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**Doing Environment and Nature
Protection Differently:
How Foundations Differ in Their
Work on Environmental Issues in
Germany and the United States**

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Abstract

Environmental foundations in Germany and the United States were examined for differences in financial settings, professionalization and fields of action. Data from an online survey shows that US foundations have greater financial strength and act more professionally than German environmental foundations. Furthermore, the fields of action show significant differences. In both countries captivating topics that have a positive connotation dominate financial spending, while there is a significant difference in orientation towards nature conservation and environmental development. Together, these findings suggest that beyond the financial power of the foundations the tradition of civil society organizations influences the fields of action and the thematic orientation.

Keywords: civil society, environment, foundations, Germany, USA

1. Doing environment and nature protection differently

Environmental issues are one of the major challenges in recent years. Nevertheless, the concerns regarding environmental problems have existed for a long time. The first big environmental wave in the late 19th century (Brulle & Jenkins, 2005; Weiland, 2007) rediscovered the wilderness and increased awareness of preservation and conservation, and the second wave in the mid-20th century sought changes in the direction of politics and individual behavior (Lubitow & Faber, 2011; Mitchell, 1991; Vaughn, 2011). The level of environmental initiatives within civil society has since risen constantly (Brulle & Jenkins, 2005; Straughan & Pollak, 2008).

Especially today, when governments face the fiscal pressure of the economic crisis, interest in philanthropic nonprofit organizations in Europe and the United States (US) is awakening. That these protagonists of civil society have enormous potential to face social and environmental challenges seems beyond any doubt (Salamon & Anheier, 1992a, 1992b; Anheier & Daly, 2007). However, Anheier and Salamon (2006; Salamon & Anheier, 1998) identify huge differences between civil societies. They conclude that the nonprofit sector performs different functions as a result of different historical 'moorings' and social and economic 'shapes'. By acting on these assumptions, the theory develops four types of 'nonprofit regimes' based on governmental social spending and the nonprofit sector economy size. Germany and the US are defined by a large nonprofit sector size but distinguished by the level of government social welfare spending (Salamon and Anheier 1998).

It seems clear in this research that there should also be differences in the nonprofit sector in Germany and the US. In this study we analyze foundations that support environmental activities in both countries. A closer look at the existing literature indicates strong civil society activities for environmental challenges in the US. Based on IRS files, Straughan and Pollak (2008) determined that over 26,000 organizations ranging from neighborhood groups to established organizations were active in environmental issues related to environment and nature protection in 2005.

The majority of these organizations (16,966 out of 26,548) is grouped in categories related to environmental conservation (Natural resources, Water & Wetlands, Land Conservation, and Wildlife). The minority (1,476) is engaged in categories related to environmental protection (Pollution abatement, Energy, and Recycling). Other categories are generic or related to botanical services and beautification (Straughan & Pollak, 2008). Environmental foundations are an important part of these activities. In 1999, more than 5,300 foundations offered grants of over \$10,000 in support of environmental and animal welfare (Brulle & Jenkins, 2005).

The Environmental Grantmakers Association (EGA) (2012) analyzed data from their organization members for the year 2009 that showed a change in American environmental foundations' focus from environmental conservation towards environmental protection. In this report both subject areas were equally represented in 2009, whereas conservation was represented more than twice as much as protection in 2007. Data on foundations in Germany is hardly available. The German association estimates the share of environmental activities at about 6% of all money spent by foundations (Bundesverband Deutscher Stiftungen, 2008).

Ongoing discussions about the recent developments in civil society are based on this research. The discussion of professionalization in the nonprofit sector is thereby of high importance for the US. Given that the nonprofit sector accounts for almost ten percent of all wages and salaries and more than 5 percent of the organizations in the US (Hwang & Powell, 2009), nonprofit organizations depending on public or private support are more and more under pressure to demonstrate their effectiveness and document their outcomes in order to continue securing monetary support for their projects. Carol Fitz-Gibbon (2002) describes it as the "age of indicators", Melinda Tuan (2004) as the "culture of measuring", and Joanne Carman (2009b) as the "accountability movement". Foundations and grantmaking public charities, whether endowed or fundraising, also emphasize the importance of accountability and performance measuring (Benjamin, 2007; Carman, 2009a; Ostrower, 2006). Therefore, foundations may lead grassroots organizations into professionalization in order to increase their mobilization (Jenkins, 2006) or shape these movements in the direction of private public grantmakers to obtain more donations (Bartley, 2007).

