

## GUEST EDITORIAL

### Professions under suspicion: what role for professional ethics and commitment in contemporary societies?

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**Abstract** The rising distrust and the surveillance over expert knowledge highlights how the professions and societies maintain a paradoxical relationship: the latter both needs as much as it suspects the former. This tension requires a sociological reading able to clarify the role of ethics and professional commitments. This constitutes the underlying thread for this thematic dossier. Within its scope, readers shall encounter theoretical and empirical contribution that enable a better interpretation of the relationships between professions and societies and thereby better grasping the processes that generically frame the ideas around the suspicion of the professions.

**Keywords:** sociology of professions, new public management, trust, distrust.

**Resumo** O aumento da falta de confiança e a monitorização do conhecimento especialista demonstram o quanto as profissões e as sociedades mantêm uma relação paradoxal: as últimas necessitam das primeiras da mesma maneira que suspeitam delas. Esta tensão requer uma leitura sociológica capaz de clarificar o papel da ética e de compromissos profissionais. Isto constitui um tema subjacente neste dossiê temático. Dentro deste âmbito, os leitores podem encontrar teorias e contribuições empíricas que permitem uma melhor interpretação das relações entre profissionais e sociedades e, por este meio, uma melhor compreensão dos processos que emolduram genericamente as ideias que giram à volta de suspeitas relativas aos profissionais.

**Palavras-chave:** sociologia de profissões, nova administração pública, confiança, desconfiança.

**Résumé** L'augmentation du manque de confiance et le contrôle de la connaissance spécialisée démontrent combien la relation entre les professions et les sociétés est paradoxale: ces dernières ont besoin des premières autant qu'elles les suspectent. Cette tension requiert une lecture sociologique capable de clarifier le rôle de l'éthique et des engagements professionnels. Voici un thème sous-jacent pour ce dossier thématique. Les lecteurs peuvent y trouver des théories et des contributions empiriques qui permettent une meilleure interprétation des rapports entre professionnels et sociétés et, par conséquent, une meilleure compréhension des processus qui encadrent génériquement les idées qui tournent autour des soupçons à l'égard des professionnels.

**Mots-clés:** sociologie des professions, nouvelle administration publique, confiance, méfiance.

**Resumen** El aumento de la falta de confianza y la monitorización del conocimiento especializado demuestra cuanto las profesiones y sociedades mantienen una relación paradójica: el último necesita del primero de la misma manera que lo pone bajo sospecha. Esta tensión requiere una lectura sociológica capaz de clarificar el papel de la ética y de compromisos profesionales. Esto constituye un tema subyacente para este apartado temático. Dentro de este ámbito, los lectores pueden encontrar teorías y contribuciones empíricas que permiten una mejor interpretación de las relaciones entre profesionales y sociedades, y por este medio, una mejor comprensión de los procesos que enmarcan, en general, las ideas que giran alrededor de sospechas por parte de los profesionales.

**Palabras-Clave:** sociología de profesiones, nueva administración pública, confianza, desconfianza.

## Introduction

The possibility that professional groups might be dealing with growing barriers to the autonomous application and management of their knowledge leads onto the broader debate about whether the professions, as the means of organising, conveying and applying knowledge, are now undergoing a historical moment of decline. However, references to the decline of the professions continues to lack a proper framework. According to a certain discourse, the response seems clear and easy: the self-regulation of knowledge harms more than it benefits society and deserves restrictions and limitations.

The issue is that this argument seem to share some of the features of normativism and the naturalization found in Parsons's seminal approach to the professions, but now applied in the opposite direction: from the importance of professions to social cohesion, the demand now focuses on the importance of civil society to social cohesion; from the importance of the asymmetries of knowledge to the importance of symmetries of knowledge; the importance of closing off knowledge has turned into the importance of opening up knowledge; from the importance of mediators between knowledge and clients to the importance of individual choice of knowledge.

The response to the question as to whether or not professional autonomy is shrinking takes on a dual level of importance: conceptual and empirical. The conceptual importance arises out of the greater visibility thereby endowed on some of the connections fundamental to the functioning of countries in recent centuries. Such importance reaches beyond the Western world given the global expansion of capitalism and the welfare state model (not overlooking the obvious historical and institutional differences that have complexified understandings of state-professions relationships in various parts of the globe).

