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The Collectif québécois des fondations sur les inégalités sociales

An exploratory case study of collaboration
between Quebec foundations

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Translation

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Introduction

In the spring of 2015, at a time when social movements had been mobilizing to tackle austerity policies for several months, certain foundations in Quebec decided to add their voices to those denouncing the unequal impacts of the stringent budgetary measures introduced by the provincial government. The publishing of an open letter signed by nine Quebec foundations marked the beginning of a new form of collaboration between these organizations that have traditionally remained on the sidelines of public debate. The letter reiterated calls from international economic organizations to be vigilant about austerity reforms and invited the liberal government to weigh the effects of its public policies in terms of their impact on inequalities within Quebec society. The letter garnered substantial media coverage and prompted the organization of a half-day reflection on social inequalities bringing together stakeholders from the philanthropic, academic and community sectors.

Even today, this collective appeal remains surprising: foundations rarely address the government publicly, much less as a group. As one of our study respondents noted, “It doesn’t happen often, it won’t happen often in the future, and you know ... this approach should be used very, very sparingly, because in this case there was a sort of responsiveness, but you know, that’s rare.”¹ The fact that social inequalities were being addressed was also surprising insofar as, historically speaking, philanthropy has tended to focus on poverty issues.

This working paper proposes to revisit the conditions that gave rise to such an unlikely mobilization. The present case study is based on observations² and on a series of interviews held since summer 2015 with the foundations involved in the initiative, as well as the director of the Institut du Nouveau Monde, who supported them. After briefly presenting our methodology, we will come back to the political context and internal

¹ Except where otherwise noted, the quotations in this report are from interviews conducted in the context of our research. The quotations are verbatim transcriptions that convey the tone and expressions of our respondents, but consequently also contain typical errors of spoken language. All translations of interviewee statements are ours.

² It should be noted that this study is also an outgrowth of a broader ethnographic inquiry into the Fondation Béati. This last partnership study led by Sylvain Lefèvre and Annabelle Berthiaume, in collaboration with the Service aux collectivités de l’Université du Québec à Montréal, was conducted over a slightly more than two-year period. For more information, see Lefèvre, S. & Berthiaume, A. (2016). *Béati, un modèle de philanthropie alternatif? Accompagner le changement social en le finançant*. Montreal: Research report (https://philab.uqam.ca/fichier/document/RapportBeati_sept_vff.pdf).

questions that characterized the foundations in the months leading up to their public statement. We will then present some of the issues and challenges involved in the continuation of the foundations' initiative. Finally, we will conclude with an assessment of the real and potential impacts of the creation of this group, commonly identified in our interviews as the *Collectif des fondations* (hereafter called the "Collectif").

Methodology

Sources

Data collection for the study was performed from June 2015 to January 2016. A number of sources were used:

- 9 semi-structured interviews, each one to two hours in length, with member foundations of the Collectif
- 1 semi-structured interview with a Collectif consultant
- The open letter written by the foundations
- Participant observations
- Public documents concerning the foundations belonging to the Collectif (websites, briefs presented before parliamentary committees, etc.)
- Informative follow-ups with Collectif members concerning their efforts and progress

Analytical method

Each interview was transcribed in full for content analysis purposes. We conducted a content analysis of interview transcriptions, public literature, and observation notes from our research team³ in order to be able to describe the nature of collaborative efforts between the member foundations of the Collectif. Respondents' anonymity was strictly maintained throughout the research.

How to read this report

Depending on reader needs, this report may be read with varying degrees of thoroughness:

³ Our thanks go to Mélanie Saint-Pierre, a master's student in strategy and social and environmental responsibility at Université du Québec à Montréal, for her participation in holding and transcribing the interviews.

- Each argument begins with a summary (in blue) of the section's main idea.
- Except where otherwise noted, the quotations in parentheses are drawn from our interviews. Longer quotations are indented from the main text.
- The footnotes provide sources and clarify points of theoretical analysis or semantics.

0. Chronology of the Collectif's creation

In the fall of 2014 the Béati Foundation approached other foundations regarding possibilities for taking collective action on the issue of social inequalities. At the time, two employees of the Béati Foundation, wishing to bring diverse networks together, contacted a few foundations already close to their own. In addition to foundations known for their “activism” and proactiveness in the community sector, the Lucie and André Chagnon Foundation was invited to be among the first to join the initiative.

After the Chagnon Foundation accepted, leadership of future efforts was divided between the Fondation Béati and the Chagnon Foundation. According to one Foundation representative,

“We shared the burden, if you will, in terms of how ... given the resources we have, and that other foundations don't, we said to ourselves we would try to think about organizing meetings, having an agenda, you know, the usual, all of which is important to move things forward.”

Having chosen to address the issue of social inequalities, these initiating foundations used their contacts to reach out to foundations that might also be interested in the project. In spite of a few refusals, several foundations agreed to join reflections on what form the group should take. One of the key concerns in this respect was the achievement of a diversified composition. Foundations were invited to join gradually, based on a search strategy focused on quality of commitment rather than numbers alone, so that, as one of the interviewees put it, the group could “build up slowly and surely, and last.”

On November 18, 2014, a first working meeting was held between the handful of interested foundations at the offices of the Lucie and André Chagnon Foundation. A decision was made during the meeting to write a collective letter setting forth the foundations' official position. The first draft would be drawn up by the Executive Director of the Béati Foundation, Jacques Bordeleau, and reworked by Michel Venne, Director of the Institut du Nouveau Monde, for the next meeting.

On the occasion of the second meeting, held on December 2, 2014, the topics addressed included the letter's release. One of the meeting's attendees described to us some of the issues discussed at the time: "What tone we would adopt, what goals we would pursue, how to go about it, where we set our limits in terms of taking position, because there are limits you can't overstep..." It was at this meeting that the group of participating foundations decided to send the letter first to the Prime Minister's Office and, only subsequently, to the media.

A few days later, on December 8, 2014, a final version of the letter was adopted. The foundations that had participated in the first two working meetings were then invited to share the letter with other foundations that might be interested in co-signing. These other foundations were expected to give an official reply by December 17, the date of the third meeting. On this third meeting, 10 foundations had officialized their support of the letter. Others also confirmed their interest, but had not yet given their official endorsement. A number of discussions were held by the regional boards of directors of Centraide, but they ultimately decided to decline the invitation to sign the public letter.

