that they are very much upholding as a value” (Political Participation Support organization from Southern Europe). They mentioned having conversations with staff through the duration of their first grant regarding improving the strategy and systemic aspects of their work.

> And because of our very honest conversations with Guerrilla, I pushed the team to go for a more honest type of application where we were sharing very transparently conversations that we were having internally about the strategy, about how we wanted to have more systemic change approach and work in the organisation, what we thought worked of our work that we did with marginalised communities, what we thought didn't work. (...) And this was not appreciated on the other side or the grantmaking council decided that we or our work is not systemic enough. And this was quite a bit a big hit.

They reported writing back to the foundation in order to discuss the rejection and members of the organization and the Activist Council were able to discuss their views on the decision. The interviewee continued,

> (...) you have to imagine every time you are in contact with these foundations, there's the board that is elected and political, and they take most of the time the decisions on who gets the funding and then there's the people working in the office. You're mostly in contact with the people working in the office, not with the people taking decisions. So I wrote back and I was very honest in saying that I was very disappointed with the decision because this did not, to me, give justice to what was the past of our conversations and asked to talk with members of the grantmaking council to clarify. We then had a call with two members of the grantmaking council and we were very honest with them. And I think in that moment we understood that they did not understand what [the organization] was. What we meant or like, there had been some miscommunication or lack of communication, lack of transfer

of information between the staff in the office and the grantmaking council. (Political Participation Support organization from Southern Europe)

This experience can hint at tensions in funder-grantee communication as a result of the foundation's structure. As the participant explained, since organizations are mostly in contact and building a relationship with the foundation through staff (who are not the ultimate decision makers), if information is not properly passed on this can lead to miscommunications and situations where expectations are frustrated and the organization's trust on the funder is tested. In some of the insights shared from an evaluation Guerrilla Foundation commissioned on their participatory grantmaking practices, the foundation recognized communication challenges: "All communication with candidates still is channeled through staff which makes it difficult at times to transfer AC feedback swiftly and precisely. The more people are involved in the grantmaking, the more complicated these processes become." (Guerrilla Foundation, 2024). There is also the question of the organization's work "not being systemic enough". While this can show the foundation is committed to their funding criteria and critically examines their grantees work, asserting what is and is not systemic transformation is debatable. This question will be further discussed in a section ahead as a more general insight into radical philanthropy.

According to the grantee descriptions, communication seems to be a fundamental area in which the relationship with a radical funder is significantly different than others. Feelings of "affinity" and mutual understanding can contribute to closer and more honest relationships. Similarly, radical foundations' openness to receive feedback and critically consider it, even to change their practices, is a crucial insight that highlights their commitment to putting their values of power redistribution and grassroots support into practice. Lastly, as one example showed, the foundation's decentralized structure requires well established internal processes so that information is not lost and miscommunications are avoided.

4.2.3. Relationships

Trust and closeness between organizations and radical foundations was often emphasized, as one Edge Fund grantee exemplified saying "there's a degree of faith and solidarity and togetherness" (Sex Workers Rights organization from the UK). In some instances, previous relationships with people from foundations meant they felt closer to that funder and in other cases the relationship was built over time. Providing support beyond the grant, sharing other funding opportunities and connecting the grantee to other organizations of their network contributed to building a trusting relationship in which organizations can see the foundation wants them to succeed beyond the project they funded. There were some examples of this practice: in one instance one grantee mentioned their funder had helped settle an issue with their bank account, another grantee mentioned their funder shared other funding opportunities

with them, another said they had had discussions with foundation staff about developing their strategy and work in order to be more systemic. In this regard, one person mentioned about the Safe Passage Fund:

> It also feels good to know that they are also trying to support us in finding further funding. So it's in their interest also that we manage to achieve our ideal goal and not only the thing that we applied for in the applications, which normally was 5.000 [euros] last year, 10.000 [euros] this year . So it's really just for coordination, but I feel that they are very engaged with the organizations and the activists to try to support them in getting the sustainability that we need. (Consortium of Organizations for Migrants Rights from Southern Europe)