The empirical relevance arises out of the existence of different spheres of debate. One derives from the non-academic space and specifically represents the sphere in which we encounter the polarised visions based upon normativism and the naturalization of arguments. The criticism of the self-regulation of professional knowledge has risen in conjunction with the defence of the emancipation of lay knowledge, understood as a viable alternative. However, the utilisation of the expressions "professions", "professionalism" or "professionalization" frequently represent black boxes with their meanings correspondingly lacking in analysis and conceptual precision.

The other sphere of debate reflects the internal field of the sociology of professions. Here, we encounter a lack of consensus as to whether the evidence does or does not constitute a decline in professional autonomy. This disconnect illustrates at least three central aspects to the sociological debate. The first is that the processes and challenges that professions experience are nationally rooted. While not disregarding the influence of shared international dynamics, the national scale represents the best viewpoint for understanding the world of the professions. The second is that the different professional groups do not necessarily go through coinciding processes in terms of their social, political and scientific affirmation. The

third is that the field of sociology of professions involves the cohabitation of different theoretical-epistemological traditions that contain tensions that have lasted down through time.

Based upon the idea that the empirical variability among professions does not allow for easy or unequivocal analysis, we thus need to grasp how the professional model does not display (as least not yet) signs of being in decline irrespective of the need to study in detail the pressures that are impacting on trust in professional ethics and commitment. This deepening of the debate requires understanding some of the aspects that we seek here to develop. Another prior note regards the need to pay due attention to the internal conflicts prevailing in the sociology of professions and hence we cannot read the contributions gathered here as in any way reductive of the plurality of the ongoing debates.

### **Professions as interdependent systems**

To the extent that the debate in the sociology of professions developed over the course of the second half of the last century, the field also became denser and more complex. Already by the late 1970s, it was clear that the search for labels for the different contributions that had characterised the preceding decades, above all stemming from the functionalism-interactionism duality, had become a false question that did more to harm than to benefit any understanding of the arguments (examples of the complexification of the debate feature in Evetts, 2006a, and Freidson, 2006; in turn, Sciulli, 2008, and Larson, 2008, set out problems with labelling the different approaches).

One argument that has since become relatively consensual reflects how the actions, positions and roles of the diverse professional groups gain support from strategies and power relationships (Saks, 2016), whether regarding clients (Johnson, 1972), knowledge and the organisation of labour (Freidson, 1971, 1986) or the labour market (Larson, 1977).

This provided the original framework for noting how the professions exist in a bidirectional relationship with society. Hence, professional groups exist as interdependent systems that interweave with politics, knowledge and the marketplace. Competition, conflict and alliances over the scope of intervention in society are predictable patterns for inter and intra-professional relations alongside the fact that the conditions for controlling the work — the transmission, application and evaluation of knowledge — are not held equally by professionals (Abbott, 1988).

Another benefit of this interpretation came from the opportunity to shift the focus of attention from the definition of the professions (whether this constitutes real or built categories) in order to focus on the coexistence of multiple resources and strategies that the professional groups deploy in attempts to demand and dispute jurisdictions, thus rendering the classification of “profession”, “occupation” and “semi-profession” of little relevance.

This in no way conveys that the contemporary debate has given up on concerns over the appropriateness of analytical categories. Freidson, for example, has long

since insisted that the control over working content distinguishes the “professions” from other “occupations”. According to Larson (2012), “professionalization” reflects the value of the labour to societal functioning. The difference in the usage of analytical categories resides in the means of their conception: the empirical existence of the “professions” is relative and not absolute; it is not historically linear and falls within the scope of broader dynamics of social stratification.

The analysis of professions has come to centre on how the jurisdictions get established and maintained and by whom. In general terms, among the factors enabling the founding and maintenance of jurisdictions, there are: technological advances (e.g. biotechnologies); extraordinary events (e.g. garbage collection after Hurricane Katrina); state policies, and there is an important distinction here between policies expanding social supports (e.g. social services) and policies controlling public expenditure (e.g. auditors); the associative strength of professional groups (e.g. medicine); or the functioning of the market (e.g. brokers).

The dependence of collective life on knowledge and the intrinsic characteristics of knowledge (the level of abstraction and its scientific nature) explain the differences in the capacity to control the professional jurisdictions, thus also the differences in the professional group statuses. The greater the extent to which groups are able to establish themselves in areas perceived as necessary and propose means of understanding and acting in interventions in these areas, the greater their power over clients, the state, other professional groups and the market.

