

A CONTEMPORARY LOOK INTO PHILANTHROPY | REGENERATIVE GIVING PRACTICES

ANA BIGLIONE E
JOANA MORTARI

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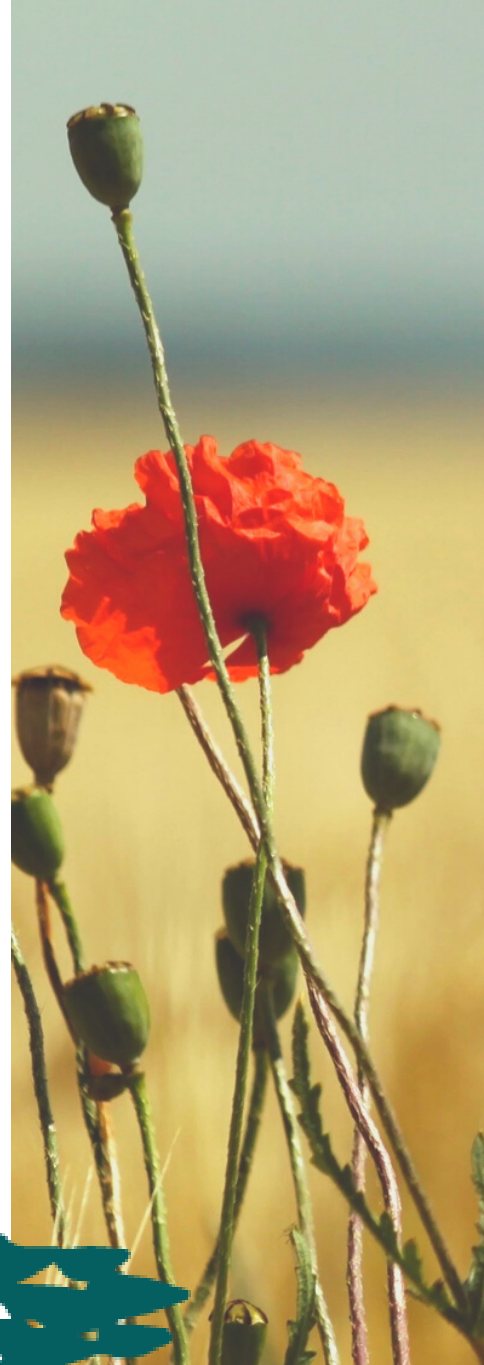
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ABSTRACT

This article seeks to deepen the understanding of patterns of thinking that influence (with a greater or lesser degree of awareness) giving in Brazil and proposes to design innovative pathways for giving arising from ideas developed in the economic and philanthropic fields that have received the name of regenerative.



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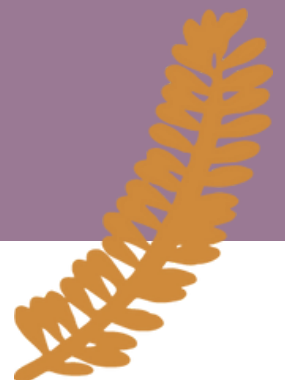


“To me, the story isn't simply that nature needs humanity in order to survive, but also that humanity must rediscover its own nature and its connection to the mystery of life, in order to transform.

Regeneration is a law throughout the cosmos where the mystery of life involves the process of life, death, renewal.

If we are to find our reconnection to the capacity to transform, we must die, in a sense, to the limited understandings of life that now prevail, in order to find a deeper ground of imagination from which to grow a greater, more genuine human culture.”

Micheal Meade
(MEADE, 2021)



WHAT THE PRESENT TIME ASKS OF OUR PHILANTHROPY: A SMALL INTRODUCTION

The term philanthropy comes from the Greek *philos* - love - and *anthropos* - human beings. The idea that the word philanthropy refers to is love for the other, one of the essential characteristics of humanity. In this sense, talking about the beginning of philanthropy is, in itself, something presumptuous: where do our acts of love for one another begin?

