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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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1. Abstract:

2. Introduction

“*Professions profess*.
They profess to know better than others the nature of certain matters, and to know better than their clients what ails them or their affairs” (Hughes, 1963).

When the debate comes up to the sociology of professions, many approaches, convictions and contradictions overlap in their way of dealing with the topic. Be it the basic examination of an appropriate definition, the analytical embedding of the profession (-s) within the academic discussion in the sociology of work [or further sociological theories] or questions concerning the status of professions and their transformations in modern societies: structural functionalism, action theory, system theory or knowledge sociology offer different ways of understanding. Additionally, the multiple forms of the conceptual field [“profession”, “professional”, “professionalism” or “professionalization”] indicate the possibility of talking at cross purposes and refer to various ´aggregate conditions´ of the phenomenon. Finally, the shimmering and manifold debate additionally intersects with our everyday understanding of “professional” as the opposite of amateurish (see Pfadenhauer 2003, 12).

In recent years, research on philanthropy has also come across the professionalization topic, and a lot of studies and contributions have examined the professional transformation in the sector, mainly with regard to the meso-level of non-profit organizations. For Hwang and Powell (2009), professionalism is mainly expressed by a “rationalization of charity” (ibid.) and encompasses both the use of new methods and tools taken over from the economy [such as strategic planning, evaluation, financial audits] and an increasing level of education among board members and employees. The volume of Langer and Schröer (2011) assembles contributions to various aspects of professionalization in management, governance and leadership in and of non-profit organizations. Besides of the academic discourse, a lot of practitioners call for a professionalization in the field of philanthropy, charity or foundations (see among others Schambra, 2003; Burgard, Naeve, 2015). However, no systematic appraisal of sociological theories of professions to the field of philanthropy has been conducted so far. With this paper, it is intended to deduce some hypotheses and points of reference for further research.[1]

In the mentioned volume of Langer and Schröer, one article draws attention to a misleading understanding of professionalism and cautions against too much managerialism in non-profit organizations as this could lead to mission drift, reduced voluntary work and an impairment of community building (Meyer and Leitner, 2011). The contribution joins a number of critical articles that deal with the transformation of non-profit organizations, particularly from the perspective of economization (see among others Schimank and Volkmann 2008; Eikenberry and Kluver 2004). Focusing on the question of the professionalization of foundation management, Vahlpahl asks ambiguously whether this means more than hiring someone with a degree (Vahlpahl, 2011).

The paper tries to shed light on the professionalization debate and to establish links to research on philanthropy: it aims at identifying and critically discussing philanthropy as a possible profession with an original and distinctive contribution to modern societies, not only in terms of economic, but especially in terms of value-based input. Before answering the question of the resulting consequences, the question rises what constitutes a profession? Does the process of professionalization automatically lead to the status of a profession? And what comparative advantages does professionalism imply for occupations?

With regard to ENROP´s 2017 conference title on 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 for detailed discussion.

3. Theoretical approaches to the professions and its conceptional field

In history of science, especially in sociology, there is a long and eventful tradition in discussing the status, function and contribution of professions to society. In the course of the functional differentiation of modern societies, professions have been made the object of systematic research. As synoptic overview – making no claim to be exhaustive - the following chapter presents several theories and approaches on professions in a chronological way in order to elaborate indicators and hypotheses for discussing philanthropy and especially foundations in current society.

3.1 Respectable gentlemen with self-offering gesture – professions in the beginning of the 20th century

First and foremost, one should recognize the differences in the debates on professions and “free occupations” between the Anglo-American and the Continental European approach; it depends on the perspective on their position and relationship towards the state. As for example in Germany, “free occupations” had been considered only vaguely and with state supervision, professions in the Anglo-American context had been seen as liberal positions with a high level of autonomy and self-governance (Kairat, 1969, 14). Even though this dichotomy has weakened during the 100 years of scientific debate, it should be mentioned before chronologically presenting central approaches on the professions.