How to actually make the calculations necessary to ascertaining whether professional jurisdictions are currently rising or falling remains unclear. First, because the rise of new jurisdictions may reflect the growing specialisation and division of labour and not the increase in the number of professions (Freidson, 1994). Second, because the emergence of a new professional jurisdiction may reflect either the creation of a new market or the reconfiguration of already existing markets. While the reconfiguration of existing markets reflects the dispute and transfer of needs, clients and consumption among professional groups, the creation of new markets stems from increases in needs, clients and consumption and, thus, a new space for professional groups.

One important aspect requiring discussion is the extent to which in contemporary societies there is a deceleration in the creation of new markets in comparison with the acceleration in the reconfiguration of the already existing markets. This hypothesis should not gain any absolute or radical interpretation as the trend towards the continuous creation of new needs, clients and consumption is foreseeable in societies based upon knowledge (Freidson, 1994), on individual reflexivity and agency (Giddens, 1991; Archer, 2012), on uncertainty (Beck, 1992) and on industrial capitalism (Larson, 2012). This hypothesis also contains a conjunctural component that may evolve with diverse meanings in addition to not gaining adherence in other parts of the globe (we might refer to the cases of China or India where economic growth in recent decades has clearly driven the establishing of new professional jurisdictions through the intermediation of new markets and cumulative to state initiatives, developing technologies, professional groups and markets).

In every case, the action of the states and the functioning of markets in the 2008 financial crisis demonstrate how the metamorphosis in the division of labour has nevertheless incorporated more of the dispute over and transfer of needs, clients and consumption than the creation of new domains for professional action.

Our argument here stresses the need to consider in detail the dispute over the reconfiguration of existing jurisdictions as a strategy for professional power. Based upon this position, we may more easily understand the process of reproducing the needs of professions as a means of organisation, transmission and the application of knowledge to society.

Although during the 2008 financial crisis and recession it has rendered evident the attempts to break professional autonomy undertaken by states in the public sector and the market in the private sector, which is expressed at the labour markets (tendency towards deskilling) and in terms of the degradation of labour relations (tendency towards proletarianization), the issue is that such attack is being implemented by professionals themselves undergoing processes of professionalization. Technical autonomy, monopolies on knowledge, labour market gatekeeping and the normative usage of expert knowledge are among the mechanisms for professional power found in the activities dedicated to the control of other professional activities (think of the general manager profession and the importance of the techno-structure to the functioning of bureaucracies, including both the public and private sectors and different bureaucratic configurations: the industrial factory, the hospital, the university, etcetera).

Irrespective of how the emergence of emerging professional groups frequently rest upon their criticism of the already established professions, they reproduce normative discourses of professional value (professionalism) and the resources of professionalization also deployed by longer standing professions (Evetts, 2006a).

What these tensions demonstrate precisely is that the division of labour stems from the dispute over existing markets. In this sense, the professions are not in decline; they are rather experiencing growing disputes and this tension pits different professional groups against each other.

Having stated this, we may now move onto the second important idea that spans the understanding of the interdependence between the professions and the state. Irrespective of the differences between the Anglo-Saxon and European Continental professional models in relation to the place and role of the state in these professionalization processes (see Evetts, 2006a, or Larson, 2012 for a summary), state licensing constitutes a transversal and formal mechanism essential to professionalization. Licensing means granting the authorisation for the exercising of a certain activity even while the respective labour market (credentialism) and the content of labour (autonomy) may receive greater or lesser levels of protection (Kuhlmann, 2006). The differences between Continental and Anglo-Saxon countries, which in essence reflect the models produced by centralised and liberal states respectively, would seem to interrelate more with different levels of credentialism and autonomy than actually in terms of licensing.

The licensing of activities is what enables the legal, juridical and financial existence of the labour and well illustrates the centrality of the nation-state model in

the sphere of the professions. Thus, the expansion in the administration, the bureaucracy, citizen rights and equality, and as well as the dependence on expert knowledge to a large extent explain the dependence of collective life on the professions. This relationship flows in two ways: the professions need the state just as much as the state needs the professions in the efforts both undertake in order to secure legitimacy for their existence (Larson, 1977).

