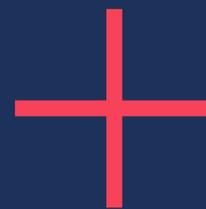


COVID
EMERGENCY
STUDIES



WHAT THE
PANDEMIC TOLD
US ABOUT GIVING

REALIZATION:



PROMOTED BY:



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Based on a phenomenological investigation, this article seeks to illuminate the nature of the changes that have occurred in the Brazilian culture of giving ignited by the mobilization consequent to the impacts of Covid-19, as well as its patterns or permanence. We start from the principle that donation is not a mere object, it is an activity directly related to social dynamics that are present in our reality and has, in its background, the archetypes of power inherent to the Brazilian culture. The way it expresses itself (as it is, not as it should be) provides us with inputs about ourselves, as society, as well as our way of being reveals aspects – sometimes unnoticed – of giving. To arrive at the characteristics of the pandemic giving, we heard varied focus groups: one with donors and organizations promoting the field and the other with organizations that received and distributed goods and resources. We looked into researches carried out in 2020, data on the volume given and references on pandemic giving in other countries as well. This text seeks to portray part of the cultural movement of giving, so that the reader can see some of the essential features of the explored phenomenon (HOLDREDGE, 2005), reflecting and constructing their own images. Thus, it does not propose to necessarily bring answers, conclusions or certainties. The year 2020 was marked by a reflex-giving, however, its experimentation by many, hitherto non-donors, added to a deeper reflection on how it happens and what is generated by the way it is done. It has the potential to bring about significant changes for the years to come.

INTRODUCTION: WHAT HAS NOT GONE UNNOTICED?

2020. The scare of a new situation afflicts the human consciousness all over the world. Airplanes on the ground, closed borders, the silence of big cities seems deafening. Newspapers around the world become monothematic: the lack of air on a planet surrounded by oxygen. The days pass by and, what seemed like a temporary surreality, begins to lengthen. The quarantined individual wants to move; his soul is restless. But how?

While many seemed to have suspended living, the field of philanthropy promotion and social innovation was working at a frenetic pace, just like health professionals or individuals working in the most essential activities. More than an increase in speed, there also seemed to have been a new movement, almost an inversion. In communities and social initiatives, several organizations and leaders stopped making so much effort to fundraise and started to receive offers. Philanthropic funds multiplied, campaigns to support hospitals, food and hygiene items distribution sprouted on a daily basis.

“I felt marginalized for years and years... It is not possible, I thought for years, that they did not understand me. Suddenly things started to change, quickly”, were the words of a social entrepreneur in the philanthropic sector. Or even the response of a social entrepreneur in the area of community empowerment to the question “what has changed with the pandemic?": “Well, we started to be sought out by organizations that wanted to give.”

The partial expression of this reversal resulted in the celebrated 6.5 billion-donated reais, in the more than 540 fundraising campaigns for health and social welfare (ABCR, 2020), in the countless stories of people, companies and social organizations that, despite having their doors closed, sustained salaries of employees who were unable to work, or even in actions to support small entrepreneurs whose activity was completely at risk. The lockdown seems to have awakened a portion of people previously asleep.

Although positive and significant, the reversal in the flow of efforts to obtain resources also seems to maintain challenging aspects and, when we look at this abrupt movement of giving, we will see that it is not, in itself, exactly a novelty. Lex Bos (2010, p. 142) states that the formative human impulse of a donation has two directions: it can come from within the individual, who, in processes of resignifying assets, becomes aware of her relationship with the world or, as in this case, it can come from a need in the world which “pulls out” an internal movement in the individual, which in term, manifests itself as donation. Earthquakes, famine, a dam collapse and, in this case, the pandemic.

