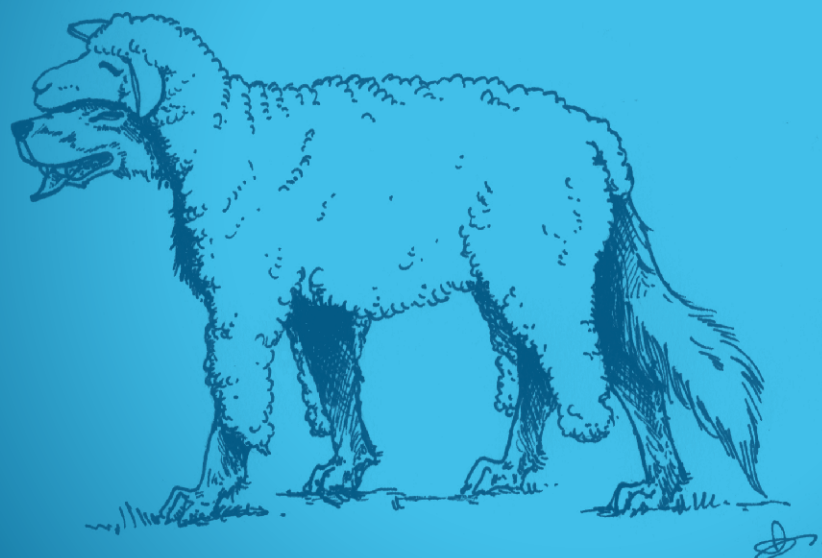


# In sheep's clothing: Philanthropy and the privatisation of the 'democratic' state

## A SUMMARY



Back in 2008, right after the 'latest' global collapse of the capitalist system, Bishop and Green published their Ode to, what they baptised, *the philanthrocapitalist*. Their book preaches the "renaissance of giving and philanthropy" and describes the "growing recognition by the leaders of capitalism that giving back much of their fortune to improve society is as much a part of the system as making the money in the first place" (2010, p. xii).

Later that same year, Bill Gates, who at that time was the world's richest man, outlined his approach to solving the world's problems. His message at the World Economic Forum was unequivocal and unidirectional: where states, multilaterals and traditional non-governmental organisations have failed, the market can succeed. To do so, governments, businesses, and non-profits should collaborate in order to facilitate and stretch the reach of market forces so that more individuals and companies can make a profit — economic or in terms of social recognition, while working on easing the world's inequities.

*In sheep's clothing: Philanthropy and the privatisation of the 'democratic' state*, seeks to advance our existing knowledge on the shape and new roles of philanthropic actors at different levels of the policy-making cycle in the field of education.

First, it seeks to identify, map and examine a number of key philanthropic organisations that are now active in the field of education across the globe. Second, it aims to develop a typology of philanthropic involvement and participation, particularly focusing on the way in which they interact with and modify the roles of other traditional actors involved in education

policy development (i.e. governments, unions, professional organisations, training institutions, etc.).

Methodologically, the research project is innovative. It is based on the principles of 'network ethnography', a combination of social network analysis and ethnographic methods.

The research was conducted in two phases. The first part of this report considers the more general implications of the involvement of 'new' philanthropists in global education policy communities in different countries across the world. Numerous adjectives have been used to describe this new approach to philanthropy, which highlight different facets of engagement (e.g. impact, strategic, engaged, venture) but all share a common denominator: they all apply the principles and methods of venture and investment capital to philanthropic decision-making and activities.

Within this new configuration, the boundaries between charity and business are blurred to the extent that in order to fulfil their new roles, the new philanthropic ventures are set-up as hybrid organisations. More concretely, the first part of the research focuses on the rationale and portfolio structure of four venture philanthropy



organisations: Omidyar Network, NewSchools Venture Fund, Reach Capital, and LGT Venture Philanthropy.

The analysis of data gathered confirms that new philanthropy is not only about finding new technical solutions. It actually implies a new way of understanding the world and the public sphere, of solving problems and 'improving lives'. They openly promote market-based solutions and dynamics of privatisation of education at all levels. For instance, funding of private and charter schools, developing new public management schemes, incubating new edu-tech businesses, advocating for new forms and methods of accountability and evaluation, etc.

We could think about the influence and effect of these forms of 'giving' as a form of 'philanthropic governance'. Through their philanthropic action, these new policy actors may be able to modify meanings, mobilise assets and exert pressure or even decide on the direction of policy in specific contexts (Saltman, 2010).

As Horne (2002) argues, new philanthropists operate in a *parapolitical sphere* within which they can develop their own policy agendas.

## Ark — a case study

The second part of this report, focuses on the UK registered education charity Absolute Return for Kids (Ark). It is best known for its role as a provider of academy schools in partnership with the government in England. It is rapidly growing in geographical and budgetary terms, and in the number and nature of the programmes in which it is involved.

The aim of this part of the research is to identify, through the analysis of Ark's international work, some of the multi-faceted channels for philanthropic action into the field of education policy, including but also exceeding philanthropic funding —in the form of investment and grant making, that are turning philanthropy into a significant force in the re-working of education as a non-state activity in different spaces and locations.

In particular, this report maps Ark's growing activities and collaborations across the world —in

India, Liberia, South Africa, Uganda, Kenya and Ghana, among others.

There is detailed analysis of the wide range of collaborations and initiatives that involve Ark acting and engaged with a variety of partners, spanning from government to non-state actors, and performing different roles in different capacities: education provision; curriculum development; teacher and leadership training; eco-system/market building; network building; policy influencing; evidence-producing/commissioning.