The primary goal of this study is to analyze the influence of previously discussed research and describe differences and similarities between environmental foundations in Germany and the US. We intend to test whether the previously outlined discussions on modern civil society are valid for the environmental sector. Are there differences in the relevance of foundations in countries with a different share of governmental spending? If so, do these differences influence the professionalization of foundations? We also intend to analyze the environmental fields of action and activities to generate statements regarding the dependence of foundations on public affiliation with specific topics. In this research, we therefore compare data from German and American environmental foundations to determine whether the international discussions are valid for both countries.

2. Method

2.1. Participants and Procedures

We present cross-national data from an online survey of foundations that support or operate environmental projects. The data was collected in 2011 in the US and Germany. In both countries the sampling frame consisted of all foundations that included environmental issues in their mission statement (hereinafter 'environmental foundations'). The German sampling frame was set up from the databases of the Maecenata Institute for Philanthropy and Civil Society, and the Association of German Foundations (BDS). These data sets contain 1,359 environmental foundations that can be assumed to represent the whole population of German environmental foundations. In a full unit sampling, the foundations were contacted either by e-mail (1,075) or conventional mail (284). The American sampling frame consists of environmental foundations listed in the register of the US Foundation Center (5,274), representing the whole population of American grantmaking and operating foundations. We invited every foundation with a listed and valid e-mail address (869) for the sampling.

Each foundation invited by e-mail had the opportunity to state that it currently does not support environmental issues. This opportunity was taken up by 277 German and 43 American foundations. We received 201 completed interviews from German foundations and 79 from American ones during the data collection. There were also 9 foundations that were funded by local or national political authorities (hereinafter "public foundations") in the case of Germany. The outcome was a response rate of 0.186 for Germany and 0.09 for the US. The cooperation rate, including currently non-environmental foundations, was 0.352 for Germany and 0.14 for the US (American Association for Public Opinion Research (APPOR), 2011).

2.2. Procedure and Design

The online questionnaire was developed with EFS-Survey. The foundations in the sampling frame were invited either by postal or e-mail. There were two reminders for those invited by e-mail. The Study was anonymized but most foundations voluntarily chose to state their names. During the research, foundations were asked to answer questions regarding their financial setup, environmental aims, and scopes and activities for environmental protection and conservation. The questions on the relevance of specific issues and the activities the foundations performed were based on the 7-point Likert scale according to Rohrmann (1978; Stoer & Lawless, 1993), ranging from "not at all" to "exclusively".

2.3. Data analysis

We are aware that by this approach we cannot claim the American sample is representative. We will therefore discuss the results of the survey in close comparison with the data obtained during the literature review. We used non-parametric and chi-square tests to analyze differences and similarities between Germany and the US. We also distinguished, where necessary, between public and private foundations in Germany to obtain more adequate results. We used an alpha level of 0.05 for all statistical tests. The analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS 21.

3. Results

3.1. Financial settings

American foundations have a significantly broader financial basis than German foundations (see Table 1). The total amount in US dollars (USD) that American environmental foundations spend on average ($M = 3,692.42$, $Mdn = 40.17$) is more than 3.5 times higher than in Germany ($M = 1,007.29$, $Mdn = 40.17$), $U = 6,743$, $z = 6.911$, $p < 0.001$, $r = 0.496$. The differences between the total expenditures becomes more distinct when public foundations are excluded when comparing American and German data (Germany without public foundations: $M = 479.79$; $Mdn = 40.17$). If we look only at private German foundations, the total amount of money spent in 2010 is reduced by over 50% in our sample. Therefore, in our sample, private American foundations spend about eight times as much as private German foundations on average.