Any understanding of the state-professions relationship needs to span two aspects: one at the level of research and the other in normative terms. In the research field, we have to unpack the state-professions relationships. In other words, how results of the state-professions relationships depend on the specific professions as well as the internal sub-groups of both the professions and the state itself among which institutional relations develop. This reference to professional sub-groups is nothing new and means understanding the multiplicity of interests and structures that inhabit the interior worlds of professional groups (vd. Larson, 1977; Freidson, 1986; Abbott, 1988). Reference to the sub-groups of the state in turn involves grasping the differences between the various areas of governance as well as the various actors that make up the state. In sum, this reflects how the “public interest” does not represent a unique vision shared among the actors and regulatory bodies that represent the state and act in its name (Kingdom, 1995). Recent literature has attributed attention to the role of agency usually attributed to professional groups, in their deployment of strategies with the purpose of strengthening their social, political and economic statuses, should also apply to the state (e.g. Johnson, 1995). Bourgeault (2017) mentions that this remains a relatively underdeveloped variant of the sociology of professions but that might enable a better understanding of the oscillating signals given off by political decision makers, whether indicating greater support for or greater opposition to professional autonomy.

In normative terms, it involves understanding the logics that underpin the actions of the state and the professions. In an expansionary context for the welfare state, the professions and professionalism have become unavoidable as the means for states to protect their populations. Already into the neoliberal context, not only do states transfer the meeting of certain rights to the market but the lack of trust in professional self-regulation also grows. There is no scope for a dual interpretation of professionalism and managerialism but this does understand how today the state and the professions interrelate in a more pluralist and disconnected fashion when compared with the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Larkin, 1995; Bourgeault, 2017).

### **Looking at professional ethics and commitment in times of suspicion**

Usage of the expression suspicion in the debate on professions is not original (see Evetts, 2006b). We deploy it here in a provocative and non-normative sense in order to convey how contemporary societies have been impacted by social changes that span the globe and the most diverse dimensions of life, including geopolitics,

the economy, work and employment, demography, and in addition to the clear repercussions for individual patterns of life.

These processes of change are replete with instabilities, ambiguities and uncertainties that pose important challenges to the professions. Among those faced, there is the particular relevance that the preponderance of decisions, and especially the ideas, produced by supranational organisations such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) or the World Bank (WB) has gained. These institutions put forward accountability as a principal of good governance for incorporation into every system, and the development of market economies and the sustainability of their democratic political systems emerge as feasible only if and when maintaining contexts of good governance alongside holding institutions responsible for their results (thus, accountable). The growing belief in the virtues of responsibility has led to the advent of a culture of accountability strongly aligned with the idea of a strong and active civil society able to pressure governments, public and professional institutions into accounting for their respective performances. Based on this attitude towards civil society, there comes the hope of building a solid structure of trust among citizens and institutions as well as between citizens and professionals given that the idea that we are witnessing the end of citizen trust in institutions has already become institutionalised and especially among the professions, their knowledge, advice and counsel and specialist judgement. The appearance of the scandals featuring bad professional practices as well as the social legitimacy of various forms of knowledge (that is, not only the scientific) as acceptable for underpinning decision making and professional action constitute two core factors in the institutionalisation of the idea that trust in professionals has ended.

The culture of accountability thus appears as a solution that shall enable the resolution of the lack of trust problem. Nevertheless, its critics refer to how such does little more than to undertake “rituals of verification” (Power, 1997). The great attractiveness of the culture of accountability derives precisely from the attempt to build relations of trust that are not sustained by personal relationships but instead by objective and quantifiable data. Within this dynamic, the processes of professional working control get displaced from professionals to the actual systems of control that question the persistence of mechanisms for professional self-regulation. The processes of control, audit and accountability are, in fact, interpreted as powerful “political technologies” and as a relevant component of a project that we might designate, through recourse to Foucaultian terms, as “neo-liberal governmentality” (Shore and Wright, 2000). The key factor in this process of governmentality consists of the imposition of new norms and values through which the external regulatory mechanisms shape the conduct of professionals (Miller and Rose, 1990).

Since the 1980s, the forms of professional labour organisation have been undergoing change to a large extent because professional work increasingly falls within the scope of large organisations that frequently also display heterogeneous characters (Noordegraaf, 2007). Some authors argue that the growing integration of professionals into organisations has resulted in the inclusion of new professional logics that may have contributed towards alterations in their own

fundamental values (Suddaby, Gendron and Lam, 2009). In reality, while traditional interpretations of the logics of bureaucracy and professionalism point to their irreconcilable natures, the majority of studies have demonstrated that professionals adapt well to such bureaucratic structures and have maintained their commitment towards the professions (Suddaby, Gendron and Lam, 2009).

