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Shared Spaces or Shelters for Precarious Workers? Coworking Spaces in Italy

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Abstract

This paper critically discusses the relationship between new workspaces, such as Coworking Spaces (CSs), professionals using such spaces, and the related work patterns, looking at the Italian context in particular. There appears to be a mismatch between the educational level of such workers, their expertise and expected professional status on the one hand, and their reality in terms of employment precariousness and low income, on the other. It appears that CSs and, more in general, new shared workspaces act more as shelters from a difficult and exclusionary job market than as mainly "serendipity accelerators." The hypothesis of this article is that, through a careful interpretation of the emerging dimensions and spatial effects of CSs, it is possible to more clearly identify some dynamics of inclusion and exclusion on the one hand, and of sharing and competition on the other, that characterize the job path of new knowledge-based occupational groups.

Keywords

Professionals, knowledge workers, coworking spaces, inclusion, precariousness, Italy

The changing nature of professions and the role of new workspaces

The debate on professions has acknowledged, in the last few years, the changing position of professionals in the job market and society, and even a shifting definition of professionals themselves, in such changed conditions (Bellini & Maestripieri, 2018; Gorman & Sandefur, 2011; Leicht, 2015;). Differently from the past, professionals, today can be defined according to their expertise, even if they lack specific educational credentials, codes of ethics, qualifications to access professional associations (such as those including lawyers, or architects, or medicine doctors). Professionals as a specific category, and knowledge workers as a broader field, increasingly share some common elements: "In the eyes of contemporary scholars, the commonalities between traditional professions and new forms of knowledge-based work are more important than the differences" (Gorman & Sandefur, 2011, p.277). The underlying trend is connected to the "emergence of new occupations offering services based on expert knowledge but lacking the autonomy, service orientation, or prestige of traditional professions (e.g., biochemists, management consultants, financial analysts, public relations specialists)" (Gorman & Sandefur, 2011, p.280).

In the face of such increasing differentiation and increased heterogeneity in the field, these 'new' professionals may experience, in turn, exclusion mechanisms and forms of marginalization vis-à-vis other traditional professionals. This is visible both at the theoretical level, in terms of definitions of different professional roles, and practice, in empirical observations of labour market dynamics (Bellini & Maestripieri, 2018).

Besides, the concept of professionalism may be redefined as a 'practice,' highlighting the practicality of the wisdom used by professionals in performing their everyday tasks. Since practitioners of newer occupations increasingly lack formal representation and associations, they tend to convene in building informal 'communities of practice' (Gorman & Sandefur, 2011; Wenger, 1998; Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002). Such communities of practice can be sector or theme-specific (around defined professional areas, or emerging challenges, or tools), but they can also be place-based, as far as they convene professionals from different sectors in specific places; innovative workspaces such as coworking spaces, maker spaces, fab-labs or urban hybrid spaces are among those typically hosting these communities.

Coworking spaces, in particular, host different types of professionals, specifically those engaged in start-ups, early-stage entrepreneurs, freelance, self-employed and independent knowledge workers, who need social and professional interaction to overcome the risk of isolation and loneliness (Spinuzzi, 2012). Moving from this first empirical observation, in this article, we will try to identify some connections between the emergence of new professionals, the increased heterogeneity in their work path, the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion at play, and the diffusion of innovative workspaces.

Shared Spaces or Shelters for Precarious Workers?

Emerging professionals (Maestripieri & Cucca, 2018) have assumed the market logic as naturally constituting their essence while not perceiving the insecurity determined by exposure to the market as problematic in an era of hegemonic neoliberalism (Murgia, Maestripieri & Armano, 2016). As a natural consequence, less power implies a weaker association between professional status, social status, and financial rewards (Bellini & Maestripieri, 2018, p. 7). Being on the market, however, is not always sufficient to ensure adequate income levels and access to welfare, in particular in difficult labour markets, such as the Italian one (Maestripieri & Cucca, 2018).

Within this context, a good case in point is that of professionals belonging to the creative class; the increasing relevance they have assumed is, however, also linked to the reorganization of the forms of work in the knowledge economy, that is characterized by a progressive fragmentation of working relationships. These working relationships are accompanied by an increasingly accentuated insecurity of workers, whether they are low-skilled workers or individuals with high-level skills and networks. These workers share some characteristics with a larger population "floating, composed of female workers and independent workers, precarious, poor at work, skilled and mobile workers, subjected to permanent flexibility" (Allegri & Ciccarelli, 2013, p. 219) (*author's translation*), so much so that some observers have proposed to assimilate them to a Fifth State, in the "desperate search for emancipation and equality" (Allegri & Ciccarelli, 2013, p.11).

If one looks in particular at urban and metropolitan contexts, in which high skilled professionals in the knowledge-based economy typically move, one can see the emergence of these new professionals either as self-employed workers ("lone eagles") (Spinuzzi, 2012), or joining forces in start-ups and, more in general, in the formation of small and flexible management entities (Gandini, 2015). As main subjects in a context of distributed work, they pose novel questions in terms of positionality, both in the labour market and in society at large. Unlike in the past, the struggle for workers' rights and the same resistance strategies appear to be deployed on a purely individual level, while structured representation strategies, as well as a process of collective identification of these subjects, are missing: "The price for freedom and serendipity paid by many freelancers and creative entrepreneurs—categories who represent the lion's share of coworking creators and users—is often precariousness: low or fluctuant income, fragile health insurance and retirement scheme" (Moriset, 2013, p. 20).

In Italy, this general trend is exacerbated by a stagnant labour market dynamic, that coupled with underinvestment in education, training and career paths, leads many young people to retreat into defensive educational and career strategies (if not in the refusal of strategies at all, as is witnessed by the high ratio of NEETs) (Bonanomi & Rosina, 2020).

To better understand how looking at coworking spaces may provide further evidence about the role and characters of emerging professional, thus contributing to the international debate on this issue, in the next sections we will first critically introduce the trends and drivers connected to the diffusion of CSs, and the related proximity and sharing dimensions; we will then, try and characterize who are the professionals using CSs, and how they can be defined based on intrinsic characters, such as their expertise and employment status, but also in relation to their choice to settle in CSs, and the impacts that opportunities related to this choice may have on their careers, impinging on some evidence emerging from a survey on coworkers (CWs) across Italy. Finally, we will propose some concluding remarks about the professionals and CSs, regarding knowledge sharing, proximity and the creation of communities as defensive strategies in a difficult labour market.

The emergence of coworking spaces: Trends, features, role

Coworking spaces are places of knowledge concentration, production and exchange, strongly based on relational and collaborative dimensions, which have been diffusing worldwide in the last fifteen years, due to different concurrent trends in contemporary production patterns, connected to the emergence of the knowledge economy. CSs are innovative workplaces where independent (and frequently precarious) knowledge-based, creative, and digital workers—mainly self-employed professionals—share their workspaces: they have been interpreted as "shared workplaces utilised by different sorts of knowledge professionals, mostly freelancers, working in various degrees of specialisation in the vast domain of the knowledge industry" (Gandini, 2015, p. 194).

Moreover, CSs are working environments in which people, who are not linked by any hierarchical or organisational structure, decide to work side by side, to overcome isolation and to take advantage of proximity (Boschma, 2005); this, in turn, may enhance forms of community building and opportunities for cooperation, but also, more specifically, the strengthening of new working connections and the creation of knowledge spill-overs (Capdevila, 2014; Spinuzzi, 2012). In the end, CSs can be seen as interesting experiments in the creation of enabling environments for the diffusion and exchange of tacit knowledge, and this is in fact one of the aspects investigated by literature; in this perspective, the proximity factor acquires specific importance: "just by belonging to a local community, an insider will have access to the shared knowledge among members of similar but distant communities" (Capdevila, 2014, p. 2).

The spread of these new spaces and places of work across the world has been linked by literature to a multiplicity of phenomena: among these, of relevance for this article are the diffusion of ICTs, which have enabled different forms of smart working (Johns & Gratton, 2013), by freeing people from the need of being located in a specific place, with some advantages, as well as downturns (Isin & Ruppert, 2015); the emergence of a metropolitan creative class and the ways, methods, and tools of knowledge transmission and exchange

that characterize it; *the reorganization of forms of labour* in the knowledge economy and the difficulties of their representation.

The emergence of a new so-called metropolitan creative class has been the subject of extensive literature (Florida, 2002; 2004), which has highlighted the potential linked to the spread of professional activities based on knowledge and creativity for cities; there have been recent critical reviews, in light of the dilemmas, the growing forms of spatial and social polarization, the difficulty of an excessively simplifying interpretation (a good summary of the literature in Scott, 2014). The new professions lead to the creation of widespread and fragmented networks, but at the same time to processes of strong spatial agglomeration, clearly visible in the main urban areas.

Concurrently, there have been significant changes in the labour market structure, connected to the diffusion of jobs that differ from forms of full-time regular employment (Allegri & Ciccarelli, 2013; Cappelli & Keller, 2013). These phenomena, differently combined in each political, institutional and economic context, result in an increased diffusion of highly skilled professionals, characterized by different forms of expertise in the creative domains (arts, architecture, design, digital media, communication, etc.) and tertiary level education; such workers are, to a certain extent, forced to be always innovative, while at the same time a precarious and fragile segment of the job market (Allegri & Ciccarelli, 2013; Moriset, 2014).

Finally, as far as new urban economies are concerned, there has been a renewed attention to their social and relational dimension, one interesting, albeit controversial example being the emergence and diffusion of the sharing economy (P2P Foundation, 2012; Rifkin, 2014). Several characters define this semantic field: the progressive transition from ownership to access, the sharing of goods and services or "sharing of idle capacity" (Frenken & Schor, 2017, p. 5), otherwise largely underutilized, the rediscovery of the importance of social networks, which are at the same time the end and the medium of this profound renewal (Frenken & Schor, 2017).

The emergence and spread of forms of coworking and workspace sharing has often been related to this paradigm shift, although it is perhaps worthwhile to problematize this relationship, by investigating more in depth the tension and dynamics between collaboration and competition, which is articulated in much more complex ways than what emerges from the current debate. While CSs can be seen as strengthening cooperation and knowledge sharing by impinging of proximity, the competitive dimension is necessarily present, particularly for precarious and marginalized professionals. Thus, as far as professionals are concerned, the article investigates their relationship with CSs, and looks in particular to how CSs can be seen as springboards in their professional careers and life, or if they rather act as shelters and defences from a difficult labour market, in particular in the light of the increasing differentiation in the professional world, the increased heterogeneity and, therefore, the emerging risks of marginalisation and exclusion that concern the most

fragile and precarious segment of this universe. As we will see in the final section, the concept of sheltering implies a double-edged and ambiguous situation.

Sharing and proximity

Before the huge reorganisation in workplace uses due to Covid-19 pandemic and the related restrictions, coworking spaces tended to attract users from varied backgrounds and professions: the so-called coworking-users or coworkers can vary from freelancers, self-employed individuals and entrepreneurs to consultants, and small and micro enterprises (Butcher, 2018; Garrett, Spreitzer & Bacevice, 2017).

A study by Krauss, Le Nadant and Marinos (2018) on coworking spaces in small and medium size cities in France and Germany has categorized coworkers as: (i) freelancers; (ii) microbusinesses; (iii) employees or self-employed workers. CS can host both microbusinesses and self-employed workers, based in the coworking spaces themselves, and employees whose activity is done on behalf of a company based outside the coworking spaces. In the latter case, coworking can be considered a mode of telecommuting that allows companies to relocate part of their activity to places distant from their headquarters, to deal with strategic and management needs or to meet the needs of their employees. This strategy, which will probably become more diffused in the light of the new work habits, has thus far mainly been adopted by multinational firms in the USA, and, more recently, also in Europe.

New workplaces may attract diverse professional profiles and competencies, ranging from the creative industry - such as architects, designers, journalists, etc.- to engineering and digital sectors-namely IT, software developers, consultants, etc. (Akhavan & Mariotti, 2018; Gandini, 2015; Spinuzzi, 2012). Therefore, coworkers can learn from each other through sharing spaces and interaction. Despite the heterogeneity among coworkers regarding their organisational status (Parrino, 2015), there is for sure one common aspect among all coworkers: they all seek a workplace to 'work-alone-together' (Spinuzzi, 2012).

Some scholars have classified coworkers based on what they may earn from being located in a CS (Bilandzic & Foth, 2013):

— *Utilizers*, use CSs for their need of technological infrastructure

— *Learners*, make use of CSs to gain and exchange knowledge, attend events, etc.

— *Socializers*, seek recognition and acknowledgment in CSs

Researches on the Global South also confirm the above-mentioned profiles of the users (mainly based on the Western World). On this matter, a study on CSs in Manila, Philippines, shows that coworkers are mainly among 'digital entrepreneurs of start-up companies; highly skilled knowledge workers such as freelance lawyers, consultants, and architects; and

foreign digital nomads who often form a community among themselves, which are occupations and work cultures that contrast starkly with the roles that online Filipino freelancers often assume' (Tintiangko & Soriano, 2020, p. 78).

In other words, early-stage entrepreneurs, freelancers, self-employed and independent knowledge workers need social and professional interaction to overcome the risk of isolation and loneliness – typical of working from home – and also to increase meeting and networking opportunities (Johns & Gratton, 2013; Moriset, 2014; Mariotti, Pacchi & Di Vita, 2017). From a proximity study point of view, Boschma (2005) has underlined the impact of geographical proximity, and agglomeration economies, on interactive learning and innovation. Furthermore, the importance of geographical proximity should always be examined with other dimensions of proximity: social, institutional, cognitive, organizational.

Besides, Kwiatkowski and Buczynski (2011) have defined coworking based on five main values: collaboration (the willingness to cooperate with others to create shared values), community (intangible benefits, shared purpose), sustainability (do good to do well and offset the environmental footprint of the space), openness (free sharing of ideas, information, and people), and accessibility (financially and physically accessible, diversity).

The Italian context: Results from empirical research

Data and methodology

Looking more closely at the Italian situation can enable us to highlight some specific trends, which help us to investigate more in-depth the relationship between level of expertise, professional status, and location in a CS for a wide variety of professionals.

In 2018, 549 CSs have been registered in Italy, according to the Italian Coworking Survey (Italian Coworking, 2018). They have been founded in the last ten years and are mainly located in cities, following some dynamics similar to those in other regions of the world, but also with some peculiarities. While concentrations of such spaces are visible in metropolitan regions (which host about 47% of the total), there are also CSs diffused in less dense areas, both in suburban regions and in marginal inner (rural) areas. The city with the highest presence of CSs is Milan, which has been a pioneer in this trend in Italy (Mariotti, Pacchi & Di Vita, 2017; Pacchi, 2018), and in which around 100 CSs are located (depending on the definition). Besides, while some CSs in Italy are promoted by the public (in particular, by Local and regional administrations, aiming at fostering local development and innovation), many are private, promoted in this last case either by for-profit on non-profit organizations.

Data about coworkers come from a survey (on-line questionnaire) that has been carried out in 2018 and was addressed to the CWs working in the 549 CSs in Italy (Akhavan & Mariotti, 2018). The respondents, 326 in total, work in 138 CSs (about 25% of the total), located in 83 different cities, homogenously distributed in the four macro-regions of Italy (north-west,

north-east, centre, south, and islands). There is a concentration in metropolitan areas (34%), with Milan registering 60 CWs. The survey was sent to coworking managers, that in turn diffused it to their coworkers, and this two-step process probably explains the relatively low level of respondents. Thus, although the sample is not representative of the entire community of coworkers in Italy, it covers a significant share of the CWs, thus offering interesting insights to explore the phenomenon. Further research might focus on the more representative, sector- or regional area-specific surveys that might allow to deepen and consolidate the results of this first exploration.