On January 14, 2015, the participating foundations held their final working meeting, in which they adopted a course of action. Thanks to funding from the Lucie and André Chagnon Foundation, a public relations firm (Casacom) was also hired to help move the project forward. In an interview, the strategy was summed up in the following terms:

"We were requesting a meeting, so we said to ourselves, if they propose to meet, well, we'll see where it leads and what impact we might have, and how we might influence things or guide things along. ... If we received no answer, we had only one strategy; we said to ourselves, if something takes shape, well, that's great, we'll meet, and if we get no response, well, we'll go to the papers. Our timetable was also somewhat determined by the budget for the project..."

As they had agreed, the foundations thus sent the letter they had signed directly to the Prime Minister in the days following their fourth meeting. MPs Hamad (then Minister of Labour, Employment and Social Solidarity), Coiteux (then Minister responsible for Government Administration and Ongoing Program Review, as well as President of the Treasury Board), and Leitão (Minister of Finance) were also to receive a copy of the letter.

A few days later, since the foundations had not received a reply or an acknowledgement of receipt, they decided to go forward with releasing the letter to the public. The open letter was published on March 11, 2015, in the *Idées* section of the newspaper *Le Devoir*, under the title *Les risques de la rigueur budgétaire*:

The risks of budget stringency⁴

We are concerned about rising social inequalities, an issue that is leading our most respected economic organizations to issue calls for vigilance

Collective text* - The signatories are directors of private foundations.

For the first time ever, Quebec foundations are joining their voices in expressing their preoccupations and echoing the concerns of the individuals, families and communities they support. Today, as a number of government programs are being called into question and the tax system is being closely scrutinized, we wonder about the potential impacts of these changes on society.

We are especially concerned about their impact on social inequality, which is growing across the world and prompting calls for vigilance by the most credible economic organizations and, increasingly, by recognized political leaders.

A criterion by which to judge reforms

We wish to contribute constructively to the debate by inviting the government of Quebec to take these concerns into account and to weigh the effects of its reform projects on citizens and communities.

It is clear that public finances must be managed responsibly. It is equally important to make sure public services are effective and achieve their goals, which is why they are periodically reviewed.

We invite the government, in its efforts to responsibly manage public funds, to also make policy choices based on the effects they will have on social inequality. We propose that the government adopt the reduction, or at least non-exacerbation, of inequalities as a criterion for judging the merits of a given reform.

A more egalitarian society: a win-win for all parties

Quebec is the most egalitarian society in North America. This enviable situation is a result of collective choices and constitutes a significant economic and societal asset. As experts from across the world have shown, inequalities are harmful to the economy, society and democracy. Our day-to-day actions on the ground throughout Quebec continue to testify to this fact.

When inequalities rise, a gap grows between citizens. The ties between members of society stretch and break, much like the links in a chain. When this happens, the entire community suffers. Social problems are worsened and pressure on public and community services mounts, resulting in higher costs. In this scenario, everyone loses.

⁴ Collectif des fondations. (2015, March 11). "Les risques de la rigueur budgétaire", *Le Devoir*, Retrieved from <http://www.ledevoir.com/politique/quebec/434025/de-grandes-fondations-privees-inquietes-les-risques-de-la-rigueur-budgetaire> (translation ours)

Countries with higher inequality exhibit higher crimes and lower life expectancy than other countries. Conversely, the most prosperous and economically high-performing countries are among the world's most egalitarian countries.

Over the years, Quebec has adopted a series of measures to diminish inequalities through taxation, education, health services, and proper social services. The idea has been to invest in everyone's potential so that each individual can contribute to the best of their ability. When everyone is able to make a contribution, both the economy and society are better off.

Staying vigilant

It seems the time has come, today, to examine whether the means we have given ourselves are still as effective as they could be. There is, however, one thing that Quebecers do not bring into question: the goal of a society that gives everyone a chance. It is important, in our view, to remember the Quebec-wide consensus illustrated, among other things, by the National Assembly's unanimous adoption in 2002 of the Act to combat poverty and social exclusion.

Yet in spite of the efforts made, inequality levels are higher in Quebec today than they were 30 years ago. We must, consequently, remain vigilant. Reforms will be all the more effective if they contribute to diminishing inequalities. In this event, we are convinced that we will all come out as winners.

The content of this letter was widely circulated by the media and prompted interviews on the subject. The letter essentially reiterated international economic organizations' entreaties to be vigilant about austerity reforms and encouraged the Quebec government to weigh the effects of its public policies on the most vulnerable populations, but also on Quebec society at large.

Media coverage of the March 11, 2015 letter

Newspapers:

Le Devoir, “Austérité au nom de quoi? ”, Josée Boileau, March 11, 2015⁵

Le Devoir, “Cri d’alarme contre la ‘rigueur budgétaire’. Huit fondations privées craignent un accroissement des inégalités sociales”, Marco Fortier, March 11, 2015⁶

Ici Radio-Canada.ca, “La ‘rigueur budgétaire’ inquiète des fondations privées”, Radio-Canada with the Canadian Press, March 11, 2015⁷

La Presse, “Des fondations dénoncent les risques de la rigueur budgétaire”, the Canadian Press, March 11, 2015⁸

Huffington Post Québec, “Des fondations dénoncent la rigueur budgétaire dans une lettre ouverte”, the Canadian Press, March 11, 2015⁹

Métro, le journal, “Des fondations écrivent une lettre contre les risques de la rigueur budgétaire”, Editorial staff, March 11, 2015¹⁰

Grandstittres.com, “Des fondations écrivent une lettre contre les risques de la rigueur budgétaire”, March 11, 2015¹¹

FM93, “Des fondations contre les risques de la rigueur budgétaire”, March 11, 2015¹²

La Presse, “La dette, l’austérité et les inégalités sociales”, Francis Vailles, March 12, 2015¹³

Actualités UQAM, “Un appel à la vigilance”, Claude Gauvreau, March 16, 2015¹⁴

Le Devoir, “L’expérience québécoise, un modèle”, Charles E. Pascal, March 19, 2015¹⁵

⁵ Retrieved from <http://www.ledevoir.com/politique/quebec/434052/austerite-au-nom-de-quoi>

⁶ Retrieved from <http://www.ledevoir.com/politique/quebec/434058/cri-d-alarme-contre-la-rigueur-budgetaire>

⁷ Retrieved from <http://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelles/societe/2015/03/11/001-gouvernement-quebec-rigueur-budgetaire-programmes-sociaux-inegalites-sociales.shtml>

⁸ Retrieved from <http://www.lapresse.ca/actualites/politique/politique-quebecoise/201503/11/01-4851109-des-fondations-denoncent-les-risques-de-la-rigueur-budgetaire.php>

⁹ Retrieved from http://quebec.huffingtonpost.ca/2015/03/11/des-fondations-ecrivent-une-lettre-contre-les-risques-de-la-rigueur-budgetaire_n_6845458.html

¹⁰ Retrieved from <http://journalmetro.com/actualites/national/734683/des-fondations-inquietes-de-la-rigueur-budgetaire/>

¹¹ Retrieved from <http://www.grandstittres.com/nouvelles-generales/des-fondations-ecrivent-une-lettre-contre-les-risques-de-la-rigueur-budgetaire/>

¹² The hyperlink for this news item is no longer available.