In this organisational context, professional powers seem to get diluted in the confrontation with the new pressures for greater control and accountability. More recent empirical studies contest this perspective of rupture and incompatibility between managerialism and professionalism and instead suggesting that both may interweave within a significantly more complex dynamic (Carvalho and Santiago, 2010; Carvalho, 2014; Correia, 2013; Kuhlmann et al., 2013) that drives processes of hybridism.

According to Noordegraaf (2015: 198) hybrid professionalism is about how professionals treat cases within well-managed organizational contexts; this is “meaningfully managed professional work”. He also mentions the model “beyond hybridity”, which describes situations in which professionals are taking organizing seriously, i.e. for professionals who deal with contradictions between professional and managerial principles, organizing becomes part of the job.

Other data also contribute to strengthening this idea of the persistence of the professional fields in current societies and the vitality of professionalism. The increase in the levels of education and training, the extension of the characteristics of professionalization to new groups traditionally associated with the occupations and the resistances and processes of negotiation developed in the field constitute some examples of the facets worth integrating into reflections on professional groups within the current context.

### **Objectives of this thematic dossier and a summary of its contributions**

This themed issue brings together four articles by scholars from Western Europe and the USA who have been studying professions and professionalization. The common subject running throughout their contributions encapsulates the suspicion surrounding professions in contemporary societies that characterises, apparently, self-contradicting dynamics ranging from distrust in self-regulated knowledge and value to the actual professional rationale and ideology.

The first article, by Magali Larson, revisits her own work *The Rise of Professionalism. A Sociological Analysis*, published in 1977, one of the most cited and striking books on studying professions. Along with Johnson and Freidson, Larson initiates the so-called paradigm of power in the analysis of professions. Larson (1977) proposes a synthesis of the Marxist and Weberian theses, approaching professions as self-interest groups in capitalist society and analyses professionalization as a social mobility project in which occupations seek to achieve not only economic position but also social status and prestige. Larson’s paper begins by presenting the reasons and the narrative of her 1977 book by outlining the main questions that triggered



her interest in the study of professions; searching for how professions came into being. In a second stage, Larson points out the faults and the omissions of her work, just before reflecting on the contents of *The Rise of Professionalism*, which today continues to hold relevance to the study of professions. The article then closes with a brief view on contemporary challenges to studying the professions.

*The Rise of Professionalism* highlights professional groups as essential in the delimitation of labour markets. Its distinctive feature stems from identifying the monopoly and the closure of professional service markets. Thus, the means used to define and maintain these closed labour market monopolies are control over access to the profession (controlling the education system) and market protection (credential system). Larson sees professionalization from a structural perspective and further argues: (1) structures are not inevitable because agents construct and sustain them by participating in the institutions that express and support them; (2) structures are read by actors as obligatory although “they are entered by choice” because of the individual desire to engage in them; and (3) a structure seen as an obligatory passage hold structural properties for other structures.

Once established, the structural links effectively become shelters (credentials and market shelters) involving monopolistic tendencies. According to Larson, certificated knowledge is insufficient to establish the superiority of the knowers even if this remains necessary to the professionals’ self-presentation to the public. Knowledge matters when “affirmed and applied in markets of services that are structured in different ways and subjected the professional project to different conditions”. In stating this, Larson maintains that a sheltered market involves certificated knowledge and “the negotiation of cognitive exclusiveness within certain market conditions”.

After revisiting her 1977 work, Larson highlights its faults and omissions. This correspondingly identifies and discusses five main flaws. The greatest flaw is the abstraction and generality of *The Rise of Professionalism*, which come, according to Larson, from the dependence on the secondary material then available rather than accessing primary data. This issue also justifies one of the two omissions referred to by Larson in her work: the fact that she did not deal with independent agent dynamics, such as those of states and universities, the key institutions addressed by professional projects. The “excessive abstraction and generality”, in Larson’s words, prevented her from looking to the historical aspects of these institutions, their internal arrangements and politics and their external political effects, which are independent of the professions.