The questionnaire was composed of the following sections: (i) socio-demographics (gender, age, education, etc.); (ii) employment status, skills, and sector; (iii) income and revenues increase or decrease; (iv) the motivations for selecting the CS; (v) the advantages/ disadvantages; (vi) facilities provided and the most used ones; (vii) proximity measures: social, institutional, organizational, cognitive; (viii) satisfaction for working in the CS and wellbeing; (ix) urban effects of the CS as perceived by the interviewee; (x) willingness to work in CS in the next 3-years.

Results

It results that 44% of the respondents are female and 56% male; 52% are aged 36–50, followed by CWs aged between 25 and 35 (38%), over 51 (9%), and those aged 19–24 (1%).

About 37% had spent at least 6 months abroad, for the purpose of education or work.

As far as the educational level is concerned, the majority (about 78%) is highly educated: about 41% holds a Master degree, 18.4% a bachelor degree, and 18.7% achieved a specialising master or PhD degree. The remaining: high school (20.9%), secondary school (0.9%) and primary school (0.3%).

The CWs' sectors of specialization mainly belong to the creative industry (65%), followed by management consultancy, training, and other sectors.

The analysis of the employment status shows that the majority of CWs are freelancers (59%), followed by employees (30%) and other categories (11% – apprentices, interns, students).

Looking at the size of the firms the CWs work for, 64% have up to 5 employees, 17% 6-10 employees, 14% 11-25 and about 5% more than 50 workers. Besides, about 11,7% are start-up firms.

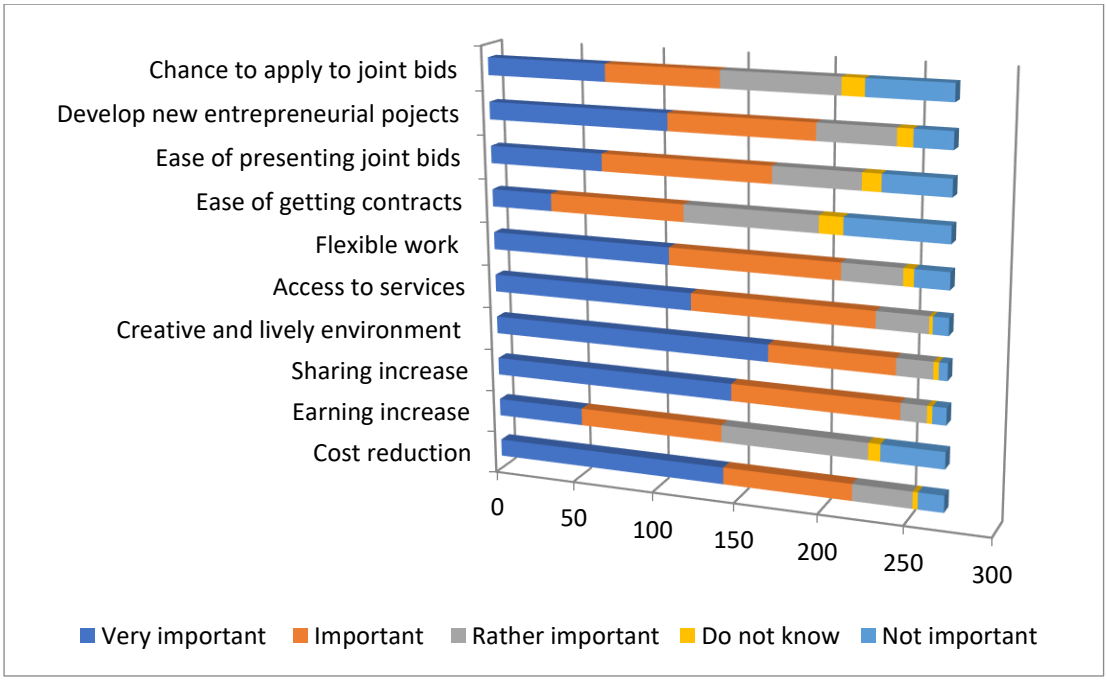
The CWs declared to have, on average, a low-medium income: 32% earn less than 15,000 euro gross per year, followed by 41% between 15,000 and 30,000, 17% between 30,000 and 50,000, and the remaining 10%, more than 50,000. Those earning more are managers and

entrepreneurs. There is not a concentration of higher income in specific sectors. The firms CWs belong to are rather young: 77% was founded after 2010.

What are CSs offering to CWs? About 49% are attending or have attended training courses organized in the space: only 12.3% of the CS did not offer any course to their coworkers. Therefore, the spaces favour the professionalisation of coworkers, also through investment in education and skills.

The CWs underlined that the main ("very important") motivation supporting the selection of a CS was related to cost reduction (Fig. 1). Indeed, during the economic downturn, CSs represent a valid and cheaper alternative to traditional offices. Other pull factors applied to the opportunity: (i) to work in a lively and creative environment, that well fits the CWs that were mainly specialized in the creative industry; (ii) to increase knowledge sharing; (iii) to access shared services and instruments (i.e. IT, secretary, common rooms, meeting rooms, etc.); (iv) to access a flexible labour organisation; (v) to develop new entrepreneurial projects; (vi) to apply for joint bids and the ease in presenting joint bids; (vii) ease in getting contracts; and (viii) to increase earnings.

Figure. *1. Motivation for selecting the coworking space (pull factors)*
Source: Mariotti and Akhavan, 2020 (p. 46).



These answers stressed the importance that respondents attribute to the main advantages of being located with CSs: cost reduction and the lively and creative environment, characterized by the sharing of services, spaces and knowledge, which could increase new business opportunities. These answers underline the role of organisational proximity that

CWs experience in a CSs (i.e. services, facilities, training courses, etc.), which enhances knowledge sharing and business opportunities growth.

The role of most of these aspects, which depict the attractiveness of the CSs, has been further explored through questions about the advantages the respondents were expecting to exploit in the CS. The comparison between expectations and actual perceptions by the coworkers allows us to understand whether what is perceived overcame the expectations or the other way round.

As shown in Table 1, what is perceived by the respondents overcomes the expectations as far as the supply of spaces, facilities, services are concerned; besides, it appears that CWs have also developed more friendship with other CWs, than they were expecting.

These results confirm the importance of the working environment (a proxy of organizational proximity), which ranked in the first positions also in the analysis about the motivations, and that might have been responsible for the ease to establish friendships. A lively and creative workplace might enhance the sense of community (a proxy of social proximity) that plays a key role in CSs.

Table 1. *The expected and perceived advantages to work in a CS*

	expected	perceived	expected	perceived	expected	perceived	expected	perceived
	Very important		Important		Do not know		Not important	
New professional relatior	196	167	71	108	1	14	3	37
New friends	123	164	117	113	15	14	16	35
Access to new info channe	143	136	101	129	15	14	12	47
Access to new training op	99	97	116	117	14	25	42	87
Access to facilities and ins	111	138	123	132	10	10	27	46
Access to new spaces	147	197	102	117	5	3	17	9
Access to services	97	127	118	120	9	14	47	65

Table 1. *The expected and perceived advantages to work in a CS*
Source: Akhavan & Mariotti, 2018

Moreover, the survey investigated an aspect that is not well analyzed in the literature on CSs, which is the way the physical dimension and the organisation of space are conducive to better interaction patterns: many CWs stressed the importance of the layout of CSs, which fosters meeting opportunities.

For instance, about 38% of the CWs (always or very often) discussed issues related to their work during lunchtime, mainly in the kitchen or in other devoted spaces of the workplace.

Overall, all the effects of the workplace on coworkers we have analyzed might have positive impacts on their economic performance and well-being: indeed 39% of the CWs and 29% of the firms experienced revenue increases since they had started working in the CS. Interestingly, about 73% of the respondents declared to have developed new products and

services, of those 52% have done it jointly with other CWs. Additionally, almost all CWs (97%) confirmed they were satisfied to work in the current CS. It can, therefore, be stated that CWs have evaluated positively their CSs, indeed 57% declared that they intended to work in the same CS in the next three years, 5% would move to another CS, 34% did not know and only 4% would not work in a CS anymore.

Conclusions: Lessons from workspace evolution

The emerging patterns from our empirical research in Italy offers new insights to the international debate by describing a diverse world of professionals choosing to locate in a CS, some of whom belong to recognized professions (with Charters, certification, accreditation tests, etc.), some not, with a very diverse array of employment status and career paths. What certainly those people have in common is the level of expertise, predominantly in knowledge-intensive fields, in creative industries as well as in the ICTs and digital sectors.

As we have seen, around 60% of those located in CWs obtained a Master or PhD Degree, while in Italy, in general, less than 20% of citizens in the 25-64 yeas age bracket hold a tertiary degree. This confirms the trend we mentioned at the beginning of the article, which identifies professionals essentially based on their expertise. Moreover, 65% of professionals in CWs work in the creative industries, and around 60% are freelancers, which again confirms that they can be solo professionals, which are rarely embedded in large organisations, or even in smaller units.

Knowledge sharing via physical and social proximity and the related knowledge spill-overs play a significant role in both the choice to settle in a CS, and in the reasons for remaining in one. Moreover, by sharing different forms of practical knowledge and milieu knowledge about the characters of specific segments of the labour markets (clients, providers, etc.) professionals in CSs can form and strengthen communities of practice, which do not use exclusively online connections, but can enjoy some form of physical interaction.

At the same time, if we look at income, most professionals earn uncertain and low incomes, and CSs do not appear to work as springboards in securing them a more stable career and recognized social status.

Moreover, as far as the representation of their needs and interests is concerned, the emerging picture is double-edged, because it is not clear yet to what extent coworking spaces have the potential to become places for a new collective identification and to produce forms of empowerment, or else if they will remain isolated bubbles, shelters for weak and precarious knowledge economy professionals, in which growing forms of social, professional and economic polarisation will perpetuate and intensify. The sheltering metaphor appears particularly appropriate to describe this double-edged situation: CSs are places in which precarious and insecure professionals find some form of protection from the

difficulties of their labour market, but at the same time this does not become for them neither a springboard for securing more stable and profitable careers (only a minority mention an increase in their income), nor, more importantly, an occasion conducive to building form of political representation vis-à-vis neoliberal professional markets.

Even if such emerging evidence concerns the Italian situation, if we widen our perspective to issues and questions from the international debate, as reconstructed in the first sections of this paper, it appears that the relations between the status, careers and forms of representation of knowledge professionals and CSs in Italy are not dissimilar from those that can be found across Europe. Various sources in literature, as well as the first pieces of evidence emerging from a EU funded a COST Action on New Workspaces in more than twenty European countries, point in this direction. The first suggestions from this research may thus become a starting point to open up new research paths about the double-edged potential of such workspaces in different national and territorial contexts. Such new research paths lead us to some final remarks about the role of this debate in the current pandemic situation, and the possible directions emerging for the post-pandemic one.

Looking at what has been happening in the last few months, coworking spaces have been struggling during the Covid-19 pandemic, when physical distancing needed to be guaranteed and people have been confined into their homes to minimize the risks of contagion and transmission of the virus. A large majority of service workers had to move from traditional work in the office, what Oldenburg called the Second place (Oldenburg, 1989) to work at home (First place) through forms of smart or remote working (Ozimek, 2020), as in the case of the creative professionals, to which most of those located in CSs, or Third place, belong. This has had a massive impact on those coworking spaces that were founded on the 'sense of community amongst CWs, which may enable them to benefit from knowledge transfer, informal exchange, cooperation, and forms of horizontal interaction with others, as well as business opportunities (Spinuzzi, 2012). Recent surveys focusing on the effects of the pandemic on CSs have underlined (among the others, see Coworker, 2020) a significant drop in the number of people working from CSs since the outbreak, which, in turn, has been followed by a negative impact on membership and contract renewals, and a drop in the number of new membership inquiries.

Within this scenario, CSs will possibly be forced to reinvent their role by hosting remote workers, i.e. mainly employees, whose activity is done on behalf of a company or organisation based elsewhere, and/or offer services to the neighbourhood (i.e. family membership, baby-sitting, re-training courses for those who lost their job).

This strategy, in perspective, may allow employees to work closer to their home, on the one side one side, and to avoid commuting to the city by working in less central areas that are considered safer than metropolitan cores, on the other side. The so-called resilient CSs (Gandini & Cossu, 2019), or Community-led CSs (Avdikos & Merkel, 2020), embrace the

evolution of work in a direction of flexibility and independence, by prioritizing strong relationships with their local context, to positively impact this one through entrepreneurial activities. If this trend will be confirmed, after the emergency phase, the relationship between different emerging professionals, their inherent increasing heterogeneity, and innovative workspaces will inevitably change, in the direction of a novel combination and interaction not just with other, diverse, professionals, but with workers with different knowledge, skills, expertise and career paths. Thus, CSs may become more mainstream, and precarious professional may lose one protected space, in favour of a more heterogeneous environment.

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The Academic Profession in Neoliberal Times: A Gendered View

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Abstract

While witnessing a feminization of its workforce, the academic profession has experienced a process of market-based regulation that has contributed to the precarization of early career phases and introduced a managerial culture based on competition, hyper-productivity, and entrepreneurship. This paper aims to investigate the implications of these changes for female academics. A mixed model research design was used based on administrative data on the Italian academic population and qualitative interviews with life scientists within a specific academic institution. Results show that the implications of university transformations in terms of gender heterogeneity are complex. On the one hand, the increased precarization of early career stages has increased gender inequalities by reducing female access to tenured positions. On the other, the adoption of performance-based practices has mixed consequences for women, entailing both risks and opportunities, including spaces of agency which may even disrupt male-dominated hierarchies.

Keywords

Gender, professions, neoliberal academia, scientific careers, inequalities.

Introduction

In recent years, the academic profession across the world has gone through a process of marketization, favouring cost-efficiency, accountability, and performance (Krüger, Parellada, Samoilovich & Sursock, 2018). These large-scale changes have occurred in parallel with the progressive differentiation of faculty members, their increasing precarization and their diversification, especially in terms of gender. Whether these transformations have increased heterogeneity in the profession, and more specifically gender-based inequalities, is the subject of this paper.

Historically rooted in institutions (universities) and organizations (departments), the academic profession has for a long time shared certain features with the traditional professionalism of the last century: high status, relatively good economic return, public engagement, freedom from market-based principles, and intellectual autonomy (Gorman & Sandefur, 2011). These characteristics have recently been challenged, however, by the cuts to public funding of higher education across many Western countries which have fostered a university model based on performance evaluation.

Italian academia has not been exempted from this global trend. While witnessing an increase in the academic population as a whole, and in its female component more specifically, the profession has gone through a process of market-based regulation led by at least four main drivers: the reshaping of the academic career ladder and more specifically the precarization of its early stages, the block on turnover within the tenured workforce, the adoption of evaluation systems for the productivity, and cuts to national, publicly financed research funds.

Given this framework, the purpose of this paper is to understand both the implications of these changes, at structural level (in the way they affect recruitment and contracts) and at cultural level (in the way they affect values and norms), and how these implications, by intersecting with the growing gender-based differentiation of the academic workforce, affect gender inequalities between men and women. A mixed-model research design— based on administrative data on the Italian academic population and on qualitative interviews with academic life scientists — has been undertaken to answer these questions.

Theoretical background

Professional work in public institutions, including academia, has recently experienced important changes fostered by the massification of higher education and the spread of new public management practices. In parallel with changes occurring in the wider public sector, universities have progressively shifted from the old liberal-humanist model towards a system based on market-based principles (Deem, 2009). Sometimes framed in terms of “academic capitalism” (Slaughter & Leslie 1999; Ferree & Zippel, 2015), some other in terms of “neoliberal turn” (Connell, 2015), this shift has fostered a culture of academic

managerialism based on performance evaluation. These changes have affected the work of academics and the way in which academics perceive themselves. The focus of this paper is to investigate these changes by taking inspiration from different strands of literature: the sociology of professions, critical university studies, and the study of gender inequalities in academia.

