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19. Professions, Governance, and Citizenship through the Global Looking Glass

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RC52 Sociology of Professional Groups

Introduction

The state-professions relationship and the role of professionalism as facilitator of public sector services are key issues of the professions studies. This makes the study of professions an important source of understanding how to create a “better world,” with more efficient public sectors and accessible services for all citizens. Currently, the relationships between professions and the state face a number of fundamental transformations involving different governance reforms, stakeholders, and professional groups. First, state regulation expands towards “governance” with plural actors and market logics; second, globalization and new economies add new forms of “state” and “citizenship”; and third, austerity politics curb prospering markets and public funding for professional services.

This contribution maps the (re-)making of the bonds between professions, governance, and citizens from an international perspective. Historically, the rise of professionalism and the emergence of professional projects are characteristic of civic societies (Bertilsson, 1990). “From the public’s perspective, these services offered by the professions became a yardstick for the success of welfare states to translate the concept of social citizenship into the practice of social services” (Kuhlmann et al., 2016, p.33). Also important is the capacity of professions to “buffer social conflict, acting as mediators between states and citizens, while professionalism furnishes hegemonic claims of nations, governments, organizations and social groups with legitimacy and authority of scientific knowledge” (Kuhlmann et al., 2016, p. 33). As Larson has shown, professionalism also serves as an ideological model for “justifying inequality of status and closure of access in the occupational order” (Larson, 1977, p. xviii).

Globalization and new emergent economies have expanded the scope and practice of the professions. Rapidly developing markets in the BRICS countries

and some other middle-income countries have created new demands for professional expertise and services in public and private sectors (Ballakrishnen, 2016; Bonnin and Ruggunan, 2016; Iarskaia-Smirnova and Abramov, 2016). This happens at a time when the neoliberal turn in the Western world has brought into question the concept of the “welfare state.” Austerity politics and structural adjustment programmes have curbed prospering markets and public funding for professional services, hitting some countries harder than others.

These developments provide unique opportunities for researching changing professions in different social contexts, but this is not without challenges. Viewing professions through the global looking glass calls for a critical reflection of the concepts of professions and professionalism, which essentially built on the political and economic conditions of the twentieth-century welfare states in the Western world. Despite the centrality of the state in the study of professions (Johnson, 1995; Thorstendahl and Burrage, 1990), research and theories have largely failed to adequately reflect on the geopolitical contexts of specific concepts of “state” and “citizenship.”

Recently, research into professions has been paying greater attention, firstly, to globalization and transnational governance (Ballakrishnen, 2016; Faulconbridge and Muzio, 2012) and to international comparison (Bourgeault et al., 2009), and secondly, to the role of organisations and markets, and the connections between managerialism and professionalism (Leicht, 2016; Dent et al., 2016; Kirkpatrick et al., 2016). However, studies primarily look at Western countries, while little is known of the professions in the Global South and in Eastern countries. We seek to further an international dialogue by referring to developments in South Africa, India, Argentina, Russia, Turkey, and the Arab countries (for details, see http://www.isa-sociology.org/pdfs/rc52_professions_in_world_perspective.pdf), and in southern European Union (EU) member states (Italy and Portugal), which faced austerity measures and the politics of New Public Management (NPM).

We apply an explorative case study approach comprising eight country cases. The material was gathered using secondary sources and research carried out by the authors; data were analysed using thematic analysis. Currently, no comparative methodology and no indicators for comparison exist that would allow for a systematic comparison of professions across countries, sectors, and occupations. Most challenging is the lack of a common “reference unit” beyond the concept of welfare state professions that would allow us to create a coherent story of the changing role of the professions. Instead, the examples below take snapshots of professional development using the state-professions relationship as the connecting tie among the case studies.

