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Workshop - Politics and attitudes

Does Commitment Transform the Activists' Mind?

Differential Socialization at Play

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Abstract

The paper addresses four specific questions. First, does commitment *transform* the activists' mind, or are the newcomers' worldviews already synchronized with the movement views before joining activism? Second, if activism impacts the activists' mind, *to what extent* commitment alters the newcomers' worldviews? Do we see a reinforcement of existing worldviews or a radical transformation? Third, if activism shapes the activists' mind are those impacts *durable over time*? Finally, *for whom* commitment transforms the activists' mind? Are all activists impacted by a socialization process or only specific activists enter in a process of mind transformation? And who are they? Those specific questions are addressed with longitudinal data by examining commitment impact on three groups of activists: People joining the environmental movement, unions, and volunteering organizations.

These questions deal with a major question of social theory: Do we need specific meanings to act or does action fashion our mental dispositions? In other terms, should we reverse the causality stated by Max Weber? While for Weber worldviews are necessary to act, and for Parsons those mental dispositions are rather deeply anchored in the individuals' self and therefore largely stable over individuals' lifespan, recent socialization studies show that the socialization process occurs all along the individuals' life, and people are constantly re-socialized over their life. Certainly, meanings are necessary to perform action, but action also shapes and re-shapes individuals' meanings. But the question is to assess to what extent action re-socializes individuals, and who are the individuals who are more prone to change. In this contribution we advance the theoretical idea of *differentiated socialization*.