

Foundations: catalysts of innovation, social change and civic action.

Caroline Gijssels, Elke Franchois, Wim Van Opstal

Foundations are increasingly recognized as civil society actors. As independent, separately constituted non-profit bodies with their own governing board and with their own source of income, they aim to contribute to the improvement of the living conditions and quality of life of the general public and of specific individuals and social groups in need. They promote civic initiatives and active citizenship. They take up a more central role in policy discussions and represent a valuable source of income for associations. Some of them (also) operate own key programmes and services in a variety of fields. As such, they position themselves as actors within the Civil Society. Networks of foundations at national as well as international levels are set up to reflect on and promote the role of foundations in society, to support the interchange of ideas, strategies and models among individual foundations, to promote transparency and corporate governance within foundations, and to help philanthropists to achieve their goals in a more effective way. Legal reforms are instigated to better protect foundations as a specific legal form with specific aims, to create more convergence between the national laws on foundations, and to create more space for private foundations (see Develtere, Van Ootegem & Raymaekers, 2004; EFC, 2005; Gijssels & Develtere, 2006).

For a long time, evidence on this vibrant part of the European Civil Society remained rare (see Anheier, 2001; Daly & Anheier, 2006; Develtere, Van Ootegem & Raymaekers, 2004; EFC, 2005; Gijssels & Develtere, 2006; Schlüter, Then & Walkenhorst, 2001). A large scale project of the European Foundation Centre launched in 2003, aimed to collect evidence on foundations in Europe. We participated in this project and collected data on the sector of foundations in Belgium and Luxembourg. In this paper we present recently collected facts and figures on these civil society actors.

References

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