Similar results can be obtained for annual spending on environmental issues. The spend amount in the American sample ($M = 2,012$, $Mdn = 200$) is double that of the German one ($M = 948.2$, $Mdn = 20.09$), $U = 4,745$, $z = 5.438$, $p < 0.001$, $r = 0.426$. With regard to private German foundations, the average only ($M = 259.9$, $Mdn = 20.09$) is reduced by almost 75%. Therefore, private foundations in the US annually spend almost eight times more money on environmental issues on average.

Table 1: Mean and Median of Money (Thousands of USD) spent in 2010 by Environmental Foundations in Germany and the US. (Voluntary Answer)

	Germany [excluding public foundations]				USA			
	Mean	Median	SD	n	Mean	Median	SD	n
Financial Resources								
Total	1,007.29 [479.79]	40.17 [40.17]	6,023 [1,440]	129 125	3,692.42	600.00	10,596	65
Environment	948.20 [259.90]	20.09 [20.09]	6,710 [746]	100 97	2,012.04	200.00	10,060	63

In terms of sources of income, foundations in both countries differ significantly with regard to their dependency on interest on capital, which is higher in Germany ($\chi^2 (1) = 7.130, p = 0.012$) and for private grants ($\chi^2 (1) = 15.986, p = < 0.001$) and others, which are higher in the US ($\chi^2 (1) = 6.121, p = 0.030$). There is no significant difference between gifts, donations, and public grants (see Table 2). With regard to relevance of the different sources of income for environment and nature protection, there is only a measurable significance for private grants $U = 4,405, z = -1.448, p = 0.035, r = 0.099$. All other sources of income do not differ significantly in their relevance to environmental issues.

Table 2: Prevalence of different Sources of Income in Germany and the US

Sources of Income	Germany (n = 185)		US (n = 72)		χ^2	P
	n	%	n	%		
Interest on Capital	159	90.3	55	76.4	7.130	0.012
Gifts/Donations	125	71	44	61.1	2.061	0.160
Public Grants	45	25.6	17	23.6	0.151	0.753
Others	8	4.5	10	13.9	6.121	0.030
Private Grants	20	11.4	24	33.3	15.986	< 0.001

3.2. Professionalism

We measure an environmental foundation’s level of professionalization based on whether or not a foundation evaluates the projects it supports or operates. There is a significant association in whether American and German foundations do or do not evaluate the projects they support or operate $\chi^2 (1) = 29.025, p < 0.001$. In Germany 33.8% (45 out of 133) of foundations stated that they perform evaluations, while in the US 75.4% (46 out of 61) stated this. Based on the odds ratio, the odds for American foundations performing evaluations are 5.997 times higher than those for German foundations. The foundations were also asked why they do not perform evaluations if they have indicated that they do so. The German respondents mainly reported that the projects they support are too small (64.7%), or that there is a lack of financial resources (39.7%) or employees (39.7%). Only a few reported that evaluation is not necessary after years of working together (see Table 3).

Table 3: Responses of German foundations to Survey Question “Why are your projects not evaluated? (Check all that apply)” (N = 68)

Reasons for no evaluation.	N	%
No Money	27	39.7
Lack of Employees	33	48.5
Projects are too small	44	64.7
Long time working together	9	13.2
Planning to use Evaluation	13	19.1

Note. An adequate Analysis of the American foundations was not possible due the low number of statements (<5)

3.3. Objectives and activities

We focused on commitment to environment and nature protection and asked what relevance ten different environmental subject areas have for the foundations. The results demonstrate that biodiversity (*Mdn* = 5) and landscape (*Mdn* = 4) are the most popular issues foundations in both countries support and promote. In both cases the relevance level for American foundations does not differ significantly from that for German foundations ($p > 0.100; r < 0.100$). With regard to other objectives, American foundations tend to care more about agriculture ($p = 0.071; r = 0.122$) and consumption ($p = 0.061; r = 0.127$) than German foundations. However, there are highly significant associations with a medium effect ($p < 0.01; r > 0.190$) for inland waters, energy and transportation, forestry, and air and climate, and a large effect ($p < 0.001; r > 0.300$) for waste and toxins, and coasts and seas. In each case the median for US

foundations is above the median for German foundations, with the exception of waste and toxins where the median is the same (see Table 4).