¹³ Retrieved from <http://affaires.lapresse.ca/opinions/chroniques/francis-vailles/201503/12/01-4851602-la-dette-lausterite-et-les-inegalites-sociales.php>

¹⁴ Retrieved from <http://www.actualites.uqam.ca/2015/appel-a-la-vigilance>

¹⁵ Retrieved from <http://www.ledevoir.com/societe/actualites-en-societe/434786/l-experience-quebecoise-un-modele>

Radio:

95,1 FM, *C'est pas trop tôt*, Media scan with Jean-Philippe Cipriani, March 11, 2015¹⁶

95,1 FM, *Pas de midi sans info*, Interview with Jacques Bordeleau, March 11, 2015¹⁷

98,5 FM, *Dutrizac l'après-midi*, Interview with Jacques Bordeleau, March 11, 2015¹⁸

89,1 FM, (Bas-Saint-Laurent), *Le monde aujourd'hui*, Interview with Jacques Bordeleau, March 11, 2015¹⁹

Unlike with the first letter to the government, as one interviewee recalled, “There was a response, and then (the Collectif) received an acknowledgment of receipt from the Prime Minister who was forwarding the letter to the Minister of Finance, and I think the minister responsible for the Quebec region, Mr. Hamad.” However, at the time of writing this report, no substantive conversation has taken place between the government and the members of the Collectif.

Following the letter’s publication, the group of foundations decided to organize a half-day of reflection entitled “Les inégalités au Québec, restons vigilants” (inequalities in Quebec, we must remain vigilant) on April 22, 2015 at Montreal’s Cinéma l’Excentris.²⁰ The foundations continually worked with the Institut du Nouveau Monde to facilitate the event’s organization. Over the course of the half-day, a number of experts addressed the thorny issue of measuring social inequalities in relation to the impacts of government reforms. Several foundations also expressed their interest in joining the Collectif in order to pursue this common reflection.

After several review and planning meetings, the Collectif carried out a third public action in January 2016 with the filing of a brief in connection with the Public Consultation Towards a Third Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion.

¹⁶ Retrieved from http://ici.radio-canada.ca/emissions/c_est_pas_trop_tot/2013-2014/archives.asp?date=2015-03-11 (at 6:35 a.m.)

¹⁷ Retrieved from http://ici.radio-canada.ca/emissions/pas_de_midi_sans_info/2014-2015/archives.asp?date=2015-03-11 (at 11:24 a.m.)

¹⁸ Retrieved from <http://www.985fm.ca/lecteur/audio/les-fondations-au-qc-se-mobilisent-et-denoncent-le-263016.mp3>

¹⁹ Retrieved from http://ici.radio-canada.ca/emissions/le_monde_aujourd'hui/2015-2016/archives.asp?date=2015-03-11 (at 5:38 p.m.)

²⁰ To view the event overview document produced by the Institut du Nouveau Monde and the list of attendees, see http://www.fondationbeati.org/Documents/Avril_15_Les_inegalites_au_Q_uébecx_restons_vigilants.pdf

The brief, entitled “Réduire la pauvreté et les inégalités sociales, un enjeu qui nous interpelle,” was signed by some 20 foundations.

Excerpt: “Reducing poverty and social inequalities, an issue that concerns us”²¹

Our brief is a follow-up to the letter that a number of the signatory foundations of this brief addressed to the government of Quebec in March 2015.

...

The core of our message is the need to focus on improving living conditions and prevention by drawing on methods with a proven track record, as well as by properly assessing the impact of administrative choices and public policies on social inequalities and ensuring consistency across governmental actions.”

Stakeholders involved

The following table outlines the stakeholders involved in the Collectif’s actions:

Open letter (March 11, 2015)	- Béati Foundation - Berthiaume-Du-Tremblay Foundation - YMCAs of Quebec Foundation - Dufresne and Gauthier Foundation - Léa-Roback Foundation - Lucie and André Chagnon Foundation - J.W. McConnell Family Foundation - Solstice Foundation - Montreal Women’s Y Foundation
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²¹ See the “Stakeholders involved” section of this document for the list of signatories. (January 29, 2016). *Réduire la pauvreté et les inégalités sociales, un enjeu qui nous interpelle*. Retrieved from <http://berthiaume-du-tremblay.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Memoire-Reduire-la-pauvrete.pdf> (translation ours)

Half-day of reflection (April 22, 2015)	Approximately 100 people attended the event. In addition to the signatory foundations of the open letter, a number of other contributors participated as well, from such backgrounds as: - Unions (AFPC-FTQ, CSN) - Public health - International development (Oxfam) - Academia (including a researcher affiliated with the Léa-Roback Research Center and sitting on the Chagnon Foundation Board of Directors; an emeritus professor from Université de Montréal and former president of the Centre d'étude sur la pauvreté et l'exclusion; and several organizations collaborating with the Service aux collectivités de l'UQAM, including Relais-Femmes) - Philanthropy (Philanthropic Foundations Canada, Mallet Institute, and representatives of other philanthropic organizations such as the Léger Foundation and the Centraides).
Brief (January 26, 2016)	- Centraide Duplessis - Centraide Estrie - Centraide Gatineau-Labelle-Hautes-Laurentides - Centraide du Grand Montréal - Centraide KRTB-Côte-du-Sud - Centraide Lanaudière - Centraide Mauricie - Centraide Outaouais - Centraide Québec Chaudière-Appalaches - Centraide Sud-Ouest du Québec - Béati Foundation - Berthiaume-Du-Tremblay Foundation - YMCAs of Quebec Foundation - Dufresne and Gauthier Foundation - Léa-Roback Foundation - Jules and Paul-Émile Léger Foundation - Lucie and André Chagnon Foundation - Solstice Foundation - Montreal Women's Y Foundation - J.W. McConnell Family Foundation

1. Conditions leading to the emergence of the Collectif

General political context in 2014–2015

The first element that enabled the foundations to form the Collectif was, of course, a political context of multiple governmental austerity budgets, involving major cuts to health, social services and education. The foundations were concerned for the organizations they supported—which were being financially suffocated by the cuts—and were acutely aware of their own financial limitations in the face of ever-increasing needs.

