Expanding Nonprofit Governance Research: Linking Actor-Network Theory with the Dominant Coalitions Perspective.

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In recent years a number of scholars have called for new and/or more nuanced ways of understanding nonprofit organizations and governance, including calls for more critical theory, perspectives capturing power processes, and research focusing on the question who really governs nonprofit organizations. Seeking to address some of these issues, Renz and Andersson (2011, 2013) have suggested looking to the role and evolution of dominant coalitions within nonprofit organizations i.e. the coalition of organizational actors that exerts power and influence and thereby ultimately controls the governance of the organization. The dominant coalition perspective offers a useful, multifaceted but also more complex starting point to comprehend key elements of nonprofit governance, and as noted by Renz and Andersson (2011 p. 10), also stands to benefit from input from other theoretical perspectives:

“Given the complexity and breadth of the construct, it is logical that we must explore and examine it from multiple perspectives. Indeed, one of the key questions to answer is which of these theoretical perspectives are likely to be more or less useful in understanding the dominant coalition and, therefore, the larger phenomenon of dominant coalition in nonprofit board governance.”

The purpose of this research is to depict and discuss one such perspective:, actor-network theory (ANT), and show how ANT helps bring depth and novel approaches to think about dominant coalitions and nonprofit governance. Our paper not only introduces ANT, it investigates one critical governance incident taken from an in-depth case study of the Riverwest Public House Cooperative in Milwaukee to illuminate the utility of the ANT approach. Hence, this research will discuss, not just the promise of ANT as a mean to analyze dominant coalitions, but also how ANT can help conceptualize key elements of the dominant coalition process.