According to the Dutch sociologist, giving in extreme situations is guided internally by moral pressure, when an individual is faced with the material differences between his life and that of others (BOS, 2010, p. 144). The

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pandemic, unlike a local emergency, is a situation that presents itself to everyone, although not in an identical way, which makes us even more sensitive to its effects. It points a beam of light into the existing inequality and social precariousness of Brazilian society, placing it in evidence. The abundant material existence of some in relation to the scarcity of others becomes wide open. At moments of tangible urgency like this one, there seems to be a fortuitous alignment between internal anguish and external need. "Giving soothes the tensions of human consciousness, it responds to the perception of the gap between possessors and non-possessors, to the need to let vital water flow from our dam to the dry part" (BOS, 2010, p. 146).

One of the big questions asked in 2020, repeated by journalists in interviews and papers news, is whether Brazilians have become, in their own words, more solidary. Whereas a huge wave of donations is undeniable, the impulse of giving that emerges with the pandemic seems to be of an emergency nature and not necessarily

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leads to a long-term change or the development of giving habits.

At the same time, we must recognize that a lot has happened. 2020 was a year of great experimentation and movement, of important social mobilization. People who were not used to giving found information in the media on how to do it, discovered ways, asked for help, and when living through the act of giving, they were able to experience a more protagonist place in the construction of the desired reality. 2020 also seems to have been a year of sowing.

1 METHODOLOGY: HOW TO SEE THROUGH THE EVIDENT?

If we want to portray the change that the Covid-19 pandemic generated for the culture of giving, or to explore its reverberations in more depth, we need to be open to ask: has there really been change? If so, where, how? What has emerged or was strengthened? What has died or lost strength? Or even further: we need to look into what has been preserved.

The door through which we have decided to venture into this study was a phenomenological exploration based on two focus groups with members of the Movement for a Giving Culture (2011) – a plural and autonomous movement that brings together people from different initiatives who feel, in some way, connected and engaged with promoting a giving culture in Brazil – and some other guests who composed them: one from donors and organizations that promote giving and one from social organizations. The goal in phenomenology is to study how people make meaning of their lived experience, through a careful examination of individual experiences. It is from these experiences that we sought to capture the meaning and common characteristics, or substances, of an experience or event (STARKS and TRINIDAD, 2007, p. 1,374).

Based on a “questioning route” (MASSEY, 2011, p. 21) with concrete examples from our own experience about changes in relation to giving, our conversations sought to avoid responses that represented intentions or desires and that could be distanced from reality (KRUEGER, 2006). We sought to immerse ourselves in what and how it happened, in the stories that were lived or reported, taking care that the voices, which showed an opposed point of view, also appeared. The focus groups were the main strategy for identifying aspects of change, and we considered research, studies and data from the websites of organizations promoting the field as secondary sources.

Through a dance between what emerged from the conversations and what caught our attention in these studies, we sought to build a portrait of this cultural movement. Something that does not intend to necessarily bring answers, conclusions or certainties, but whose purpose is to help us see something of the essential features of the explored phenomenon (HOLDREDGE, 2005) and that moves in the direction of the dynamics and relations, which are usually underlying and little visible in traditional models of analysis.

2 DONORS AND POWER DYNAMICS

Donors and their donations were celebrated in 2020, there is no doubt about that. According to the Brazil Giving Research, in 2015 the estimated value of donations from individuals was 13.7 billion reais (IDIS, 2015). The estimated value of donations from companies, institutes and businesses, family and independent foundations, according to the GIFE Census of 2014, amounted to R\$ 3 billion (GIFE, 2015)¹. The values shown by the Monitor de Doações (Giving Monitor), R\$ 6.5 billion, refer only to those addressed to fight the pandemic effects (ABCR, 2020). In other words, the equivalent to approximately 40% of resources donated per year in Brazil was given to address the effects of the pandemic in 2020.

Nevertheless, in addition to the amount per se, the question which arose was: was anything different in the way these donations were made? What dynamics were present and what do they reveal about our current giving culture and trends?