Physicians and lawyers form the core professions on which the first studies had been conducted on in the 1920s. When Marshall published his overview article on the history of professions in 1939, he was also dating back to ancient times and chose these two as representatives for the ideal types of analysis, as the social status of medicine and law had and still does encompass a lot of characteristics that are valid until today: conceived as a selected body of superior occupations, professions need an association that guarantees technical efficiency and tests their members´ ability before be omitted to practice; the association is guided by a self-imposed code of ethics; and finally the profession is allowed to fight for its monopoly in the respective area, which were medicine, law and architecture (Marshall 1939, 325 ff.). In addition, professions are considered “respectable,

[1] As this paper is part of my ongoing dissertation project, there might remain some shortcomings at this early stage of work.

because they do not strive for money, but they can only remain respectable if they succeed, in spite of this pecuniary indifference, in making quite a lot of money, enough for the needs of a gentleman life" (Marshall 1939, 326). This omission may irritate, but must be seen in its historical circumstances and the respective point of view when coming from the organizational to the individual level: in the interaction between professionals and clients. Marshall states first, that the professional service is seen as not standardized, that's why the clients must show themselves submissive to authority. The second characteristic in this relationship is trust: clients must show themselves trusting, the professionals trustworthy. So the gentlemen life enables the professionals to guarantee the prerequisites for the mutual interactions with their clients.

In 1939 too, Parsons published his first paper on professions. With a systematic regard to his history of theory, Parsons had published his first major book on the structure of social action in 1937 in which he introduces his *voluntaristic action theory* with its generalized formula on *unit acts* as the result of a theoretically deduced convergence between Weber´s *action theory* and Durkheim´s macro theory on *faits sociaux.* (see for detailed exemplification Schluchter 2015, 331 ff.). Parsons´s theoretical advancement from the structure of social action as first part to the structural-functional analysis of societies as second part of his oeuvre had taken place as a result of an intensive debate on professions. He took into account the question how modern societies manage to link selfish and altruistic purposes in their occupation structure. "It is a question on the exceptional position of professions, e.g. physicians and lawyers, in general: a whole string of so-called free academic occupations. Without doubt, they are an integral part of modern occupational structure and programed on performance and success" (Schluchter 2015, 379). So in his article "The professions and social structure" (Parsons 1939; poorly, but comprehensibly translated in German with "Die akademischen Berufe und die Sozialstruktur") Parsons highlights the unique position and importance of professions by calling them a unique feature of modern civilization. He positions professions as counterpart to the prevailing characteristic of modern societies, capitalism (in analogy to Weber): "The professions appear not only as empirically somewhat different from business, but the two fields would seem to exemplify the most radical cleavage conceivable in the field of human behavior" (Parsons, 1939, 458). The characteristics Parsons elaborates are in a way similar towards his predecessors:

1. With the rise of science, rationality became a central element of modern societies. Professions gain their exceptional position as they are scientifically based and oppose towards traditionalism and its normative authority. So the action and decisions taken by professionals are considered as efficient and rational.
2. The second general pattern of profession lies in their technical competence. Similar to the first pattern, professional actions gain authority by this feature.
3. As third, most important and decisive element Parsons identifies the universalistic action of professionals: Whereas in most social relationships "It becomes a matter of what A means to B as a particular person[…] the relevant questions (of professions) do not relate to who the patient is but to what is the matter with him" (Parsons 1939, 462).

By identifying universalism as lasting principle for modern societies, Parsons was able to establish his scheme of pattern variables that make up the basal level of coordination of actors in their various combinations (see Schluchter 2015, 381). In his structural-functional perspective Parsons had then been able to theoretically construct professions as trustees for central values of society. In his late work he also included university lecturers and engineers and characterizes them as professional complex that bridges the spheres of functionally differentiated societies (Parsons, 1978).