By elaborating on the notions of hybridization (Noordegraaf, 2007; 2015) and differentiation (Bellini & Maestripieri, 2018), the sociology of professions provides the conceptual tools through which to identify the features of the new academic. In this respect, scholars have investigated the way professionalism intersect with managerialism, while embracing an organizational logic (Blomgren & Waks, 2015), with some considering neoliberalism as one of the reasons behind the current crisis in professional work (Leicht, 2016), and others attempting to go beyond the dualism between professionalism and managerialism, trying to define what being a "hybrid professional" means today in terms of work processes, authority, and values (Noordegraaf, 2015). Alongside this interest in the hybridization of professional work, further researchers have shed light on the increasing differentiation of the professional workforce, including the growing (gender-based, ethnicity-based, etc.) diversification of its members (Boni-Le Goff & Le Feuvre, 2017) and their increasing precarization (Murgia, Maestripieri & Emiliana, 2016). By looking at the intersection of hybridization and differentiation, the work presented in this paper investigates how the two processes affect gender heterogeneity.

Of the critical university studies, this research shares the concern that these new managerial practices may exacerbate inequalities within organizations. According to many researchers, the emphasis on performance metrics is likely to reinforce existing hegemonic structures of power relations among academics (Deem, 2009; Connell, 2015), while increasing pressure on early-career researchers who are struggling to survive the academic pipeline face to increasing contract instability (Bozzon, Murgia & Villa, 2017). Within this debate, many feminist scholars have focused their attention on the gender practices (Poggio, 2006) at the base of the construction and evaluation of academic excellence, the ways in which they shape the concept of the "ideal academic" (Thornton, 2013) and how they intertwine with recruitment processes (Van den Brink & Benschop, 2011), thus systematically generating disadvantages for women. A few others are less clear-cut in their evaluations, recalling how the old university model included elites and "old boy networks" that prevented women's advancement in academia (Ferree & Zippel, 2015). From this perspective, current transformations may even disrupt such dynamics and create new opportunities. Whether they do, on balance, reproduce or attenuate gender inequalities is the research question at the core of this work.

The neoliberal turn in Italian academia

Since the mid-2000s, face to increasing financial cuts, Italian universities have progressively embraced the new public management paradigm by reducing costs and adopting productivity standards. This process has been characterized by at least four elements.

The first element relates to the reshaping of the academic career ladder through the most recent piece of university reform legislation, the so called “Gelmini reform” (act n. 240 of 2010 or «L.240/2010») which, inter alia, has replaced the former permanent contract of assistant professor (the so-called “Ricercatore Unico” or RU) with two new types of short-term contract: an A type (“RTDa) and a B type (“RTDb”). Of the two, only the B type can be considered the point of access to tenured positions, , in that, once the contract is ended, and if the candidate has obtained the national scientific qualification necessary for becoming associate professor, it automatically turns into an associate professor position.

The second element concerns the block placed on the staff turnover. In force for the decade between 2007 and 2017, government-imposed limits on staff turnover have prevented universities from fully replacing retiring academics with an equal number of new, younger ones. As a result, stable contracts have decreased, while unstable ones have increased (Bozzon et al. 2017).

The third element relates to the increasing pressure to performance evaluation. The Gelmini reform has introduced a minimum standard quality requirement for the recruitment of associate and full professors: the “national scientific qualification” (“abilitazione scientifica nazionale”), which is granted by a national committee on the basis of the candidate’s CV. At the same time, quantitative-based performance evaluation systems have been introduced for departments and universities, with the intention of allocating part of governmental funding to the highest scorers. Examples include the VQR (“Research Quality Assessment"), taking place every four years, and the “Departments of Excellence”, which took place in 2017.

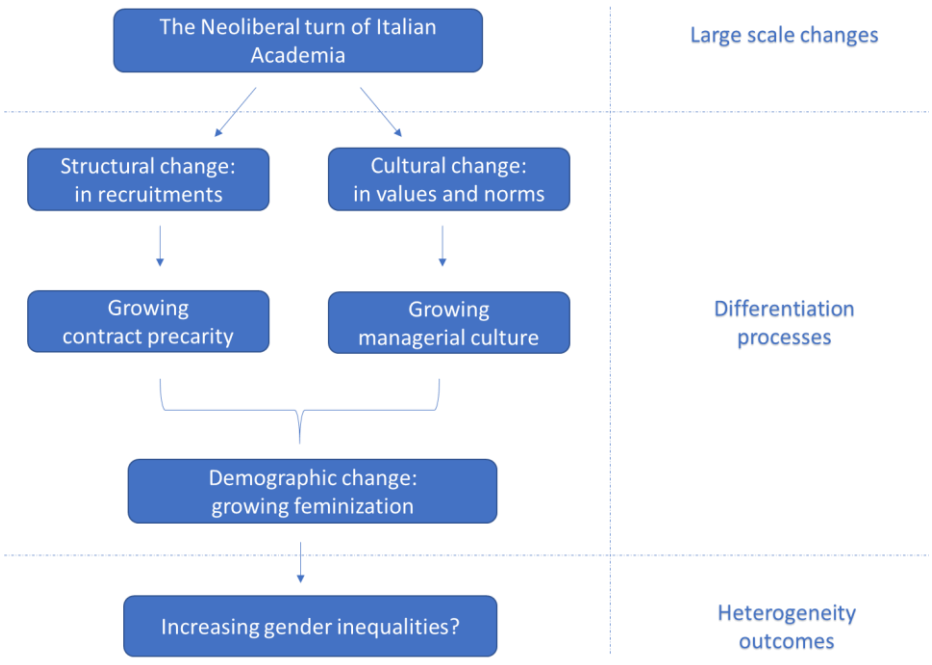
The fourth element concerns cuts to national, public-funded research grants provided by the MIUR (Ministry of Education, University and Research). These cuts have forced researchers to seek alternative sources of funding, from private and international public bodies such as the European Union. The capacity to attract external grants is essential, not only because external grants make it possible to fund research, but because they also make up part of the performance metrics of organizations.

The combination of these four elements has had profound effects on Italian academia. The first and second elements have fuelled the precarization of early career stages, while the third and fourth have pushed academics to adopt what could be described as a market culture of knowledge production based on hyper-productivity, competition and entrepreneurship.

Research questions, data, and methods

This research focuses on the gender heterogeneity of the academic work force, which I define here as gender-unequal opportunities that make it harder for women to climb the career ladder. In this respect, a two-steps investigation will be undertaken. First, the implications, in terms of *differentiation* processes, of *large scale, institutional, changes* will be considered. That is, to what extent neoliberal transformations are *differentiating* the professional workforce, both in terms of growing precarity (structural level) and in terms of new managerial values/norms (cultural level). The two differentiation processes run in parallel with a third process of differentiation: the feminization of the academic workforce. Second, this research aims to investigate the outcomes of these differentiation processes in terms of gender heterogeneity. While differentiation processes are neutral in their implications, heterogeneity is not, since it can entail differences in opportunity and status, and so of inequalities. By focusing on the gender dimension of heterogeneity, this paper looks at the way in which market-driven differentiation processes — contract precarity and managerial culture — intersect with the feminization of the academic population and affect gender-based inequalities. The link between large-scale changes, differentiation processes and heterogeneity outcomes are outlined in the table of analysis themes reported in Figure 1.

Figure 1. *Table of analysis themes*



To identify to what extent differentiation processes influence gender heterogeneity outcomes, a mixed-model research design (Tahakkori & Teddlie, 1998) has been used, based

on quantitative and qualitative data sources. The first part of this research uses quantitative data to identify the structural implications[1] of the precarization of early career stages. The second part is based on qualitative interviews, with the aim of grasping the implications of the new market-orientated culture of knowledge production.

First, repeated cross-sectional data on the Italian academic population have been examined with the aim of mapping its composition both in terms of gender and across time. Data include the number of academics working in both public and private universities in Italy on 31 December each year from 2000 to 2018, their respective rank, gender, and scientific area . Rank comprises six positions: postdoctoral researcher ("assegnista di ricerca" or "AR"), pre-reform assistant professor ("ricercatore unico" or "RU"), the A and B types of post-reform assistant professor ("ricercatore a tempo determinato A" or "RTDa" and "ricercatore a tempo determinato B" or "RTDb" respectively), associate professor ("professore associato" or "PA") and full professor ("professore ordinario" or "PO"). The scientific areas correspond to the 14 areas identified by the National University Council (Consiglio Universitario Nazionale or "CUN"), according to which the public selection of researchers and professors is made. Data were examined using descriptive statistics, cross tables, percentage variation, and ratio analysis.

Second, a case study was conducted at the life sciences department of a large Italian university. The field of life sciences has been chosen for several reasons. First, it is the most feminized of the 14 MIUR-defined scientific areas in Italy, with women being 57% of academics in this field in 2018. Moreover, it strongly relies on generous funding to finance its research, which makes it interesting to study in times of financial constraint. Within the field of life sciences, this specific department has been chosen for two reasons. First, it has a good percentage of women in its workforce (55%), which reflects the recent feminization of the profession, and in its governing bodies. However, vertical segregation — consistent with national data on the life sciences — persist, with women being the majority of postdoctoral researchers, half of academics in the intermediate levels, and only a third of full professors. Second, the department is high performing, both in terms of productivity and external funding (which represents 90% of its budget), including five ERC (European Research Council) grants. In 2017, it was awarded "Department of Excellence" within the frame of the above-mentioned, homonymous, ranking. Furthermore, it had adopted an internal system to measure the productivity of its components in the early 2000s, even before the

[1] In its structuralist and post-structuralist definition, which I embrace, the term structure includes all factors transcending (but intertwined with) the subject (Foucault 1966) and so not only economic, social and institutional factors but also linguistic, cultural and normative ones. As Hays (1994) points out in her attempt to clarify the debate, the term structure is more often used by many sociologists to describe only some specific aspects of the structure, more specifically its economical, social and institutional, in a few words, "material" dimension. This specific use of the term structure—which may have been influenced by the Marxist tradition—is now widespread and it is often used in opposition to the term culture. It is with this meaning that I use the term structural, even though I am aware that it is a slight abuse of terminology.

introduction of nationwide performance indicators. For all these reasons, this department seemed to fit the "neoliberal turn" in Italian academia perfectly, in that it includes, and arguably takes to the extreme, many of the new public management principles: productivity, accountability, and entrepreneurship. From March 2018 to March 2019, 23 unstructured interviews were conducted with 14 women and nine men who work, or have worked, in the organization. Out of the 23 interviewees, five are full professors, four associate professors, eight assistant professors (two RU, three RTDb, three RTDa), three postdoctoral researchers and three former precarious researchers who have left academia altogether. Table 1 lists, following the timeline of the interviews, the basic information (gender, age, and position) of each interviewee. The interviews were analysed through qualitative content analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) by using ATLAS.ti software.

Table 1. *List of interviewees: gender, age and rank*

Code	Gender	Age	Rank
I1	W	44	Associate professor
I2	W	37	Post-doc
I3	W	52	Associate professor
I4	M	30	Post-doc
I5	W	36	Post-reform assistant professor (RTDa)
I6	W	53	Full professor
I7	M	43	Associate professor
I8	W	39	Post-reform assistant professor (RTDa)
I9	M	58	Full professor
I10	W	58	Full professor
I11	W	42	Post-reform assistant professor (RTDb)
I12	M	67	Full professor
I13	M	45	Associate professor
I14	M	70	Full professor
I15	W	42	Post-reform assistant professor (RTDb)
I16	M	44	Former research fellow
I17	W	34	Post-doc
I18	W	41	Post-reform assistant professor (RTDb)
I19	W	55	Pre-reform assistant professor (RU)
I20	M	31	Post-reform assistant professor (RTDa)
I21	W	46	Pre-reform assistant professor (RU)
I22	M	35	Former research fellow
I23	W	46	Former research fellow

Neoliberal transformations and structural changes: reducing access to the tenured positions

Table 2 shows the number of academics, by rank, in 2000, 2008 and 2018 working in Italian universities. Percentage variations have been computed, for the period 2000-2018 and for

the two sub-periods 2000-2008 and 2009-2018. Results show that the number of academics in Italy has increased by 19.5% during the 19-year period considered. However, this increase has largely been driven by the stunning growth in postdoctoral researchers, a position that was introduced at the end of the 90's and which, in the period considered, have more than tripled (+154.5%). Without considering postdoctoral researchers, the increase in the number of professionals is much smaller (4.9%). By looking at the two sub-periods, it becomes apparent that this expansion occurred exclusively during the first sub-period: a 30.7% rise between 2000 and 2008. By contrast, during the second sub-period (2009-2018) the number of academics fell by 8.6% thus reflecting the 2007-2017 cuts of the turn-over Considering only tenured positions, in other words excluding postdoctoral researchers and RTDa assistant professors, the decrease was double: 19.8%.

In summary, the data suggest that, in the last two decades the number of academics has increased especially because of the growth in postdoctoral appointments and notwithstanding the decrease experienced in the second sub-period as a consequence in the 2007-2017 reduction of the turn-over.

Table 2. *Academics in Italy by rank and year*

	2000	2008	2018	Δ00-08	Δ08-18	Δ00-18
Post-doc (AR)	5549	12090	14105	+117.9%	+16.7%	+154.2%
Pre-reform assistant professor (RU)	19386	25263	12445	+30.3%		
Post-reform assistant professor A (RTDa)			3993		-20.5%*	+3.6%*
Post-reform assistant professor B (RTDb)			3643			
Associate professor (PA)	17081	18256	20784	+6.9%	+13.8%	+21.7%
Full professor (PO)	15026	18929	13185	+26%	-30.3%	-12.3%
Total	57042	74538	68155	+30.7%	-8.6%	+19.5%

Source: MIUR data on academics in Italian universities

* The 08-18 and 00-18 percentage variations of the number of assistant professors are computed by including, for the upper bound (2018), both the pre-reform (RU) and the post-reform (RTDa and RTDb) assistant professors, and for the lower bounds (2000 and 2008) the pre-reform (RU) assistant professor only.

The increase in the academic population between 2000 and 2018 ran in parallel with a growth in the female proportion: from 31% in 2000 to 41% in 2018. This growth is the result of the stunning increase in women in absolute terms — from around 18,000 in 2000 to around 28,000 in 2018 — and the very modest growth (approximately 1,300) in the male workforce over the same period (table available upon request). Distinguishing between two sub-periods (2000-2008 and 2009-2018), it is apparent that the growth in both the male and female workforce is concentrated in the first nine years surveyed. During the second decade, the number of female academics has remained quite constant, while around 7,000 male academics were lost. In other words, the increase in the female proportion during the second sub-period — the period witnessing the block on turnover — is not due to an increase in the number of women in absolute terms, but rather to a decrease in the number of men. More in-depth analysis on the rate of recruitment shows that this is mainly due to

men's greater concentration in the older cohorts exiting the active population (Gaiaschi & Musumeci, 2020).

With the aim of investigating the implications of the reduction in the turn-over, the 2008-2018 period only is now taken in consideration. Table 3 shows the ratio — for men (M), women (W), and both (MW) — between the number of individuals in a given rank (r) and the number of individuals in the previous rank (r - 1), by comparing the year 2008 with the year 2018. The rank of assistant professor includes pre-reform assistant professors (RU) in 2008 and post-reform assistant professors (RTDa and RTDb) in 2018. The ratio is constructed as follows:

$$\text{ratio} = \frac{n(r)}{n(r-1)}$$

This is not to be confused with the promotion rate, which would require following a cohort of individuals for a certain number of years and then estimating the proportion that has progressed through to the following rank, but it is nonetheless useful for understanding where obstacles in career progression concentrate. A ratio equal to 1 means the number of individuals in rank r is equal to the number of individuals in rank r - 1. A ratio higher or lower than 1 means the number of individuals in rank r is higher or lower, respectively, than the number of individuals in rank r - 1.

