

Abstract for review

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The professionalization of philanthropy – merely a kind of rationalization or something different?

Reflecting theoretical aspects on professions and philanthropy in modern societies

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Abstract:

Organizations in modern societies are increasingly obliged to provide information on transparency, accountability or efficiency, that's why professionalization has become a key term among NPOs and in the accompanying sector research (e.g. Langer & Schröer 2011, Hwang & Powell 2009). Within these transformation processes an economic rationale seems to be prevalent, as shown by the import of business models and practices from the for-profit sector, such a strategic planning, program evaluation, the focus on efficiency and impact or public relations (Hwang & Powell 2009: 269 ff.). However, there is an inherent conflict between basic orientations in the NPOs: the currently predominant economic rationale vs. the value driven rationale (Vahlpahl 2011: 483). When transferring these processes to the macro-level and with regard to the changing face of philanthropy and alternative forms of organizing [professionalism can be considered as such, according to Freidson (2001)], research on philanthropy should reflect the immanent meanings and implications of professionalization. Drawing on the professionalization model presented by Wilensky (1964), Parsons' structural-functional approach (1964) and a knowledge-sociological update (Pfadenhauer 2003), the paper aims at identifying and theoretically constructing philanthropy as a profession with an original and distinctive contribution to modern societies, not only in terms of economic, but especially in terms of value-based input.

Understanding philanthropy and its practices as a profession helps to explain the current processes of professionalization; the theoretical perspective emphasizes the unique challenges of philanthropy in modern societies and its comparative advantages likewise, as it encompasses not only economic, but also normative questions for the common good.

Most important references:

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