The results: Different directions of travel in the professions

To begin with, the development of the professions in Arab countries refers to “professionalism” as a universal concept and goal. Arab professionals (e.g., university professors) propose professional values that strikingly resemble those known from functionalist and trait approaches in 1960s and 1970s debates. At the same time, a few traits are missing that have been key issues in the Western functional approaches, like the bonding of professionals in associations and the goals of control and monopoly. This example reveals that universal approaches to professionalism may be mobilized and transformed to create strategic responses to the challenges of building a professional field, while lacking the full hegemonic power of scientific evidence and mature mechanisms of public control and state support.

Looking at the professions in Turkey and Russia, in both countries centralized state/political power has constrained the scope of action of professional groups and the concept of professionalism. Hence, policy changes in both countries transform the state-professions relationship and create new connections, albeit in different ways. Turkey is a middle-income country with strong emergent market logics, including consumerism, which create demand for public sector services. At the same time, the implementation of policies from the realm of new public management attempts to control professional interests. The case of the medical profession brings transformations into view that combine different strategies. New managerial controls cause worries in the medical profession and resistance against a loss of autonomy and professional values, and at the same time, both the government and the medical profession respond with creating new bonds. Policy reform has introduced a number of new clinical management positions for doctors and new methods of managing professional performance and remuneration, while the medical profession tries to retain and even expand its role in setting standards of medical specialty training through associations of medical specialists. Here, the state-profession relationships are transformed in ways where both sides share some aspects of governance, while at the same time the interventionist state keeps a monopoly on control.

Russia, as an example of a transformation country in the BRICS group, has historical linkages with continental European concepts of professions and “intelligence”/ knowledge workers. The new emergent profession of social work in the 1990s illustrates that different value systems combine to create a professional field and training/education systems. While inadequate wage policies of the government together with gendered cultures of social work as unpaid/cheap women’s labour constrained professional development, new access systems introduced by market-driven social policy furthered professionalization; social workers need to validate access and claims to social rights. Consequently, social work is becoming integrated in the public sector and benefits from market expansion. However, social workers lack the power of defining the concepts and

their position in the new marketized policy arrangements, and this may also transform the relationships with clients.

Our next cases comprise professional development in India and South Africa. Next to economic growth and emergent global power as BRICS countries, both countries have also established more plural governance arrangements, which may create new spaces for the professions to flourish. Professional development is shaped by globalization and colonial history. Linkages with the Anglo-Saxon model of the liberal welfare state professions with strong self-governing capacities and control of access to the professions may therefore be embedded in professional development.

In India, the development of the legal profession provides an interesting case because of its position in a matrix of strong globalization and transnational forces, and national regulatory orders that include a number of constraints for market completion of Indian law firms as well as restrictions for foreign lawyers. In this situation, both Indian and foreign companies have developed strategies of market expansion through new forms of corporate investigation. For instance, India is well on the way to become a major centre for legal process outsourcing, a strategy which is also known from the IT and publication sectors. Such transformations foster the development of a small elitist professional segment, while other legal professionals may face a loss of market power, as they are not able to compete in a globalizing environment. This case highlights transformations in state-professions arrangements: first, state interventions have only limited power to target re-stratification of the legal professions because of emergent global corporate market politics; second, the model of a strong self-regulatory profession may further new forms of strategic market closure without strong state support to build a small elitist segment.

The South African case also illustrates rapid growth and relevance of a public professionalism in recent years and integration in public sector policies. As part of the post-apartheid politics there is a strong demand for more inclusive professional development. However, the professions remain structured by gendered and racial/ethnic patterns of inequality. In this case, it seems that the professions are able to mobilize strong self-governing capacities, as separated from the state, to preserve occupational monopolies for some social groups and control access to professional fields through exclusionary strategies. Thus, re-stratification and other transformations in the professions, like marketization and management, may further create gender and racial inequalities, despite a lack of (formal) legal and state support and even in contrast to new legal requirements of inclusion. Recently, more concerted attempts by the state to regulate professions in line with the state transformation agenda might turn the wheels and constrain attempts to preserve the occupational monopolies for some social groups.