All the participants mentioned the existence of online meetings or even in-person gatherings, group chats or ways to get in touch with the grantee network of their funder. One person mentioned they had come into contact with another organization through their funder which resulted in building a training course together and another said “they [radical funders] offer so much more than just money (...) they connect movements” (Feminist Foundation from Poland). As with funder-grantee communication, grantees are not forced or pressured to attend gatherings or engage with the network but foundations offer it, which opens the door for organizations and movements to connect across Europe. This connection and network building works in favor of systemic change by countering competitive dynamics between organizations and building coalitions working for common goals. This aligns with values of collaboration and fosters an environment where many alternatives can flourish. By creating relationships where honesty comes before performance, where there is space for failure, the discomfort of critique and the opportunity for dialogue, the universalizing practices of philanthrocapitalism can begin to be dismantled.

In conclusion, radical foundations seem to foster an environment where grantees feel supported beyond the financial side of the relationship and are able to build networks and communities not only with their funders, but with their funders’ grantees as well.

4.3. Insights on radical philanthropy

4.3.1. Funding the underfunded

Radical foundations argue for the need to fund grassroots movements which means looking beyond professionalized NGOs and reaching local groups who are organizing in their neighbourhood, school, city and who are typically overlooked by mainstream foundations. Thus, it is important to understand if radical foundations are reaching the underfunded groups they aim to support. Several grantees spoke of the difficulty in accessing funding, especially

core and unrestricted funding, due to their area of intervention, activities and strategies pursued. One interviewee from a climate justice organization said that because they do direct actions that include civil disobedience[27] they had to find funders that would not exclude organizations who used those strategies. This significantly narrowed their list of possible funders, which emphasizes the importance of radical funders who are willing to support organizations who use more disruptive strategies.

More often, grantees spoke of having difficulty securing funding due to their area of intervention: the organizations working on degrowth, migration, sex workers' rights and local left-wing politics mentioned this difficulty. Beyond working in areas most funders are not interested in supporting, other factors compounded that made it more difficult to access funding. In the case of migration, the organizations working in this area mentioned a recent defunding trend as a result of the rise of anti-immigration sentiments and right-wing parties and movements across Europe. In the case of sex workers' rights, legal questions complicated funding as the interviewee mentioned: "as soon as money gets involved it gets really hard, because the banks don't want to… You can get done for the kind of stuff around pimping" (Sex Workers Rights organization from the UK). Additionally, working with vulnerable populations in financially precarious situations also brings up difficult questions about funding. The same organization mentioned considering setting up a mutual aid fund but giving up on the idea since that would mean someone would have to choose who would get money, how much and who would be left out. Another grantee explained they had turned to Guerrilla Foundation to be able to cover the travel expenses of a US grassroots community organizer to Europe. They said "there was no way that we would get funding from anybody else because it's like, talking about movement and talking about police brutality, talking about incarceration. Talking about, you know, challenging funders, challenging artists…" (Anti-Racist organization from western Europe).

A broader investigation would be required to fully understand if indeed radical foundations are funding underfunded groups. However, the participants' reports seem to confirm that claim: they report difficulties in accessing funding due to their areas of intervention and pursued strategies. Additionally, it seems radical foundations also fill funding gaps, helping organizations be able to fund occasional events or even meet their budget needs with smaller occasional grants.

[27] Civil disobedience in this context is understood as "the refusal to obey the demands or commands of a government or occupying power, without resorting to violence or active measures of opposition" https://www.britannica.com/topic/civil-disobedience. Civil disobedience has been used as a tactic by several social movements over history and is currently one of the main strategies the climate justice movements utilize.