Across the different strands of Ark's international work led by the Ark Education Partnerships Group (EPG) is the self-stated aim to improve education systems through public-private partnerships (PPPs) and accountability. They attribute the non-state sector a key role in addressing the so-identified learning crisis in developing countries. This work is underpinned by a public policy framework of limited government intervention in the delivery of services and programmes on the ground through a diversification of provision paired with strong systems of school accountability.

This therefore includes an ensemble of policy 'solutions' oriented to increasing school/provider autonomy in PPP modalities, alongside the creation of accountability systems and regimes, supported by strong data, assessment and performance measurement and management.

Likewise, Ark's advisory work for such modalities of system reform focuses on the negotiation and facilitation of so-called contract management public-private partnership arrangements.

These are modelled on the English Academies and the US charter school programmes and then promoted across a variety of nations and/or regions/localities, involving non-state actors that take over state schools, and the parallel development of school inspection and accountability measures. Advocacy and 'evidence' building are important contributing elements in the development and continuing legitimisation of this agenda.

Through these multifaceted and complex set of roles and the relationships, Ark is increasingly becoming a significant, active agent facilitating and enabling market-oriented education policy frameworks across several developing nations.



# Findings and emerging themes

## 1. *Network relationships: practice and discourse*

Philanthropies operate in complex relationships with national and sub-national levels of government as funders, providers, lobbyists, advisers and evidence producers, at times partnering with and at times supplementing the state.

These organisations act and interact in spaces across and within nations, bringing considerable financial and 'political' influence to bear, re-working and re-populating the international education policy community.

They connect the interests and activities of enterprises, governments, philanthropies, and non-governmental agencies in new ways. They also constitute both networks of practice through which they act on education systems—delivering and/or funding education services, as well as discourse communities, ideologically converging around educational liberalisation and promoting market-based solutions and dynamics of privatisation of education.

Through them and within these interactions, new voices are given space. In addition, new narratives that determine what counts as a policy 'solution' and a 'good' policy are articulated and validated. Together, they are bringing school management, leadership, accountability, curriculum and teacher training within a single discursive logic of practice.

## 2. *Evidentology: the slippery relationship between evidence and ideology*

Philanthropic organisations are not only concerned with the immediate impact of the programmes in which they become involved. They also share a more ambitious aspiration to use these experiences as evidence or 'demonstration work' to effect larger change across education systems.

The organisations studied emphasise the need to overcome ideological perspectives and base arguments and practices on 'evidence'. There is, however, a thin and contested evidence base to many of the market-reform mechanisms and programmes for which they advocate or implement. Furthermore, in this report, there are examples of programmes that did

not achieve expected outcomes yet similar programmes continue to be promoted.

Questions need to be asked as to whether the reliance on limited sources of evidence, particularly those which emerge from randomised control trials, is preventing contextual and less easily quantifiable and observable factors from being considered in debates, and with what implications and consequences.

In the same way that an overreliance on narrow test results as an accurate and fair measure of the quality of schooling is highly contested, the single-sided reliance on experimental and quasi-experimental sources of data limits our understanding of other crucial aspects of the success of an education system.



## 3. *Policy mobility: 'Hot' policies?*

This report analyses some of the ways in which philanthropic organisations are involved in the international mobility of policy models presented as successful in specific settings.

In the case of Ark this includes "the sharing of education policy and implementation experience in the UK" (Hares and Crawford, 2018).

An obvious issue relates to an inadequate consideration of the specificities of the local factors and context that might have contributed to the policy success in the places of origin, over and against local factors and political and socio-economic contexts of recipient places.

There are also related issues around what Tikly (2004) understands as forms of new imperialism in the 'export' of Western education policies to low income countries.

Secondly, a specific issue that emerges is the uncritical approach to some of the policy initiatives and programmes that are being presented as 'models' to be 'exported', without adequate recognition of the controversies raised in the very contexts that are taken as examples.

It is crucial for organisations involved in policy travel to openly engage with the criticisms they generate 'at home' before embarking on moving them abroad.

This include critiques around the pitfalls of managerial models of teacher and leadership training; around evaluation and accountability frameworks based on narrow test results; de-contextualised measures of added-value; social selection and inequalities created or perpetuated by systems of choice, competition and school autonomy.

#### 4. **Reform: agents and beneficiaries**

This study raises questions about a potential conflict of interest born out of the dual role played by these new philanthropic organisations within the education markets they operate in and promote.

They are deliverers of education services in public-private partnership arrangements or through PPP negotiation, facilitation or support and as advisors for and advocates of market-oriented system reforms.

At the same time, they are in different ways beneficiaries of the reforms they promote, gaining increasing sections in the markets of provision they help to create, either as providers or as advisors and stakeholders. In the process, they are also gaining an amplified and increasingly recognised voice in the global policy debate.

#### 5. **Democratic deficit: policymaking through the back door**

Far from the mirage proclaimed by its advocates of a more democratic space where policy actors operate through horizontal and balanced power-relations, philanthropic governance creates a 'democratic deficit'.

This research poses fundamental questions about the future role of government and other traditional political agents and, more importantly, about democracy and democratic accountability. Either by promoting their own ideas on how to achieve social and political change or by supporting particular existing initiatives, a growing number of philanthropic organisations are self-assuming responsibilities and duties, bypassing the scrutiny and accountability governments and elected officials are subjected to.

Their connections and alliances, agendas and methods, cross-border movements, and local implementation of programmes analysed throughout this report, constitute new sites of policy within what Peck and Tickle (2003) call *emergent geographies of neoliberalisation* in a world of 'fast policy'.



The full research paper by Junemann C. & Olmedo, A. (2019) can be found here: <https://go.ei-ie.org/SheepClothing>



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