Starting in 2014, the gloomy context of austerity or *rigueur budgétaire*, which had been prevailing in Quebec for some time already, impacted a number of partners of the foundations interviewed. These foundations, feeling that despite their work, “social inequities ... weren’t getting any better,” decided to take a stance in support of the organizations they funded by reminding the state of some of its social prerogatives.

According to one respondent, Quebec society took shape based on a certain “consensus” around the reduction of social inequalities, a fact that the foundations had a duty to remind the government about:

“I don’t want to criticize the government, but I do want to speak up, and I think things were expressed pretty clearly in the letter. The fact is that we are one of the most egalitarian societies in America, and I think that’s nice... It gives us a certain quality of life, and it allows a certain percentage of Quebec’s population to live better. It results in us having what’s probably one of the lowest crime rates in America, all sorts of things come with that...”

In two of the interviews we conducted, the interviewees were very clear on this subject: in their view, even foundations and “businesspeople” who are “perceived mostly as right or centre right-leaning” are aware of the importance of the state’s role. One of the respondents viewed the act of speaking up as playing the role of an “advance scout”:

“We wanted to tell the government, ‘watch what you’re doing—you have a role to play as a state, because here in Quebec, we agree on a certain consensus. We want our society to be as fair as possible, we want the

well-being of our population, we pay more taxes than other provinces ... We take care of our own, and all that.' So I think we have to uphold the idea that the state has a role to play, and that it must play, in the distribution of wealth."

Hence, the foundations' wish to take position was rooted in the perception of a context where the vast majority of stakeholders would be in agreement with them. Indeed, in journalistic circles, communities and certain business sectors, denunciations of budget cuts' impact on social inequalities had been emerging for some time. Accordingly, in participating in the public debate on inequalities—a debate with practically “no opponents”—the foundations anticipated little risk.

Restructuring in the foundation sector

The second element that helped spark the Collectif's emergence had to do with foundations' growing questions about their own role. Most of them have traditionally sought to fund emerging initiatives, with the idea that the state will subsequently institutionalize the initiatives that prove effective and legitimate. But what is the role of foundations in a context where public funding no longer provides this support to organizations? For some foundations, these questions provoked nothing short of an identity crisis: What is their role and their purpose?

For some foundations, driven by a desire to improve their visibility and make themselves more widely known, their restructuring has taken the form of revamping their brand image. However, this brand image improvement goes beyond mere logos and websites, and extends to the fundamental role of foundations. A number of foundations mentioned to us their wish to develop their own public statements or to empower their partners to do so, with a view to occasionally speaking up in public debate. As one respondent put it, “There’s a shift from grantmaker to changemaker. Initially, foundations were mainly a source of grants, but we can increasingly take on a more active role in bringing about change.” This trend was confirmed by another respondent: “Ten years ago you didn’t see any foundations taking position, there’s a reason they (the media) have often said it’s extremely rare—it has virtually never happened!” One interviewee related to us that during its latest strategic planning, her foundation had consulted its funded organizations to collect their point of view:

“Do you find that (the Foundation) should take position?’ We checked this out and the organizations told us that ‘yes we would, because you have the financial autonomy to do so and it would help support us!’ and they added that ‘we know you well, we know you’re not going to take up all the space.’ To put this statement in perspective, we work together a lot, the organizations acknowledge our efforts and we have a bond of trust, we highly respect the organizations—these values are important to us.”

It was out of a wish to unite these milieus that the Béati Foundation decided to take action and initiate the movement: “Should we leave things alone, are we outside that debate or should we jump in at some point and say ‘We have our own two cents to add!’” Given their financial autonomy and their experience working with organizations, foundations feel that they have developed expertise that gives them credibility in public debate:

“As foundations, we work very closely with organizations in each of our activity sectors, and we see first-hand what’s happening on the ground. We can also see how the government might want to subcontract organizations rather than (assume) its state responsibilities. ... At the end of the day, our role is really to keep a watch, and to provide support, because we can speak out freely... We aren’t government-funded.”

Another director concurred:

“The only thing (the foundation) relies on the government for is fiscal policy, but otherwise it has complete independence to at least speak openly about those matters and to try to make them more tangible for ordinary people.”

In the interviews, foundations closer to community or rural milieus more specifically evoked their empathy with discouraged contacts: “I felt a lot of distress in friends, people saying, ‘do I really feel like fighting on?’ We’re already working in precarious conditions, we’re confronted with people who are suffering and dealing with more and more serious problems”; “The whole idea was sort of putting a foot down, saying ‘this is ridiculous, what can we do?’ That’s sort of what we experienced this past fall...” Thus, foundations were concerned by their context in both senses of the word: in witnessing their funded groups’ difficulty and disarray, they came to question their own, traditionally distanced posture in the face of a critical situation.

One foundation director, discussing areas located outside the major urban centres, deplored even his own lack of resources to fund more initiatives in order to match observed needs:

“There’s no more stimulus in outlying regions—areas that definitely have fewer resources, fewer businesses, fewer financially comfortable people who can lend support ... Whether you’re talking about a foundation or ... even myself! I deplore our lack of resources to intervene in outlying regions.”

The context of austerity that served as the backdrop for the foundations’ mobilization was thus perceived as the “straw that broke the camel’s back.” Indeed, there emerged a much broader and more acute question about the role of foundations in Quebec. In a situation where public services and funding were being cut, they felt they had an increasingly important responsibility resting on their shoulders. Several foundations, especially smaller and medium-sized, told us that without government investment, their efforts to combat inequalities would be derisory. Alone, they are “unable to keep up,” as one respondent told us. One interviewee went as far as to say he found himself “trapped” in an unwanted role: “Organizations are so fragile that it’s like the sword of Damocles hanging over their head, it’s not the role you want to play.” He feels as if he has the power of life or death over organizations that are increasingly in need of funding. As a funder, he feels “somewhat isolated in terms of the decisions to be made” in this respect. For two other foundations, the absence of the state funding required to continue innovative initiatives also brought into question the innovation niche they had chosen. Given that the government is virtually no longer supporting the institutionalization of these initiatives, what is the use of funding innovation and creation?

