“Occupational Stratification of Voluntary Work in Retirement: Empirical Evidence from Germany”

This paper investigates the impact of an employee’s occupational prestige on the probability of transitioning into volunteering in retirement. Based on a rational choice approach, we focus on the relationship between occupational prestige, the individual’s striving for social inclusion and voluntary work in retirement. We assume that, as a side-effect, doing voluntary work provides social prestige for the actor. We further argue that by going into retirement, actors with high occupational prestige will perceive a disproportional loss of prestige which stems from the difference in occupational and retirement-endowed prestige. In order to compensate for this loss, they will have a stronger incentive to transition into voluntary work than retirees with low occupational prestige (“compensation effect”).

To test our hypothesis we use the SOEP waves 1998-2013. Our sample contains 1,855 individuals of whom we have 19,071 observations. Based on event historical analysis it is shown that higher occupational prestige (measured by SIOPS) results in a higher conditional transition probability to volunteer in retirement (0.017**). This effect is significantly higher than the effect of occupational prestige of active workers on the transition to volunteer, which is negative and insignificant (-0.002).

We conclude that our findings show the hypothesized compensation effect, the aspiration to balance out the loss of occupational prestige by the socially visible prestige gained by volunteering.

words: 227

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