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Abstract

In the context of more and more project-based research funding, commercialization and economic growth have increasingly become rationalized concepts that are used to demonstrate the centrality of science for societal development and prosperity. Following the world society tradition of organizational institutionalism, this paper probes the potential limits of the spread of such rationalized concepts among different types of research funders. Our comparative approach is particularly designed to study the role and position of nonprofit research funders (NPF), a comparison that is relevant as NPF could potentially be shielded from such rationalized pressures given their lack of profit gaining motives. By making a qualitative interview-based investigation we are able to describe how research funders rationalize their contributions to society at large, as well as their obligations to the researchers they fund. Four types of research funders are compared—independently wealthy philanthropists, fundraising dependent nonprofits, public agencies, and industry. We find that NPF, and especially philanthropists, are the least commercially geared type of funder, but that

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philanthropists also express least obligations to researchers funded. This is in sharp contrast to public research funders who, even more than industry, employ commercially geared rationalizations. We also find that both public and corporate funders express obligations to the researchers they fund. Our results indicate that there are limits to the spread of commercially tinted rationalizations among NPF, but that this does not necessarily mean an increased sense of obligations to the researchers funded, and by extension to the integrity of scientific pursuit. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)