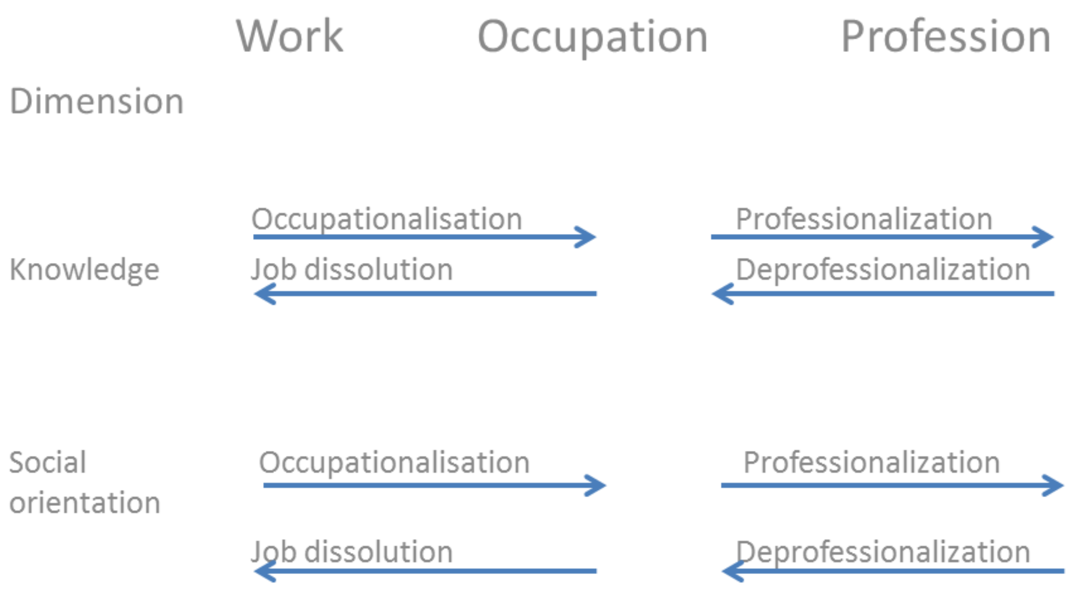
3.2 The debate on professions in the 2nd half of the century –shift of paradigms, advancement and revisions

One can consider the1950s and 1960s as flowering period in the discussion on professions. In his seminal article in 1963, Hughes states that "professions are more numerous than ever before" (Hughes 1963, 655). He also introduces an actualized approach, away from defining and embedding professions in a grand theory like Parsons towards a dynamic progress of other occupations heading for becoming a profession. Drawing on an interactionistic model, he states that “in my own studies I passed from the false question ´Is this occupation a profession?´ to the more fundamental one ´what are the circumstances in which people in an occupation attempt to turn it into a profession and themselves into professional people?`” (Hughes 1963, quoted in Pfadenhauer, Sander, 2010, 367). So the professionalization debate had been opened and the theoretic paradigm shifted from structural-functional towards the above mentioned interactional approach with its central categories of “licence” and “mandate”. They “are attributed towards the professionals due to their role-specific, exclusive expertise, in which the professional is inaugurated as novice and which is withhold from laymen with the (paternalistic) justification that only in this way it can have its problem-solving impact” (Pfadenhauer , Sander 2010, 369). Hughes presents the various efforts and obstacles, e.g. of social workers or the YMCA in their strive for being recognized as profession. The author also identifies and extrapolates several indicators and “main themes of professionalization. Detachment is one of them; and in that sense of having in a particular case no personal interest such as would influence one´s action or advice, while being deeply interested in all cases of the kind” (Hughes, 1963, 660). Furthermore, he returns on already identified necessary prerequisites such as systematic knowledge affiliated with a prominent role of universities and academic degrees, an universal perspective and the not negligible aspect of financial subsistence, as “many of the would-be professions cannot offer enough future income and prestige to get people early and keep them long in school” (Hughes, 1963, 662). Nevertheless, Hughes concludes with the vision of an increasing need for professionals in modern society and focused on the globalization of knowledge and institutions for professional exchange.