Results in Table 3 show that, in 2008, taking men and women together, assistant professors were twice as many as postdoctoral researchers (at a ratio of 2.09), and full professors were roughly the same number as associate professors (at a ratio of 1.04). Only the transition from assistant to associate professor reports a "loss" of academics (at a ratio of 0.72), suggesting that the major obstacles to career progression in 2008 were concentrated in that specific step. Ten years later, the situation is different. With the ratio now at 1.04, transition from assistant to associate professor has ameliorated and this step now appears to be the least problematic. By contrast, the ratio for the two remaining steps has worsened.More specifically, , change seems to be greatest in the transition from postdoctoral researcher to assistant professor, where the ratio has gone from 2.09 in 2008 to 0.54 ten years later. This means that assistant professors have gone from being twice as many as postdoctoral researchers in 2008 to around half their number in 2018.

Table 3: *Ratios by year and gender*

	2008			2018		
	M	W	MW	M	W	MW
Assistant/postdoc	2,31	1,87	2,09	0,62	**0,46**	0,54
Associate/assistant	0,88	**0,54**	0,72	1,21	0,84	1,04
Full/associate	1,27	0,58	1,04	0,79	**0,39**	0,63

Source: MIUR data on academics in Italian universities

Reducing access to the tenured positions: the gender implications

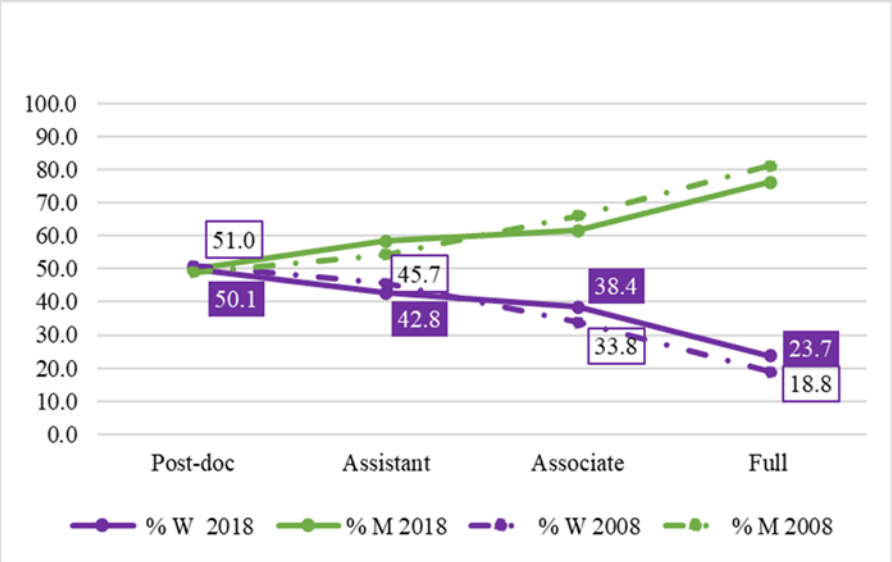
So far, analysis suggests that, while going through a process of feminization, the academic profession has witnessed a change in the position of the "bottleneck" in the career ladder. More precisely, the bottleneck seems to have moved from the transition to associate professor — where it occurred ten years ago — to the transition to assistant professor, where it occurs today. The decrease in recruitment at assistant professor level, together with the increase in postdoctoral contracts, has had the effect of reducing access to tenured positions: while the number of academics who would like to enter the profession has increased, the number of available places has decreased.

This reduction in access to tenured positions has different implications for men and women. Table 3 shows that, in 2008, both men and women experienced the highest loss in the transition from assistant to associate professor. However, the loss was higher for women (0.54 against men's 0.88). Moreover, while men experienced an advantage in the transition from associate to full professor (at a ratio of 1.27), women experienced a disadvantage, transitioning at a ratio of 0.58. The easiest step — for both genders — was the transition from postdoctoral researcher to assistant professor, at a ratio of 2.31 for men and 1.87 for women. Ten years later, the same ratio has decreased to 0.62 for men and 0.46 for women. The transition from assistant to associate professor seems to have become somewhat smoother, albeit to a greater degree for men. On the other hand, women's most critical step appears to be the transition to full professor even though the worsening in time is rather small, changing from a ratio of 0.58 in 2008 to 0.39 in 2018.

The gendered consequences of these changes are represented in Figure 2, which reports the distribution of men and women by rank in the years 2008 and 2018. During the period considered, the female percentage of postdoctoral researchers seems stable, while increasing at associate and full professor level but decreasing among assistant professors. To understand the changes before and after the passing of the 2010 university reform law, the figure compares the female percentage of pre-reform assistant professors (RU) in 2008 with that of post-reform assistant professors in 2018 (RTDa and RTDb). Over these ten years, the female percentage at this level of the career ladder has decreased from 45.7%

almost as far as 42.8%. If only RTDb assistant professors are considered, the female percentage decreases to a further 41.5%, suggesting a four percentage point deterioration.

Figure 2: *The scissor diagram: Academics by gender, rank and year*



Source: MIUR data on academics in Italian universities

Note: the category assistant include pre-reform assistant professors (RU) in 2008 and post-reform assistant professors (RTDa and RTDb) in 2018.

In summary, the female proportion of assistant professors has deteriorated, and this deterioration is stronger among RTDb assistant professors, who are considered to hold a quasi-tenured position, than among the RTDa, who hold the more precarious contracts. These findings suggest that the reduction in access to tenured positions and the parallel restructuring of early career stages have had the overall effect of "anticipating" the adverse selection of women along the career ladder: from the transition to associate professor level—where it occurred in 2008 - to the transition to assistant professor level — where it occurs now. Out of the two short-term assistant professor positions, the A and B types—the B type automatically turns into an associate professor. This means that the selection for future associate professors occurs now—*de facto*—at the previous level, that of assistant professor. The "anticipation" of the selection process along the career ladder, coupled with the reduction in access to stable positions, explains why the transition from post-doc to assistant professor has now become the most challenging for women. When the overall situation becomes difficult, it seems, obstacles to female advancement become even more pronounced.

Neoliberal transformations and cultural changes: academic managerialism

The first part of this research has shed light on the structural implications of the precarization of early career stages, fostered by the 2010 university reform law and the block on academic turnover. The aim of this second part is to investigate the cultural changes driven by the introduction of productivity metrics and increasing reliance on external grants.

The new professional culture of "managerialism" has reinforced the already present idea — criticized by many — that scientific success is based on individual merit and not on the scientist's personal characteristics, such as gender (Deem, 2009; Zippel, 2017). Taking inspiration from previous work on the "ideal" academic (Thornton, 2013), as well as the construction of "academic excellence" (Van den Brink & Benschop, 2011), this section attempts to capture the professional and organizational culture by examining the formal and informal criteria usually considered during the selection processes taking place in the department. The operationalization of the academic culture into a list of criteria has made it possible to identify what the supposedly the good academic or, more precisely, the good bio-scientist working in academia, looks like.

Content analysis of the interviews has brought to light five recurring themes on this subject: 1) scientific productivity; 2) attracting funds (especially, but not only, in the case of associate and full professors2); 3) being an independent researcher (especially in the case of postdoctoral researchers and assistant professors); 4) being part of a wider scientific, most likely international, network; 5) teamworking (within the research group as well as within the department in general).

It is appropriate here to explore these five criteria in greater depth. First, a good academic should be productive, in other words "publishing a lot and well". This definition of productivity, however, is not shared by everyone, and many interviewees adopted a critical stance towards it, either by pointing out the "exaggerate tendency to necessarily always be in the first quartiles" or by making it clear that productivity depends on many other (external) factors, first and foremost the size of the research group. Nonetheless, regardless of how productivity is defined, it is perceived as being the key basic requirement that a good scientist should fulfil.

Second, a good academic should "bring home the money" and act like an entrepreneur. Faced with increasing financial constraints and the cuts in national, publicly financed research funds, the importance of attracting funding has now become "absolute" or "fundamental" since "without funds you don't survive":

[2] Post-reform (short-term) assistant professors – and even more so postdoctoral researchers – have fewer grant opportunities, since most of the time funders require the recipient to have continuity of contract within their organization.

> You can't expect money from the department, nor from the Italian government. You must bring home money by yourself, so you must choose the right line of research, one that will attract funding (full professor, female, 58 years old).

> Funding for single research groups, for working, buying reagents, paying postdoctoral researchers, etc., comes from the European Union and private foundations (…), most funding is external. When I first arrived here, the ministerial situation was quite prosperous: you had the PRIN3, you had the FIRB4. Now…nothing…there is nothing left (full professor, male, 67 years old).

For the youngest researchers, the capacity of attracting funding is strictly related to the third characteristic of the good academic: that of being an autonomous scientist. In other words, to be able to work independently from the principal investigator of the research group. Speaking about receiving her ERC starting grant, one interviewee claims that one of the reasons behind her success was, in her opinion, the fact that "[she] made herself autonomous from [her] PhD tutor". She further argues that, for the ERC evaluation committee, it "is important that you break away from your tutor" by not having "all the publication with him/her". A lack of independence, she adds, is usual in the Italian academic system, and something of which the European Commission is well aware.

Fourth, the good academic should be part of a wider scientific network which, according to the great majority of interviewees, should be an international network, since, as one interviewee explains, "research is being conducted worldwide, and we need to compete with the rest of Europe, and the US". The belief is that these networks provide possibilities for increasing collaborations and co-authorships, and therefore this factor is taken into great consideration. Speaking of the attributes that an associate professor should have, a full professor responds:

> Is he member of an international scientific community that will enable him to develop or participate in further research collaborations, and thereby increase his publications? Or is he totally isolated? You can be a very good scientist, but if you work by yourself…you are not useful, you are not useful (full professor, male, 58 years old).

The inclusion within a (international) network responds to the need to avoid isolation, since isolated researchers tend to be less productive. This consideration sheds light on the collective dimension of knowledge production and the importance of collaboration not only with colleagues of the same scientific community but also inside the organization. Hence, the

[3] *Progetti di ricerca di interesse nazionale* (Research Projects of National Interest).

[4] *Fondo per gli investimenti della ricerca di base* (Basic Research Investment Fund).

fifth and last characteristic that a good academic should have is “the capacity for teamwork”: mostly cited when talking about the criteria for internal career progression, the theme of “teamwork” refers to two different organizational dimensions, depending on the seniority of the candidate. When referring to early-career researchers — mostly postdoctoral researchers — it concerns loyalty to the research group or laboratory5. For senior positions, it acquires a higher organizational dimension, namely the organisation and management of the department itself. “Being available for the department” is a crucial and frequently advocated principle defining the concept of the good life scientist in academia. Speaking of the characteristics that a full professor should have, one interviewee poses the question, “Is he or she willing to put him or herself at the disposal of the community?”

The good academic should contribute to the good functioning of the organization and show “abnegation” to the “the public good”. This entails two activities that have traditionally been considered low(er) in value compared with research work: service work and teaching. Service work includes several administrative and managerial tasks, for instance being part of one of the commissions of the department, coordinating a degree programme, representing the department inside university committees (such as animal welfare, or management of the botanic garden), as well as helping to “prepare the documents that form the basis for the department’s local, national and international evaluation”. According to many, these activities are highly valued in the department.

One associate professor speaks of a recent visit, to the department, of the CEV (“Commissione di esperti di valutazione” or “Committee of Experts in Evaluation”), a recently created body at the national level to evaluate university performance, including research outputs and the range and quality of courses. Through the CEV, universities are accredited to provide their courses and classes:

> Take, for example, the CEV visit. It does not bring any advantage to me as single researcher, but, when the department is positively assessed, it means an advantage for everybody. If more funds come our way, there can be more recruitments… So, get involved, work as a team, be united (associate professor, male, 43 years old).

While demonstrating commitment to—and diligence in—service tasks, the ideal academic should also possess good teaching skills. However, most interviewees mentioned teaching skills in ancillary terms vis-à-vis research (“a good researcher is also a good teacher”) or—at the most—as useful for the good functioning of the department as long as it makes up part

[5] Early-career researchers are the ones who “live in the lab” the most, actually performing the experiments, while associate and full professors end up coordinating the team and dedicating a large part of their time to managerial tasks.

of the manifold activities within the organization: if you can't be a good researcher, at least be a good teacher.

In summary, the ideal academic possesses a mixture of characteristics, reflecting the multiple tasks required within the profession, including ensuring the "good functioning of the department". The increasing emphasis within academia on departmental performance—fostered by the recent university transformations - means that this conception of the good academic is embedded in organizational dynamics.

Academic managerialism and gender inequalities

According to most interviewees, the criteria used to assess candidates for recruitment and promotion are gender-neutral, since these standards are based on "merit" and are therefore objectively measurable. The "gender-neutrality" of the professional characteristics of the good academic match the "gender-neutrality" of the organization. Many respondents voiced the opinion that they work in a fair department vis-à-vis women. At the same time, many of them would agree that maternity entails a disadvantage for women—in terms of scientific production and therefore of career progression, thus confirming the "over-visibility" of the maternity penalty in relation to other, perhaps less obvious, gender-related obstacles (Zippel, 2017).

Is this the case? Is the conception of "the good academic" gender-neutral? The aim of this section is to investigate how the new managerial culture in academia — entailing the redefinition of the ideal scientist — intersects with existing gender inequality practices, for instance, whether it is reinforcing heterogeneity based on gender by producing new forms of gender-based exclusion, or whether it is actually opening up new spaces of agency for women.

The mantra of productivity comes with two features that are important for this discussion. They are different, but nonetheless interrelated. The first feature concerns a tendency among academics to overlook the factors that influence how individual "merit" is constructed and scientific excellence evaluated. For instance, only few interviewees acknowledge the fact that productivity (also) depends on resources—in terms of time, funding, networking, etc.—which are differently distributed, and even fewer (more specifically, one woman), demonstrate awareness that this distribution can be gendered. And yet, a wide range of literature has contributed to casting a light behind the curtain, as it were, regarding the gender difference in scientific productivity, by showing how productivity relies on funding, time, networking, and allocation of tasks, which are unequally allocated between men and women (Ceci & Williams, 2011). The second feature concerns a reliance on objective criteria of measurement of individual performance. Such emphasis clashes with the persistence of unconscious gender biases within selection processes (Moss-Racusin, Dovidio, Brescoll, Graham & Handelsman,

2012), as well as with the true nature of the processes themselves, which very often lack standardization (Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012). As such, they are not immune to gender-based exclusion practices. A consequence of this is that, if naively adopted, this emphasis on excellence may not only reproduce gender inequalities, but probably even make them harder to detect. At the same time, this same emphasis has certainly contributed, to some extent, to helping overcome the old hierarchical mechanisms based on affiliation and seniority. For example, when asked to assess how meritocratic the department is, a female full professor says:

> So, it is a little bit more meritocratic now because…goats6 are not automatically upgraded anymore…in the sense that simply being here for a long time is no longer enough of a reason to promote someone… X (name of a colleague) is evidence of this change" (full professor, female, 58 years old).

The person to whom she is referring (X) is a (male) researcher working in the same scientific sub-field. At a certain point, the issue of his career progression was debated in the department. The interviewee strongly opposed and, in the end, prevented him from advancing to the next step. According to her, he was not productive enough and he "didn't grown up his own research group". This could perhaps have been enough in the past, but today it is no longer acceptable. In summary, while the new emphasis on productivity may be contributing to widening gender disparities in some ways, it may at the same time be breaking down old hierarchical mechanisms and thereby helping to create fairer opportunities for both men and women.

Likewise, attracting funding may open up possibilities for career progression as well. Grants are essential for making research activities possible. In this sense, they can be an instrument, for women, to acquire prestige within the organization and climb the career ladder. The following interviewee, a woman, explains how obtaining an ERC starting grant made it possible for her to become associate professor. According to her, this is evidence of how meritocratic her organization is:

> The department has strongly supported me, because it is true that I have brought a lot of money with me. But sometimes you have departments where money does not count as much and where it is more important to have a good mentor protecting you. My department is much "cleaner", here they recognize merit (associate professor, female, 44 years old).