4.3.2. Participatory grantmaking

Participatory mechanisms were not indifferent to organizations and can have impact beyond the funder-grantee relationships in question. As was already mentioned, the decision making processes and structures of radical foundations mean they understand grassroots organizations' contexts better than other funders. Radical foundations like Guerrilla, Safe Passage and FemFund can be understood as movement insiders (Ostrander, 1995), but in the cases of the Edge Fund or FundAction, the organizations are directly part of the decision making process. FundAction grantees highlighted its participatory and democratic nature and argued "it's much different being a member of FundAction, which is a participatory grantmaking organization, democratic, with many activities and many assemblies and many meetings" (Community Support and Solidarity organization from Southern Europe). They mentioned they saw this funder more as a "community of activists" than a foundation due to its structure and decision-making model and added:

> This structured procedure is much more difficult because it's time consuming and resources consuming. But I think this is the way that people should move. This is the answer to a Europe that becomes less and less democratic. (...) I would prefer to have organizations like FundAction with all the difficulties and the resources consuming procedures, and also to have small groups of activists that support us, than having to deal with a big European organization. There is a specific hierarchy there. (Community Support and Solidarity organization from Southern Europe)

There is also a dimension of building skills and mechanisms for alternative participatory and democratic ways of organizing, a dimension of prefiguration, because "people in FundAction and most probably in other similar organizations are getting used to being in this type of continuous discussion on thematics and decide together and discuss together and all this" (Community Support and Solidarity organization from Southern Europe). This vision counters another participant's critique of funding "de-skilling" organizations: they argued that when organizations centralize tasks in a paid coordinator (because they have received funding that allows them to hire this person), tasks become less likely to be shared and "people in the movement aren't getting the skills" (Land Rights organization from the UK). There are risks, as with any funding, but also opportunities for organizations to think critically about their work, strategy and relationship to funding and to their movements as a whole.

Niamh McCrea's (2024) article *All Things Considered, Should Egalitarian Movements Accept Philanthropic Funding?* brings several contributions to this discussion. When organizations resist funder conditionalities, or as the Transnational Migrants Rights and Anti-borders organization did, share critical feedback with their funder, they not only shape their relationship to their funders - affirming what they will or will not accept - but also impact the

relationship of the movements with the funders as a whole. In other words, resisting funder conditionalities or opposing other harmful funder dynamics can help set a different standard for philanthropy's relationship with grassroots movements' as a whole, which emphasizes how organizations can also shape philanthropic practices. In addition to resisting funder conditionalities, organizations can open doors to other groups in their movement by letting go of competitive logics and sharing their resources: financial, intellectual but also access to funder and movement networks (*ibid*.).

Two examples of organizations shaping philanthropy came up in the interviews. In the first example, the organization that provided critical feedback to the Safe Passage Fund said that when the foundation proposed giving them more money for their activities they thought of setting up a mutual fund "for all the groups working on mutual aid and borders" (Transnational Migrants Rights organization). Later they said "So, because we practise the muscle of letting go of money, we practise the muscle of, ok, so I got this money, what can I do to redistribute it?". They also shared questioning other ways to approach funding issues saying "money is a horrible thing. Like, speak of needs" :

> I wish there was a model where we could, like, systematically hack these [the culture of the funders] (...) we need more tools, for sure (...) to unlearn and undo all the money shames we have and to abolish money. But also to be like, "Ok we need resources". How do we respectfully and or through, you know, rigging the system… You know, all the tools. How do we get resources? (Transnational Migrants Rights organization)
>
> Another organization shared their experience of "playing the role of Guerrilla":
>
> (...) we've trained some of our funders in community organizing, and we've sent them to the [one place's] organizing training too, so that they have formal training. And that has helped them try to have a more guerrilla-type approach. (...) And also, some of the movement people that we've trained and supported, because of the community, got jobs within the philanthropy sector, right? So, it's a community where we're kind of like, this is the army, we have our agents. So, when last year [new elections were called], we had like three weeks to mobilize, right? And because of that history, what we did was the people in the philanthropy sector from our community managed to mobilize people in their sector and say "You're sending all this money to traditional white, middle, upper class folks who think about democracy, but if you want to mobilize people to vote, it's grassroots". (...) We redistributed over 90,000 euros within three weeks to 30 different grassroots and minority-led initiatives. (Anti-Racist organization from Western Europe)

These examples show organizations are also engaged in rethinking how to resource themselves and their movements, which can help expand possibilities beyond the participatory grantmaking models in practice today and challenge radical foundations in their path to end philanthropy.