Just a year after, Harold Wilensky answered Hughes in the American Journal of Sociology by questioning the professionalization of everyone. He curbs the impetus of Hughes and states that “a popular generalization is that occupations are becoming ´professionalized.” (Wilensky 1964, 137). He takes established and recognized professions as a point of reference and named two distinct criteria for their constitution and the public image “(1) a technical feature - based on systematic knowledge or doctrine acquired only through long prescribed training and (2) the professional man adheres to a set of professional norms” (ibid, 138). If “classical” occupations decide to professionalize themselves and “to separate the competent from the incompetent [.], (T)this involves further definition of essential professional tasks, the development of internal conflict among practitioners of varying background, and some competition with outsiders who do similar work” (ibid, 144). According to Wilensky, a first step on the professionalization track is to establish “a self-conscious definition of the core tasks” (ibid.) which draws a distinction and leads to social disclosure and a stratification of work. Second, it needs established and standardized education content and courses with access control. The third and forth step deal with the external relations, on the one hand with neighbor occupations and for positive campaigning with the political agitation and “the support of law for the protection of the job territory and its sustaining code of ethics” (ibid, 145). In conclusion, Wilensky expressed his critical views on the hypothesis that every occupation would undergo this elaborate process of transition. Barriers may derive from the staff, the quality of the occupation or other delimitation and positioning problems on the organizational level.

In the German context, the discipline of the sociology of work had been prevalent during the 1960s and 1970s. However, the topic of professions and professionalization were discussed to a much lower extent than in the US. When reviewing two seminal contributions to occupations in transition, Hartmann (1969) referred to Hughes´s idea of gradual differentiation and established a triad of “work – occupation – profession” by critically discussing Hesse´s approach of definition. Whereas Hesse stated that “professionalization shall mean every process that leads to the development of an occupation” (Hartmann 1968, 194), Hartmann voted for campaigning for the neglected power aspects in this technical view and claimed that there are several gradual steps in the evolution of different work areas and that society had always applied, whether consciously or not, different valuation standards for these areas. At the core of his contribution is a flow chart that operates with precise benchmarks and outlined various processes of professionalization and deprofessionalization with regard to their specific societal orientation and the knowledge involved.

Figure 1: Hartmann´s flow chart with precise fix points (1968, 204)



In his revised professionalization theory, German sociologist Ulrich Oevermann claims that “societies need professionalized activities that can´t be controlled by the state or the market appropriately” (Pfadenhauer , Sander 2010, 364). Interestingly here, Oevermann refers to Marshall´s idea of professions as a kind of third sector. Also with the attribution of professions as something of a third quality, Eliot Freidson published his work on “Professionalism. The third logic” in 2001. According to Freidson, the third logic exists as ideal type of organizing and labor division next to the bureaucratic logic of the state and the competition logic of the market [this approach resembles to Parsons´s convergence hypotheses of Max Weber and Emile Durkheim when writing “The structure of social action” in 1939; there is also pop-up heuristic mental association to the Nonprofit or Third Sector]. “Professionalism may be said to exist when an organized occupation gains the power to determine who is qualified to perform a defined set of tasks, to prevent all others from performing that work, and to control the criteria by which to evaluate performance. In the case of professionalism, neither individual buyers of labor in the market nor the managers of bureaucratic firms have the right to themselves choose workers to perform particular tasks or evaluate their work except within the limits specified by the occupation” (Freidson 2001, 12). The author systematically elaborates core elements of the historic individual of this ideal type in constant alignment with the other two spheres of market and bureaucracy. Each chapter presents a chart that positions professions with their special features and qualities in relationship towards market and bureaucracy. With regard to knowledge, “the ideal-typical position of professionalism is founded on the official belief that the knowledge and skill of a particular specialization requires a foundation in abstract concepts and formal learning and necessitates the exercise of discretion” (ibid, 34 f.). With regard to the division of labor, “occupational control […] is a central element of ideal-typical professionalism. […] The negotiated order also establishes the functional and hierarchical relations among the occupations that cooperate in the joint production of a particular product or service” (ibid, 59 f.). Labor markets and careers also show special characteristics for professions, e.g. the port of entry for profession is a practice institution, and “the key to creating and gaining access to occupationally controlled shelters is the credential that serves as the prime, indeed, the mandatory market signal for consumers” (ibid, 82). Subsequently, Freidson discussed the various characteristics of training by the type of occupation and finally, he arrives at the discussion on ideologies behind different professions and concludes that “the professional ideology of service goes beyond serving others´ choices. Rather, it claims devotion to a transcendent value which infuses its specialization with a larger and putatively higher goal which may reach beyond that of those they are supposed to serve. […] Such values as Justice, Salvation, Beauty, Truth, Health and Prosperity are large, abstract, and on the face of it indisputably desirable, […] professionals can claim independence of judgment and freedom of action” (Freidson 2001, 122).