The interviewee also recognizes that she has always been "a strong candidate" because of her ERC funding: for academics, bringing in money entails the possibility of being seen as more

[6] *Capre*. In informal Italian, "goats" is a term given to people who are thought not to be particularly intelligent.

attractive — or even as a precious asset — by the relevant organization(s). In this vein, the ERC probably represents an extreme case, but it is highly indicative — in its engendering competition among universities trying to catch fresh ERC grant recipients with the most attractive offer — how individual financial research resources have become an instrument for bargaining. From this perspective, it could be argued that the new reliance on external funding might be helping to break existing gender dynamics and open up spaces of opportunities.

On the other hand, attracting funds is not always enough. The ability to bring in money is not immune to being belittled when it comes to women. One female full professor explains how uneasy she felt around her male peers after winning her ERC Consolidator grant:

> They stopped saying good morning to me for a while… X (name), but also Y (name), he couldn't look me in the eye… I think they thought, 'If she's obtained an ERC then anybody can'. I have a Spanish friend, a woman, who won an ERC, and the dean told her, quite plainly, 'Well, Z (name), if you can get it then everybody can (full professor, female, 58 years old).

When speaking about herself, she downsizes her success by recalling how European grants respond not only to excellence criteria but also to diversity issues, such as gender and geographic origin. And yet, when asked whom they considered to be "excellent" within the department, the great majority of interviewees named precisely this professor.

The loss in prestige of the most competitive—but increasingly "feminized" (European Commission, 2019)—European Union grant potentially reminds of the loss in status (and pay) witnessed in traditionally male professions and occupations once women began to enter their workforce on a large scale (Glover, 2005; Wright & Jacobs, 1994). If women can compete successfully in the most prestigious arenas, such as funding by the ERC, it may mean that these arenas come to be regarded as not quite so prestigious after all. Ultimately, the definition of excellence varies according to existing power relations based on gender.

Finally, mixed implications for women also stem from the growing emphasis on teamwork. The importance of the "good functioning" of the department entails the reconsideration of non-research activities such as service and teaching, two activities to which women, according to much of the literature on this subject, dedicate a large proportion of their time, but which count less than research when it comes to career progression (Winslow, 2010).

> Everything is important… I mean, if there is a colleague who is very involved in teaching and performing service tasks for the department, but he or she is not

> very good at attracting funding…this is fine. If there is somebody who is great at attracting funding but who is less available for helping within the department… I wouldn't be able to say categorically what is more important, because I think it depends on the person, we look at the person, at his or her CV (associate professor, male, 43 years old).

The emphasis on teamwork has forced departments to reconsider the value of traditionally female-dominated tasks, such as service work and teaching. One consequence of this may be new opportunities opening up for women. At the same time, however, service work and teaching continue to be considered ancillary to the "core" activities of the good academic, namely research and fundraising. Moreover, a process of re-segregation (Reskin & Ross, 1990) along gendered lines may be occurring in relation to non-research tasks. The re-emergence of a hierarchy could be taking place, in which some activities (coordinating departmental committees; writing project presentations for the "Departments of Excellence" ranking), which are likely to be male-dominated, are seen as more prestigious and are more useful in terms of career progression, while others (coordinating degree courses), which are likely to be female-dominated, are both less advantageous in terms of prestige or career advancement, and more time consuming. For example, according to some interviewees, women devote more time than men to tasks that are practical and often invisible, but nonetheless necessary, such as cleaning the lab, keeping the cupboards tidy, calibrating instruments and taking charge of the lab's stock purchasing (such as reagents, solvents, and gloves). The last task — given the manifold rules related to being a public institution — is a particularly time consuming activity, but poorly appreciated when it comes to career advancement.

Conclusion

This research has shown that the academic profession has recently witnessed multiple processes of differentiation. An increase in the number of professionals working in academia, as well as its diversification in terms of gender, have occurred in parallel with recent market-based transformations. These transformations have precarized the academic profession and introduced a managerial culture based on performance and entrepreneurship. The implications of such changes in terms of gender heterogeneity are complex.

The precarization of early career stages has "anticipated" the female adverse selection along the career ladder: from the transition to associate professor level where it occurred in 2008 to the transition to assistant professor level, where it occurs now. Once gender equal, the assistant professor position has since witnessed a decrease in its female component. Results suggest a backlash effect, in terms of gender distribution, in the early stages of the academic career ladder. From this point of view, neoliberal changes have increased gender-based heterogeneity, in that they have increased the obstacles to access the profession for

those at the margins of the professional field, namely women. As such, it has enhanced its gender inequalities.

The change in professional culture looks more complex from the perspective of gender. To break this issue down, three aspects should be taken into consideration. First, the emphasis on scientific excellence may actually be helping to mask both the conditions on which it depends (the different allocations of opportunities and resources) and the threats to its measurability (the biases in evaluation), none of which are gender neutral. From this perspective, it is likely that this change in culture is making gender inequalities less visible. On the other hand, this emphasis may also be disrupting old hierarchical mechanisms that themselves are gendered and preventing women from advancing in their careers. Second, the increased importance of attracting grant money has enabled women to acquire prestige and resources while progressing in their career, thereby disrupting the traditional, male-dominated hierarchy. On the other hand, not even the most prestigious grants are immune to being devalued once they feminize. Third, the emphasis on the good functioning of the department—which has been fostered by the introduction of new evaluation systems—has forced the reconsideration of traditionally female-dominated tasks, such as teaching and service work, which may be opening up new opportunities for women. On the other hand, teaching and service work remain ancillary to research, while entailing a risk of gender re-segregation within the different departmental activities. Considering these three elements, it seems that the new managerial culture does not, per se, exacerbate gender inequalities in Italian academia, since gender inequalities and sexist practices precede—and eventually may even thrive in—such a culture. A more pressing concern, however, is that this new culture may actually be making existing gender inequalities less visible—even less so than they already are—certainly as long as it reinforces the idea that scientific success depends on individual merit alone, without consideration of the wider context, including the structure of opportunities and the organizational culture, which are both gendered (Acker, 1990).

This study has some limitations, more specifically the fact that the interview participants come from a single department in the field of life sciences with a particularly excellent track record. Considering this, the findings of the qualitative field should not be regarded as indicative of the whole of Italian academia, only of similar contexts. On the other hand, the use of a mixed-model approach has made it possible to shed light on the complexity of the relationship between the recent neoliberal university transformations and gender inequalities, by considering both the structural and cultural dimensions of these changes. In summary, while these neoliberal transformations have reduced access to the stable positions and enhanced the adverse selection of women at assistant professor level, the case study shows they have also fostered a new professional culture with less clear-cut consequences for women, including increased space of agency which may actually disrupt old, entrenched elitist systems and male-dominated hierarchies.

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Local Broadcast Journalists and the Trap of Professional Heterogeneity

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Abstract

The ideological tenets of the journalistic professions, historically grounded in the development of modern Western democracies, are increasingly shaken by the changes brought about by a series of technological, economic, and ideological processes challenging the foundations of professionalism. This article considers how these changes influence the way work is performed and experienced in Italy by local journalists, providing professional news coverage and programs to communities at the grassroots level, through both private and public outlets. The findings of qualitative research adopting a neo-institutional approach are presented and discussed following the analytical frame of the special issue, distinguishing three dimensions (*within, between, beyond*) related to the increased differentiation and the changing role of professionals in post-industrial societies. Conclusions point to the fact that the resulting heterogeneity if accepted without granting the necessary conditions to maintain professional standards, may bring into question the feasibility of a professional community.

Keywords

Precarization, digitalization, media workers, democracy, neo-institutionalism

The ideological tenets of the journalistic professions, historically grounded in the development of modern Western democracies, are being challenged in the postmodern era by a series of endogenous and exogenous changes weakening the foundations of professional work (Leicht, 2015; Schnell, 2018). This article considers how these challenges influence the way work is performed and experienced by professional journalists of Italian local private and public television broadcasters offering news coverage and programs at the grassroots level. The literature on the Italian broadcasting system mainly focuses on the case of RAI (*Radiotelevisione Italiana*), the national broadcast company, and, after deregulation at the end of the 1970s, on the development and expansion Silvio Berlusconi's media company, Mediaset, paralleled by his successful but contested political career. The case of local broadcasting—where Berlusconi's Mediaset company blossomed—remains little explored in its original variety and subsequent evolution, an "invisibility" ascribable to the lack of attention received by local outlets from the state, mainly known in its vexatious and heavily bureaucratic aspects, to be avoided through strategies typical of the underground economy (Barca, 2007). Despite their weak positioning in the national media system, local television providers continue to produce news and local programs in areas often ignored by national and global broadcasting, representing a reference point for local institutions, organizations, and communities, in adherence to the public service ideal of journalism (Grasso, 2006). In the last few decades, however, their ability to endure has been further challenged by increased competition from an expanding global multimedia system following the widespread diffusion of digital technology (Giacomello, 2012; Padovani, 2010).

This article draws on document analysis, official statistics, and qualitative research to consider the case of journalists working in television outlets in Sardinia, the first Italian region to test the national shift from analogue to digital broadcasting. It starts by discussing the main advantages offered by the neo-institutional approach to the study of professions (section 1), leading to the adoption of a long-term view of the professionalization of journalism in Italy (section 2); it then proceeds by presenting the research project design and methodology (section 3) and its main findings, analysed following the tripartite frame proposed by this particular issue (section 4). The discussion identifies the organizational level as crucial in mediating change in the three dimensions analysed, and concludes pointing to the problematic nature of heterogeneity, if its acceptance disguises the primary need to grant journalists homogenous conditions allowing to actually perform work as professionals (section 5).

A neo-institutionalist view for the study of professions

Neo-institutionalism has recently been acknowledged as one of the most fruitful theoretical approaches for the study of professions (Leicht & Fennel, 2008; Muzio, Brock & Suddaby, 2013; Saks, 2016; Scott, 2008). Among its advantages, with respect to other approaches, is the fact that it is particularly effective for addressing the interrelatedness between social actors and the organizational and societal context in which they are embedded (Powell &

DiMaggio, 1991), recognized as a crucial dimension for understanding the ways in which professions operate and vary in time and place (Abbott, 1988; Friedson, 1986). In addition, the study of professions is deeply intertwined with topics central to institutional theory (such as legitimation, symbolism, power, agency, and organizational fields) (Leicht & Fennel, 2008: 431). Furthermore, the wide theoretical breadth of neo-institutionalism allows its integration with complementary insights offered by other approaches (Benson, 2006; Saks, 2016), as the article will do by adopting in the analysis of research results the three dimensions discussed by the special issue editors in their opening essay (within, between, beyond).

Despite multiple internal currents, a common core of neo-institutional theory can be identified in its focus on the mediating role of institutions in the impact of macro-level forces on micro-level actions, as well as on the positive feedback mechanisms linked to early patterns of institutions, sustaining their path dependency, and thus on the need to investigate their institutional history, from genesis to evolution, in order to identify within a long-term perspective periods of "punctuated equilibriums" and "critical junctures" opening "windows of opportunities" for change towards new orders (Ryfe, 2006, pp. 137-138). In this respect, neo-institutionalism is recognized as offering fundamental insights to the study of professions, both in contributing to the understanding of the specific regulatory, normative, and cultural-cognitive elements granting them stability and homogeneity (Sparrow, 2006), as well as in the investigation of the nature of the changes whose diversification and heterogeneity are increasing (Cook, 2006).

In the case of journalism, the literature shows how its genesis as a profession was deeply imbricated with the history of mass media development in Western capitalist democracies (Schnell, 2018). Beginning with the political and market forces driving the expansion of the newspaper industry (Chalaby, 1996) and continuing with the spreading of national broadcast services, journalism was built as an institution of the wider governmental structure of modern nation-states, enacting a powerful cultural consensus supporting the social and political order by assembling authoritative accounts of the news of the day and thus informing public opinion (Barnhust & Nerone, 2001). Among the ideological tenets of the profession – popularized in the image of journalism as the "watchdog of democracy"— the main principles relate to its public service orientation, speed in reporting news of greatest interest and concern for the public, striving for objectivity and accountability through specific techniques and a critical ethical autonomy, and the protection of sources when their confidential nature requires anonymity (Deuze, 2005). While for journalists the reality was often quite far from such "occupational myths" (Aldridge & Evetts, 2003), they did exert a sort of gravitational pull, holding journalists to a professional identity capable of defining a formal conception of its jurisdiction, despite their mobility in other jobs related to writing and information (Abbott, 1988). It also encouraged their adherence to normative behaviours (Nerone, 2002) that, when facing influences on its field of action by

heteronomous forces, such as politics or business (Bourdieu, 2005) or critical voices, could defend the profession by appealing to a collective sense of autonomy (Matthews, 2017) based on the defence of democratic values.

Those ideological tenets are being shaken by the wider challenges weakening the foundations of professional work in post-industrial societies, questioning "the commitments and values of the professions to universal conceptions of social progress, objectivity, and truth", without offering citizens-clients alternative institutional patterns that would allow them to actively deal "with the culturally fragmented, information intensive, globalized, world where real-life important decisions need to be made" (Leicht, 2015, p. 11). While the digitalization of multimedia systems has led to an overload of daily accessible information for citizens, the expansion of commercialism in media production has fostered processes of precarization and de-professionalization of journalists' work (Deuze, 2005; Örnebring, 2010; Walters, Warren & Dobbie 2006). In a time of an oversupply of information, we seem to be experiencing a shortage of professional journalism (Schnell, 2018), a paradox that asks for further investigation in order to be more carefully understood.

The professionalization of journalism in Italy: genesis and critical junctures

Given its embeddedness within the history of Western democracies, the professionalisation process of journalism took a variety of forms, particularly influenced by the regulatory, normative, and cultural-cognitive features of nation states (Benson, Blach-Ørsten, Powers, Willig & Zambrano, 2012, p. 23). In Italy journalism blossomed as an institution with a narrow economic and social base, a secondary occupation linked to the political realm, the clergy, and the literary and academic élite (Capra, Castronovo & Ricuperati, 1986). This began to change with the development of the commercial press in the last two decades of the 19th century, when distinctively journalistic ways of writing emerged, the number of people making journalism a full-time job increased and a sense of distinct professional identity developed (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). In 1908, the Italian National Press Federation (FNSI) was created as single union for journalists, signing the first national collective labour agreement. The pathway towards professionalization was abruptly interrupted by the fascist dictatorship which disbanded the FNSI to create a fascist journalist trade union.

The FNSI was re-established after WW2 when the newly born Italian Republic included freedom of expression and press among the principles defining its democratic identity (Italian Constitution, 1948, art. 21). In the early 1960s, a national law established an Order of Journalists (*Ordine dei Giornalisti*), setting normative control over access to the profession. Although this achievement was seen as a sign of the closeness of journalism to the state (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 112), it contributed to formally defining the jurisdictional borders of the profession and its basic tenets, referring to the ideals of freedom of information and criticism, adherence to fact centred accountable reporting, respect for news sources, and a shared spirit of cooperation of journalists with colleagues

and editors and of mutual trust with their readers (Law n. 69, 03/02/1963, art. 2). The post-war decades also saw the reorganization of the RAI—which had offered radio services during fascism—after the "BBC model", conceiving of public service broadcasting not only as a distributor but also as a producer of programs, able to certify their quality and to offer citizens information and education in addition to entertainment (Burns, 1976). The Italian version of the BBC model, however, was shaped by governmental control over the media, in continuity rather than rupture with the pedagogical setting of fascist propaganda. For the Christian Democratic governments leading the country in the post-war decades, the RAI was a tool for favouring the unification of society in terms of language and culture, as well as in adherence to the moral values of the Catholic socio-political model (Bianco, 1974).