4.3.3. Aligning expectations around systemic change

Thinking back to the grantee who reported Guerrilla did not fund them again because “their work was not systemic enough” brings up the question of funders setting up expectations of “systemicness”. But what does it mean for a funder or the group of activists that make decisions within the foundation to say that an organization’s work is not systemic enough? Who creates the scale and who has the power to enforce it? If, when it comes to non-radical foundations, organizations need to show they have an innovative plan that “empowers” communities and “creates impact”, is it not the case that radical foundation’s grantees are making ‘systemic change’ a performance act? Is expectation of impact and measurable outcomes currently generalized in philanthropy being substituted by an expectation of the organization's activities fitting with an expected degree of “systemicness”? The argument is not that organizations are lying to foundations, but that they will adapt their communication of themselves to meet what funders (radical and not) want in order to get the resources. Similarly, the argument is not that foundations should abandon all expectations or stop prioritizing systemic change. As one participant put it:

> I think these progressive foundations should have absolutely this role of pushing, asking the right questions, challenging the organization, asking them but is what you do really systemic? But also to pretend or assume that a group can already solve all of their issues and figure out their system change approach in a matter of a year is absolutely madness. (...) So yeah, I do think that there should be kind of this dual support, supporting [the organization] to find your systemic change approach, but also financial support that is stable and long term to allow the other to actually work. And this would have an insane impact. This is, for me, the most impactful thing they [radical funders] could do. (Political Participation Support organization from Southern Europe).

Another interviewee’s reflection adds to this point:

> They [traditional funders] would only fund, you know, the doing and the successes. I mean, I think the answers are really there, right? It's, like, it's undoing impact. So much of it is about undoing impact, which is, you know, the lingo of these groups and how they understand it. Not doing and just being is also doing. (Transnational Migrants Rights organization)

Systemic change takes time and radical foundations can have a role in supporting it and helping organizations improve their strategy and work. But it is worth looking into what standards are being set up and to remain aware of them in order not to replicate a similar structure with different content. Challenging impact and the constant pressure to do more is to challenge the systems that require constant growth. As the previous statement argues, the existence of grassroots movements and groups is already doing something just by existing. It

is affirming that people can come together towards a common goal shaping that path collectively, that there are other ways of being and building more democratic and equitable existances beyond neoliberal individualism and productivism.

Radical foundations show a concern for engaging with the tensions inherent in their role as funder, as the examples of Safe Passage taking on feedback and Guerrilla's blog posts show. Organizations should also be aware of power dynamics, question radical funders' practices and critically reflect on the role of philanthropic funding in their work. As Niamh McCrea (2024) argues,

> I would like to suggest that movements need to cultivate a critical literacy around philanthropy, one that combines an openness to experimentation with a clear-eyed sense of its significant risks. Two broad areas of praxis require particular care and attention. Firstly, movements must reflect on, deliberately articulate, and actively defend their transformative vision, clarifying in the process the tactical place of philanthropy within this. Secondly, they must preserve egalitarian modes of organising in the face of funder conditionalities, and in the face of practices and norms which undermine participatory ideals and threaten relations of care and solidarity. (*ibid*., p. 293)

It is this critical literacy of philanthropy that also prevents co-optation. Some of the grantees spoke out in this regard and in agreement with McCrea's argument: organizations need to understand and be clear about their needs and both the funders and the activists need to put in effort in building a funder-grantee relationship that is transparent, recognises each other's goals and build towards more equitable futures.

4.3.4. "What is radical?"