In this respect, the Collectif’s position-taking also represented an opportunity to demonstrate a degree of loyalty to funded community sectors, either in terms of reaffirming solidarity or perhaps improving their bond of trust. One respondent noted that the foundations’ goal, more “realistic” than changing social policies, “was also to show that we were listening to the preoccupations that had been shared with us. Because ... everything that we had heard, yes we could witness what was going on, but for those who had told us, we knew our initiative would also be a demonstration that we were listening to them.” This especially made sense to foundations that wanted to

develop more harmonious relationships with the community milieu, after having met with sometimes intense criticism from this sector. For the Lucie and André Chagnon Foundation, the strongly criticized announcement that public-private partnerships with the Quebec government would not be renewed also marked the transition to a “new stage” for their foundation.

Finally, another element involved in the restructuring of the philanthropic sector was the desire among some foundations to have a networking space for Quebec. As one respondent confided to us, she was “very happy” that this time had come:

“For a long time I had wanted to be able to work together between foundations, but generally foundations work in their own respective sectors, in line with their own missions, and don’t necessarily feel the need to meet with others in order to do what they do.”

Such a network could also more fully take Quebec specificities into account. According to one of the interviewees, the establishment of a provincial entity would additionally provide a way for the sector to interact with government counterparts. In other words, it could become a “focal point for dialogue” between the government and the philanthropic sector. For some foundations, Canadian networks such as Imagine and Philanthropic Foundations Canada, and even American networks, are more strongly inspired by “Anglophone culture” and therefore not well suited to the Quebec context, where the state has greater social prerogatives. At the time of the Collectif’s formation, only a few of the Quebec foundations were consistently taking part in Canadian meetings of foundations. “Our territory is Quebec, so we didn’t necessarily see the value...,” in the words of one respondent. Nevertheless, forming a new group of foundations was not viewed as a form of competition with the Canadian network, but rather as a quest for complementarity: “Without wanting to snub the pleasure of meeting with fellow foundations in English-speaking Canada, there is an element there that’s foreign to our practices and that prevents complete satisfaction.” In any case, in the view of the Collectif foundations, the Philanthropic Foundations Canada network “has a different role, it’s an association of foundations, it relayed (the letter), discussed it, used it as an example of collaboration between foundations,” according to one respondent.

On the subject of “this language-based difficulty that keeps coming up” and the need to “share reflections and then work together on issues,” a previous collaborative experience between several Quebec foundations had already taken shape from 2009 to

2013. According to some of the foundations that took part in this previous initiative, one of the main reasons for its failure was an organizational structure that proved “too much of a burden” in relation to the needs of the members. One interviewee also described the initiative’s scope as “unrealistic.” Even if it did not endure, the initiative did enable ties to be forged between certain players. Moreover, its failure offered up lessons regarding the winning conditions or the obstacles such an initiative involves—lessons that might benefit efforts to mobilize in order to address inequalities.

Given today’s different political context, one respondent explained the existence of an even greater need to come together: “We really felt a desire (on the part of the government) to further disengage and, I would say, to let competition reign even in the community sector, we felt a spontaneous groundswell and a desire to say, hey! Watch out!”

The emergence of a unifying initiative: *modus operandi*

In responding to this disengagement of the state and carrying out a successful second attempt to bring foundations together in Quebec, addressing the government about the inequalitarian consequences of budgetary austerity represented a unifying initiative. This unifying dimension can be explained, first, by the leadership exercised by the foundations that initiated the Collectif project and, second, by the resources available to bolster its media-related actions. Among other things, talk about “the cost of inequalities” across society had intensified in recent years. The writing of the public letter proved both the process that enabled the creation of the Collectif and its outcome.

The interview respondents all mentioned the qualities of the players who had initiated the project. The Béati Foundation, and more specifically its director Jacques Bordeleau, was acknowledged for its role in ensuring the Collectif’s cohesion. Thanks to its average size, Béati was successful in rallying large foundations around the same table without intimidating the smaller ones. Its proximity to funded communities also gave it the legitimacy to talk about the realities reported by actors on the ground. Demonstrating a level of commitment bordering on activism, the director invested a considerable number of hours in setting up the project. The drafting of the first version of the letter by a project manager from the Béati Foundation, Julie Raby, constituted a starting point based on which several foundations then decided whether or not to join. Béati’s assumption of partial responsibility in managing the Collectif, and more specifically its role as

spokesperson in the context of the media release, inspired confidence in the other foundations.

In addition, the Béati Foundation decided to make the strategic choice of getting the Lucie and André Chagnon Foundation on board from the outset of the Collectif project. This helped give the initiative credibility, both in the eyes of the media at the time of the release and earlier on in the eyes of other foundation managers. A number of these foundations pointed out that it was the Lucie and André Chagnon Foundation that decisively convinced them to take part in the Collectif. For one of the foundations, the choice to join came from their habit of working together with this foundation.

Moreover, a previously existing partnership between the Lucie and André Chagnon Foundation and the Institut du Nouveau enabled the latter's involvement in the Collectif from the project's beginnings. The INM has three key resources at its disposal: organizational know-how, a position at the crossroads of the political, community and economic sectors in conjunction with an ambition to connect with the "general public," and finally expertise on the issue of inequalities, given its recent awareness campaign on this topic.²² The consultation services of this intermediary were instrumental in refining the letter and validating its content. The INM was hired to help the foundations effectively word their arguments, to find common ground with each other, and consequently to find the right positioning while avoiding overly accusatory or divisive formulations. The foundations were supported in this process by Michel Venne, the INM's director, whose background is in journalism. One foundation representative shared with us that during meetings, he "came to challenge them a bit, to suggest avenues for them to consider." Given that the institute had already been addressing inequalities for some time, its contribution helped lend credibility to the foundations' message from the inception of the Collectif. The Collectif's statements were now ready to be released.

It is also worth noting that a number of well-known players had been speaking up on the international stage in recent years on the issue of inequality. Among other things, a report on inequalities by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

²² Noël, A. & M. Fahmy (Ed.) (2014). *Miser sur l'égalité. L'argent, le pouvoir, le bien-être et la liberté*, Anjou: Fides. Several contributors to this last book attended or participated in the half-day reflection at the Excentris.