We start here wanting to recognize that this essential characteristic is not born with what we currently call philanthropy and is, in fact, much broader than what we understand by it. Over time, the word philanthropy was stripped of its original meaning and dressed in tight clothing, representing a specific field of activity. The philanthropy we are investigating here concerns what we understand as the standardized and/or systematic practice of giving private resources for public purposes.

What are the characteristics of this philanthropy? How is organized institutional giving born in our country? What are its origins, and movements, and what do they tell us about it? What thought structures and paradigms have guided - and currently guide - our philanthropic field?

With the intent to be more aware of how we would like to advance towards the future, we first ventured to explore the formative process of our culture of giving, identifying behaviors and values that are expressed in this field. We intend to understand more about the present paradigms and seek to recognize where we continue to perpetuate the social and environmental imbalances that we wish to transform.

The scenario of weariness and a certain restlessness felt by professionals - like us, who have been involved in the field for years - and which that tells us about a possible emptying of meaning, or even inadequacy, of the current form of our philanthropic practices was our source of inspiration for this research. We are experiencing that unsettling moment that precedes change, where a new way of doing things is about to emerge, but has not yet become apparent, that leads us to act based on recognized practices, even though we feel that they are no longer so adequate. This tiredness is change - or the need to change - announcing itself to us.

The writing of this article is our way of trying to enter this newness that is moving closer and cooperating with its emergence, questioning current practices and seeking to see possibilities of philanthropic practices that can establish new relationship dynamics which can regenerate ourselves, the field, and our society. After all, a frontier philanthropic practice, which is contemporary and regenerative, is owned to us.

BRAZILIAN INSTITUTIONAL PHILANTHROPY: HOW DID WE GET HERE?

It is said that the institutionalized philanthropic practice that we know today was built up over several centuries by the so-called Western Christian societies and originated in ancient Greek civilization (ARAÚJO, 2022). From the actions of the Catholic Church in Greco-Roman times, the individual acts of caring for the other have been somehow organized, structured, and named charity.

Several cultural aspects of Brazilian native peoples are still unknown. This is, after all, part of the challenge of the Brazilian cultural formation in its entirety. In the same way, we often recognize the structuring of acts of giving in Brazil from the Portuguese colonization and the strong presence of Catholic organizations they founded in the country. The practices of indigenous peoples are not part of the 'history of philanthropy'. Therefore, the acts of charity are part of the Brazilian colonization process, which moves forward authorized, to a great degree, by the rationale that the indigenous peoples needed to be "civilized". In doing so, they carry a contradiction in themselves: after all, what or whom should philanthropic practices be at the service of?

In colonial Brazil, there are several forms of associativism and aid processes experienced between enslaved and 'free' black people, and around the Independence of Brazil, formal associations of a non-religious nature began to emerge, mainly linked to labor issues and of general public interest, embodying the beginnings of what we know today as organized civil society.

The development of the entire social field experienced a significant setback in the 1930s, with the expansion of the State control and participation in the at-the-time named "non-profit" activities and, later, in the mid-1960s consequent to the military dictatorship.

It is then, from another movement of the Catholic Church, highly influenced by liberation theologians, that a response is born in the form of encouragement and in the creation of a network of support to citizens and civil associations. Intellectual and cultural elites mobilize, financed mainly by foreign resources, and this phenomenon is recognized as the foundation that enables the emergence of the democratic state, the bases for the universalization of rights, and the development of the so-called "third sector" in Brazil (LANDIM, 1993).

For a few decades, the philanthropic capital comes mainly from international resources and it is responsible for funding the first organizations, which in turn, promote the Brazilian philanthropic field in Brazil, such as the Grupo de Institutos e Fundações Empresariais - GIFE (1995), the Instituto Ethos (1998), the Institute for the Development of Social Investment - IDIS (1999).