Beyond their relationship with specific funders, interviewees articulated scepticism and critiques regarding radical foundations' work and radical philanthropy in general. One of the interviewees had been involved in the first years of one of the mentioned radical foundations and shared their opinion on the radical philanthropy trend. They argued that the "power question" in the funder-grantee relationship had not really been addressed but avoided and questioned the mechanisms foundations put in place to decentralize power. In this regard, they said "I don't see that the power has been distributed equally throughout the ecosystem, community" and added:

> I'm not really convinced anymore that it is a successful effort [radical philanthropy]. I think it is successful in terms of values and ideas, but implementation, I would say, is not really successful (...) I think it's very self-centered. It's a self-referential process, people are investing much more and too much time defining their own relations or patterns of communication, or behavior, or operation. It's a combination of an isolationist approach,

like, you know, we are this community of radical philanthropists, and now we understand each other, but actually the world does not understand us, neither do we do enough to approach the, say, world. (Political Ecology organization from Southeastern Europe)

They also argued there is a lack of communication regarding the practical transformations radical philanthropy entails and the results it generates, which means other funders and foundations who might be interested in working towards more radical practices lack the full information, which can frustrate their attempts at adopting radical philanthropy. At the same time, they argued some communities who had come together to develop participatory grantmaking and other radical approaches may have dissolved "and then it did not spread further, because many potential funders who considered maybe to become part of it, very quickly realized that they don't want to get rid of these old power structures" (Political Ecology organization from Southeastern Europe). This evidences a point that questions to which extent radical foundations have been able to significantly influence the philanthropy field - which was mentioned before as one of the key aspirations of radical philanthropy (see Chapter 3). They also questioned:

And for one, I always think, you know, what is radical there? I mean, I have a question, what is radical? And how this radical philanthropy approach is translating into your relations with formally speaking grantees, but let's say partners or groups with which you work. How? Is it really transformative? How does that change? How does that change your relationship, and how this transformation of your relationship, what impact it has, you know, further impact. Where can you track this impact, where can you see there is impact? (...) I like the fact that the proposal writing or reporting has made it easy for the users and beneficiaries, but I also, how to say, is this what is radical? (Political Ecology organization from Southeastern Europe)

Regarding the broader trend in philanthropy towards more egalitarian practices, when discussing Philea's conferences and the recent *Philanthropy and Equality* framework (2025a), one participant argued:

(...) it's gonna be hot right now to support the resistance, you know what I mean? So you've got to keep things moving. But in the US, you see how 2020 was the year of DEI… (...) And I think part of it is, if you're changing the language and what's hot right now versus changing the structure, it's not sustainable. (...) I don't believe that radical words mean radical change. I want to see what you are doing." (Anti-Racist organization from Western Europe).

The questions of "what is radical" or "is it really radical" are highly subjective and up to what the individuals, organizations and foundations define as radical. This research sheds light on some of the dynamics that are changed in funder-grantee relationships and more broadly when it comes to radical philanthropy, hopefully it provides information that can be useful for

that discussion. While unequal power relations do not disappear, it is possible to say funder-grantee relationships tend to be more open, honest and closer when it comes to radical foundations. Is receiving a grant from a radical funder that different from any other foundation? For some organizations it seems it is, others did not seem to attribute that much importance to having a radical funder. Does it improve an organization's work or make it significantly different? Arguably, the biggest impact is in the act of just funding these groups, of these foundations supporting typically underfunded grassroots organizations that would many times otherwise not be able to access funding. Accessing the funders network can also be a crucial opportunity for grantees and lighter reporting requirements can free up time that can be put into organizing. As several authors highlight (INCITE!, 2007; Kohl-Arenas, 2016), foundations' grant management and reporting requirements tend to force organizations to professionalize due to its need for specialized skills, resources and time, and ultimately can lead to co-optation. When it comes this point, it seems radical foundations' practices avoid co-optation also due the light reporting, grant flexibility and focus on systemic change instead of measurable outcomes. Ultimately, further research should be conducted to analyze the impact radical funding has on the grantee's work and thus shed further light on the transformative nature of the foundations' practice, a topic which fell out of the scope of the present research.