2.1 Collaboration: a step towards the other

Although the Brazilian culture has a reputation of being warm and open, the Brazilian, in general, still identifies the government as the main responsible for solving social problems (IDIS, 2015) and collaboration is not usually predominant in the way donations are made. What in other countries is a cultural formative value, is a challenge in Brazil.

Before the pandemic, we could count the donations that were collaboratively thought out on the fingers of one hand. The great propeller that leads this field in Brazil has always been an individual, business or family initiative (GIFE, 2019). In this sense, the birth of collaborative giving initiatives – of a collaborative philanthropy (GIFE, 2020), as GIFE itself has been seeking to expand amongst its members – was a remarkable aspect in the entanglement of given resources in 2020. Even though it is not a novelty in the giving field (mainly internationally), this way of doing has taken shape, leadership and strength. Even in the corporate sector. The largest Brazilian telecommunications companies have come together to reinforce the importance of physical distancing through the #FiqueBemFiqueEmCasa (#StayWellStayHome) campaign (MTJCV, 2020).

Three of the largest Brazilian banks have jointly, among other initiatives, invested in quick tests, a fact that was highlighted by one of the group’s participants as an “unprecedented movement”. Initiatives such as the UniãoBr Movement (sem data) were born. They self-describe as a “voluntary movement of Brazilian civil society, without political involvement, to strengthen the fight against the effects of the pandemic of the new coronavirus”. It started with a WhatsApp group and spread like wildfire) throughout

¹ The 2014 GIFE Census is not the most recent one, but it is the closest to the 2015 Brazil Donation Survey. The 2018 GIFE Census estimates the value of 3.2 billion reais (GIFE, 2015, 2019).

Brazil, divided into state units and becoming one of the initiatives to be awarded by Folha de São Paulo in 2020.

A number of crowdfunding initiatives that have been formed and spread across existing platforms, have become better known. Some of these explicitly sought collaborative engagement, where a donor summons others, such as the #FamiliaApoiaFamilia (#FamilySupportsFamily) Movement (BENFEITORIA, sem data). This move from the individual to the collective was even expressed in words on the platform: “Above this immense crisis [of the coronavirus] there is a bigger battle: that of collective values versus individual values. [...] This is also a window of opportunity to show the power we have when we come together”. (BENFEITORIA, sem data a.). Collaboration seems to be evident not only as a means to a specific end and, hopefully, not temporary either, but as a cause in itself. An expressive change depends on this collective quality, on the activation and co-authorship of each individual from civil society in the building of the democracy that we want and deserve.

The collaboration movement can then be seen as a citizen formation movement, a seed in changing the paradigm of the roles played by the State and civil society, among individuals (and their own desires and opinions) and groups. In that regard, giving in the pandemic may achieve an individual and collective formative role.

Beyond addressing the cause or effect of a disruption of access to health or social equality, it can work as an alarm clock, a shift from “doing for yourself” to “doing for the other” or even “doing it alone” to “doing it with the other”, as it has actually happened in some cases.

2.2 The path towards freedom to all

Although we have gone forward in relation to developing more collaborative movements, an intrinsic characteristic of institutionalized giving has become very visible: in the giving-receiving relationship there is a power-and-resources center that gives and a periphery, whose power is dispersed, that receives. We still seem to reproduce

some cultural aspects of a subservient and subordinate Brazilian attitude in this relationship. This time in the figure of social organizations. As actors who receive the resources and assets and are willing to pass them on to the final beneficiaries, organizations, consciously or not, assume both the risk of contamination during the pandemic and the challenges or implementation costs. In this sense, even though celebration and recognition happen for both, the image that is formed is that donors exercise freedom, while social organizations exercise an obligation.

The choice of the donor center points to a prioritization of resources in two directions: one in the direction of supporting health programs and the other, social welfare. In health, donated resources were organized primarily in the form of philanthropic funds to support a health and research infrastructure and, in social welfare, a large part of philanthropic resources took the form of fundraising campaigns that mediate the purchase of staple-food baskets (ABCR, 2020), addressing subsistence (food) and protection (hand sanitizer, cleaning products) of low-income families.