As an expression of the mobilization of the Brazilian industrial elite, the first private foundations were created. However, when Brazil is recognized for its potential for economic growth, at the end of the 1990s, the international resources being poured in migrate to other countries in the south axis, emptying philanthropy.

Corporate philanthropy is leveraged by the arrival of foreign companies and the perception of the urgent need for qualification of the workforce. Their action, predominantly motivated by the needs of a specific target audience of employees, their families and communities around their factories, also starts to consider relational aspects - such as 'social licenses to operate (ABREU, 2022) and, later, intentions to add value to their brand. At the same time that the decrease in international resources and a field of private enterprise social investment is consolidated, the unprecedented volume of public resources directed to civil society by the Government end up demobilizing some autonomous initiatives (IPEA, 2011) and culminate in two decades of collective inattention to the need for the development a giving society in Brazil.

As of the 2010s, it is possible to recognize a growing awareness by the philanthropic elite about the importance of strengthening the Brazilian democratic fabric through the strengthening of civil society organizations and the formation of a more giving society, as well as a positive multisectoral joint effort for the passing of a new Regulatory Framework for Civil Society Organizations (MROSC). Although distinct philanthropic movements continue to exist, they seem to have come together around the common purpose of promoting a culture of giving in Brazil, which has the potential to move Brazilian philanthropy towards new paradigms.

WAYS OF THINKING THAT SHAPE BRAZILIAN GIVING

"The history of giving shows that these contemporary conceptions of philanthropy are impoverished and in need of enrichment"
Paul Vallely
(VALLELY, 2020)

Among the various threads that weave the formation of Brazilian philanthropy, we can recognize the existing tension between philanthropic practices that sustain power dynamics already established in society and those that seek changes in social relations and power structures.

At what point in time does a practice that is intended to be transformative become part of the structure that maintains the very social dynamics it wants to transform? This is the question that must always accompany us in this field of philanthropy and that seems to easily elude us. And it is the question that inspires us to investigate the ways of thinking that form Brazilian giving, aware that we can only regenerate philanthropic practices when we are able to see the deeper layers which form the ways of thinking that are revealed through giving.

Fully understanding something means observing its individual characteristics and the context in which it is inserted. Philanthropy is an expression of human (social) behavior and carries, in its various practices, ways of thinking that have been imbued for decades in our ways of doing. Yet, in our daily lives, we act without even recognizing them.

The paradigm of distance and separation and its relationship with trust

The donor (in their social reality). The organization that specializes in giving. The consultants or professionals of this organization. The organizations which will possibly be supported. Its various projects as shown in presentations, data, and numbers. The team of professionals who carry out the project. The receiver (in their social reality).

This is the current chain of relationships between an institutional donor and the one who receives its donation. Few donors know, live, and in color, the reality of those who receive their support.

Usually, this relationship is mediated by a series of structures and the involvement of other people. Choices and decisions tend to be justified based on theories of change, plans, and analyses, much more than a deep and experiential contact with reality.

The more distant we are from each other, the less we know about the other's intentions, feelings, and thoughts, and the greater the space for the development of distrust or the need for mediators in this relationship (of trust). We commonly attribute the feeling of distrust between those who give and those who receive to historical causes, such as scandals from past decades that left scars on philanthropic practice, or to the behavior of the other - in this case, social organizations, which we assume may not be using the resources in 'the best' way - reducing the issue of trust to its most concrete facets and not paying attention to the fact that distance is an element that corroborates it, whether in giving or everywhere else.

An interesting aspect to reflect upon about distance is the one pointed out by the American historian Rebecca Solnit when she states that the paradigm of separation is no longer simply a natural process of evolution of human consciousness which is currently at a point of imbalance (as already pointed out by James Hollis, Jungian psychoanalyst), but that, at some point in the last century, isolation and distance became an intentionally defended and diffused ideology for the maintenance of the power structure of the dominant social classes (SOLNIT, 2016).