As a response to the growing critical voices on the lack of pluralism and democracy in the management of national broadcasting, in the mid-1970s a reform shifts RAI's control away from the government to the parliament and launches a third channel, originally intended for the production of regionally-focused programs—in line with the administrative decentralization provided for in the Constitution. At the end of the 1970s, a series of interventions by the Constitutional Court invalidates RAI's monopoly, opening the way to private broadcasting companies with a local dimension, which acted for more than a decade within a regulatory vacuum. While exposing the system to a "savage deregulation" that led to a "commercial deluge" (Hall & Mancini, 2004, p. 125), this vacuum offered a window onto opportunities for change in the definition of contents more in line with the needs of generations or local areas with different subcultures. The moment is profitably exploited by Silvio Berlusconi, a businessman with a background in the real estate sector, adding two channels to his primary one, to be later included within the Mediaset Group (Ardizzoni & Ferrari, 2010). The Mammì Law, introduced in the early 1990s to regulate the national public and private broadcast systems, enhances the Rai/Mediaset duopoly and asks private radio and television providers to broadcast daily news, increasing the demand for journalists (Agcom, 2017).

The duopolistic balance of the Italian media system, shaken in the mid-1990s by the introduction of companies offering digital satellite pay-TV services (D'Arma, 2010), is soon restored by national policies regulating the shift from analogue to digital terrestrial technology (DTT) in the 2000s (Padovani, 2010). Those policies, however, fail to adequately safeguard the weakest players in the national media system, namely local outlets. In the case of RAI, in particular, the shift to the DTT platform was seized as an opportunity to rationalize its offer, meeting the requirements of a competitive dynamic based on television branding (Mattiacci & Militi, 2011) and justifying an increasingly questioned license fee for public broadcasting in ensuring greater pluralism and a richer variety of quality products. Local private television providers, conversely, did not have the necessary resources to reorganize their offer in order to compete with the big players, and their strategy in

adapting to the shift to DTT was mainly one of limiting damage, rather than investigating opportunities (Barca, 2007).

In the face of this, local journalism represents a particularly interesting case to investigate the effects of ongoing changes on the profession. The limited literature shows that local broadcasting remains a source for news and stories close to the interests and issues directly affecting local communities (Aeranti-Corallo, 2018). Focusing on the issues raised by this special issue, the article investigates if and how the profession of local journalists in Italy is challenged by the wider changes investing media systems in post-industrial societies.

Research design and methodology

In Italy, journalists working in local television represent the third largest group among journalists overall and are the largest among journalists in the broadcasting sector[1]. Though they often work undeclared and under precarious working conditions, their relevance has significantly emerged after the recent signing of national collective labour agreements between FNSI and local radio and television editors (since 2000) and periodicals and online press outlets (since 2010) foreseeing reduced salaries *vis à vis* journalists under contracts signed with the association of editors of national newspapers, periodicals, and press agencies. The local media system of Sardinia, where the empirical research was carried out, comprises 48 radio stations, 7 television providers, and 2 daily newspapers (Agcom, 2018; Ucsi, 2017). Of the 257 professional journalists employed in the region, 25% work for daily newspapers, 21% for local broadcasters, 9% for the RAI, and 2% for other national broadcasters.

Sardinia offers specific features making it a particularly interesting case study compared with other local media systems in Italy. Television is the media most utilized by local residents in the region—with mass media usage rates higher than the national average—and, though national channels record the highest share, the highest rated outlets for regional news are the local television provider Videolina, followed by the RAI3 regional newscast, and the *Unione Sarda* daily newspaper (Agcom, 2018). Starting from the attention given by the neo-institutional approach to the organizational level in the interplay between agencies and institutions, the choice was made to focus on journalists working for the two most-followed local outlets in order to investigate the role of the public and private model in mediating ongoing change. Both Videolina and RAI3 Sardegna[2] were set up in Cagliari during the 1970s following the accountability crisis experienced by the national broadcasting service: the first outlet was created as a free television service challenging

1 In 2015, the number of registered journalists for each sector was: 6,175 for newspapers, 2,691 for periodicals, 2,285 for local radio and TV, 1,879 for public radio and TV (RAI), 1,796 for other companies, 1,084 for private national radio and TV (Aeranti-Corallo, 2018, p. 55).

2 RAI3's regional services are formally part of the wider national public broadcasting company but are considered a local public outlet with reference to the regional content of its programs and newscast services.

state monopoly over broadcasting, while the second emerged after the RAI's reform aimed at offering a more pluralistic and decentralized public service. For the last 40 years, they have been operating within the same organizational field and were exposed to largely the same institutional pressures, including the national shift from analogue to digital broadcasting, which was first tested in Sardinia.

Document analysis, participant observation and interviews with informed actors allowed to widen our knowledge over the issues investigated, further explored in 25 in-depth semi-structured interviews with professional journalists and media workers employed in the two outlets. Interviewees were contacted via email or telephone through personal acquaintances and snowball sampling, in order to take into account the diversity of workers employed in the local outlets (in terms of type of occupation, gender, generation, role). All workers contacted gladly accepted to participate to the research and only a few planned interviews were not realized for time constraints. Given that the small size of the companies facilitates workers' identification, interviewees were granted anonymity and asked to choose their favoured location for the interview, in order to feel free to express their opinions and share information on more personal or sensitive topics. The author's brief experience as a free-lance journalist and knowledge of the local context offered a common language facilitating the interpretation of what was being said by the interviewees (Becker & Geer, 1957), while her research skills and aims allowed to grant an informed but unbiased approach to their accounts (della Porta, 2010). Semi-structured interviews, of the average duration of one hour and a half, were adapted to the specific career history of the worker, starting from family and educational background to the present time, also including information on managing careers with family life. Often interviews were followed up with messages, phone calls, or even a second meeting, when more information was needed.

Realized, audio-recorded, and transcribed *verbatim* by the author between summer 2019 and spring 2020, interviews were analysed following an inductive and comparative approach, identifying the main categories and thematic areas recurring in the transcripts (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; della Porta, 2010). In a second step, a selection of those categories was associated to the three analytical dimensions discussed by the special issue editors in their opening essay (*within, between, beyond*), related to the increased differentiation and the changing role of professionals in post-industrial societies (Bellini & Maestripieri, 2018). The following paragraphs analyse the research results associated to each of the three dimensions: the increased flexibilization of the labour force, leading to distinguish *within* the journalistic profession a "mass precariat" and a professional élite, performing the same tasks but experiencing quite different employment security and socio-economic recognition; the impact of disruptive technological innovation on work organization in broadcast outlets, offering employers and employees windows of opportunities to redefine the borders *between* professional journalists and other media workers; the influence of a market oriented ideology in the management of broadcasting

companies, driving professional journalists *beyond* professionalism, towards a logic of increased productivity difficult to reconcile with working conditions granting local audiences reliable, in-depth information.

Changes within journalism: flexibilization of labor and the growth of a mass precariat

A major change occurring in the journalistic profession in Italy is the decline of its profitability, linked to the widened and protracted precarization of the labour force. The last few decades have registered a significant increase in the number of journalists within the lower income brackets: the percentage earning below 35,000 € per year rose from 56% in 2000 to 65% in 2015, when more than 40% of journalists earned less than 5,000 € per year from journalistic activity (Agcom, 2017, p. 12). This evidence tells us that, today, those living only partially and precariously from professional practice represent the majority of journalists in Italy, as confirmed by the growing percentage of contributors[3]. Younger generations are mostly exposed to the risk of unstable and persistently precarious work: almost 90% of journalists under the age of 30 earned less than 20,000 € per year in 2015, while this was true for only half of the journalists between 50 and 60 years of age (Agcom, 2017, p. 20). The decline in the viability and profitability of journalism leads younger generations to search for other occupations, while the profession rapidly ages: 17% of journalists were under 30 years of age in 2000, and only 8% in 2015 (Agcom, 2017, p. 10).

As outlined by our interviewees, the precariat was a part of the professional path of journalists, typically associated with their apprenticeship period. Its length—often shortened by political support—widened for the so-called "Generation X", entering a labour market asking for a more flexible labour force with higher educational credentials but later than previous generations. Those belonging to that generation relate having found stable jobs after investing most of their youth in work, often sacrificing a significant part of their personal life:

> Well, I can say that it's not so much the journalistic profession, but the precariousness of work itself that has taken a lot of energy from me. For a long time I was focused on work, very, very much, because I wanted to achieve an independence I couldn't reach: dismissals, precarious work (…) I struggled a lot and this also affected my personal history. [journalist, public TV]

Since 2000, after the digitalization of the media sector, the precariat took on a different dimension, widening both in length and size to involve a non-marginal part of journalists

3 3 The national law establishing the *Ordine dei Giornalisti* distinguishes two categories of journalists, enrolled in different registries to practice the profession: the professionals (*professionisti*), who work exclusively as journalists, and the contributors (*pubblicisti*), who have other jobs but are regularly paid for journalistic activities. In 2017, among the journalists registered as active in Sardinia there were 354 free-lance professionals, 408 contributors, 28 trainees, and only 224 employed professionals (UCSI, 2017, p. 8).

and to persists without offering a temporal horizon to its end. This led to the growth of protest movements to raise awareness of the issue of precarious and undeclared work of journalists in the different media sectors:

> As temporary workers we protested all around Italy, a national protest of precarious journalists of the press, television and radio (…) [Before year 2000] you went through 5, 6, 7 years [of temporary work], then you were in, if you endured, if you were fit, after this exercise, the hard test of experience, they took you. For someone to become a journalist, the rule was: be good and have support. If you were only good, you would enter last, if good and backed by support, a little earlier. So, until the year 2000, more or less, you got in if you were resilient; after that, this crisis became so important that those options were not available anymore. Precarious people have become so many that there is a mass movement, not just a movement, of precarious workers! [journalist, private TV]

The response to those requests is quite different in the two outlets considered. In the private outlet the limited demand for journalists in the contexts of a restricted local media market hit by an economic crisis, allows the editor to exploit the work of journalists fearing to lose their job, kept in a state of insecurity over their occupational future:

> The crisis is not only exogenous, they [editors] also widened it. Why? Because it's convenient. They tell you: "Well, I've got 10 people waiting for your job". It means you'll work for me twice as hard, because you are afraid of losing your job. [journalist, private TV]

In the public outlet the strong internal union in which RAI journalists converge (USIGRAI) engaged in a battle against the company, eventually leading to secure stabilization paths for colleagues with precarious contracts, offering them the guarantees needed to steadily proceed in their professional career and personal life:

> I worked about 8 years [in RAI] as precarious (…) But, since I know the world of journalism, I can tell you that our precariat was a golden one. In those years I never thought of being fired, I was just paid a little less than my colleagues (…) I've never had doubts, barring unforeseen accidents, of this [stabilization] path. [journalist, public TV]

Changes between journalists and other media workers: the impact of technological innovation on work organization

Technological innovation fundamentally influences the organization of work in media systems. At RAI, television production—launched in the mid-1950s—initially followed the organization of the film industry, offering an already tested model, sharing conventions and a division of tasks over the use of specific equipment (Lari, 2012). The transition to the

video-magnetic tape, motivated by the costs of filming, led to the adoption of increasingly integrated and manageable video-cameras, allowing a simplified recording and editing process. As a consequence, several categories of workers become obsolete and are assigned new tasks not always consistent with their skills. Similarly, to what happened at the BBC in a time of analogous changes (Burns, 1979), the decoupling of workplace hierarchies from the logic of production competence and experience activates workers' corporate or individual strategies to gain horizontal or vertical mobility.

A case in point is offered by the movement of RAI video-operators, asking the company to be offered the favourable contract of professional journalists, in recognition of the creative—and not only technical—value of their skills. This possibility, normatively envisaged in the early 1970s, when television shooting was framed around the filming industry model, had been strenuously opposed by media companies (Menduni & Catolfi, 2001). The movement, however, unexpectedly received the support of the USIGRAI, interested in gaining new affiliations in the prospects of a possible diaspora of its members. At the end of 1980s, when the shift to video-magnetic tape had greatly simplified the production process, video-operators were formally credited by RAI as having the status of professional journalists. The new journalist figure, called *telecineoperatore* (tele-movie-operator), was authorized to autonomously organize his/her work without journalists' supervision. However, the increased costs of the contract under the new professional status led RAI to not renew it and to gradually contract out to formally freelance workers operating for the company on a regular basis.

In the case of local private television providers, which developed during the 1980s after the advancements in electronic technology, the most significant changes derive from digitalization. In Sardinia, where at the end of 2008 the national switch from analogue to digital television was first tested, local private outlets were exposed to the uncertainties of the experimental stage in the face of increasing competition from high-quality standard TV channels following the opening of new frequencies[4]. The sharp decline in audience ratings translated into a decrease in their revenues from sponsors, placing local outlets in a state of crisis worsened by the contemporary global recession (CORERAT, 2011). The crisis also hit the largest provider, Videolina, which—despite regional interventions supporting the sector—resorted to solidarity contracts in 2015, reducing the hours and pay of workers to avoid individual or collective dismissals. After this period, which lasted six months for journalists and one year for other categories, the editor reached an agreement based on workers' acceptance of "multifunctionality" contracts, declaring their availability to cover a series of tasks previously performed by different categories, with the same economic conditions. For journalists, this translated into the realization, all by themselves, of the

4 When the process was launched in the region, the shift to digital television, offering 64 channels instead of the 15 offered by analogue tv, translated into a loss over a two-year period of nearly one-third of Videolina's 600,000 contacts registered in 2007 (Giacomello, 2012, pp. 158-159).

whole production process: text writing, image shooting, editing, and post-production. This increased tensions with technical workers who felt betrayed both by their colleagues and the company, downplaying their skilled competences as easily replaceable:

> In this way journalists are killing us (…) I'm dead as a professional figure, because of them, who for 200 € extra started doing video and editing (…) They betrayed us (…) Oh, well, that's done! [operator, private TV]

As for the surveyed journalists, while few of them emphasize the new autonomy gained through multifunctionality in terms of wider freedom and control over the production chain, most acknowledge the downgrading linked to the reduction of the quality of production and the devaluation of some of the key features traditionally defining journalistic professionalism—such as verification, ethical accountability, and depth (Schnell, 2018):

> [Now] I do everything, I love it, everyone [among journalists] loves it, among the youngest ones (…) Before we were going out in three and everyone did whatever he/she liked: now I do what I really want to! [journalist, private TV]

> [Local] television providers found themselves with no money and high personnel costs (…) So they are reorganizing themselves. How? Now, with a little camera that weighs 1 kilo (…) you, the journalist, do the shooting and then edit it: I do everything, with the same contract. I used to be a journalist who wrote, elaborated, and thought and even had time to study: today there is no longer time (…) you write, you look for any image that looks like what you want to tell, you throw it in there and you air it [the TV report]. I get to do from 5 to 9 reports a day of two minutes each. You become a news factory; you are no longer a journalist. [journalist, private TV]

Beyond professional journalism: the shifting ideology of local media outlets

The literature on journalism in post-industrial societies has noted how the thriving of non-regulated communication sources linked to evolution of global digital multimedia systems challenges journalists' traditional role as gatekeepers of information (Schnell, 2018). In the case of our interviewees, the reduced control on sources is not perceived as a professional threat but normalized as part of the evolution of media systems. Journalists' main worries rather point to their increasing difficulties in maintaining those working conditions allowing them to develop and sustain professionalism, offering reliable, in-depth information and making a difference for their audience vis à vis the "fake journalism" created by laymen, often young precarious workers with strong digital skills, unexperienced and unaware of the deontological issues at stake in the production process, accepting to work voluntarily or for poor remuneration:

> The problem is that [today] everyone can write. When you read an article online, do you know if it's written by a professional journalist or someone who has a degree in

> science, for instance? You don't know! (…) How do they make information? Maybe collecting bits from other parts, copying and pasting, from here fake news [spreads]: it's hard to untangle this ball of yarn! [journalist, private TV]

It is especially the increase of daily workload, created by a series of concomitant factors (constant connection with updated digital information, new skills and tasks required by social media communication, reduction of staff size), that challenges journalists' possibility to operate in conditions granting the quality and accountability of their services to the public:

> Look, we [journalists] may do a lot of things, but then at some point the quality declines as the quantity increases. The quality declines so much that, in the end, in my opinion, the audience says: "If I look at Facebook I have better information than the two lines written on the fly by a [journalist] who is doing a thousand things at a time!" [journalist, public TV]

While interviewed journalists largely share the experience of an ongoing deterioration of working conditions, the degree of distress seems amplified by the organizational culture prevailing in the private outlet. Set up as a free radio and tv provider in 1975 by a university student challenging state monopoly on broadcasting with rudimentary equipment and a bunch of friends, the outlet maintained the organizational culture of a family firm—informality of relations, trust between workers, involvement in and strong commitment to the company (Vallejo, 2008)—also in later years when, under the charismatic leadership of its editor, it grew in size and professionalism, adding the ownership of the most popular newspaper in Sardinia to radio and television services. In 2000, due to financial difficulties, what had become the largest media company in the region is sold to a Sardinian entrepreneur operating at the national level in the real-estate sector and close to Berlusconi. In the attempt to modernize the company to reach the efficiency standards needed to survive in an increasingly competitive market, the editor reorganizes it according to a managerial model, applied through a "command and control" leadership (Seddon, 2005). Huge infrastructural investments are carried out: ten years later, the company's headquarters move into a residential centre newly built by the editor, including a planetarium, a multiplex cinema, shops and restaurants, a piazza with a fountain, next to a street officially renamed Journalists' Avenue. During those same years, in the face of the crisis brought to local private outlets by digitalization, the editor adopts measures to reduce personnel costs, offering older employees redundancy contributions, cutting external collaborations, and replacing their correspondent work with a flexible and extensive use of employees induced to sign the "multifunctionality" contracts described above.