The severe constraints of time and resources justifies the second flaw: the exclusive focus on Britain and the United States, excluding other geographical variants of professionalization (specifically the continental variant) that appear later in sociological studies and display different dynamics to the Anglo-American model. The historical context within which professions formed in modern society provides the focus of Larson’s book. This issue also stands out as the third fault or limitation Larson identifies. Although one of the most serious mistakes of *The Rise of Professionalism* involves assuming a profession as a unified actor or *objet trouvé*, as if professional unity was a fact, rather than having to be produced or constructed. According

to Larson, this assumption induces too many mistakes and it would have been very helpful if, as she says, she had gone to the real context of any field “before the project”. This links to the fifth flaw: the fact that not using primary data led her to ignore how classic professions were mostly male and mostly white. Gender and ethnic issues remained excluded from the discussion on professionalization.

Although recognizing the flaws and omissions of her dated work, Larson underlines how several of the dimensions remain useful to analysing professions and professionalism: (1) The emphasis on the structural link, between certified knowledge and relatively uniform or standardized training, and positions in the social division of labor, still remains very useful. Larson proposes that one of the current tasks of the sociology of professions should involve looking at what happens when the essential structural link is severed, or at least weakened by the overproduction and the maladjustment in the supply and demand of high-level diplomas and qualifications. (2) Larson refers to how her comparative analysis of the resources available to medicine and engineering offered some important insights. Her structural approach to market control identifies the key resources in the negotiation of cognitive exclusiveness and the establishment of market shelters. The idea is that “variation in these resources inflects the path to success of particular occupations”. (3) Larson discards the distinction between professions and bureaucracy, very often present in sociology of professions works. This distinction, that emphasises the opposition between forms of authority and control of work, does not seem very useful and, according to Larson, it may be more fruitful to consider the emergencies in different forms of professionalism within organizations. (4) As in 1977, Larson insists on the Weberian notion of “calling” (*beruf*) as this highlights the intrinsic value of work and in this way “distinguishes professionalism and the professional’s identity more than a hypothetical disinterest”. The use-value of work is fundamental in her discussion of “anti-market principles” in the professional project.

The second article by Julia Evetts reflects on the current dynamics of professions and professionalism. Starting out from the idea, as referred to in sociological analysis, of professionalism as a special means of organising work and controlling workers (unlike industrial/bureaucratic organisations where hierarchical, bureaucratic and managerial controls are in place), Evetts advocates for a need to reconnect professional occupations and professional organisations, highlighting the challenges and opportunities this presents to professionalism and professionals working in organisations.

The article refers to three concepts extensively deployed in the sociology of professions: profession, professionalization and professionalism. However, the main purpose of this article involves focusing on the concept of professionalism and its long history in the sociological analysis of professional work, discussing the changes in perceptions and theories on the professions. Evetts firstly explains the challenges to professionalism as an occupational value and as a really different way of organizing work and workers, when compared with the managerial hierarchies of industrial and service organizations. The aim is to discuss how interpretations of professionalism as an occupational value have changed over time with

Evetts identifying several key milestones: (1) The early analyses of professions in which the key concept was the occupational values of professionalism and its importance for the stability and civility of social systems. Parsons's work gets referenced as the best known contribution towards the clarification of the particular features of professionalism, its central values and contributions to social order, alongside bureaucratic hierarchical organizations. However, professions reveal an alternative approach to the managerial hierarchy of bureaucratic organisations by means of their collegial organisation and shared identity based on competencies and sometimes guaranteed by licensing. (2) Freidson's work demonstrates the continuing importance of maintaining professionalism as the core organising value for expert service work and discusses the logics of three different ways of organising work: the market, organisation and profession. According to Evetts, this interpretation represents the optimistic view of professionalism as an occupational value and grounded in the belief that such work is of special value either to the public or to the state. (3) Evetts refers also a more pessimistic or critical interpretation of professionalism and of occupational values analysis. (4) In turn, a later development perceives professionalism as a discourse of occupational change and control in working organisational settings where managers deploy the discourse. Evetts states that this interpretation of professionalism combines the optimistic and pessimistic views. In this way, professionalism gets assumed, reconstructed and deployed as a strategic resource for managerial control in organisations.