By not becoming aware of and reflecting on this distance, the philanthropic field ends up supporting it, intellectualizing and propagating the problem of lack of trust, making it a justification for the way they structure their actions. As long as we try to overcome the lack of trust by trying to control it instead of identifying and understanding its existence, we will be giving it voice and strength instead of weakening it, establishing ways of acting that dissipate it.

Practical examples of Brazilian giving that express mistrust are the choice of institutional donors to carry out their own philanthropic projects¹ or the structuring of grantmaking in extremely controlling processes. Where trust is lacking, fear brings out the need for control. We recognize that in both examples, the donor's actions may or may not originate from a lack of confidence, and we do not intend to generalize here. It is up to each donor organization to reflect on its practice in a true way and find its blind spots (MORTARI, 2021).

The point is that in organizations that recognize the existence of distrust as part of the modern western social fabric, beyond the trauma left by the blunt Brazilian historical issues and Latin American systemic corruption, practices emphasize developing relationships that also act to change this paradigm, paying attention to the distance and way of connecting with those who receive their donations, understanding that to control is to try to overcome the challenge of establishing trust instead of addressing it.

[1] By own philanthropic projects we mean those led and executed by family foundations, corporate foundations or independent foundations.

The paradigm of abstraction and imprisonment of living dynamics in mechanical processes

Some time ago, Ponte a Ponte, an organization focusing on qualifying philanthropy, published a collection of learnings about the social field. To illustrate their point, they used the image of a person from a social initiative immersed in calculations and numbers, thinking with a disappointed face: "Can you measure the sparkle in the children's eyes?" This iconic question is just one of those currently echoing amid management choices in civil society organizations.



Fonte: Ciano BuijonteAponete

The act of giving is born linked to our humanity, to our feelings of gratitude and solidarity, and is full of symbolism. Yet, throughout the process of institutionalization, it is stripped of its emotional qualities and dressed in a way that boosts its transformational attributes that can be measured.

The primary current of the evolution of present human thought developed from the idea that every phenomenon can be explained from the relationship between its cause and its effect and that we can divide anything into isolated parts to analyze or decipher its functioning. Over time we learned to attribute more importance to characteristics that can be expressed mathematically, which we call 'objective,' and less to the others, considered of a 'subjective' nature. In the words of Henri Bortoft: "a major aim of positivist science is to replace the phenomenon with a mathematical model (...). This quantitative result is then supposed to be more real than the phenomenon observed by the senses" (BORTOFT, 1996). What goes unnoticed is that, in this view considered objective, there is also a filter, a clipping being made by human perception, which attaches importance to some characteristics to the detriment of others.

Immersed in modern scientific thought (in which we refer to various names that express part of their characteristics: positivist, reductionist, dualist, or objectivist), we also build philanthropy that attributes more value to what can be described in numbers. We develop theories and models to which organizations, projects, and - even the reality in which they operate - should fit, not the other way around. Numerous procedures are created that almost inevitably become bureaucratic. Instead of approaching relationships and deepening the understanding of the social challenge that is in place, we usually fragment it to fit it into the models or theories developed. By doing so, we close a circle that ends up proving itself (its effectiveness) but ceases to delve into the real issue. If unaware of what they are acting from distrust, donors start to generate procedures that quell the freedom of action and the development of organizations.

By creating a dynamic in which so many management maneuvers are necessary to meet the different demands and interests of a myriad of funders, it becomes almost impossible not to lose course or disconnect from their performance's real purpose and meaning. As paradoxical as it may seem, restraining an organization's freedom concerning its performance and strategies also reduces its responsibility for what it does, diminishes its reflexive capacity, and, thus, a more profound address of the issues with which it works. Its social performance, constrained and lost amid so many aspects that it needs to look to obtain donations, becomes less able to be responsive or flexible to the changes of reality and more at the service of the will and time of the funders, which even perpetuates a dynamic of power maintenance.

