

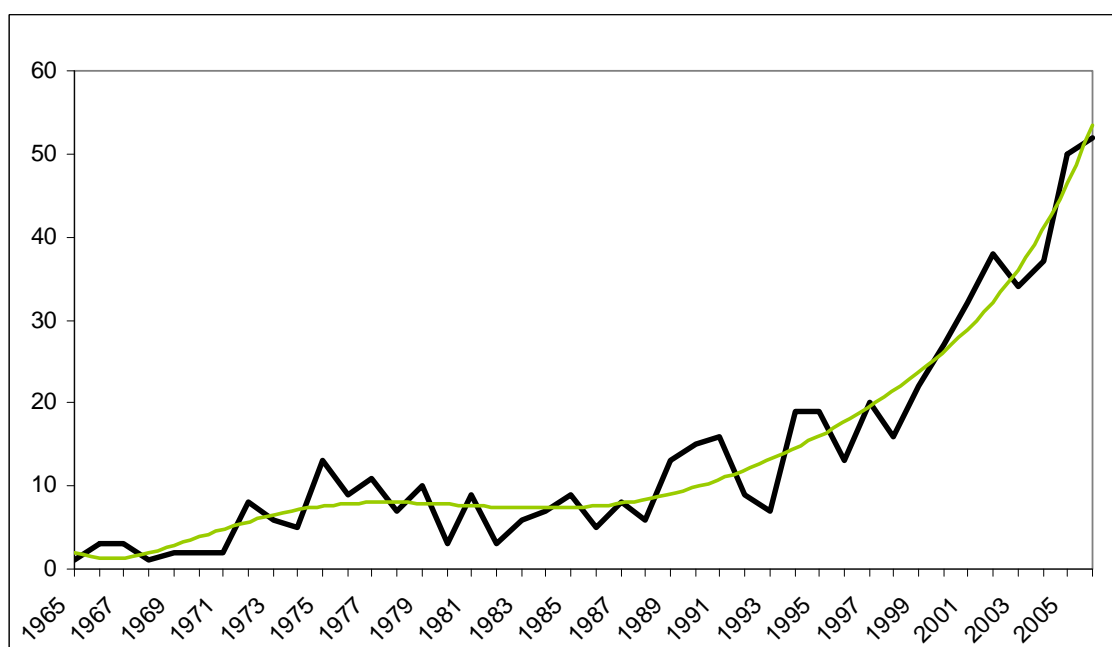
## A Brief History of Research on Philanthropy

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One of the earliest scientific publications documenting the practice of philanthropy was published in 1899 (Veblen, 1899). Thorstein Veblen described how philanthropy was a form of conspicuous consumption for wealthy entrepreneurs in the United States at the end of the nineteenth century. Since then, the study of philanthropy has become more popular (see figure 1).

Figure 1. Annual number of empirical research articles published on philanthropy, 1965-2006