Finally, the work of Julia Evetts shall be presented. She is Professor Emeritus at the School of Sociology and Social Policy at the University of Nottingham and has written extensively on occupations and professions. In contrast to this chronological presentation, she systematized the multitude of approaches and theories under three trends (Evetts 2014, 35 ff): for the early phase (1) professionalism can be described as normative value. Here, authors such as Carr Saunders, Marshall and Parsons can be grouped. They all strived to define professions and situate them in modern societies´ working world. The more critical literature to these first efforts can be seen as reaction and recapped in Evetts´s word of (2) professionalism as ideology. Here, questions of power and hierarchical asymmetries prevailed. The last and currently prevailing attitude towards the topic Evetts describes with the term (3) professionalism as a discourse. And within this discursive stage, again several branches can be identified: when the discourse has been taken over to classic work organizations where it is applied by managers, professionalism can be considered as disciplinary mechanism, according to Fournier (Evetts 2014, 40). Or, starting from different occupations, one can “differentiate between professionalization “from within” (that is, successful manipulation of the market by the group, e.g. medicine or law) and “from above” (that is, domination of forces external to the group, e.g. engineering and social work). Generally, Evetts considers professionalism as occupational value linked with an ideological background: “The ideology of professionalism that is so appealing to occupational groups and their practitioners includes aspects such as exclusive ownership of an area of expertise and knowledge, and the power to define the nature of problems in that areas as well as the control of access to potential solutions. It also includes an image of collegial work relations of mutual assistance and support […]. Additional aspects […] are autonomy in decision-making and discretion in work practices, decision-making in the public interest (sic!) unfettered only marginally by financial constraints, and in some cases […] even self-regulation” (Evetts 2013, 788 f.). Evetts concludes with the notion that in modern knowledge-based service societies the call for professionalism remains highly valid. It needs to be noted that with this conceptualization- apart from all various and contradictory approaches – the subject area has proceeded from ´professions´ and ´professionalization´ towards ´professionalism´.

4. Interim conclusion – trends and commonalities

After this detailed, by no means exhaustive overview, the interim conclusion tries to systematize some crucial trends, attitudes of thinking and commonalities from the exuberant literature on the profession topic.

As a first point, one can note that during the last 100 years of discussion, the conceptional field has moved from professions and professionalization towards the term professionalism. The static view on professions had been dynamized by questioning the processes of professionalization. With the notion of professionalism as presented by Freidson and Evetts, the quality feature gained center stage. In (post-)modern knowledge and service societies, this depicts an essential attribute for the working world. Further research on the professional~ topic and philanthropy may has its best connectivity with professionalism; however, it is important to recognize that there are multiple options and starting points.