It is worth noting that this is not a criticism of processes that consider metrics. Still, just as the non-awareness of donation from distrust can keep us attached to control, the non-awareness regarding the way of thinking about our donation processes can lead us to the feeling that numbers and metrics are the solutions. By doing so, we disregard the risk of social action being trapped in pre-defined processes (theorized and abstract strategies) that distance organizations from their natural capacity for transformation. Instead, they reduce them to "operating systems" to simple operators or service providers that are often disconnected from their essence and transformative potential.

"The real issue around donor-recipient relationships has not changed since the beginning of time: it is the power dynamic. (...) What seems reasonable and rational to the donor may seem intrusive and arbitrary to the recipient."

Melissa Berman
(BERGMAN, 2008)



Maintenance forces of power dynamics in the philanthropic field

"In the social change sector, as well as in the rest of our society, we are beginning to recognize that we suffer from an imbalance of power. (...)"

Nell Edgington
(EDGINGTON, 2021)

Recently much has been said and written about power dynamics in philanthropic practices. Of course, the power disparity between large donors, particularly the organizations that receive the resources, is not new. What has gradually changed is the tone and intensity of the conversation about such differences. What was once timidly expressed by a minority, generally regarded as radical and antagonistic, is now being widely and clearly recognized and discussed worldwide.

Food, shelter, health care: assistance is where the impulse of Brazilian philanthropy is born. As it progresses, the philanthropic field devalues the care donation, often attributed to a derogatory and dated connotation, and takes a long time to differentiate it from donations that arose from a welfare culture. While care donations, valuable and necessary, meet a present and urgent need in society and are an exercise of affection and care, those that arose from the welfare culture are a challenge because they end up perpetuating power in the hands of those who already possess it.

The desire for a less charitable and more emancipatory action emerges as a necessity and as activism and, gradually, philanthropy begins to think more aligned with the idea of protection and guarantee of rights. New terms, such as 'private social investment,' 'strategic philanthropy', or 'effective altruism,' are now used to express this new look. Born from the perception that, in addition to care, a donation has the potential to change the causes that generate social problems, its structure follows the market logic that presupposes a return, even if, in this case, a return to society as a whole.

In the investment relationship, however, the holder of resources sees himself in the position of deciding on an offer of products offered to him, and it seems to us that, although, without intention or awareness, the same logic ends up placing the donor at the center of the choice, holder of power. Another formative characteristic of the investment relationship is obtaining the highest possible return on the applied resource, which is a control-generating and materialistic logic.

The more control the donor organization has over the processes between the disbursement of the resource and the final result, the more control and power it has over the intentional social change and the organization's performance.

When we talk about power, we are referring to the possibility of one part of the relationship imposing its will on the other, so that the one who does not hold the power perceives the chance to act in disagreement with the will of those who possess it decreased as well as the possibility to leave this underprivileged position in the future. Moreover, for one to have the power, others must recognize such power, making the powerless part of the structure which sustains power.

Finally, another characteristic inherent to power is its force of attraction: when peripheral voices (in relation to the center of power) begin to rise, they are drawn to the center, where the freedom of thought and expression of those who approach are sucked by the dominant paradigm expressed in the center. In his book *Decolonizing Wealth*, Edgar Villanueva uses the metaphor of farm farms (plantations) to describe this phenomenon. According to him, the enslaved people who reached the big house often began behaving as feudal lords with other slaves. Likewise, minorities come to power and perceive little space to act differently from the established culture, starting to replicate it. The way of thinking of the power center remains unchanged. Paulo Freire refers to the same phenomenon when he states: "When education is not liberating, the dream of the oppressed is to be the oppressor" (FREIRE, 1974).

In the philanthropic field, the expression of the maintenance of power occurs both in decision-making and in the predominance of the donor's way of thinking, for example, concerning the management style of the supported organization. As a result, there is an appreciation of ideas developed from business management processes, such as efficiency and effectiveness, systematization, and application on a large scale, without actually recognizing the application of concepts developed for industrial production in human processes or their consequences.