The choice made by donors, whether conscious or not, was noteworthy: delivering material goods (staple-food baskets) instead of passing on financial resources directly or in the form, for example, of prepaid cards (named digital staple-food), which transfers the power of choice over what to purchase to the beneficiary. One of the organizations in the focus group is proud to say that it was able to talk to the organizers so that the given resources could be used in such digital staple foods, and not in staple-food baskets in both campaigns they participated in. One other campaign, despite having authorized the use of digital staple-food, does not mention this choice in its communication materials, prioritizing images of staple-food baskets, which, in a way, seems to deviate from

the challenge of officializing the delivering digital staple-food, thus avoiding a possible negative reaction from its donors.

In the name of fear of the resources being used differently from what is believed to be the right way, donors resist by exercising power, defining the use of the given resource. A relationship of trust between the donor and the receiver seems to be only possible based on actions that are controlled and verified. Is this trust? In this regard, whether due to the urgency of doing at the time or the lack of reflection on how it is being done, the questioning of the power structure underlying the choosing of what another person will eat (or should or should not do), seems to be of little relevance.

If, on one hand, we seem to be still far from a reality in which the donation generates, predominantly, a real transfer of power from the center to the periphery, on the other there is a recognition, on the part of some people with whom we spoke in the focus groups, of a bigger humbleness on the part of companies and donors. They have started to give voice and listen to community and nonprofit leaders. We have heard from a leader of an organization that promotes giving that some points of view like “I own the capital, so I tell you what to do” have changed a little. The very fact that there is someone recognizing and someone being recognized makes this transference movement visible.

The power-dynamics, which gives signs of movement, seems to retain something already commonly seen before the pandemic: the one who approaches the donor’s

language and culture is acknowledged, and not the other way round. If, for example, the donor is an entrepreneur, those who are able to “speak the language of the business community” are valued. This is what is noteworthy in this center-periphery relationship: the fact that it is not the peripheral knowledge that is being valued, or even a new knowledge that arises from this relationship, but rather, it is a donor-centered value.

The movement of power centered in the resource – and, therefore, on the donor –, inherent to the economic capital system, for a giving that gives up that power and deposits it on the receiver, contributes to a much more

profound systemic change than the results of the donation itself. Giving can mitigate the effects of the pandemic and, depending on how it is done, it can also change (or maintain) underlying dynamics of power (and inequality) that exist long before it.

Whether here or around the world, when the current paradigm of power manifests itself in the way philanthropy is practiced, philanthropy

itself perpetuates it. “Giving, generosity and the human impulse to care for people in need are all positive aspects of our humanity. Charity as an institutionalized practice, however, often perpetuates power dynamics between givers and receivers, (...)”, says Justice Funders (sem data).

Giving up power through authentic and close partnerships with less controlled and more agreed donations, in which the beneficiaries of the resources have the right to define the use of that resource in what

A RELATIONSHIP OF TRUST BETWEEN DONOR AND RECEIVER SEEMS TO BE ONLY POSSIBLE WHEN BASED ON ACTIONS THAT ARE CONTROLLED AND VERIFIED

they perceive as most relevant to their operation seems to be a donation model that promotes another type of change: a historic change in the relationship between those who have and those who do not have economic power.

Would the perception of change felt in the focus groups be a seed, in Brazil, for a philanthropic paradigm focused on the formation of a common-unity between those who have resources and those who feel the effects of structural injustices? What is the role of each one of us so that we can blow the sail in that direction?

3 SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS AND SOME UNDERLYING PATTERNS

When talking about changes from the point of view of organized civil society institutions, it is first necessary to remember the diversity that exists within the term civil society institution: varied causes, financing modes, proximity levels to public resources or services, budget. We excluded sports clubs, trade associations, some hospitals and other private entities from this study². In relation to giving, focus of this study, we have observed distinctive movements among advocacy organizations and those which work with public welfare.