A second insight refers to the theoretical approaches and their level of analysis: Parsons came from a micro perspective and ended at a structural-functional macro perspective after his discussion on professions. His question dealt with the macroanalysis of professions as trustees for universalism in modern societies. In contrast to Parsons, the interactionistic model presented by Hughes refers to the microlevel and takes into account the mutual interactions, positions and the accompanying positioning of professionals and clients in social situations. In between stand the organizations and associations that are situated as intermediaries on the mesolevel. The debate on professionalization as a stage of development from occupations towards a profession is mainly rooted there. Could we think of the philanthropy as a profession (macro)? Or of philanthropists as professional practitioners (micro)?

A third point refers to the commonalities of the presented approaches. Most commonalities refer to the organizational mesolevel (see also Evetts 2014, 43) and include aspects such as existence of a professional umbrella institution that provides the code of ethics, a standardized educational training, the licensing and admission procedures, the competences needed and is capable and accountable for sanctioning mechanisms. These institutions also control and govern the work systems, set up priorities and standards and take care for the education and training of the junior staff. Within the association there is a collegial working atmosphere and a discretionary judgment, assessment and decision-making. Few commonalities refer to the microlevel; they describe the relation and interaction between professional practitioners and their clients as trustworthy and confidential.

As forth and last point, it is necessary to point to the fact that the current debates on professionalism are intertwined with social transformation processes. With the notion of a "knowledge society" (Böhme, Stehr, 1986), numerous authors point to the fact that modern societies highly depend on and are simultaneously based on scientific and technical knowledge. As continuation of Weber´s rationalization assessment (Schluchter 2015), knowledge is the dominant resource for constellation of actions, world views and institutional and organizational structuring. The scientification of numerous social spheres does not stop at the philanthropic sector. And, of course, the sector must adapt to a changing environment and problems. Issues such as strategic philanthropy (Anheier, Daly, 2007) or impact investing dominate internal debates; global problems such as migration, populism or terrorism represent significant challenges. For classic professions such as medicine and law, knowledge is standardized, governed and reinforced by access restrictions. But what does a philanthropist need to know? What do staff members of philanthropic organizations need to know in order to act professionally in their field?

5. **The professionalization of philanthropy? – A critical appraisal**

Following these points, there are many options how to link the professionalization discourse with philanthropy in general. At a first glance, one can gain the impression that the professionalization discourse has hit the philanthropic sector with asynchronicity. As written above, non-profit organizations had been in the focus of discussion, even though the topics dealt with mainly derive from the business management or administrative sphere. Critical voices and positions are accompanied by this organizational change.

On the micro level of philanthropy, there has been a call for further research on the professionalization of volunteering (Ganesh, McAllum, 2012), but with little reaction so far. In 2006, Horn and Gardner got the impression that within grant making foundations, the work of their staff can be considered as lonely profession: "grantmakers do not identify with philanthropy in the way that other professionals identify with their respective fields" (Horn, Gardner, 2006, 78). Based on their qualitative research interviewing some 1,200 leading practitioners in several fields (genetics, journalism, law, business, higher education, theater, medicine and philanthropy (ibid.)), they identified several interpretative patterns for this gap: as "grantmakers own neither the money they give away nor the work they support […] they feel isolated from grantees, the public, and their colleagues" (ibid., 83). This sentence includes all problematic aspects: as it isn´t their own money, the grantmaking professionals set up a cognitive distance between themselves and their work and don´t have the autonomy needed in comparison with other professionals. As the decision-making power is located at the donor´s or the board´s level, the performing foundation staff remains within an employment relationship. A second pattern is connected with the results and the impact of the activities: "grantmakers are also one step removed from the social change they support with their grant" (ibid, 86). The distance to the projects funded increases the alienation to the professional activities. Finally, the lonely work of foundation staff is enhanced by the isolation from the public, within and between foundations. Transferring the results of these qualitative inquiries, it seems that only few indicators derived from the theoretical approaches can be regarded as fulfilled.

