

Abstract for review

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Promoting Philanthropy?:

Mapping an Institutional Field in Expansion

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Abstract:

This paper offers to explore the emergence of a new type of philanthropic actors—called here “philanthropy promoting organizations” (PPO’s)— in contemporary global context. Relatively to the rich growth of international research on various aspects of philanthropy, little attention has been paid to the multiplication of actors and organizational formations engaged in promoting philanthropic giving as such, as well as often facilitating the process of giving or even engaging in some form of active mediation between donors and recipients.

I shall report on initial progress, if also issues and dilemmas, in developing as comprehensive a data basis as possible of this kind of organizations world wide, establishing their number, geographic distribution, date of founding, diverse institutional features as well as discursive mission definition and modes of operation. Analytically, this also entails reaching for a working definition of such organizations, which would help situate them in the field of philanthropy and philanthropy-related organizational formations at large. The idea is to test the extent to which the promotion of philanthropy constitutes a growing and distinct category of philanthropic action that may intersect, but does not overlap with hitherto better known types of philanthropic practice and institutions (such as fund-raising, foundations, professional associations etc.).

Methodologically, the paper will be based on a preliminary, qualitative survey of texts available on the official internet sites of a sample of 60 relevant organizations. Special attention will be given to the identification of and possible parameters of comparison between diverse types of PPOs, such as nonprofit vs. commercial; operative on an international scope vs. targeting local audiences only; taking the shape of formal organizations vs more informal networks or virtual web projects; and most importantly here, aiming to promote giving in the public at large vs. among the very wealthy specifically.

While mainly concerned with issues of analytical and typological distinctions, the argument will also suggest their implications for a systematic comparative and contextualizing exploration of the organizational and discursive formations accompanying the promotion and justification of philanthropic giving in general, and elite, high net worth philanthropy in particular, in contemporary settings.

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