Argentina provides an example of a Latin American country with a growing economy and social services, increasingly plural governance tiers, and his-

torically strong socio-cultural connections with Europe (especially the Latin countries), which might further the emergence of public sector professionalism. Here, technological changes and new developments in information and communication technologies have fostered the development of transnational offers from higher education institutions, especially in professional education and postgraduate studies. So professional groups respond to transnational markets by creating both new career chances for individual professionals and a process of knowledge production of a professional group. This example highlights how globalization and transnationalism may strengthen the role of the professions as change agents and policy players not only nationally, but (at least in future) also on the international floor.

Finally, developments in southern European Union (EU) member states strongly affected by the politics of austerity and new forms of public sector governance and management give proof of transformations in EU welfare states. Changes in governance of the public sector may constrain the decision-making powers of professional groups, but at the same time, they open up new opportunities. This can be shown for instance in medicine in Portugal, where doctors are involved more closely in management and taking over new roles (Correia and Denis, 2016). More generally, workforce trends in the EU over the last two decades show a robust increase in the health and social care professions and their share of the total employment (Pavolini and Kuhlmann, 2016).

Conclusion and outlook

These country cases have taken us on a journey around the globe and told the stories of a range of professional fields, from higher education, law, and media to social work and medicine. At present, these are selective, unfinished stories coming into view as part of an emergent global approach to the professions and professionalism. Yet there are some important trends to identify.

Firstly, the developments illustrate the importance of professional groups forming the backbone of knowledge societies and public sector services, and providing the expertise for governance and policy reform (Burau, 2016). The changing public policies and the new concepts of governance as well as the austerity measures may transform the scope of action and practice of professions and professionalism, yet they also embody new opportunities for professional groups to shape the direction of progression. This is what Bertilsson (1990) described years ago as the double role of the professions as “officers” and “servants” of the public (Kuhlmann, 2006).

Secondly, there are important differences in the directions professional groups across the globe pursue in their development, innovation, restratification, and contestation. In the Arab countries, universal approaches to professionalism are used strategically to build a professional field and expertise, while mature

mechanisms of public control and state support are lacking. Russia and Turkey show strong centralized, hierarchical state interventions to constrain professional self-governance coupled with increasing involvement of professionals in management that may target professions-users relationships. In Argentina, India, and South Africa, globalization and a self-governing professional model may promote the building of new professional fields, but also create different opportunities towards inclusive professionalism and equality. Italy and Portugal respond with a mix of inclusive strategies (involving professionals in organising/managing public services), market-based incentives, and interventionist states to control the behaviour of professionals.

In summary, the context-dependency and co-existence of various paths of professional development challenge previous theorising of the professions as more uniform (Western-based) groups, experiencing similar forms of “jurisdiction” (Abbott, 1988) of professional knowledge and powers, or as Freidson (2001) put it, they share a “third logic” of professionalism as opposed to market logics and bureaucracy. Fresh approaches are therefore called for which expand on the range of governance and citizenship concepts, the professional groups and models of professionalism involved in research and theorising. Here, our comparative case study research has made a first step towards exploring how the study of professions from a global perspective may contribute to better understanding transformations in public sector policy and services.

We have set the focus on the state-professions relationship and the institutional conditions to open the box of global research into the professions. Yet the institutional approach did not adequately grasp the actor-centred changes, including in the gender arrangements, as observed in both the most male-centred areas like the military (Carreiras, 2006) and female-centred groups like nursing (Wrede, 2008), and in the ethnic/racial/cultural composition of the professions (Bonnin and Ruggunan, 2013). Professions in a twenty-first-century globalising world are no longer populated solely by white male actors, although inequality still persists. The developments may transform the concepts of “citizenship” and “the public” from inside the professions, and therefore need greater attention.

Note

A first, shorter version of this contribution has been published in *Global Dialogue* (Kuhlmann et al., 2015; <http://isa-global-dialogue.net/professions-in-an-international-perspective-opening-the-box/>) and did not include the EU case. We wish to thank the participants in the sessions at the ISA Forum for an inspiring discussion, and the new RC52 President Helena Serra for enthusiastically pushing forward the global dialogue.

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