Here comes a paradoxical question of power: we must become aware of the existing dynamics so that we can act in such a way as to distribute power among all involved, making it a generative force for the development of all and not just some, especially when we are in power. The more power we hold in our hands, the greater our responsibility to question ourselves and open ourselves to be transformed – not just transform.

WHAT IT MEANS TO REGENERATE AND REGENERATIVE PHILANTHROPY

"In order to embrace a new paradigm of connect, relate, and belong, instead of divide, control and explore, we first have to heal."
Edgar Villanueva
(VILLANUEVA, 2021)



About regenerating


Regeneration is the ability of organisms to recombine themselves and renew themselves. Regenerating is a life-insistent requirement, seeking health as a principle of existence. Regenerating recognizes the process of becoming. Regenerating is about healing.

A regenerative attitude, instead of exploring, destroying or exhausting, implies taking care of what it relates to. It is a radical change in the relationship we establish, be it with material resources, nature, or other people.

John Fullerton warns us that this change will require us to acquire a sophisticated understanding and comfort with complexity, to discover our humility as a species (FULLERTON, 2015). In his studies on a regenerative economy, he describes how we have become accustomed to, for example, an extractive economy, which depends on taking advantage of labor, which takes away natural resources without worrying about their perpetuity, which privileges some to the detriment of others and certain forms of knowledge in relation to others. This perspective is so embedded in our culture and day-to-day that we hardly notice it, so we also don't usually realize the depth of its damage. As a result, we have difficulty understanding that we are generating a cycle that is not capable of allowing its regeneration and seeing new ways of organizing ourselves as a society.

Regenerating social processes means, perhaps in the first instance, opening ourselves up to see, with courage, both what exists today as inconsistencies as new possibilities.

Regenerative Donation Practices



"Change will come from the bottom up, not top-down, from the individual to society, not from society to the individual. I'm not talking about revolution, but about awareness and transformation of reality from concepts that resonate in the soul of human beings who live in our time and lack new ideas"

Daniel Burkhard
(BURKHARD, 2015)

Welfare donation takes place in response to an imminent need in the world. The impulse to donate comes from outside and ravages us, summoning our action of donating from the core of our humanity. Strategic philanthropy is formed from the desire to organize this relationship, and expand its effectiveness, from the meeting between what the donor wants to see differently in the world and what needs to be changed. Regenerative philanthropy adds a deeper reflective layer to this relationship both internally and externally. It is like asking for more of ourselves and also recognizing more deeply the world we live in.

A philanthropic action that intends to be regenerative will wake us up for greater coherence with the deepest intentions and needs of the much-desired transformation. It recognizes that we start from challenging paradigms in our present time - such as distance and separation, abstraction and imprisonment in mechanical processes, and others such as racism, male chauvinism, and colonialism; and that means that many times, by not looking at them, we risk acting (giving) in a way that corroborates the forces that maintain these power dynamics. It also recognizes that the path to a more conscious giving, which does not carry privileges, power, distrust, and abstractions unnoticed, requires an arduous path of continuous and challenging self-reflection that questions our certainties. It also recognizes that the new reality that emerges from this internal dive has the potential to be a constructive force for a new dynamic of social life as a whole (not just for giving). The donation that emerges from this new place has the potential to generate profound social changes that even shift the donor's power place.

Various authors approach the need for changes in philanthropy by highlighting its different aspects. Edgar Villanueva, for example, highlights the colonizing characteristic of civilization, calling special attention to white privilege and the need to decolonize philanthropy. The Justice Funders movement, originating in California, United States, proposes what they call 'a just transition for philanthropy' (JUSTICE FUNDERS, 2019) that goes from an extractive way of thinking and giving (which perpetuates power relations) to a regenerative one (which presupposes an authentic partnership between donor and

recipient, where the latter has the right to design paths for their own lives). Others, such as Marion Rockefeller Weber's Flow Funding (THE FLOW FUND CIRCLE, 2022), seek to infuse trust, discovery, and adventure into the giving process or as a Project for trust-based philanthropy (TRUST-BASED PHILANTHROPY PROJECT, 2022), which focuses on the impoverished dynamics of trust between donor and recipient and traces efficient change paths for grantmakers.