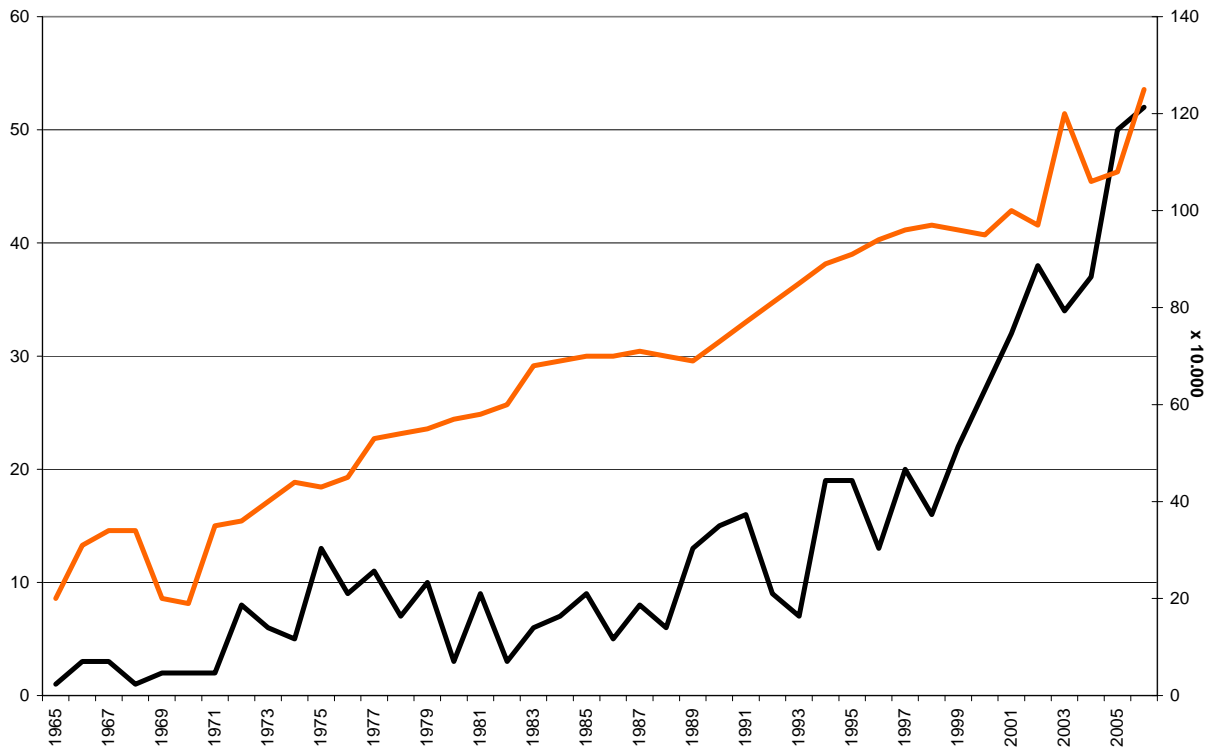
The figure plots the number of articles referenced in a recent comprehensive literature review of empirical articles on philanthropy (Bekkers & Wiepking, 2007). Two further articles that were published after Veblen but before 1965 are omitted in this figure (Sorokin, 1928; Blake, Rosenbaum, & Duryea, 1955). The number of papers published has increased strongly. In 2006, the number of articles published was 52. In the past forty years, we see several outbursts of academic attention for philanthropy. The first bulge appears in the 1970s. The scientific attention for philanthropy diminished somewhat in the early 1980s, but increased again at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s. We see an appreciable increase since 1998. The number of papers published annually in this period more than tripled since then.

The growth of research on philanthropy occurred in part as a result of the proliferation of academic research in general. How has the study of philanthropy developed compared to the development of science as a whole? When we look at the relative increase of the articles published on philanthropy compared to articles published worldwide in all scientific journals, we see some

<sup>1</sup> This research note was conceived when René Bekkers was an assistant professor and Esra Dursun was a research assistant at Utrecht University in 2009.

remarkable developments in publications (see figure 2). There is a clear increase in the number of articles published worldwide in all scientific journals. Except for a few dips and bumps, we see a pretty linear six fold increase from about 200,000 articles in 1965 to over 1.2 million articles in 2005. Compared to the trend from figure 1, we see that the number of articles published on philanthropy roughly keeps up with the development of science as a whole from 1965 to 1975. Until 1982 the number of articles that appears on philanthropy declined, while the number of articles in science as a whole continues to increase. Since 1998, however, we see that the number of articles published on philanthropy grows stronger between than the number of articles published in science as a whole. From 1998 to 2002, there is a leap in the publication of philanthropic articles, which continued increasing after a slight decrease between 2002 and 2003.

Figure 2. Annual number of empirical research articles published on philanthropy and SCI papers covered, 1965-2006



Source for SCI trend: Garfield (2007)

### Changing disciplinary origins

Philanthropy has been studied by several disciplines. Most of the articles were published in economics (30%), psychology (26%), philanthropic studies (19%) and sociology (11%). The study of philanthropy has been less common in marketing, communication, public administration and management, education and political science (each about 0,2 to 5%). Relatively small proportions of the literature on philanthropy have appeared in health, communication, biology and science.