(OECD) was published in May 2014 in the organization's member countries.²³ The findings of this paper show that the rise in inequalities is bound up, among other things, with recent transformations in taxation, and income tax in particular. In almost all the industrialized countries studied, the distributive role of the state had declined. Moreover, the book *Le Capital au XXI^e siècle* (subsequently translated as *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*) by Thomas Piketty, published in 2013, had been featured in a number of public and televised debates.²⁴ In his book, Piketty sets out to demonstrate how inequalities have grown and the affluent have become wealthier. In his view, social inequalities should be a prime focus of economic analysis. The previous year, a book by Economics Nobel Prize winner Joseph Stiglitz had underscored the economic toll of growing inequalities on social ties and security.²⁵ Hence, fundamentally speaking, the issue of social inequalities had already rallied many credible players. It furthermore extended across the various focus areas of the foundations.

In terms of the form to adopt, the foundations all seemed to agree that their stance should not be a challenge to the state or the government, but rather a statement of concern regarding austerity measures and their impact on social inequalities: "Our aim is not to overthrow (policies) ... that's impossible, we know full well, but just ... to introduce doubts into the process ...". Thus, the tone that was chosen, more benevolent warning than criticism, contributed to the social acceptability of the foundations' discourse. According to one respondent, this factor was key to his decision to collaborate with the collective: "As long as we're staying neutral and non-political rather than pressuring, it's alright." Sending the letter to the government before releasing it to the media likewise illustrated this caution and the Collectif's choice of a non-confrontational strategy.

Finally, the organizational mode proposed by the initiating foundations also seemed to mesh with the usual working methods found in this sector. Email exchanges were used and the meetings were rather brief (approximately two hours). The signing of the public statement required a minimum of time from busy administrations. For this same reason, an internal division of labour, adapted to the schedules of the different organizations,

²³ OECD. 2014. *Focus on Top Incomes and Taxation in OECD Countries: Was the crisis a game changer?* Retrieved from <http://www.oecd.org/els/soc/OECD2014-FocusOnTopIncomes.pdf>

²⁴ Piketty, T. 2013. *Le Capital au XXI^e siècle*. Paris: Le Seuil.

²⁵ Cf. Stiglitz J. (2012). *The Price of Inequality: How Today's Divided Society Endangers Our Future*, W.W. Norton & Company.

seemed to work out smoothly. The Béati Foundation was responsible for validating the Collectif's arguments and its approach with community groups, whereas two external resources refined the public discourse and the media strategy.

2. What does the future hold for the coalition?

Several questions put to our interviewees dealt with the future of this Quebec coalition of foundations and the potential participation of the interviewed foundations. Their answers allowed us to identify three points of tension that help shed light on potential issues and eventualities going forward.

The issue of inequalities... between foundations

Since the foundation sector is itself heterogeneous, it is not surprising to note the diverse composition of the foundations that make up the Collectif, with significant differences in terms of financial resources, territory (local-provincial-Canadian), and relationships to the state (partnership/distance).

Predictably enough, the most striking disparity lies in the foundations' financial capacity. Given that it includes two of Canada's ten largest foundations²⁶ and other much smaller ones, ironically, the Collectif may face a challenge in terms of the management of its members' own financial inequalities. This gap in size often goes hand-in-hand with different organizational cultures, ranging from a more entrepreneurial culture to what one interviewee described to us as "activist at heart"; "It's two different worlds." Some of the member foundations have few or no salaried permanent positions, which can sometimes represent a problem for follow-ups and participation in meetings. This issue of disparity was reported in our interviews, for example by the following respondent, telling us about his position in the group: "Even if we share the same goals and go to the same meetings, we definitely don't have the same role as a big foundation. For example Chagnon, we always meet in their rooms, and so on." Another interviewee, lacking the resources to give his words greater weight, felt that he had less influence to propose alternative paths, such as a less costly solution in the context of organizing the April event:

²⁶ According to the value of their assets in 2012. (cf. Philanthropic Foundations Canada (2013). *Assets & Giving Trends of Canada's Grantmaking Foundations* Retrieved from: <http://pfc.ca/wp-content/uploads/trends-canada-grantmaking-foundations-sept2014-en.pdf>

“We thought it was really expensive, but it’s just that the organizers were professionals, and there were multiple people organizing the event. When we organize symposia, it’s a lot cheaper (laughing) than the INM, but they’re professionals. Their services don’t come cheap.”

To take this disparity into account, the Collectif adopted a degree of flexibility in contributions to expenses (for example, not all foundations contributed financially to the organization of the event), although this could become a source of tension in the longer term. Moreover, in spite of the advantages of a less institutionalized coalition, the lack of a more formal structure may also carry long-term risks. In addition to the fact that maintaining this structure requires particular effort of the foundations (sometimes on a voluntary basis), even a single unexpected event (e.g., the withdrawal of the most involved individuals, a change in strategic direction for one of the initiating foundations, etc.) could jeopardize the entire coalition.

Along similar lines, the disparity of resources between the foundations risks significantly influencing their commitment to the coalition’s continuation. Small and medium-sized foundations, for example, may experience the “cost” of their participation more directly on the rest of their activities, and their members (employees or other) may have less time to devote to the project. On this subject, two respondents told us about questions that had arisen among their boards of directors: What are the potential and measurable impacts of this commitment? Can a collective effort without any support really be successful? At a time when some foundations would like to fund a larger number of projects in order to foster more initiatives (or to keep others going), questions arise about the “profitability” of invested resources: Can these foundations afford to invest in the Collectif?

In a different vein, the foundations’ different respective focus areas also influence their interest in participating in a provincial coalition. Some foundations, for instance, have a different scope of intervention (restricted to a particular provincial region or to international action) whereas another is geared toward women only. This aspect also applies to foundations operating in the rest of Canada. Will this coalition benefit them? For which projects? According to one of these foundations, this aspect constituted a barrier to playing a leading role in the Quebec-based Collectif. On the other hand, however, this same foundation also perceived that it could “possibly bridge gaps with other foundations” or “extend certain themes across borders.”

The fear of “talking politics”

The second point of tension revealed during our interviews had to do with the Collectif's future operating modes. This point brings up the constraints of charitable organization status recognized by the Canada Revenue Agency, which places a 10% limit on politically oriented expenses, and the heated debate in recent years over the legal and fiscal interpretation of this limit.

