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Professionalization in the field of adult education and social work – comparative analysis of Anglo- Saxon and Hungarian experiences. Thesis, 2005

The thesis addresses the issue of professionalism in emerging occupational areas (adult education, community development, social work) which directly stemmed from 19th century social philanthropy.

At the outset fields and aspects of social care, adult education and community development were intertwined, there were no specific social boundaries among them. They were part of social movements. During the 20th century separation into different professional segments has been taken place.

The heritage that they were deeply rooted in social movements later featured in several distinctive traits that made them different from the established, so called 'learned professions' of clergy, medicine and law. These traditionally exclusive set of professions achieved high status and social rewards, control access, self-regulate their practices and police their standards.

Notably the most obvious difference is that the aim of social activities in the newer professional fields outlined above is mainly enabling and empowering people, adding the active ingredient that brings about change in people's lives and in the wider social context. Their concern is definitely not to spoon-feed people, not to place the direction of relevant actions into the hands of experts, but let the people grow, let the people decide, let them gain power over their own lives. This element causes a constant ambiguity and seems to jeopardize the success of professionalization.

So the real problem of professionalization for these areas is how to sustain quality service and perform competently according to standards of excellence parallel with the task of not creating dependency and exercise control over clients, not to monopolize knowledge, not to strive for status and privileges.

However professionals do exercise power. The category *profession* has got a lot of definitions and most of them emphasize a certain degree of symbolic power characteristic of the term, which derives from the specialized body of knowledge that is not shared by everyone. The expertise of the holder of the specialized knowledge is respected, his/her authority is accepted within the professional territory that ultimately means a degree of autonomy for the practitioner. Professionalization revolves around the principle that members control their work (goals, content, terms and conditions). Professionalizing as a collective project carves out this autonomy into institutionalized forms and tries adhering to it seeking jurisdiction to establish the achieved exclusionary shelter.

Aims of the study:

1. If a social movement shifts to become an occupation, and if it aims to professionalize successfully and be recognized as such, it must develop a systemic, tested knowledge-base and attain control over its knowledge-production. The thesis aimed to examine what expertise the practitioners claimed to have, what strategies were adopted to aspire to professional status. Those who strove to achieve professionalization within the fields in question permanently felt a concern wondering whether it was a worthwhile goal and if the answer was affirmative, they

questioned to what extent has progress been reached by the occupational group. This constant concern is indicative of the rather fragile social status which they hold.

2. The thesis set out to investigate the professionalization processes in the USA and in Great Britain –from two perspectives: first, to analyze how it evolved historically and second, to understand the concepts of profession and professionalization strategies which the main actors had in mind directing their efforts to professionalize, to illuminate what assumptions they shared, what frameworks of meaning they created and what topics and propositions they invented. The thesis aimed to analyze the professional literature to see what was representative of the relevant discourse in the given professional fields and as a result to construct the conceptual models or paradigms of professions/professionalization seen as products of the social context in which they arose.

3. The Anglo-Saxon experience socially means a totally different context from Hungary. In the second part of the study the same topic was analysed in the Hungarian social context (characterized by heavy state involvement) and the comparative angle was utilized to highlight the differences and the similarities.

4. The thesis aimed to research the younger generation of degree-holders (adult education specialists) in Hungary to determine the extent to which they are attuned to the profession as a community, whether a professional career is a central issue in their future plans, whether they feel a strong commitment and loyalty to it ?

Hypotheses:

1. Contrary to the Anglo-Saxon professionalization pattern where the state performed a relatively passive role and consequently the professional organisations themselves created their training, accreditation and credentialling, in Hungary the profession of adult education was created largely by the state. The political forces were explicitly dominant in shaping the steps towards professionalization, so much so that they practically crushed the emerging forms of professional autonomy or limited them greatly.

The professional associations' power is rather weak in self-regulating and the practitioners do not even pursue projects which would strengthen their collective authority, rather they are inclined to undertake informal negotiations with political actors. Only individuals can create professional authority in Hungary locally, somehow their cases are not channeled through transformative phases into collective agencies.

The practitioners are mostly recruited from lower middle class, lower social class positions and, from a gender point of view, they are composed mainly of women.

Both of these factors seem to influence more the incremental practices of adjustment and do not foster ones more subversive to the given status quo.

2. In Hungary the process of building a profession is full of breaks and discontinuities. The social activities were not able to become habitualized. The stable „creation” of a professional life and long-term institutionalization is still a goal to be achieved.

3. Differentiation and rivalry among professional groupings (based on social goals, methods etc.) sets up sharp boundaries and distorts the „imagined unity” of the profession. It erodes the collective capacity of the profession and fails to present a contoured image of the profession to public opinion.