Further ahead, Evetts explores organizational settings to convey the changes and/or continuities in the construction of professionalism and how these enable assessments of what might be called the "new professionalism". According to Evetts, elucidating the changes and the continuities is crucial to evaluating the scope for professionalism surviving as an occupational value. Such features of change include the characteristics of organisational, rather than professional, forms of occupational control (e.g. members of hierarchies, bureaucracies, output and performance measures and the standardization of work practices). Therefore, managerial demands for quality control and audit, target setting and performance assessment correspondingly become reinterpreted as the promotion of professionalism. Additionally, organisational settings operating under New Public Management contexts have developed a new and distinctive variant of professionalism. Evetts also refers to some examples, such as the emphasis on governance and community controls, the negotiations between complex numbers of agencies and interests, and the recreation of professionals themselves as managers. Nevertheless, other occupational professionalism characteristics seem to resist change and to remain despite the clear incentives and policies for change, such as gender differences in professional careers and occupational specialisms.

Evetts concludes her paper by presenting a "speculative discussion section" on the challenges and opportunities of the redefinition of professionalism and its links with management for practitioner-workers and their clients in service work. Evetts revisits several studies that document the consequences and challenges to professionalism as an occupational value, including research that links with sociologists of organizations. In terms of opportunities, Evetts points out some advantages to the combination of professional and organizational logics "of hybrid

organizations and organizationally located professional projects". In addition, other benefits from this combination also stem from the incorporation of organizational Human Resources Management into professional practices, processes and procedures, referenced as an opportunity and of benefit for practitioners and their work.

Further opportunities may also explain the increasing recognition of managerialism as not only complex but also multi-faceted and multi-dimensional. Evetts states that management is serving to control and limit the work of professionals in organizations, but, simultaneously, management also gets applied by professionals as a strategic resource, both in their career development and in improving the status of their respective professional occupation. We may therefore perceive organizations as sites for professional control and domination, constituting arenas for inter-professional competition and professional achievements.

The third paper, by Tracey Adams and Mike Saks, presents a case study of Canadian health profession regulation. The authors refer to how the powers of professional self-regulation have been weakened. Public discourse has portrayed the professions as self-interested and very often putting their own interests ahead of the public interest. In addition, descriptions of professional misconducts have come to the surface, providing evidence that the traditional patterns of professional regulation are inconsistent, and fundamentally require redefinition, thus forcing the state to intervene and reconsider the outlines of professional regulation in order to reduce autonomy of professions. However, despite this compelling narrative, Adams and Saks argue that its assumptions are too simplistic before identifying three interrelated issues: (1) Regulatory transformations are not simply the result of scandals as change has occurred even in contexts without dramatic scandals. (2) This interpretation of professional change does not capture variations across societies; even if professional self-regulation has been reduced in certain contexts, it has not disappeared and not only persists in several settings but is also expanding to new professional groups. (3) The narrative fails to capture the complex interests of the key social actors. State actors are not disinterested agents, controlling self-interested professionals to protect the public but rather have their own different agendas.

In line with this, Adams and Saks refer to the need to analyse the complex drivers of state actors as theoretical sociological inputs on professions have not attained significance on this matter. To capture the centrality of actor interests and values in professionalization processes, the authors propose a neo-Weberian approach built on the work of Weber and neo-Weberian scholars on social action, rationality and state. The aim is to expand neo-Weberian theory on professions, revealing the role of values and ethics in shaping professionalization in addition to group self-interests. Adams and Saks argue that this approach returns a deeper and more comprehensive interpretation of recent changes to professional regulation.

Hence, Adams and Saks apply the framework to recent regulatory changes to the healthcare professions in Canada, highlighting how this approach proves better able to capture the complexity of such regulatory changes. This perspective states that professional groups attempt to improve their market conditions in the

face of competition by implementing exclusionary social closure, wherein they restrict access to education, credentials and the opportunities to practice with state support. This therefore reflects how professions lobby the state to guarantee and maintain several forms of legal monopoly, which result in a privileged position both in the marketplace and in their own status and power.

Adams and Saks refer also to criticisms of the neo-Weberian approach and the reaction of some neo-Weberian scholars of the professions, who have turned to Foucault to overcome several limitations. This had identified Foucault's work on governmentality as particularly useful to explore state-professions relations. However, according to these authors, Foucault's approach does not put forward an effective solution. In the same line, the Marxist perspective does not provide an answer for exploring the role of state actors in these processes. In stating this, Adams and Saks propose adopting the insights of neo-Weberian social action theory even while recognising the complexity characterising the interests of professions, shaped by formal and value rationality. These insights are especially innovative when applied to state actors, whose actions the sociology of professions have otherwise often ignored. As professional actors, state actors may attain a variety of interests and values that shape their behaviors with regard to the professions in particular contexts. Thorough comprehension of this issue enables the generation of empirical questions about those features of greatest relevance to specific situations, when legislators and policy-makers decide to regulate or de-regulate professions.