For the macro level, this view is complemented by other statements on further shortcomings of philanthropy. In 2000, Thomas Reis from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation stated that "philanthropy does much good. But it's a six-cylinder engine running on two cylinders. What would be possible if we were running on all six?" (Fulton, Blau, 2005, 2). In a similar way, German funder Arend Oetker was quoted with the line: "For me, there is nothing worse than idealistic inefficiency" (Jacobi 2009, 149). In the same year, Volker Then, managing director of the Centre for Social Investment at Heidelberg University, added that "there is no generally accepted position to say that [grantmaking] should be linked to a professional proceeding just like the management of a commercial enterprise […] So it can be worthwhile for the sector to choose the path of professionalization and to permanently convey that [philanthropy] is not merely for the founder´s private enjoyment, but rather a serious contribution to society´s common good" (ibid., 148 f.). Of course, there are indications and processes for a growing globalization of philanthropy [see Helmut Anheier´s keynote at this year´s ERNOP conference on European philanthropy], and philanthropy scholarship and practice is on its way for global spread (Rey-Garcia, 2017), but "there is no single repository of information on the field. Courses on philanthropy go where they fit, or are wanted, or where there is money for them" (ibid, 32). The field, its definition and standardization of practices remain fuzzy.

And finally, other philanthropic organizations such as foundations have not been sufficiently explored. In the comparative analysis on the politics of foundations (Anheier, Daly, 2007), several authors depict different situations: whereas in the US, Frumkin accused foundations of over-professionalization and administrative self-absorption (Toepler, 2007), the case of Greece shows that there is a low degree of professionalization that leads to inefficiency (Economou, Tsakradiles, 2007, 195). The asynchronicity not only hits the sector, but also the countries and their respective philanthropic systems in different ways.

6. First hypotheses and steps forward

Even if all the inconsistencies presented led to a disparate picture of the sector, further empirical research is needed to systematize the professionalization topic in philanthropy and to scientifically evaluate the diverse processes. The paper concludes with several hypotheses that need further empirical research:

H1: In its current status, philanthropy represents a semi-profession. There are some features fulfilled such as umbrella associations or a code of ethics. Missing indicators are the exclusive area of work, no standardized knowledge base and missing educational trainings and structures that are both standardized and with restricted access.

H2: The professionalization discourse on philanthropy must be clarified. With regard to the various theoretical approaches, it remains unclear towards which objective the processes are run. Levels of analysis must be taken into account in order to put in concrete terms the location and exclusive area of work of philanthropy. The common understanding of the philanthropy´s normative [value guardian?] has to be interrogated as well as the

H3: On the organizational level the professionalism discourse must be clarified, too. Here, Evetts draws a distinction between organizational and occupational professionalism. Whereas the first one "is a discourse on of control [and] incorporates rational-legal forms of authority and hierarchical structures of responsibility and decision-making [the second one] involves relations of practitioner trust from both employers and clients" (Evetts 2013, 787). The following table assembles the characteristics of the two different forms of professionalism in knowledge-based work that need empirical testing for the case of philanthropy:

Figure 2: Two different forms of professionalism in knowledge-based work (Evetts 2013, 788;

Organizational professionalism	**Occupational professionalism**
Discourse of control used increasingly by managers in work organizations	Discourse constructed within professional groups
Rational-legal forms of authority	Collegial authority
Standardized procedures	Discretion and occupational control of the work
Hierarchical structures of authority and decision-making	Practitioner trust by both clients and employers
Managerialism	Controls operationalized by practitioners
Accountability and externalized forms of regulation, target-setting and performance review	Professional ethics monitored by institutions and associations
Linked to Weberian models of organization	Located in Durkheim´s model of occupations as moral communties

Currently, one can gain the impression that both forms of professionalism are running parallel.

For the empirical investigation, interviews with foundations staff and managers are planned as well a quantitative online survey among foundations´ partners and grantees that would take up the position of the clients.

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