4. The younger and trained generation does not feel it belongs to a specific profession. They are not motivated to view their work as a vocation, do not identify with a lifelong professional career. Their commitments tend to become provisional. As a reaction to the unpredictability and uncertainty of the social environment, they prefer to invest in themselves, they accumulate experiences into an individualized package of skills and try to sell themselves as individual experts for a fixed period employment. (the bricoleur-model of Bill Martin)
This emerging feature has a potential risk in reconstituting, redeveloping the specialized knowledge-base of a profession.

5. The abandonment of the dominance-aspect of professionalism and subscribing to the concept of *new professionalism* can only permeate society on a limited base, it does not appear to be capable of attracting sufficient resources and consequently make itself attractive enough to recruit the most able.

Methodology

The theoretical basis of the thesis utilized the discourse analysis-concept of Foucault, Karl Mannheim's sociogenetic functional approach and Pierre Bourdieu's view of society as inter-related arenas, fields which are structured in terms of power relations.

The research rationale was to choose a multiple-methods option in order to reveal many sides of the whole picture. A cumulative view of data was drawn from different contexts. Documents which offered narratives from the profession (conference recordings, textbooks, yearbooks, texts of exemplary innovators, professional periodicals, university curricula) were analyzed, practitioners' surveys were scrutinized, interviews with professionals were taken account of.

Social realities are constructed in different ways in different contexts – the task was to explore the relevant interpretations in the particular fields.

Qualitative research:

Interviews were made with key-figures in the Hungarian professionalization process of adult education, community development and social work. The sample's age range is from 50 till 80. They have been in the forefront of profession-building and have voiced important issues. Apart from gathering from them first-hand data, they offered valuable reflection and assessment on proceedings.

The interviews were rather lengthy, semi-structured. Personal perceptions, and interpretations were specifically sought after. Personal and social perspectives were blended.

There were two focus group interviews with graduate students at their final year,(15 people in each) and one with adult students-to-be offering themselves for the entrance examination to post-graduate studies (all of them 90 minutes long).

There were only a few topics explored in the group discussion, namely: future expectations regarding work and professional life and, in the latter case, the motives of the applicants for choosing the subject.

Quantitative research:

2 surveys were conducted in 2000 and in 2002 with a 10 % sample of those who graduated in adult education within a period of 1989-1999. The surveys were designed to explore their social statuses and career paths. The respondents were asked about the jobs they performed,

their professional concerns and beliefs, their identification with the profession , the usefulness of training, professional prestige and memberships of professional societies.

Results:

1. Constructing conceptual frameworks of professions/professionalization
 - list of traits –model – (normative, ideological)
 - semi-professional model (either in a linear progressive version or seen as a regressive version: counter-professionalization (deprofessionalization)
 - dominance-model, social closure-oriented
 - radical-critical opposition to professionalization – back to the movement
 - new professionalism (civic professionalism; dialog and reciprocity-orientation (following Habermas/ Donald Schon)
 - bricoleur-model
2. In spite of the difference between the Anglo-Saxon and the Hungarian social context and the different evolvement in professionalization processes, the present state of the professions do not differ greatly.
3. British and American professionalization is much more of a result of grassroot actions, the mainstream professional organizations have a longterm viability and they perform a decisive role in shaping the professions, setting up standards. They are successful in getting the support of the voluntary society in and forming partnerships with government. At times big umbrella organizations emerge out of a lot of separated segments, so they are able to build temporary unity-alliances in the professional fields.
But the light and ambiguous approach towards monopolization and dominance (credentialling etc. which is based upon sound ethical concerns) results in a semi-professional level.
4. This is also the case in Hungary where the level of the collective autonomy is persistently weak and that culminates in a very low level of collegiate control. The civic society has always lacked supportive power. The social work in Hungary started a strong professionalization in the late 80s and chose a dominance, social closure-option, even achieved favourable jurisdiction, but it still remained an occupation relatively easy to get into and the monetary rewards didn't follow the constructed strict guidelines.
5. The names of the professions are not straightforward and are still very hazy for a lot. The public is still confused what to expect from these experts. The students who choose the subject at the university still don't know what they have signed up for. Deficits in a clear-cut image of these professions do not help to actors in the professions to identify with them.
6. The young generation does not have social characteristics like the global knowledge-elite, but still show bricoleur-contours. They invest in themselves and not in the profession as a common project. The motor of individualization is palpable in the life plans. It is dangerous for the development and transmission of the specialized knowledge-base as it would need a collective inter-subjective praxis which seems to be evaporating.