Especially for the older employees, who had joined the company when it embraced an informal, family-firm organizational culture oriented towards the production of community services, the shift towards a managerialist market oriented culture is lived with discomfort

and conceived as a sort of betrayal of those workers who had devoted their lives to the company, now treated as a cost to be reduced:

> Before, a [media] corporation had a political or moral objective too (...) now it's just a simple list of numbers, all that matters is the budget. How we get to that budget doesn't count, human resources are no longer valued as before (…) What is important is how and how often to use it (…) we are a cost! Maybe that mindset allowing them to consider human resources also from the point of view of, I don't know, seeing them as people who are there in the company, dedicating a lot of time to it, how can you define it in a word? Affective [point of view]? (…) this aspect (…) is lost. [technician, private TV]

Some interviewees note how the adoption of instrumental rationality criteria devoid of references to ethical standards, leads the editor to use the ongoing economic crisis as a ploy to further enhance his bargaining power in the labour market, weakening the position of journalists and other employed workers, in face of the risk of losing a job sought after by an increasing number of precarious younger colleagues. The setting of a "war of all against all" scenario, in fact, favours unconditioned compliance and the active endorsement of directions coming from above, in exchange, respectively, for job protection and career-making:

> Do you see this? [pointing at the company's headquarters]. This is a medieval castle 2.0 or 4.0, as you prefer. This guy, our editor, like all powerful people, had the desire to build a castle: he made the towers, the water encircling it (...) it's the metaphor of the medieval castle! Those who are inside are all his vassals and vavasours and he commands, he's the baron, with the money (…) Just like in the Middle Ages: either you were under the protection of a powerful person inside the protective structure, but you were a slave in whatever stratum of the hierarchy you were placed; or you were outside, you were in the jungle, where there was everything, the bandit, you were at the mercy of everything, because outside you have no protection: no trade union protection, no rights, nothing! [journalist, private TV]

In the case of the local public outlet, changes linked to labour market flexibilization and the digitalization of media systems take place within a wider national bureaucratic and centralized structure, oriented to the public service and imbued within a union culture defended by the USIGRAI. Often criticized for its corporatist approach (Padovani, 2005), the USIGRAI managed to secure RAI journalists professional working conditions (from freedom of expression and autonomy to job protection and competitive salaries), beyond hierarchic relationships:

> Once a colleague told me this axiom (…): "The RAI does not fire, the RAI does not punish". Given that you have a lack of sanctions, linked to professional protections –

> which are thus a good thing – you can use them in two ways (…) you have the possibility of being more independent than others, because you are not subject to a master (…) or you can use it to not work and to mind your own business (…) From this point of view the public service offers [us journalists] pocket aces that you can occasionally play; namely, to know that, at the end of the day, if your boss dismisses you (…) there will be a period of *damnatio memoriae*, but in the meantime you have a chance to do your job, and this is a possibility that in my professional career I've seen [in RAI], both locally and nationally, more than for colleagues from private broadcasters. [journalist, public TV]

Conclusion: The trap of professional heterogeneity

Journalism, as other professions, is currently challenged by a series of endogenous and exogenous changes, weakening the foundations of professional work. This article has considered how some of these changes influence the condition of professional journalists working in Italian local televisions, flourished at the end of the 1970s as a response to centralized state control over broadcasting and becoming a reference point for local institutions and communities. In the last decades, increased market competition deriving from an expanding global multimedia system, further enhanced by the diffusion of digital technology, brought significant changes both to the labour market and the organization of work in the media industry. The empirical evidence discussed in the article under the three analytical dimensions suggested by the special issue editors (within, between, beyond) offers concrete examples of the dilemmas faced by professionals, which can be interpreted through the conceptual tools and theoretical frame offered by the neo-institutional approach.

The within dimension of analysis shows how the massive growth of atypical workers in Italian journalism marks the shift of precarity from a temporary phase initiating young apprentices to professional activity, to a prolonged unstable working condition without clear prospects for change, often leading journalists to involuntary freelance entrepreneurship, poor wages and self-exploitation. Collective mobilization of journalists claiming a solution to this problem found a quite different answer in the outlets considered: if the union of RAI journalists engaged in a battle eventually leading to define stabilization paths for precarious workers, in the private outlet journalists were left to individually bargain with the editor over their occupational future.

The second dimension of analysis shows how the introduction of ground-breaking technological innovation in media systems opened windows of opportunity to revise criteria distinguishing between professional journalists and other categories of media workers. Also, in this case organizational differences played a fundamental role in defining the room of manoeuvre for actors involved. In the public outlet, the successful internal battle of employed video-operators to be recognized as professional journalists brought as

unintended consequence the elimination of their figure from the company, given its increased costs under the journalistic contract and the widened offer of media services in the market. In the private outlet, the reduction of production costs linked to the introduction of digital equipment is seized by the editor to include within journalists' duties tasks previously assigned to other workers, redefining their professionality as "multiskilled", rather than specialized.

The third dimension, investigating what lies beyond professionalism, shows the relevance of the organizational culture and ideology in maintaining professional work standards and public service orientation in media companies. Despite their reference to a different model of company (public vs. private), both the local outlets originally responded to the aim of promoting pluralism and democracy through the production of news and programs related to areas and communities often ignored by national broadcasting services. If the public outlet, oriented to the public service by definition, represented the peripheral branch of a large bureaucratic structure imbued within a union culture, the private one was organized as a small family firm, characterized by informal relations of trust and commitment to the company. In the last two decades, the growing influence of neoliberal ideology is resisted in the public outlet, but leads the private one to a market-oriented reorganization enhancing the commodification of workers, kept in a condition of insecurity to better control their productivity or acquiescence.

Considering jobs as instrumental, flexible, insecure, and variable, however, does not allow the thriving of the type of professionalism "that goes with belonging to a community with standards, ethical codes and mutual respect among its members based on competence and respect for long-established rules of behaviour" (Standing, 2011, p. 26). As well put by R.H. Tawney (1920, p. 92) a century ago: "A profession (…) is not simply a collection of individuals who get a living for themselves by the same kind of work (…) It is a body of men"—and women, we would certainly add today—"who carry on their work in accordance with rules designed to enforce certain standards both for the better protection of its members and for the better service of the public". And in dramatic moments of our lives – such as the ongoing global pandemic—we are placed in a better position to seize the importance of relying on the work of competent and accountable professionals[5].

Overall our case confirms the picture drawn by the international literature on the increased professional heterogeneity of journalists, derived from changes occurring in post-industrial media systems: precarious and stabilized colleagues operate side by side, doing the same job but receiving quite different salaries, or rather getting the same pay for a considerably different amount of tasks, increasingly performed alone or in substantially degraded

[5] An example is given by the role played by local outlets in offering local communities updated reliable information during the Covid-19 pandemic: since March 2020, when the emergency started, the monthly average audience of Videolina doubled (Auditel monthly reports 2020, https://www.auditel.it/).

working conditions. The considerations emerging from our analysis, however, point to the relevance of the meso level in mediating macro level change to safeguard professional work. As similarly noted in the debate over the new "creative class" (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2011), celebrating heterogeneity as a symbol of the variety and richness that professional profiles can take in post-industrial societies may overshadow the preliminary issue of the homogeneity of standards needed to grant professionals' rights and duties, given that it is hard to address questions of inequality—and thus of its reduction—among structurally heterogeneous groups (Castel, 1997).

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Client Professionalization, a Resource for Heterogeneous Professionals: For a Pluralistic Account of Corporate Professions

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Abstract

Drawing on the corporate professionalization model, the notion of client professionalization denotes new, client-oriented strategies of legitimization and claims relating to expertise, differentiation, regulation and dissemination. Based on the case of executive coaching in France and its professionalization process, the paper shows how these strategies enable heterogeneous categories of actors to become recognized as professionals. These strategies act as resources because they are grounded on principles other than exclusion and monopoly, such as extension and co-production, which give new value to heterogeneous socialization experiences and multiple activities. The emphasis on client-relationship skills affords atypical professionals' access to rewarding positions that would otherwise have been unattainable for them. These strategies are important for occupations such as coaching that are practiced by self-employed individuals, who have been overlooked in the literature. They also tend to constitute an appealing access to professionalization, in a context where the power of the market is increasing.

Keywords

Corporate professions, client professionalization, self-employed, executive coaching, emergent occupations, sociology of expertise, social morphology

Introduction

Following calls for more extensive research on corporate forms of professionalism (Muzio & Kirkpatrick, 2011; Bellini & Maestripieri, 2018; Reed, 2018), this paper contributes to a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the "corporate professions" (Ackroyd, 2016), by focusing on those practiced by self-employed, solo practitioners and freelancers, which have been overlooked in the literature. It seems relevant to explore this kind of profession, since the numbers of "independent professionals"—knowledge workers who work as independent contractors—have exploded in recent years in Europe (Rapelli, 2012; Bologna, 2018; Semanza & Pichault, 2019).

This diversity among "corporate professions" in terms of work contract has implications for the conceptions of professionalism involved. The concept of "client professionalization" (Salman, 2019) has been coined to denote the new strategies of institutionalization developed by professionals, in response to clients' "injunction to professionalism" (Boussard, Demazière, Milburn, 2010), so as to secure a professional territory around an emergent practice. Alternative conceptions of professionalism emerge from this kind of professionalization process, which take into account more the "active" place of the clients (Sturdy, Werr & Buono, 2009; Sturdy & Wright, 2011). These conceptions focus on value for the client, competencies vs. qualifications, multiple skills and limited social closure, coincidence of interest and co-production. They draw more broadly on a new conception of expert power, based on "extension and linking" rather than on "restriction and exclusion" (Eyal, 2013).

In this paper, I show how this client-oriented professionalization process can afford new professional opportunities to some categories of actors who were excluded from the labour market – especially from the most protected areas of the latter. This more diverse conception of professionalism has opened the scope of corporate occupations to more heterogeneous professionals, thus resulting in increasing heterogeneity among them. The heterogeneity in emergent corporate occupations, especially those practiced by independent professionals, is threefold: inner diversity within the professional group, diversity in terms of social composition, and diversity in terms of their work contract. The analysis of the heterogeneity within "corporate professions" can thus contribute to a more intersectional approach in the sociology of professions, through a better integration of other socio-material identities and positions such as gender, class and race (Brady, 2018; Azocar & Ferree, 2017). This multifaceted heterogeneity can be analyzed using the framework proposed by Parding, Bellini and Maestripieri in this special issue, in three dimensions:

"within", which looks at the increasing diversity inside each professional group; "between", which focuses on the differentiation and competition between professional groups; and "beyond", which highlights the changing relationship between clients and professionals and the way professional groups try to govern it. This paper shows that the heterogeneity within emergent corporate professions—especially those practiced by the self-employed—and their differentiation from others, have benefited from the "client professionalization" process, just as it has nourished them.

The paper takes the case of executive coaching, a corporate occupation that emerged in the US in the 1980s and spread to France and other European countries in the 1990s. In France, coaching has been disseminated in large organizations and has spawned a professional group evidenced in the creation of professional associations, training, and the arrival on the market of practitioners offering this activity as coaches. The number of these coaches in France increased from about 250 in the second half of the 1990s to 3,000 at the end of the 2010s. Coaches, who are self-employed or associated in very small businesses (limited liability companies of two or three individuals) , contract directly with client companies or provide their services as subcontractors of large consulting firms. Coaches constitute a widely heterogenous professional group, ranging from HR consultants to former senior executives in large companies, self-help therapists with fewer formal qualifications, communication trainers, and so on. This heterogeneity leads to internal competition to define what professionalism is for these consultants.

The paper is structured as follows: The first section introduces the theoretical approach by grounding the concept of "client professionalization" in the wider debate on professionalism. The second section describes the research design, the data generated and its analysis. The third section presents the findings by analyzing the case study in the three dimensions of the framework on heterogeneity: within, between, and beyond. The fourth section provides a discussion on the links between "client professionalization", new forms of professionalism, and heterogeneity in professions. It explores the ways through which "client professionalization" strategies offer a resource to various kinds of professionals, who can access relatively prestigious positions without the classical profile usually required by professions.

"Client professionalization" among "corporate professions"

Managerial or "corporate professions" (Ackroyd, 2016) convey new conceptions of professionalism, which are more commercial and market oriented (Hanlon, 1998). The "corporate professionalization" model (Faulconbridge, Beaverstock, & Hall, 2011; Kipping et al., 2006; Muzio, Hodgson,), for one, is designed to capture these new processes by showing some of the main strategies of these professions: forms of closure based on competences rather than qualifications, multi-tiered membership and organizational membership schemes, legitimization strategies focused on market value rather than achieving legalistic

forms of closure, and international rather than national jurisdiction. So far, this model has focused on corporate professions whose labour market is dominated by large firms specialized in management consultancy, project management, and executive search, in the UK and the US.

The "client professionalization" model (Salman, 2019) has been proposed firstly to account for the professionalization of emergent corporate occupations, where large organizations are not structuring the labour market, unlike in the "corporate professionalization" model. It aims at better understanding the institutional professionalization of corporate occupations that are practiced by the self-employed. Even if they seem to "shun the wider practices of professionalization" in order to "maintain a chameleon-like status" (Cross & Swart, 2018), the self-employed seek forms of "organized professionalism" (Cucca & Maestripieri, 2016) and turn to organizing and solidarity mechanisms to reduce their increasing vulnerability (Maestripieri & Cucca, 2018). The key concept of "client capture", which describes instances when clients become so powerful that professionals lose their autonomy and independence (Dinovitzer, Gunz & Gunz, 2014; Gunz & Gunz, 2008; Leicht & Fennell, 2001), can be applied to independent professionals, who are not able to turn to an employing organization to protect themselves from economic dependence on their clients. The role of clients in consultants' practice is being studied more and more as "active" (Sturdy et al., 2009; Sturdy & Wright, 2011) and has implications for professionalization. By considering "so-called consumers" as "active", professionalization is seen as a "branding activity", "best approached as a relationship" (Ashcraft, Muhr, Rennstam & Sullivan, 2012).

Against this backdrop, the "client professionalization" model brings together the new kinds of professionalization strategies of a professional group whose relationship to clients is central, especially when the professionals are self-employed. There are five kinds of strategy: legitimization strategies that highlight added value for the client and not only a moral mandate; forms of closure based on competences rather than qualifications; a differentiation process designed to satisfy clients and to reassure them, by valuing multiple skills rather than searching for a strict social closure; a regulation through codes of ethics that stem from the clients' normative injunctions rather than from the professional group itself; a new form of dissemination, relying on collaboration with internal actors inside client organizations rather than on competition.

