Abstract

*Franchising Social Change: Variable Organizational Logics of National Social Movement Groups with Local Outlets*

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National social movement organizations with widely dispersed local affiliates have been common since the turn of the 20th Century. And, there is little question that they have become far more numerous in recent years. Yet little scholarly attention has been directed at describing, for recent decades, their common structural forms, the demography of those forms, or the contrasting organizational logics that lead their founders to choose one structural template over another.

Drawing upon scholarly research on the structure and logic of commercial franchising and religious denominational structures, a typology of national-local organizational relations is developed. Then, a wide range of evidence is presented in an effort to show which of the types of national-local forms seem to have become most popular in recent years. Organizations that display one or another of these forms, which do not yield mass local membership (e.g. MADD, NOW), are contrasted to earlier franchise organizations that did generate mass memberships (e.g. Ku Klux Klan, Townsend Plan), as well as current organizations that do generate mass memberships (e.g. Industrial Areas Organization groups).

The paper concludes by deducing the consequences of trends in the demography of franchising forms for the vitality of individual participation in social change activities. Interpreting these trends through the lens of "supply side" understandings of social participation (developed by sociologists of religion) strongly suggest that declines in activist participation can be accounted for by organizational logics rather than social psychological ones.