Table 4: Group Differences for the Relevance of Environmental Subject Areas Between Germany (n = 148) and the US (n = 69)

Environmental subject areas	Germany		US		<i>U</i>	<i>Z</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>r</i>
	Mean Rank	<i>Mdn</i>	Mean Rank	<i>Mdn</i>				
Waste & Toxins	97.53	1	133.60	1	6,803.5	5.037	< 0.001	0.342
Biodiversity	109.04	5	108.91	5	5,100.0	-0.140	0.989	-0.010
Inland Waters	101.20	1	125.72	3	6,260.0	2.835	0.005	0.192
Energy & Transp.	101.15	1	125.84	2	6,286.0	3.160	0.002	0.215
Forestry	99.43	1	129.52	4	6,522.0	3.439	0.001	0.233
Coasts & Seas	97.72	1	133.20	2	6,776.0	4.720	< 0.001	0.320
Landscape	108.08	4	110.98	4	5,242.5	0.325	0.325	0.022
Agriculture	104.37	1	118.93	2	5,791.0	1.803	0.071	0.122
Air/Climate	101.26	1	125.59	2	6,251.0	2.946	0.003	0.200
Consumption	104.00	1	119.72	2	5,846.0	1.875	0.061	0.127

Foundations have different possibilities for involvement in achieving their environmental goals: one is the direction the measure focuses on and another is the kind of measure. We therefore asked the foundations if they apply new or approved approaches, and if their activities are in the direction of protecting and preserving or rather shaping and developing nature (see Table 5). Foundations in both countries use a mix of approved and new approaches to reach their goals of nature protection and conservation. Although the median is 4 for both questions in both countries, there is a small tendency towards approved approaches being used more often in the US, $p = 0.121$, $r = 0.105$. The relevance of protection and preservation on the one hand and shape and development on the other present a different picture: while there is no difference in the high relevance of protection and preservation ($Mdn = 6$, $p = 0.944$, $r = 0.005$), the results differ significantly for shape and development ($p < 0.001$, $r = -0.410$). The German foundations in our sample assign a similar high relevance to shape and development ($Mdn = 5$) as to protect and preserve, while the American foundations only make little effort for shape and development ($Mdn = 2$).

Table 5: Group Differences for Objectives in the Field of 'Environment, Nature and Landscape' between Germany (n = 151) and the US (n = 69)

Objectives	Germany		US		U	Z	p	r
	Mean Rank	Mdn	Mean Rank	Mdn				
Support proven/approved approaches	106.10	4	120.12	4	5,873.5	1.550	0.121	0.105
Explore new approaches	111.02	4	109.36	4	5,131.0	-0.183	0.854	-0.012
Protect & preserve nature & environment	110.31	6	110.91	6	5,237.5	0.070	0.944	0.005
Shape & develop nature & environment	127.70	5	72.87	2	2,613.0	-6.078	<0.001	-0.410

For a better understanding of environmental foundations in our comparison areas, we asked foundations about concrete activities they perform to achieve their environmental goals. As an active measure, we asked whether they support or manage the purchase of land or individual property rights, and further, if their organizations promote or implement measures for natural regulation, biotope construction, or nature conservation management (see Table 6).

The data for the relevance of each of these activities shows that purchasing land does not differ significantly in its relevance for German (*Mdn* = 1) and American (*Mdn* = 3) foundations, but American foundations tended to purchase land more often ($U = 4,250.5$, $z = 1.756$, $p = 0.079$, $r = 0.129$). However, the purchase of property rights is significantly more relevant for American foundations than for German ones. Even if the significance is given, more than half the foundations in both countries do not purchase property rights (*Mdn* = 1, $U = 4,262$, $z = 2.435$, $p = 0.015$, $r = 0.180$).

