Christiane Schnell

Editorial

It would be safe to state that over the last two decades, the sociology of professions has been influenced by at least two developments. First, the structural changes experienced by the established professions in the face of welfare-state transformation and new governance have taken centre stage in our research. Second, the necessity to overcome narrowed, affirmative or technocratic concepts of professionalism has been an important motivation for the advancement of the sociological debate. Both impulses have led to a multifaceted international landscape of empirical research that is concerned with a broad variety of traditional and new professional fields, different approaches to professionalization and diverse interpretations of professionalism. A foreseeable side effect of this situation is a growing disproportionality between the richness of empirical works and theoretical concepts, which are able to capture these developments in a sufficient manner.

Of course, relevant novel interpretations have emerged, but it is still a challenge for the sociology of professions to generate contemporary theoretical proposals to frame itself as a discrete subfield in the sociological debate. This issue has come to the fore in recent debates in Germany, where the tie between the sociology of professions and social theory has always been quite strong. In the summer of 2015, the Sociology of Professions section of the German Sociological Association held a conference at the Institute of Social Research, Goethe University Frankfurt to elaborate on these matters. The leading question has been to what extent the terms "professions," "professionalization" and "professionalism" remain substantial and sustainable theoretical concepts with regard to the changing landscape of current professionalism. Naturally, these questions have not been conclusively answered (and will probably never be settled), but they have led to fruitful discussions, which are presented in this special issue.

Five chapters discuss professionalism undergoing change from different theoretical standpoints. Empirically, all papers refer to the medical profession, which has traditionally served as the ideal–typical discipline from which to derive general interpretations about professionalism. Peter Münte and Claudia Scheid offer a neoclassical view on professions. This quite prominent approach in the German debate may be understood as a revitalization and advancement of the functional approach, focusing on the micro-structures of professional action. Werner Vogd discusses the future of professionalism from a systems theory perspective. Based on a meta-theoretical conceptualization, Vogd proposes a way to describe the complexity of professional reflection and decision making. The analysis leads us to the question of how far the changing framework conditions support this kind of work and can be feasible and still appealing for future generations of professionals. In my article, I am inquiring about the consequences of the hybridization of professional work. Regarding the field of cancer medicine, two patterns are presented, which show that hybridized professionalism can assume different shapes, maintaining professional power while becoming more vulnerable. Michaela Pfadenhauer and Heiko Kirschner explain how such mediatized business models as rating platforms undermine the authority of the medical profession. Finally, Gina Atzeni deals with the application and

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further development of the systems theory's insight into the sociology of professions, particularly the profession of medical doctors. By a comparative analysis of autobiographies, she presents professional expectation management as a mechanism to connect medicine to a constantly changing society.