The attention for philanthropy within different disciplines has changed rather strongly throughout the years (see table 1). Until 1984, most of the articles on philanthropy appeared in

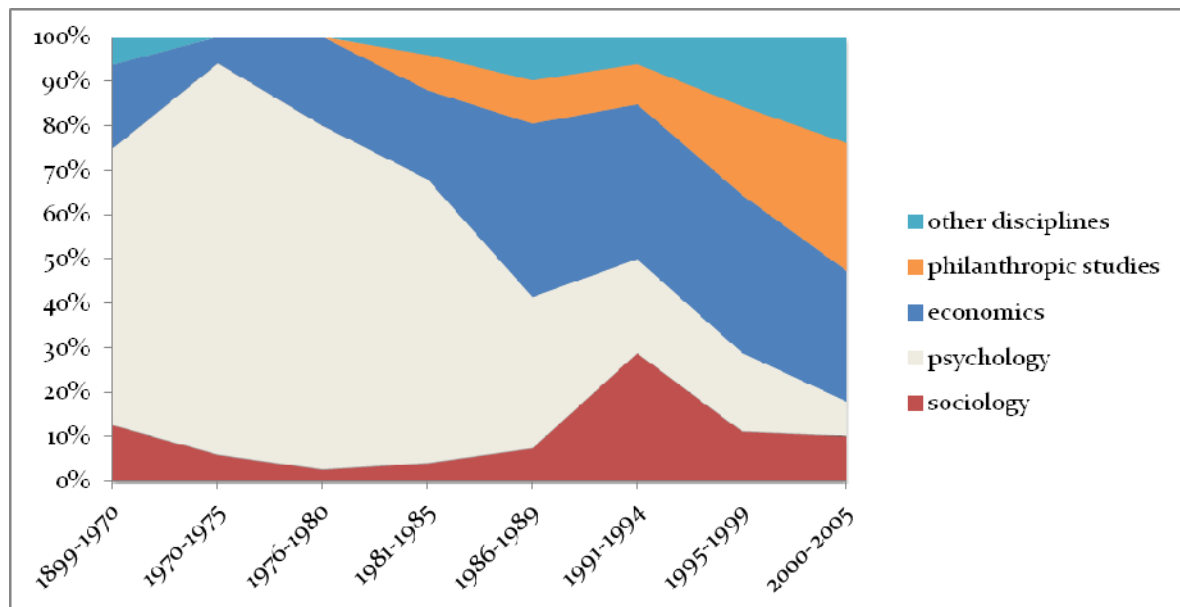
psychology (76%), followed by economics (16%) and sociology (5%). The order changed radically after 1985, when economists took the lead until 1999. The study of philanthropy became much less popular in psychology. Philanthropy became somewhat more popular in sociology since the mid 1970s, though nothing surpasses the 1990-1994 period.

Table 1. *Proportion of publications by discipline, 1899-2006*

	Sociology	Psychology	Economics	Philanthropic studies	Other disciplines	N
1899-1970	13	63	19	-	6	16
1970-1975	6	88	6	-	-	34
1976-1980	3	78	20	-	-	40
1981-1984	4	64	20	8	4	25
1985-1989	7	34	39	10	10	41
1990-1994	29	21	35	9	6	66
1995-1999	11	18	36	20	16	90
2000-2005	10	8	29	29	24	218
2006	14	6	39	27	15	52
All years	12	26	30	18	14	582

Philanthropic studies emerges as a separate field of study in the social sciences in the early 1980s. Interestingly, however, most of the papers on philanthropy have continued to appear in economic journals.

Figure 2. *Changing disciplinary origins of research on philanthropy, 1899-2005*



## Mechanisms studied in different disciplines

Among the mechanisms studied as driving philanthropy, the cost/benefit mechanism is most commonly studied (see table 2). Almost a quarter of all articles deal with this mechanism. Psychological benefits and reputation are the second and third most commonly studied mechanisms, both 17% of all articles. Need (13%), efficacy (11%) and altruism (11%) come next. Solicitation and values are the two least commonly studied mechanisms.

Attention for the eight mechanisms discussed above differs strongly between disciplines. Table 2 shows which proportion of articles that appeared in a specific discipline examined the eight mechanisms. In sociology, reputation, costs/benefits and values are the most commonly studied mechanisms. In psychology, psychological benefits are most commonly studied, followed by need and reputation. In economics, costs/benefits, altruism and reputation received most attention. In philanthropic studies, the distribution is more even: all mechanisms receive some attention. In marketing the distribution is also fairly even, though altruism was not studied.