In terms of relevance of natural regulation, biotope construction, and nature conservation, the data shows no significant difference for nature conservation. Nature conservation seems to play a major role for environmental foundations in Germany (*Mdn* = 5) and the US (*Mdn* = 5). However, there is a significant difference with a small effect size for natural regulation ($U = 4,434$, $z = 2.199$, $p = 0.028$, $r = 0.162$) and a medium effect size for biotope construction ($U = 2,183.5$, $z = -4.786$, $p < 0.001$, $r = -0.352$). The data demonstrates that natural regulation

is more relevant in the US (*Mdn* = 4) than in Germany (*Mdn* = 2.5), while the opposite applies for biotope construction, which has a higher relevance in Germany (*Mdn* = 4) than in the US (*Mdn* = 1).

Table 6: Group Differences for Activities in the Field of 'Environment, Nature and Landscape' between Germany (n = 125) and the US (n = 59)

Activities	Germany		US		<i>U</i>	<i>Z</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>r</i>
	Mean Rank	<i>Mdn</i>	Mean Rank	<i>Mdn</i>				
Purchase of land	88.00	1.0	102.40	3	4,250.5	1.756	0.079	0.129
Purchase of property rights	87.90	1.0	102.24	1	4,262.0	2.435	0.015	0.180
Natural regulation	87.30	2.5	105.15	4	4,434.0	2.199	0.028	0.162
Biotope construction	105.17	4.0	67.01	1	2,183.5	-4.786	<0.001	-0.352
Nature conservation	92.49	5.0	94.08	5	3,781.0	0.193	0.847	-0.014

4. Discussion

As outlined previously, there are significant differences between American and German foundations. While American foundations are on average able to spend a decent amount of money per year on environmental issues, German private foundations can spend only about one eighth of that. More than 50% of German foundations can only spend around \$20,000 or less per year (see Table 1). The analysis of the sources of income demonstrates that German foundations rely strongly on interest on capital while sources of income in the US are frequently balanced between different sources, with private grants being a major source of income (see Table 2). The results are in line with the theory of social origins (Anheier & Salamon, 2006; Salamon & Anheier, 1998). According to this theory the nonprofit sector performs different functions. In Germany the role of the nonprofit sector is to control the government and to demand actions on social relevant issues (Anheier & Seibel, 2001; Weiland, 2006). Based on its tradition the nonprofit sector size in Germany is high as well as the governmental spending. In the US social spending by the government is relatively low. On the other hand, there is a huge nonprofit sector in the US. The willingness to donate and therefore the big nonprofit sector seem to be caused by the lack of governmental spending in the US. This leads to a higher relevance of nonprofit organizations because the government does not take much responsibility. Therefore civil society engagement and donations are basic essentials of the

societal system in the US (Anheier & Salamon, 2006). With regard to our research, we can confirm that Germany and the US are defined by a large economic nonprofit sector size but differ in their level of governmental social spending.

The financial resources and sources of income are confirmed by the results for professionalization. While three out of four American foundations in the survey apply evaluation measures, only one out of three foundations do so in Germany. These results are consistent with the current organizational theory that states that evidence-based knowledge regarding the performance of an organization, particularly in the investment of public money, is necessary for donations (Carman, 2009b). The information obtained through monitoring and evaluation can help increase knowledge about good practice and may result in long-term relationships with potential donors and public and private grantmakers (Davis, Schoorman, & Donaldson, 1997; van Slyke, 2006). The American foundations that rely on private grants need to implement measures of accountability, while German foundations lack the possibility to spend time and resources (see Table 3) on the implementation of monitoring and evaluation (Ferris & Graddy, 1994; Fitz-Gibbon, 2002; van Slyke, 2006). Therefore, the international discussion about accountability (Carman, 2009b; Tuan, 2004) is also reflected in the environmental nonprofit sector at least in the US. Although we cannot conclusively say that the international discussion about accountability in the nonprofit sector has not reached German organizations, there is evidence that the financial strength of environmental foundations does obstruct activities of evaluation and accountability.