A study on the effects of the pandemic showed that 87% of the nonprofit organizations interviewed offered assistance to the populations affected by the pandemic, mainly through the distribution of food and hygiene products and awareness activities about its dangers (MOBILIZA CONSULTORIA and REOS PARTNERS, 2020). Of the organizations interviewed, 73% reported being weakened by the crisis.

The feeling of inversion in relation to the flow of resources, mentioned previously, was very significant for the social organizations in the focus groups that we conducted. That was when organizations started to receive a sudden offer of donations. How, then, have they weakened?

3.1 Celebration, exhaustion and risk

A sudden offer of donations is not a subtle change, nor does it go unnoticed in the lives of organizations that are constantly concerned with resources for their financial sustainability. One of the organizations in the focus group reported that it raised an amount equivalent to one third of its annual budget for the assistance of the population surrounding it. That was quicker and easier than what they would usually have raised to finance their regular operation.

Embalmed in the Brazilian cultural broth, in an unwritten but easily perceived contract about each one's places in the social structure, and equipped with resources, the social organizations have thrown themselves in the direction of taking action. At first, they seem not to have been aware of the fact that most of the resources had flown through them destined to the communities. They worked, many times, without receiving resources to finance their own existence. In addition, in the harshness of the moment, many assumed that social assistance or emergency aid work was an eminent place for them – even though these activities had not been part of their work, until then. “We did not have this income assistance nature, but we have been called, thrown in that place from one day to the next”, is what the coordinator of an organization that offers after-school-hour activities told us.

This scenario where resources (whether for emergencies or not) are primarily targeted at beneficiaries is not new and relates to the well-known challenge of social organizations to raise funds for support activities – which maintain the organization's structure and existence, such as infrastructure or administrative wages. In other words, the so-called institutional structure ends up being overlooked by most donors, who choose primary activities as their focus (and seem to forget that, without the organization as a whole, this work would not be possible).

² Although considered nonprofits by the Brazilian Civil Code, as their nature and purpose are different from that of the civil society organizations we are investigating in this paper.

However, if, on one hand, the raised funds did not necessarily contribute to the sustainability of the organizations, on the other hand the importance of their capillarity was recognized and celebrated. There were enthusiastic talks about the Brazilian population recognition on the importance of civil society organizations in both the donors' focus group as well as in the conversations that took place in 2020, within the Movement for a Culture of Giving. The invisible becomes visible, which is known to be essential for the strengthening of the Brazilian social sector. Thus, the social field can celebrate national recognition of the importance of this capillarity in the connection between resources and population. Something that was probably even more crucial in a context of absence of coordinated efforts on the part of the federal government, states and municipalities towards civil society, unlike in other parts of the world.

What remains not very conscious is the institutional weakening and exhaustion felt by social organizations in 2020. In the social organizations' focus group, which took place in December of that year and after almost nine months of uninterrupted work, the state of exhaustion and the feeling that there was still a lot to be done leapt to the eye. The leader of a social organization present in the focus group declared that, at that point, he did not know if they would be able to pay the team as from February of the following year.

What is being asked of social organizations seems to go beyond the limit of what is healthy and comes close to the point of their own extinction. We run a serious risk of, when looking at extinct organizations in 2021, consider them as a natural result of a Darwinian evolution, deeming them inefficient in their processes. Nevertheless, we may forget about the deeper cultural dynamics that is expressed at the intersection of the resistance of donors to direct resources for institutional strengthening and the lack of power of social organizations to demand such resources.