4.3.5. Present and future concerns

While this section's reflections are not directly related to radical philanthropy, they are essential to understand the context grassroots movements and organizations find themselves in today and what they expect of the future. It is also essential that radical foundations and funders understand and critically examine the social, economic and political context in order to better respond to movements' needs.

Most of the interviewees spoke of a current defunding trend across not only philanthropic funders but also EU programmes. One participant explained the defunding tendency had started with the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, with funders putting a pause on grants and calls for applications and continued with OSF's withdrawal from Europe. Another participant also mentioned witnessing a defunding tendency and reported increasingly seeing bigger organizations applying for small funding opportunities they would not need to apply to before, a trend that applies to different funders. Interviewees also reported experiencing many rejections to applications from foundations and witnessing organizations reducing their activities or closing its activities. One participant said they believed feminist organizations were

having trouble accessing funding due to “Trump and the reinstated global gag rule[28]” (Feminist Foundation from Poland). They elaborated on the effects they perceived US funding cuts are having on feminist organizations:

> Big funders want to support big players after the US funding cuts. So they sort of want to centralize everything, I think. And of course, smaller grassroots organizations are going to suffer most, for sure. (...) And this is very painful to observe. And yeah, I personally know a couple of CSOs, not only in Poland, but also in Europe, that decided to close the business, so to speak. (...) Or they are reducing the workload, meaning, you know, not carrying out more projects or discontinuing projects. And of course, it's going to impact the people who need that most. (Feminist Foundation from Poland)

Other areas like migration have also suffered:

> It's already so much more difficult than before in the migration domain because of the manipulation tactics in the media and the political instrumentalization of this subject also. So it's ever more difficult to even talk about migration, but also to access funding for it. So most of the organizations are suffering with shrinking, not only shrinking funding, but also shrinking civic space and stuff. (Consortium of Organizations for Migrants’ Rights from Southern Europe)

Increasing criminalization of protests and social movements is also a concern. One participant reported:

> In [their country] you have the criminalization increasing, so you could face charges that sound kind of like, I don't know, like sabotage or you're not a terrorist yet but as soon as you get like the terrorist charge you might get problems because funders will have this problem. For them they're funding a group that might be considered, I don't know, too radical or have a word that sounds bad on paper and then you would need to adjust I guess if you want to keep getting the money (Climate Justice organization from Northern Europe)

This participant mentioned the example of Elokapina, the Extinction Rebellion Finnish branch, who were charged with “fraud, public incitement to commit a crime and providing false testimony to a public authority” (YLE News, 2022; Elokapina, 2024). Regarding the fraud allegations, the prosecutors accused the group of misleading their funders to "fund activities that clearly endanger public order or security, or that are illegal" (YLE News, 2022), but the court found that the donors and fiscal host were aware that the funds were to support climate justice activism. The charges were dropped in May of 2024, but the case is illustrative of a broader trend to criminalize social movements across Europe, as was mentioned in chapter 2.

[28] In March 2025, the White House issued internal orders to various federal agencies and departments ordering they limit, avoid and remove from their websites and materials “woke” words like: DEI, feminism, LGBTQ, social justice, pregnant people, and many more (Yourish *et al.*, 2025).

In this context of defunding, shrinking civic space and increasing criminalization, one participant made the case for funders to take on a stronger stance in support of grassroots organizations:

> I understand that for you, you're afraid of being in the front line of attacks, but you are the powerful ones. If you say, this is our money, we do what we want, shoo, then we're safe. If you run out of the line of fire, then we're in the line of fire. We don't have your kind of power. And if we are attacked and we're not there anymore, that's just fascism walking in. So, you got to do your part and stand up and be strong. (Anti-Racist organization from Western Europe)