With regard to the results for environmental subject areas, the data is in line with the research by the EGA (2012), Straughan and Pollak (2008), and Cracknell et al. (2012). In both countries, biodiversity and landscape are the most relevant subject areas. However, in the US, areas related to environmental protection and climate change also have a high relevance for foundations, while these topics are almost a blind spot in other countries. The high relevance of landscape and biodiversity is concordant with studies by De Groot and Van Den Born (2003), Walter and Schapfer (2010), and Ulrich et al. (1991), which conclude that the local landscape has a high value for recreation. Similar results can be found for the value of biodiversity. Martín-López, Montes, and Benayas (2007; 2008) demonstrate that there are affective factors that influence the willingness to pay for biodiversity, especially for wildlife conservation and common and familiar species (Martín-López, Montes, & Benayas, 2007). Bartley (2007) argues that it is likely that “cherry picking” is common for environmental foundations in both countries. Due to the need for donations and public and private grants, foundations seem to choose attractive topics such as biodiversity and landscape protection. Meanwhile technical and unpopular topics like waste and toxins, agriculture, or transportation are less common.

Nevertheless, there is a significant difference in the relevance of these technical subject areas in our results. The significantly higher relevance for these topics in the US could have resulted from the history of environmental movements in Germany and the US. While the self-concept of civil society in the US can be seen as an independent corrector of federal politics, German civil society interacts with the state and trusts in governmental decisions (Weiland, 2007). Therefore, it is likely that environmental nonprofit organizations in Germany would consider the responsibility for pollution prevention as the government's and have confidence in the implementation of environmental regulations. The US on the other hand has a long tradition of civil society organizations taking responsibility for environmental protection (Rothman, Nash, & Etulain, 1998; Weiland, 2007). However, these different traditions in civil society and environmental movements also attenuates the differences in financial spending between Germany and the US. While US foundations have greater resources at their disposal, the governmental spending and responsibility is limited compared to Germany. Due to the greater magnitude and the need for civil society organizations in the US the differences may be more marginal than they appear in our data.

Furthermore, the different traditions could also result in the differences in environmental management and natural regulation. While protection and preservation has a high relevance in both countries, the data analysis shows a significant difference in the relevance of shaping and developing nature and environment (see Table 5). While this topic has high relevance for German foundations, it does not play a major role in the US. These results are supported by the results for natural regulation and biotope construction, and their relevance for the activities the foundations perform (see Table 6). In the absence of valid information, we can only assume that the comparatively higher relevance of management compared to natural regulation in Germany may have resulted from different population densities in both countries (Germany has an average of 235 people per square kilometer and the US 34). While in Germany most areas are used either for agriculture, forestry, or living, in the US untouched land can still be found. Wilderness areas are therefore considered very important in the US (Rudzitis & Johansen, 1991), while this term is hardly applicable in Germany. Contrariwise, activities such as biotope construction that implement active intervention have a strong relevance for German environmental foundations. Considering German foundations' stronger affiliation to active management, together with the higher relevance of purchasing land and property rights in the US (see Table 6), it appears that German environmental foundations prefer short-term activities on average, while American foundations prefer the long-term conservation of landscapes.

5. Conclusion

Compared to the US, German private foundations seem to have limited potential in playing a major role in resolving environmental problems. Most German environmental foundations do not have the financial strength to produce a measurable impact. Meanwhile, American foundations apply more measures to ensure the accountability of their projects. Nevertheless, the role German foundations play in raising public awareness for environmental challenges should not be underestimated. With regard to the strategic and thematic orientation towards environmental issues, the data shows that foundations in both countries focus predominantly on biodiversity and landscape protection. Although topics related to climate change are well represented in the US, they mostly remain a blind spot in Germany. Furthermore, both countries differ significantly in their activities for achieving their environmental goals: the management of ecosystems has high relevance in Germany, while the American foundations prefer natural regulation.

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