These movements all point to a range of possibilities for building this regenerative quality of philanthropy, whose responsibility for learning, experimenting, and developing it is, in the first instance, on the donors themselves. The non-recognition of the maintenance dynamics in philanthropy (as a whole and on its own) and the need for changes configures what the American author Barbara Christian calls the 'crime of innocence.' By neglecting or refusing to know (or recognize) situations or perceptions that bring ethical dilemmas that force a person to "act in a way that disturbs their perception of themselves or those with whom they relate" (CHRISTIAN, 2001), we are acting unethically in a democracy, as this practice makes equity impossible.

In this sense, conversations about privilege or power dynamics not being part of the philanthropic debate become unacceptable. The very fact that they are a 'non-conversation' is a privilege of the structure that concentrates power and perpetuates this concentration. Coming out of innocence means leaving the comfort of unknowing, deepening our understanding of the most evident challenges and those that underlie them, like paradigms. It means questioning, many times, the path that was chosen until then. It means seeking to bring to consciousness what we are not aware of, intentionally and constantly, so that we can build a reality different from the one we live in (and being a creative part).

Donors, their philanthropic organizations, are responsible for and able to restructure how their resources are donated. They can intentionally act more cooperative, restorative, and regeneratively. They can boldly innovate in their own transformation, assuming their responsibility. And that necessarily means being open to change. Questioning - with objective reflective questions - about power dynamics and underlying paradigms, the quality of the relationships established with their partners, the intentionality of their action, and current modes of operation, among others, can help us to critically reflect on our philanthropic actions and invite them to a more regenerative posture (BIGLIONE & MORTARI, 2022).

If up to this day philanthropy has managed to promote improvements in social realities: education, health, and social justice, we have not yet reached a more profound paradigm or status quo change that even reduces the need for institutionalized donation as we know it. A real, long-lasting, and deep transformation of society depends on the transformation of each of us and the paradigms that support each of the instances and structures we have in society today, including philanthropy.

The way we engage in philanthropy is not secondary but central. Philanthropy will not be able to achieve the desired transformation without developing intentional practices that give life to the values it seeks to defend.

A journey towards wholeness

The idea of this path may seem relatively straightforward. But your practice is not. No regeneration process happens in isolation. It is a process of the organism as a whole, in its relationship with its environment and context. Each part influences the other; we are intertwined and part of a context that, for the most part, is against this regeneration.

Regenerative practices are “based on reflective, responsive and reciprocal relationships of interdependence” (MOVEMENT GENERATION, 2016). Building relationships that carry these qualities is a developmental exercise for all of us living in modern societies. It means that each of us must make room in our busy routine to reflect together with truth and depth. It means dialoguing with the desire to listen more actively than to speak, building new responses from the dialogue and the need expressed through it. It means working together, making processes that require dedication, welcoming differences, and respecting time... among many other examples of ways of doing things that, although they seem familiar, we are not used to really living as priorities, and that requires our own transformation.

The idea that we can transform without being transformed is lagging, and we come to recognize that we don't know exactly how to follow this path, as much as we don't know how to stop following if we really want to promote profound changes in our society.

One of the potential gains of this courageous change process is that, by moving towards more contemporary philanthropy, we are opening ourselves to regenerating dynamics that, as we mentioned earlier, are at the heart of the issues of our society and its inequality as a whole. In other words, by doing so, we contribute to a much more systemic and perennial change.

As a fruitful field for innovations and a cradle from which significant changes can germinate, Philanthropy invites us to this exercise.



“The necessary change is so profound
that it is often said impossible.
So deep that it is often said that it is unimaginable.
But the impossible is yet to come.

And the unimaginable is due to us.”

Paul Preciado
(PRECIADO, 2014)



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