Conclusion

Thinking back on the research questions, this investigation has analyzed what can be called "the radical philanthropy trend" in European philanthropy. Besides the proliferation of radical foundations, there is a growing network of grantees, activists and organizations engaged in participatory grantmaking structures, as well as networks like the EDGE Funders Alliance, working to influence the philanthropy field towards more systemic change solutions. It was shown radical foundations articulate common criticisms of social issues and share similar practices. Considering the existence of structural conditions that perpetuate inequality, foundations that describe themselves as radical argue that funders should support grassroots organizing for systemic change and change their structures to put into practice the commitments many foundations articulate of supporting communities, promote civic participation and acting for systemic change. Finally, a characterization based on nine radical foundations, selected by applying a set of criteria to the members of EDGE Funders Alliance was proposed, shedding light on their vision, structures, grantmaking practices, and funding mechanisms. Through the analysis of fourteen interviews with radical foundations' grantee organizations, the research has also provided insights on the dynamics of funder-grantee relationships and on the grassroots organizations' perspectives on radical philanthropy.

With this in mind, some last reflections stand out:

Firstly, based on the contributions of Susan Ostrander (1995), it was argued that, due to their participatory structure, radical foundations can be understood as movement insiders. The grantee interviews showed that this status has practical implications in funder-grantee relationships: organization members reported feeling a sense of closeness and mutual understanding that allowed them to be more open, honest and straightforward with their radical funders. This can be seen as a sign that radical philanthropy does indeed change core aspects of funder-grantee relationships.

Secondly, the analysis of radical foundations complemented by grantee reports pointed to these funders being self-reflective and showing willingness to adapt to changing circumstances in order to better reflect their values and vision of transformation. In this aspect, examples such as the grantee who offered critical feedback to the Safe Passage Fund and the foundation offering more funds to compensate for the unpaid labor, as well as Guerrilla Foundation commissioning an evaluation on their participatory grantmaking model come to mind. This points to the conclusion that radical philanthropy will continue to adapt and evolve by incorporating learnings and engaging their community of grantees for critical feedback.

Thirdly, in *Holding Foundations Accountable for Equity Commitments*, Beer *et al*. (2021) argue that foundation's accountability to their grantees and communities is essential in shifting power relations. Having easily accessible public information regarding their grantmaking,

decision-making criteria, learnings, funding sources and structures can be an important step in democratizing philanthropy and in creating mechanisms that allow grantees and communities to hold foundations accountable to their commitments. In this regard, when it comes to transparency and accountability, radical foundations still need to improve their practices. In several cases, as was mentioned in Chapter 3, foundations were not very transparent with their funding sources, spending, and decision-making criteria. On another note, considering Beer *et al.*'s (2021) emphasis on foundations establishing mechanisms of accountability with their constituencies, it is not very clear what radical foundations are proposing in that regard. It is worth mentioning that in their 2024 report, in light of the evaluation on participatory grantmaking, Guerrilla Foundation says they want to "move from interpersonal trust to trust in the process" (Guerrilla Foundation, 2024), that is, establishing systems of accountability both internally and when it comes to the movements they want to support. This shows a preoccupation with starting to define mechanisms of accountability, which will hopefully spread to the other radical foundations

Finally, radical philanthropy can be seen as countering philanthrocapitalist logics in practice and narrative. Philanthrocapitalism has been able to position itself similarly to international development's status of "certainty in the social imaginary" (Escobar, 1995, p. 5), articulating a narrative of win-win solutions with no downsides and appropriating what was once liberatory and radical language. Radical philanthropy works to undo some of that narrative, letting go of "empowerment" and "impact" to embrace another language. It is able to do so because it has different practices: for example, grant flexibility and light reporting means funders are not pushing for measurable results and thus can let go of impact, indicators and outcomes, which will reflect in their narrative. Moreover, it counters certainties and development's single and linear path to improving human life. Fighting back philanthrocapitalist logics can also mean fighting back mainstream development tendencies to standardize and scale solutions, to exclude politically engaged discourses and organizations that disrupt the social, economic and political structures and to support a pluriverse of alternatives to development (Escobar, 1995; Kothari *et al.*, 2019).