Table 2. *Mechanisms studied in different disciplines*

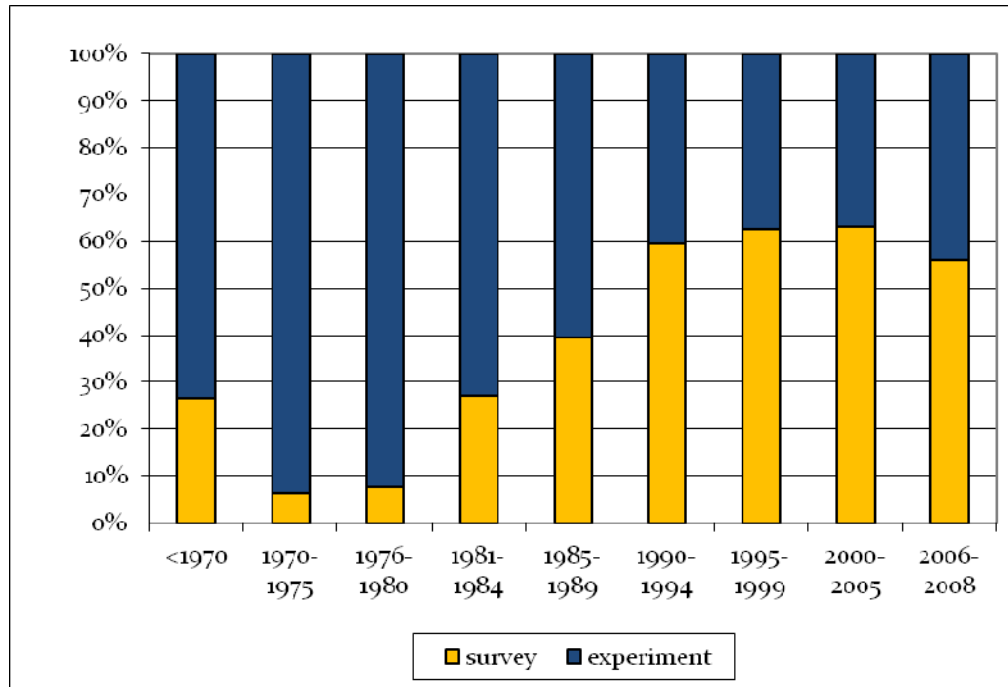
	Need	Soli- citation	Costs/ benefits	Altru- ism	Repu- tation	Psycho- logical benefits	Values	Efficacy
Sociology	3,8	3,8	34,6	-	30,8	3,8	15,4	7,7
Psychology	18,1	2,1	6,3	2,8	13,2	50,7	2,8	4,2
Economics	7,4	2,9	43,4	21,3	16,2	2,9	-	5,9
Philanthropic studies	20,0	3,3	10,0	10,0	13,3	3,3	10,0	30,0
Marketing	15,8	15,8	15,8	-	10,5	15,8	5,3	21,1
Other disciplines	16,7	8,3	22,2	19,4	22,2	2,8	2,8	5,6
All disciplines	13,3	3,8	23,3	11,0	16,1	21,2	3,3	7,9

When we change our perspective to the distribution of disciplines over mechanisms (reversing rows and columns) and proportions are computed of the articles that appeared about a specific mechanism the picture is even clearer. Almost three quarters of all the articles on costs/benefits (65%) is published in economics. Articles on altruism have also appeared most frequently in economics (67%). An overwhelming 88% of all articles on psychological benefits appeared in psychology. Awareness of need is also most commonly studied in psychology (50%). Reputation is most commonly studied in economics (35%) and psychology (30%). Efficacy is mostly studied by scholars in philanthropic studies (29%) and economics (26%). The solicitation mechanism is commonly studied in economics (27%), followed by scholars from psychology and marketing/consumer behaviour (both 20%). Finally, there is the values mechanism, which is dealt with most frequently in sociology (31%) and philanthropic studies (23%).

## Research design

In the 573 empirical studies on philanthropy, survey data are used in 292 articles (51%). Observational data, obtained in experiments or from archives, are used in 280 articles (49%).

Figure 3: *Type of data used in publications, 1899-2008*



Until 1989, the majority of studies on philanthropy used experimental methods or archival data (74%). A minority of studies used survey data (19%). This situation reversed after 1990. Since then, empirical studies have used survey data slightly more often (figure 3).

All disciplines except public administration/management are clearly dominated by one research method. The survey method is mostly used in the field of education (in 100% of articles in that discipline), sociology (93%), political science (92%), philanthropic studies (82%), marketing (75%), and communication (75%). Experiments and archival data are the default method in biology and science (88%), psychology (84%), economics (65%).

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