The signs begin to show. One of the studies on Covid's impact alerts us to the fact that we are weakening the system for confronting the post crisis harmful effects. (MOBILIZA CONSULTORIA and REOS PARTNERS, 2020). According to another study (ITAÚ SOCIAL, 2020), the pandemic can generate lack of work and income, violence, lack of education, health problems, drug abuse and child vulnerability in the long run. There seems to be a need to take care of those who take care, where the eyes of individual and institutional donors need to turn to.

3.2 Technology and network: change and / or maintenance forces?

Although for most organizations the pandemic has been a blow, some have reported strengthening throughout the year (MOBILIZA and REOS PARTNERS, 2020). The focus group with donors and social entrepreneurs in the field of philanthropy differentiated organizations that already raised or managed to raise funds on digital platforms, which obtained better financial results during the year, from those that, in general, used to raise resources with physical events and had their fundraising activities suspended (and therefore less funding). This technological filter seems to have been one of the aspects that further distanced the elite of social organizations from the others, somehow reproducing social inequality within the range of organizations of this field.

At the same time, it seems to have provoked a center, which was close to the transition, to move towards online fundraising. There was an explosion of digital events, such as lives, followed by creative use of virtual platforms that gained strength in 2020, such as Zoom, enabling fundraisings that, until recently, seemed like distant dreams. A social organization advisor who was in our focus groups reported that the nonprofit which he participates in, delivered a very successful live broadcast in 2020, in which they raised practically the organization's whole

annual budget in a single meeting. However, he does not see the same happening in the years to follow. A significant difference starts to become evident between a temporary migration of resources, which takes advantage of a time when donors are sensitive and when everyone is on their computers (which, for some, has become a highly successful strategy), and a structural investment in online fundraising in a more perennial way.

Yet, there is still another issue beyond structuring or technical capacity, which leads us back to the maintenance of an inequality social pattern. One that we can better understand by looking more closely at the examples from crowdfunding. Despite being a mechanism to make giving more democratic at its core, there is a central element to it that prevents democratization from actually happening to its full potential. “There is something about crowdfunding [which] is very strong, almost cruel: ‘it is not enough to know how to ask, you must have a network’”, says one of the focus group’s members. “When you take these successful fundraisings, they are from those who have a network”, she concludes.

What these examples reveal is that having a financially powered network is a game changer in crowdfunding. In this sense, as well as an attentive look at the distribution of power together with the caring for institutions and their teams as focus areas in promoting the strengthening of civil society organizations, there also seems to be a need for initiatives that focus on access to resources for organizations that cannot count on a network or on support for its construction, creating links that can change, for real, the underlying dynamics that maintain our *status quo*.

4 INTERMEDIARY ORGANIZATIONS, SUPPORT ORGANIZATIONS AND CONTRADICTIONS INHERENT TO THE FIELD

The Donation Monitor (ABCR, 2020) records more than 540 crowdfunding campaigns to address the effects of Covid-19. Only the Benfeitoria crowdfunding platform (sem data) accounted for more than 150 million reais given to the more than 4,500 projects that passed through the platform in 2020. Only through matchfunding, almost 45 million reais were given to the projects, approximately 20 times more than in the previous year.

An intermediary declares, in one of the focus groups, in a tone that mixes excitement and amazement, that donations had grown 30% a year in recent years, and that “this year it will grow 1,000%”. Consultants from the field and other intermediary organizations also tell us about the significant increase in people – customers – who approach them willing to understand their role and take action in relation to socio environmental issues.

The entire giving field – its agents, thinkers, consultants, structuring organizations – was, in general, in high visibility and harvested the fruits of the work carried out by civil society organizations and community leaders, standing out in the national news in volume and intensity never seen before. As in giving itself, the perceived inversion is reflected in the fact that the giving agenda is no longer pushed and encouraged in the media by a few (usually members of the social field itself). Now, it is pulled, creating a demand and a certain frisson among those who, from one moment to the next, began to be desired by the media, demanded for interviews or the like. The Brazilian society

seems more porous both to recognize the fundamental role of the social sector (and public health) and to talk about the importance of giving.