Considering this, what are the main takeaways for foundations and organizations? On a first note, foundations need to remain aware that they still hold power and that it can be reflected in the relationships with grantees. This relates to the reflections on systemic change: foundations can be a positive force in making organizations consider their strategies, vision and activities, but should take into consideration how "systemicness" can become another expectation organizations need to fulfill, which can manifest in a performance that undoes the close, open and honest relationships. On the side of grantees, they should not undervalue their ability to contribute and shape what radical philanthropy can become. Providing feedback to funders can make them aware of dynamics they did not see before, resisting funder

conditionalities can help undo them and reflecting on their needs and desires when it comes to funding can spark the creation of new ways that movements can resource themselves.

Considering the recent nature of the trend and its openness to transformation, there is no lack of opportunities to experiment and push change further. Radical foundations are especially well positioned to put pressure on other foundations to go beyond the appropriation of radical language and commit to action that sustain their narratives. The EDGE Funders Alliance is already more engaged in discussions of philanthropy working for more equitable practices and Philea can be a good arena to reach bigger foundations. European radical foundations have existed for around a decade, which is a significant period to show they have achieved considerable results and that they have been able to adapt to different circumstances. This is an opportunity to show other funders how participatory grantmaking models are possible and what steps they can take in transforming their structures towards more democratic ones. Finally, both foundations and organizations can use their networks to build alliances and face up the coming challenges. The conditions that make radical funders needed - grassroots movements' underfunding, systemic change to dismantle the structures that perpetuate inequality and building more equitable alternatives to philanthrocapitalism - are only being reaffirmed in the current political context. The Trump administration's ban of DEI language and closure of USAID, as well as a trend of increasing funding for conservative movements, are already producing effects. With organizations reporting a defunding trend that disproportionately targets areas like migration, a shrinking civic space where protests are increasingly criminalized and a sociopolitical context where far-right movements are scapegoating marginalized communities and the left as those responsible for the worsening living conditions, radical philanthropy plays an important role in supporting the movements fighting for liberatory futures.

There are still points worth investigating that this study was not able to cover given the phenomenon's novelty and the existence of diverse perspectives to explore. The characterization of radical foundations could be more detailed and exhaustive with a larger sample of foundations and a more comprehensive framework for analysis. In this regard, having the collaboration of foundations would prove fruitful to access more detailed information that is not publicly available, thus improving the characterization. Understanding the experiences of staff, boards, and activist members of the decision-making bodies is also an interesting path to better comprehend radical philanthropy. What do the people working in developing participatory grantmaking models have to say about their experience? How do activist members of Activist Councils see their role and understand radical philanthropy? The perspectives of grantee organizations can also be further explored in order to understand how radical funding can affect their work, strategies and ways of organizing, but also to understand their needs and how they also organize mutual aid and resourcing strategies in their

communities and networks, without funders. It could also be interesting to consider the perspectives of grassroots groups who do not pursue philanthropic funding even from radical foundations. The funded organizations interviewed have resolved the dilemma of working with philanthropic foundations by answering 'yes', even if not enthusiastically. How do other grassroots organizations look at this question and at radical philanthropy?

It seems right to conclude with a small reflection on what this research has meant for me as a person engaged with social movement organizing and what that experience brought to the research. Through the investigation I continually questioned my thoughts on the phenomenon, trying to remain aware of biases but also trying to find my opinion on the topic. Is it really possible to solve the power disparity? Does it even make a difference if a foundation is radical? Is the risk of co-optation not still there? After oscillating between yes and no several times, I made peace with "yes, and" and "no, but". Letting go of certainties and being open to experimentation, failure and learning is essential in academic investigation and social movement organizing. In the end, the answer of one participant to the question of how they saw philanthropy's interaction with social movements remains on my mind:

> I mean, at their best, the revolution will not be funded. I think that that says it all, you know? The interaction should be, "get lost!". And also, create abundance, like, really. And agency. (Transnational Migrants' Rights organization)

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