By analysing the legislative debate, the Adams and Saks paper aims exploring the interests and values that seem to shape the state actor decision making related to the regulation of the healthcare professions. The new tools provided by the authors allows for considering values and ethics as drivers of processes of professionalization, as well as both the professions and state self-interests. Therefore, the extension of the neo-Weberian perspective to state-profession relationships, as outlined by Adams and Saks, returns a deep comprehension of professional developments and their rationales.

This themed issue ends with an article by Florent Champy on "prudential activities" with reference to the Aristotelian concept of *phronesis*, thus practical wisdom, and aims to reflect on its specificities and also to provide three interrelated research programs: (1) on the collective commitments of professionals as a consequence of practical wisdom; (2) on the increasing barriers to practical wisdom; and (3) on social innovations aiming at overcoming these barriers. Empirical research, targeting especially architects and doctors, constitute the basis of Champy's considerations on what he terms the "sociology of prudential activities". The application of this concept, according to the author, seems very useful to explore the commitments of professionals, professional segmentation, the role of practical wisdom at work, the obstacles that stand in the way and how some professionals overcome them. However, this also especially enable the interlinkage of the above issues with the effects of the New Public Management on professionals working in organisations, a core subject in the contemporary sociology of professions.

Champy refers to the case of architecture in order to outline the significance of practical wisdom in some professions, as deliberations about the ends of the

respective activity are a distinct feature of practical wisdom. This means that practical wisdom constitutes the approach required for acting in certain specific and complex situations, which configure a high level of uncertainty. This simultaneously also requires practical wisdom to protect others from the damage experienced whenever such uncertainty is not duly acknowledged. According to Champy's argument, this embodies the opposite of the mechanical implementation of overly abstract rules (without any reference to practical situations), of formalised procedures, of scientific knowledge or of routines. In the case of medicine, the author refers to this as the ultimate prudential activity as it inevitably compromises the individuality of patients and the complexity of the human body and psyche. Hence, medicine constitutes the perfect illustration of all the features of prudential activities.

Regarding the barriers to practical wisdom in bureaucratic settings, Champy argues that Western societies largely ignore the prudential dimension of these activities, fascinated instead by technical and scientific progress. Therefore, the lack of visibility of practical wisdom makes it vulnerable in the face of other values such as performance, responsibility and the capacity for supposedly objective decision-making. Meeting these new expectations in contexts with strong and permanent uncertainty, where recourse to practical wisdom is crucial, thus encounters serious difficulties. Therefore, professionals are increasingly faced with a difficult balance between objectivity and uncertainty at the very core of their practices.

However, the most interesting contribution from Champy's article is the light shed on what he calls "the old sterile debate over the definition of professions". The identification of prudential activities enables the overlapping of the functionalist definition with the interactionist approach, providing new insights into the comprehension of the consequences of New Public Management. The cases of architecture and medicine seem to demonstrate that the perimeter of prudential activities has changed, at least when compared with the "old functionalist professions". As Champy refers, social work is a prudential activity not considered as a profession according to the functionalist perspective. Beyond discussing the boundaries of prudential activities, it is important to explore the process through which they develop by focusing on the very contents of the activity; more precisely, on how practical wisdom constitutes itself as opposed to functionalism based on status differences.

Champy's proposal opens up an original path to research, highlighting new challenges emerging from work settings, especially those where New Public Management principles and growing bureaucracy are in effect. Professional capacities to adapt their work to particular situations, their ability to reflect critically on their own routines, their arrangements to provide new spaces for practical wisdom are pointed out as some of these examples. However, this paper also proposes broadening the spectrum of these challenges by extending them to users. Within this line, Champy argues that practical wisdom-related issues offer an opportunity to expand the perspective to issues crucial to better comprehending the users of professional services.

We do hope readers of *Sociologia, Problemas e Práticas* find this themed section on suspicions involving professions in contemporary societies in equal

measure stimulating and challenging. However, perhaps more importantly, this may serve to encourage a new avenue for dialogue between several fields of knowledge that take the professions and professional groups as their common research interest.

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