The Movement for a Culture of Giving can be considered an example. While they were confronted with the challenges brought by the pandemic – as a society and as citizens – initiatives and invitations, exchanges of mobilization messages, dissemination and help for donations grew, making their WhatsApp group an essential space for exchange of intelligence and information, sowing of collaborative alliances and announcement of pandemic response (or coping) actions. Out of this flood of messages, extremely expressive actions were born for this field, such as the collaborations around the Donation Monitor itself (ABCR, 2020), which we quoted several times as a reference in this article, as it gathers numerical data about giving in Brazil in relation to Covid-19, bringing awareness to the donation movement in real time.

Some of its members described the Movement, throughout the year, as a place of hope renewal, where good news is shared in contrast with a scenario where news circulating in the traditional media was, at

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times, devastating. Institutionally – considering the institutional limit that a movement may have –, it is strengthened with the entry of new members (civil society organizations, companies sustainability leaders, institutes and foundations, philanthropic service providers, banks, individuals), attracting partners and donors, reaching a record in fundraising, which is often a great challenge for intermediary initiatives³. Donations usually prioritize end organizations to the detriment of those who act as mediators and promoters of the field, a similar phenomenon to what we portray with social organizations in relation to their middle activities.

At the end of a tense year, those who work helping to promote giving and philanthropy gained prominence with the pandemic, were requested and heard. Does philanthropy always have to rely on a disaster or emergency to stand out? Is this one of its intrinsic contradictions or is there room for us to think of a philanthropy that not only grows when there are emergencies, but also reveals and acts against the underlying needs of each moment?

5 A NOTE ON RELATIONSHIPS OF TRUST

Historically, there is a low level of confidence in relation to civil society organizations in Brazil, even though the Trust Barometer 2020 (EDELMAN, 2020) has shown a growth of two percentage points in relation to the previous year. Systemic distrust has several and complementary factors. The first one was the mark left by charges of undue transfers of public funds, which used social organizations as recipients, in the beginning of the century. The second one identifies that, in countries where corruption is systemic, the lens of distrust run through the fields of public and private life (CAF, 2014). A third point is that social organizations are the only ones perceived as ethical by society in general (EDELMAN, 2020), which means that there is an expectation of action

aligned to purpose and morals that does not apply to companies and governments. When a case of lack of ethics hits a civil society organization, the pain and the stain left behind are intense.

This look through the lens of distrust is expressed in the relationship between donor and social organization by the way we understand, not only as a society, but also as a social sector, the need for civil society organizations to prove themselves worthy of resources. This leads to a series of obligations (which again come up against the relation of power and importance of those who own resources versus those who do not).

This conjuncture also gives rise to the opportunity to strengthen systems that mediate the relationship of trust, such as certifications. Depending on how the certifications are conducted, the donor can remain in a passive role while the organization carries the extra task of proving itself worthy of her resources (this time for the certifier). It is a task with greater viability to more mature organizations (or organizations that fit this logic better), which increases the distance between them and the others.

“I think we should exchange huge forms for more proximity”, declares a social entrepreneur. “What has not changed is the need to prove yourself honest”,

DURING THE PANDEMIC, DONATIONS WERE SIGNIFICANTLY STRIPPED OF THEIR USUAL CONTROL PROCESSES

completes another focus group participant. The lack of trust seems to emphasize the system as undemocratic by restricting the choice of organizations under a single perspective which are usually grounded in structures of thought that do not encompass the diversity of existing social organizations, thus reducing Brazilian cultural plurality itself, its ways of doing and organizing. Is this the path we want to take?