In our interviews, the vast majority of the foundations mentioned their fear that public interventions would lose their “special” status if they were to become recurrent. They feared that, by expressing their views more frequently in the media, they might lose the credibility that was accorded to them on the occasion of the first public letter. One of the interviewees called for “strategy”; “Given that foundations rarely communicate publicly, it was a very special event, it was notable.” This concern also ties in with the wish to maintain a certain distance from public debates. Roughly half of the foundations mentioned to us their desire not to be connected to an activist movement or lobby “whose rhetoric they would prefer not to be associated with.” In other words, the idea was to “find a way to communicate, but not on a continued basis, because if we (the Collectif) communicate the same way as a lobby we will be put in the same (basket)...”²⁷

In addition to the Collectif, the foundations also have various partners to whom they feel accountable or with whom they seek to secure a bond of trust. In other words, their autonomy is defined according to their various connections within society. Among other things, some of the interviewees revisited the matter of partnerships between the Lucie and André Chagnon Foundation and the government. Other foundations, even if lacking such formal partnerships, also seek to preserve their privileged ties with the state. As one respondent summarized,

“But of course it is a challenge in terms of how to go about it, and you know foundations enjoy a good relationship, I would say, with the government... And at the same time no one can deny the need to restore public finances and better manage our collective assets, so... It's a tango I would say (laughs), a sort of tango or dance, you have to learn to dance, because the

²⁷ The foundations' fear of being likened to a lobby also derives from the context of Bill 56 on lobbying activities, which is currently being discussed by the provincial government.

dance is something you make up as you go, as the measures are implemented.”

The stances of the group members varied widely regarding relationships with the state, from the wish to “refrain from criticizing” to a more demanding stance on the role that a strong welfare state should play.

Finally, the foundations’ fear of “talking politics” also stems from the control measures of the Canada Revenue Agency: “the threat is always in terms of taxation, that we’ll be taxed more severely...” Indeed, despite the sense of being able to speak freely expressed by several respondents at the beginning of their interviews, some foundations concluded by mentioning their concerns about the repercussions of public position-taking and the legal framework governing their organizations. Even if, “for now,” according to one responded, “there’s nothing serious in the sense that there’s nothing concrete that would have an impact in that respect,” some foundations feel wary of this issue. They fear that control will be made more stringent, either spontaneously or in the definition of their activities (charity versus political).

The relationship between philanthropy and inequalities

The final point of tension related to the Collectif’s mobilization concerns the position of the foundations, which would like to formulate a solution to inequalities, but which, structurally speaking, are themselves a product of inequalities of capital. The context of heightening social inequalities brings back into the public debate the complex, delicate issue of wealth creation and distribution.

Foundations appear to be the bearers of an inherent contradiction in their discourse, given that they are at once a result and a cause of wealth inequality insofar as capital has accumulated since the 1980s in correlation with a decline in states’ redistributive capacity, especially from a taxation standpoint.²⁸ It is not surprising, then, that several of the individuals we interviewed proved rather cautious about publicly voicing their views on this issue on a recurring basis.²⁹ Given their habit of working on the sidelines of

²⁸ Piketty, T. 2013, op. cit.

²⁹ This is in fact a question that radio show host Benoît Dutrizac put to the Collectif’s spokesperson Jacques Bordeleau following the March 11, 2015 media release: “People

public debate, foundations wish to maintain some control over the image they project in public space.

Along similar lines, even if we were told on several occasions that foundations do not wish to replace the state, for some foundations, there continues to be some vagueness surrounding their legitimacy in voicing their views publicly regarding inequalities. Indeed, the wide majority of the foundations spoke to us of the contradictions and questions with which the responsibility of speaking up in public is fraught: Should foundations' role, instead, be to encourage or empower the groups they fund to voice their own views?

One member of a foundation more reluctant to speak in public described his position as follows:

"We really encourage our (groups) to change things, at the government level, and to take a stance. But, for now anyway, we're not a foundation that stands up to be heard in the public square. And I don't think that's the direction we want to go in, although that's a matter worth reflecting on..."

A few foundations also mentioned to us that speaking out in public also carries the risk of being answered publicly. In one of the interviews, the matter of tax avoidance through the creation of foundations arose: How can foundations politically respond to arguments on this topic? Conversely, however, according to another respondent, taxes were no longer enough to meet social needs anyhow, and in her view, paying one's taxes comes down to "paying off deficits... But you don't get any leverage." Keeping one's money within a foundation allows for "stretching your dollar further than if it went to the government."

From this standpoint, one might have thought that foundations with less capital, or those relying more heavily on fundraising, would feel more credible issuing warnings about rising inequalities. But as our interviews uncovered, some of these foundations feel that their modest infrastructure gives them a limited role. Others fear exposing themselves in terms of displeasing public opinion, and hence a large swath of their potential donor

question how foundations exist, why they exist, and how they manage money that maybe should have gone to taxes or taxes to society? ... Surely, the best redistribution of wealth is to pay your taxes... Which foundations don't!" The host went on to cite the creation of the Lucie and André Chagnon Foundation, following the sale of Videotron, as an example of tax avoidance. This criticism has continued to resurface since the beginning of the 20th century and the institutionalization of a tax privilege for foundations.

pool. Most of our respondents thus hypothesized that the Centraides' reluctance to take part in the public release primarily stemmed from concerns regarding their public image. Indeed, the Centraides' declining to sign the public letter was disappointing to many of the foundations. Considering the Centraides' credibility among the public, a number of foundations felt that they brought symbolic legitimacy to the debate on inequalities. With this refusal, "the Collectif lost its diversity." This situation nevertheless also raised certain questions within the Collectif: What is more important, between rallying the largest possible number of stakeholders and putting forward a stronger and (above all) more public discourse on inequalities? Even if the foundations went forward with the public letter, this question still seems to be left hanging.

3. Assessment of the Collectif

To conclude, given the absence of a government response to the Collectif's appeal, one might at first glance assess the Collectif project to be a failure. However, this conclusion becomes more nuanced when taking into account the impact of its highly favourable response in the media, community organizations, and even players that are usually rather critical of foundations. The Collectif's arguments run counter to the usual criticism of foundations as being an agent of social policy privatization. Above all, the Collectif's greatest effect has been to spark a novel dialogue among the foundations of Quebec. Others have since joined the Collectif in order to continue reflections on their role in public debate, on their relationship with the state, and on social inequalities. This situation is leading to a revision of their role, above and beyond private grantmakers, by raising questions about the impact of their collective voice in social debate.

The government response

Most of the foundations had little hope of bringing about a change of practices within the government in connection with the issue of social inequalities. Based on the interview statements of the project's initiators, the goal was instead to "introduce doubts."