On the side of the so-called institutional donors or social investors, the lack of confidence expresses through the option to operate their own projects – which is common in Brazil – as well as the level of control applied to grants made. During the pandemic, donations were significantly stripped of their usual control processes, in the same way as in other countries in the world (ORESTEN and BUTEAU, 2020). Does this mean that we are re-establishing trust relationships? – A question that also appears frequently in conversations within the group of the Movement. Most foundations have reviewed their practices, making them more flexible and responsive in the USA. “They are loosening giving restrictions, providing more unrestricted funding and reducing what they ask from grantees. Many plan to continue with these practices in the future, although to a lesser extent than during their response to the pandemic” (ORESTEN and BUTEAU, 2020, p. 3).

What is interesting here is that if that sounds as a possibility of advancement, it is because, as we notice the way the field of social investors/donors has been structured, we can perceive a format trapped in rigid processes that, in the name of a theoretical professionalism, may even lose sight of its effectiveness. It may also imprison social organizations, which are focusing on the specified cause, in the position of executors of the will of others.

In this regard, it also seems that the experimentation forced by the urgency brought by the pandemic created a space for further reflection and awareness about the forces that influence the way we give. Flexibility comes as a pressing need during the pandemic, but is it not a picture of excessive rigidity that has consolidated itself right under our noses and that is crying out for revision?

6 (ALMOST) FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

A phenomenological study, more than providing answers, aims to open up possibilities for people to reflect on the questions, to create an understanding for themselves about what is described to them (VAN MANEN, 2016). What each one understands is unique, plural and, yet, a reflection of the whole.

In what we can perceive and visualize out of this hologram, Brazilians became more porous for topics related to giving in 2020, even though the increase in donations do not, in itself, mean a more giving or healthier society. Yet, the beginning of a change in the perception of a citizen of her engagement, a process of self-awareness, can be the seed for systemic change. Depending on how it happens, the experimentation of giving may move from a reflex-giving, which is born in response to an external factor (emergency), to a more permanent and consistent internal will to contribute to the construction of the desired reality. This giving-intention goes beyond emergencies and addresses social dynamics that, precisely because of being so deeply ingrained in our society, may not be as evident as an emergency, or even seem so important (even if they are).

If, on one hand, the archetypes of power, inherent to Brazilian culture, were present in the way the donor relates with the grantee, (how the donor perceives his role, and that of the grantee, and vice-versa) , on the

other hand, choices made under the lens of distrust seem to be becoming more explicit, more evident (and being questioned, both in Brazil and abroad). There are also hopeful signs of essential changes that even go beyond the philanthropic field, such as awakening to the transition from eminently individual doing to the collective.

Amongst a diversity of gestures that took place in 2020, the most profound truth is that we react the way we are at each particular moment. The quality of awareness that has in itself the potential to provoke a systemic change depends on the commitment of each one of us to engage in our personal development. Galeano (1981) has said: “We are what we do, but we are, mainly, what we do to change what we are”. An increasingly transformative giving depends on us being able to see and reflect on the dynamics underlying it, the hidden pilots of our doing (in which we become so easily entangled), so that we can notice them at each step and make conscious decisions along the way, creating new possible paths as we walk.

The pandemic – its urgency, its unfamiliarity – makes this challenge even greater, which also makes our reflection even more necessary, if we do not want to fall into automatism or repeat the same mistakes. In this sense, it is not a matter of pointing the finger or criticizing the way that giving has been happening, but rather, as actors in this field, making ourselves available to learn from our own practice. By looking at it at a deeper level, seeking to recognize its lights and shadows, so that we can walk with more confidence in the direction of the Brazilian society we want, which we wish to live in, which we dream of leaving as a legacy to the children of all (not only ours).

If the emergence of a pandemic helped us to take steps – at times towards the desired direction, and at times in the opposite direction – than, what would

make a bigger change in giving if it was formed by a relationship among donor, social organizations and final beneficiaries who are in conversation and learning from each other? What reality could emerge if we took advantage of this impulse to consolidate understandings not only about the act of giving, but also to deepen in relation to the cultural dynamics of power and development?

2021 could herald the spring of giving. And a whole new social relationship.

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