In the view of one respondent, the presence of a liberal government was another factor that made her "sceptical" about political changes. During our interviews in the summer of 2015, aside from an acknowledgment of receipt, it emerged that the government issued no response to the Collectif. "It didn't budge. The government didn't even bother to meet with any representative of the Collectif foundations," according to a respondent

asked about the government's reply. For some stakeholders, the absence of a swift response on the part of the provincial government constituted the project's main failure. "Unfortunately, there was no follow-up, we weren't able to forge ties and try to work together with them to see how we can address our concerns and bring them to light in order to come up with new budget measures," said one of the interviewed representatives, disappointed.

Reception in public space

The public letter, for its part, met with a much livelier response. On this point, globally speaking, the foundations rated the Collectif project very positively.

The extent of the media coverage was "even greater than anyone expected, by far," thus giving the Collectif credibility and confirming the importance of its public statement of position. Community groups, in particular, expressed to the foundations how warmly they welcomed this action: "People were happy. In terms of communications, they were very active in spreading information on Twitter. ... I received a lot of congratulations." Several of the foundations stated that they received words of thanks and encouragement from the groups they funded: "From groups, group networks, or closely involved individuals, it was very spontaneous, in the morning, after the letter went out, I remember, feedback started coming in at quarter to seven already. Quick messages like, 'hey thank you, wow, that's fantastic!'" According to the interviewed foundations, the public letter prompted a kind of relief in the funded organizations. Given that these groups "rely on state funding," several foundations told us about the "fear of affecting their financial capacity" by taking position. Accordingly, the foundations related that the organizations felt "upheld," stood by: "They find that it adds another voice. It's one more voice speaking up for greater social justice"; "Our organizations were telling us, 'it's supportive, it substantiates what we're saying.'" In turn, these thanks fuelled a sense of pride among the Collectif's members and work teams: "We're proud to have taken part in the Collectif"; "It's like, wow! We really supported them in their efforts."

However, evaluations of the half-day reflection on April 22 were somewhat more mixed. Some of the foundations would have liked more extensive commitment and concrete actions; they would have preferred a gathering "between foundation directors" in order to move more quickly and make certain decisions for the future. These foundations were prepared to go further in terms of their investment of energy. Conversely, however,

some participants stated that they appreciated the attendance of a few stakeholders from different milieus in order to “take the pulse on the ground” regarding the way forward. Some of the foundations were unclear about the potential impact of such an event. A few months after the event, one interviewee explained to us,

“I’m not sure yet, I don’t yet see how it can be helpful to us going forward. I was still pleased, pleased with the discussions ... It was informative. I don’t know if it’ll change anything. ... I’m not yet sure about the impact of a day like that ... I’m less and less convinced that spaces for sharing information are really useful, with all the new forms of information sharing that are available today.”

The Collectif’s approach

Our interviews suggested, as an underlying theme, that the Collectif’s greatest success lay in the ties that were forged between foundations.

Even before receiving an answer from the government, one respondent took stock as follows: “What we’re really happy about is the Collectif itself. That foundations are getting together, putting their heads together, and deciding to take joint action. It’s fantastic in terms of cohesion and consistency across our efforts.” Another respondent also pointed out the considerable work that it required: “Getting to know each other better is already a way of coming together.”

Several foundations mentioned to us the project’s internal opportunity of opening the way for discussion between colleagues. One interviewee summarized discussions that took place in a foundation with a larger-than-average team as:

“There really was ... each time a very good conversation on the matter at hand and the essentials—on what we’re doing. ... those kinds of moments are an interesting opportunity, they’re rare because we don’t do that often, holding a discussion on the heart of the matter and what it’s all about, our reason for being, and that’s interesting.”

For the vast majority of the foundations, the Collectif allowed them to discuss and to reflect on social inequality issues, a topic not often addressed in the everyday work of many foundations’ teams. As one respondent, almost embarrassed, noted, “It’s kind of odd to admit, but those kinds of conversations rarely come up, really getting into the

heart of the matter.” Even in cases where internal conversations were more tense, the interview respondents nevertheless evaluated them positively:

“In each foundation, it was even, in some cases... I wouldn’t say divisions, but there were heated discussions about whether or not to go forward. And that’s excellent! That’s what we want, we want those kinds of discussions, and we definitely had some ‘alright, let’s go’ moments!”

Another element the interviewees appreciated was the occasion for foundations to come together, develop a new form of collaboration, and position themselves with respect to other foundations. In the context of our interviews, nearly all the foundations emphasized the quality of the discussions that took place. A respondent from a foundation known for its higher level of involvement in the project answered in the following terms:

“I realized there were a lot of foundations, there’s a lot of money in foundations in Quebec, and they’re telling the government that ‘your approaches aren’t working! You have to look at poverty, at inequalities.’ I think it’s an excellent initiative.”

This encouragement to come together also led one interviewee to reflect on consistency between foundations’ discourse and ways of doing things:

“It’s often said that we tend to work in silos. Even foundations, us too. We often ask our (funded organizations) to work together collaboratively, because we can clearly see that there’s work to be done, that the organizations really complement one another. And sometimes they aren’t in touch. There’s often a spirit of competition, but in our case, we have everything to gain from getting to know each other better and complementing each other, seeing where we overlap, how we can complement others ... I think it’s good, a group that could evolve over time.”

In light of this positive experience and the rewarding feedback of the funded organizations, several foundations are prepared to keep working in this direction, which seems to be in alignment with the wish to restructure their role as philanthropic actors. A desire for greater autonomy was also noted by a few foundations that wanted to distance themselves from the discourse on social inequalities put forward by the Institut

du Nouveau Monde, which had worked with them up until then, and “perhaps taken up a bit too much space” according to certain individuals. Some foundations would prefer to organize their own events independently, or would even consider pursuing different subjects for public campaigns. One foundation, for example, mentioned to us the subject of governing frameworks for charities’ political activities. Another foundation highlighted environmental protection as the potential focus of a future public statement. Nevertheless, it remains difficult to assess whether this determination will endure, after the current political context has passed and the initial enthusiasm has waned.

To conclude, in the words of one respondent, the Collectif brought “visibility” to its member foundations as social actors on the public scene. There can be no doubt that creating a group of foundations has spurred many stakeholders to reflect on their role and their positioning with respect to the state. This ongoing reflection has been one of the main themes to emerge from our interviews with a number of respondents. Such reflection will have, at least in part, responded to the existential “crisis” that seemed to preoccupy many foundations at the time the Collectif was created. Indeed, over and beyond its immediate message, the founding hallmark of the Collectif lay in the will to create a new entity and to voice a common position.