"Client professionalization" comes with alternative conceptions of professionalism, which draw on the new definition of expert power proposed by (Eyal, 2013; Salman, 2019). Contrary to the neo-Weberian sociology of professions, focused on a conception of power "understood under the twin forms of monopoly and autonomy" (Eyal, 2013), Eyal's sociology of expertise pleads for another conception of power, consisting of what he calls "generosity" and "co-production". This conception gives new value to the typical strategies of "client professionalization", since they can be seen as strategies of "generosity" (through

the soft social closure and cooperation with competitors, and through the involvement of multiple internal actors inside client companies) and “co-production” (through the regulation based on the co-production of ethical criteria and through the relational expertise at the heart of the competencies). This more interwoven relationship between professionals and clients may then not result in less power for both the expertise and the experts, since it can enhance the latter’s authority. The template of “client professionalization” thus shows that professions are not doomed to be passive victims of marketization, just as Faulconbridge & Muzio (2008) showed that professions were not systematically compromised by their embeddedness inside large organizations. These strategies of a new kind can serve as indicators of the professionalization of emergent occupations (Brès et al., 2019) and they should be tested as such in further research on heterogeneity in professionalism.

Research Design

This publication is based on an ethnographic study conducted in France in the 2000s, first in 2002, then between 2006 & 2009, and completed at the end of the 2010s. It draws on empirical data from interviews and observation, and quantitative data, as well as analysis of secondary documentation. I conducted audio-recorded semi-structured in-depth interviews with consultant coaches (n=45), human resources managers who prescribe coaching (n=16) and coached managers (n=18). As this paper focuses on the professional group of coaches, I will develop only the methodology used to collect data through the coaches. The 45 coaches were selected to constitute a diverse sample of the professional group. More than half of them were prominent coaches, founders of coaching schools and key members of the oldest professional association in France, SF Coach. The second half of the interviews consisted of: a dozen in-house coaches at large companies in a variety of industries (public/private, automobile, energy, rail transportation, telecom, banking), who provided information about the dissemination of coaching in companies; and ten coaches, not affiliated to a professional association, chosen to explore the boundaries of the professional group.

All the interviews lasted 2 hours, and the prominent coaches were interviewed several times. The interviews were structured as follows: first a biographical overview; second a part on professional practices, relations with clients, and conceptions of professionalism; and third a part on the professional association, where relevant. Observations were also carried out to better understand the professional group’s actions. I monitored SF Coach closely for a year, attending monthly evening meetings, participating in their annual colloquium, meeting with senior personnel at the association’s office, and scrutinizing their documentation. My study of the professional group benefited from a quantitative survey that I had launched in 2002, through a questionnaire that I had drafted and sent to SF Coach members (116 respondents, out of a total of 400 members). The data collected were exploited through descriptive and factorial analysis.

The dates of this long-term ethnographic study enabled me to cover the whole process of professionalization of executive coaching in France almost from the beginning, thus providing unique data on the emergence of the new occupation and on the institutionalization strategies of its promoters. This contrasts with the existing research on coaching, which focuses on the results of coaching (Mulvie, 2015) or its practice (Louis & Fatien-Diochon, 2018; Pichault, Fatien-Diochon, Nizet, 2020. A study of the professionalization process of executive coaching is moreover crucial to an analysis of the heterogeneity of this professional group, since this heterogeneity is related to the dynamics of professionalization itself. While the promoters of the institutionalization of coaching were consultants and a few psychotherapists, the followers were partly former executives who had turned to coaching after them. They were initially clients of the first coaches, and from there they became practitioners themselves and sometimes instigators of the implementation of coaching within their company.

Coaches' conceptions of professionalism have been systematically related to their biographic trajectories, in line with the recommendation of Hughes (1958) to take into account the study of "careers" in the conception of work. This is key in the case of coaches, since coaching is a second occupation in their lifetime: 71% are older than 45 (ICF, 2016). Paying attention to professional as well as personal trajectories is also relevant to an analysis of the self-employed (Bertaux & Wiame, 1981), who are more likely than their employed counterparts to experience the entanglement between private and professional life.

All the interviews were fully transcribed and analyzed by coding transcripts, by attaching keywords and themes to different segments in order to structure the raw data. The qualitative analysis of coaches' biographical trajectories was also combined with the statistical analysis of their profiles, so as to put these conceptions into a broader perspective. Therefore, very few interview excerpts will be quoted in the following sections, as the analysis focuses on the trajectories and on the institutional level.

Findings: From within to beyond, executive coaches as heterogeneous professionals

Nursing The professional group of executive coaches can be considered as heterogeneous in several ways. Using the theoretical framework on heterogeneity, this section first shows, in the within dimension, that the group of coaches demonstrates an inner heterogeneity related to socio-professional profiles; second, in the between dimension, coaching attracts more atypical profiles than its competitors such as consulting and is more diverse in itself, since coaches offer multiple services; third, in the beyond dimension, heterogeneity is found in the professionalization process itself, which differs from traditional strategies. In the

three dimensions, heterogeneity is linked to the place of the client in the professionalization process.

Within—inner heterogeneity and competing conceptions of professionalism

Executive coaches are a heterogeneous professional group in terms of socio-professional profiles and background. Most coaches started coaching after they turned 45, which means that they started their career in another occupation. The examination of their biographical trajectories reveals two main ways of entering coaching: either as a consultant or management trainer with a “bushy” trajectory, for whom coaching represents a professional opportunity that becomes a guideline around which various activities are reorganized; or else as a senior executive for whom coaching is a professional reorientation after a rupture (e.g. dismissal or accident) in a linear career within a large organization.

The heterogeneity within the professional group stemmed from the dynamics of the professionalization process itself. While coaches with the first profile—former consultants—were the promoters of the institutionalization of coaching, those with the second profile—former executives—followed in their footsteps. This dynamic is related to a specific relationship between clients and professionals, where some of the clients tend to become professionals themselves. These two profiles have competing conceptions of professionalism.

Becoming a coach as an opportunity for consultants and trainers on the fringes of the consulting world

The first profile of coaches consisted of consultants and trainers who were older, more often women or less qualified than consultants from large consulting firms. They worked as independent professionals or partners in small businesses, before turning to coaching. While coaching afforded them an extra skillset, it ultimately allowed them to extend their professional field and to gain a higher social position. This first profile, which can be described as "opportunistic", has two ramifications. In the first subgroup, coaches practiced their previous activity freelance, in an eclectic trajectory made up of numerous jobs and alternative sequences of salaried employment and independence, or even unemployment and inactivity. Although most of these coaches were from affluent backgrounds, some of them were from lower classes. They practiced diverse activities, ranging from psychotherapy to communication, education, social work, and so on. Most of them held no formal degree, even if they had started to study, or they had changed orientation several times. Some of these eclectic coaches were women, usually from upper classes, who had quit the job market to raise their children. Married to senior executives in large organizations, they would give their spouses advice about their workplace issues, but in the privacy of their

home, thus gaining experience that would later serve them in their work as coaches. The second subgroup was composed of consultants, graduates in psychology who were formerly employed in consulting firms but had resigned to become coaches, claiming that they wanted to go back to their initial vocation by choosing an activity close to psychotherapy. This second subgroup illustrates an internal tension within the consulting world, between consultants who stayed in professional service firms and others, more frequently women or men having experienced a rupture (like a disease for example). This internal tension was linked to the differentiation process from which coaching emerged as a new occupation, and which is presented in the "between" section of this paper.

Becoming a coach as a way out for executives undergoing professional retraining

Most executives who have reskilled as coaches have left their companies and are performing completely different functions from those, they had during the first part of their career (as engineers, sales managers, financial managers, etc.). They may, although rarely, become internal coaches in their former company, but always at the cost of a break with their previous professional identity. Coaches with this profile turned to the new occupation after a series of professional dissatisfactions: dismissal or resignation, sometimes correlated with a personal rupture, painful professional experiences, or loss of career prospects. Many women among them have experienced the glass ceiling—a broader phenomenon that leads women from organizational careers to self-employment (Mallon & Cohen, 2001). These women, some of whom are engineers, turned to coaching after having been coached themselves. They claim to do a job that suits their vocation, which, they say, is more "human" than "technical". Finally, provided that former executives are able to pay for private training, coaching enables them to (re)access employment without having to follow a long university course. By staying in the business field, they can build on the first part of their career and take advantage of their skills, their address book and their initial qualifications. In addition, symbolic promotion is important since, as coaches, they help and advice those who were previously like them.

Competing conceptions of professionalism—Experience versus expertise, a reverse couple

These two main profiles do not have the same relationship to coaching. For former consultants and trainers, most of whom were already self-employed, the new occupation was an opportunity to gain prestige in the consulting market. By contrast, for former senior executives it was seen as a way out after a rupture, but it meant an economic downgrade. However, former executives who have reskilled as coaches tend to behave as "converts", as in the religious sense: they are more convinced than the initial believers.

The heterogeneity within the professional group has implications for their conceptions of professionalism. The two profiles of coaches defend their own conception, leading to internal power struggles between them. The definition of what it is to be a professional was initially influenced by coaches of the first profile, consultants and psychotherapists who introduced coaching in France and founded the first professional association. They were the ones to define coaching and to establish an accreditation committee to select coaches. In their view, professionalism is based on psychological expertise, work on oneself through psychotherapy, and experience of the relationship to business clients. According to these criteria, consultants or management trainers with a psychological background can make good coaches. By contrast, former executives appear as newcomers and are less experienced: they have not built up a network of business clients and they have no expertise in psychology, apart from their recent training in coaching.

However, former executives can compete for other reasons. To them, the professionalism of coaching is based on an inner knowledge of organizational issues, that can be acquired only through professional and personal experience. They are quick to stigmatize the "shrinks" who have no idea of what business is, and they play their own experience as former executives against the expertise of consultants. But they also use the reverse argument of their initial qualifications: even if these are not connected to coaching, their prestige (engineering, MBA, etc.), compared to those of consultants and trainers, outweighs other such considerations.

In each of these two competing conceptions of professionalism, experience and expertise are equally present, but play a reverse role. Former consultants highlight their experience of the relationship to the client, whereas former executives stress their experience of management and organizational contexts, that is to say, the main issues of their clients in coaching. This shows the clients' influence on professionalism. Both of the profiles use these arguments when trying to convince potential clients, and the inner power struggle takes place on the job market, even though it can be found between the professional associations (the International Coaching Federation having attracted more former executives, and SF Coach, the oldest body, more consultants and psychotherapists).

Between—Differentiation strategies to establish a new jurisdiction for coaching

Heterogeneity does not appear only within the professional group of coaches but also between the latter and competing occupations. The strategies of coaches and their professional bodies to differentiate themselves both from consulting and from psychotherapy are marked by the influence of the clients. Coaches lay claim to a specific "jurisdiction" (Abbott, 1988) without closing themselves off from the possibility of practicing consulting and training, to satisfy their clients' multiple needs. Their differentiation from psychotherapy aims more to reassure clients than to distinguish themselves from

competitors. The strategy of multiple activities to foster their client loyalty may explain the limited social closure that characterizes “corporate professions” (Ackroyd, 2016).

Coaching was presented in professional rhetoric and, in the interviews, as an alternative to consulting, and even its opposite: the coach’s work is not based on the transmission of expert knowledge; it is aimed at guiding the coachee in the self-management of their own problems. Criticism of consulting was nevertheless based less on head-on opposition than on a dialectics. The claim that there was no transmission of expert content was based on an internal differentiation, within consulting, as Schein (1969) suggested, between the “provision of expertise” and “maieutics” or “process consultation”. Coaching was even presented as a way of enhancing consulting itself, through the method of “maieutic consultation”. Coaches tried to “reduce the work of competitors to an (incomplete) version of theirs” (Abbott, 1988), which is key to success in inter-professional competition. Moreover, as coaches, offering their clients other services such as consulting helped them to maintain a large labour market, by sustaining a portfolio of clients with changing demands.

As coaches had to reserve for themselves the possibility of practicing other activities, they finally opted for the only strategy that independent businesses could adopt in the management consulting market, in which large firms were predominant: the complementarity of these activities. They ensured that the boundaries between professional segments were respected: the coaching space could be situated “upstream” from the large Anglo-Saxon consulting firms. In interviews, coaches criticized the standardization of consulting methods, which according to them was contrary to the “customized” nature of coaching services. They claimed that “small is beautiful” because closer to clients’ needs, referring to the personalization of the service, which they presented as their particularity compared to larger firms. This sharing of the consulting territory mitigated potential conflict with the large consulting firms. It allowed coaches to work as subcontractors for these firms, which was in the interests of both, since the consulting firms wanted to offer coaching services to their clients without employing a coach full time.

The professional rhetoric of coaches was also directed at differentiating themselves from psychotherapy. But here again, the differentiation process was turned towards clients, to reassure them regarding their fears with respect to psychotherapy, rather than aiming to distinguish coaches from the competition of “shrinks”. The argument was that coaching was restricted to the “professional” domain, whereas psychotherapy pertained to the “personal” domain.

Beyond, “client professionalization” as a way to manage the growing place of the client

Finally, heterogeneity is also to be found in the professionalization process itself. How has the professional group of coaches governed the current change of marketization? This is the

purpose of the analysis of the "beyond" dimension. The concept of "client professionalization" (Salman, 2019) serves to heuristically answer this question. I present a summary of these strategies as they appear in the case of the institutionalization of executive coaching in France, except for the second strategy (differentiation), which has been presented above in the "between" section of this paper.

Convincing clients through professional rhetoric

Coaches' professional rhetoric aimed at convincing potential clients of the necessity of coaching. This rhetoric first relied on symbolism (Kipping, 2011). The word "coaching" was adopted even though it was an English word, because the American origin symbolized managerial innovations in France. The optimism attributed to the American culture made it possible to break away from the idea of suffering and the figure of the psychotherapist that client corporations feared. This was accentuated by the reference of the word "coach" to sport, which had strong appeal in the economic world, where it maintained the meritocratic illusion of fair competition.

Professional rhetoric also relies on "theorization", which consists in specifying generic problems and justifying particular innovations as solutions to these problems (David et al., 2013). In coaches' rhetoric, theorization was designed to convince potential clients that coaching was the best way to address the human problems that, through the lack of "managerial skills", hindered their firms' performance. The client-centered orientation of the theorization explains the emphasis on "added-value" in the rhetoric. But moral arguments, constituting a "moral mandate" (Hughes, 1958), were also used to add legitimacy to the new occupation by evoking cultural values and altruism, an important feature in emerging fields (David et al., 2013).

Relational form of knowledge and client-focused expertise claim

Coaches' professional associations established accreditations and certifications. These certifications can be analyzed as "impersonal devices of judgment" (Karpik, 2010) designed to reduce quality uncertainty related to market opacity, when there is no institutional or external regulation. While calling for the recognition of specific expertise for coaching, the associations retained criteria other than qualifications and valued skills: previous professional experience (external to coaching), supposed to guarantee the coach's understanding of the professional issues the coachee had to deal with; specific training; values, such as "ethics" and "quality"; the mastery of coaching skills; and on-going professional supervision. The emphasis was on the coach's practice and experience of human relationships, so as to highlight the client's place in the service delivery. Co-production is found in every kind of service, but coaches claimed it as an integral part of their work, for they use the relationship to the client as a tool in their coaching. Finally, all the associations adopted multi-level membership certifications. The national branch of the

ICF also certifies training courses, in addition to the accreditation of individual practitioners, but not coaching firms (again, because most of the coaches are independent workers).

The main associations joined forces in the 2010s and secured the registration of coaching as one of the "self-regulated professions" of the European Union. Above all, in 2015 they achieved the addition of coaching training to the National Register of Professional Certifications (RNCP) of the French Ministry of Labour. This granted official recognition to those who had been trained in a certified coaching course. Without establishing an institutional closure, this title granted de facto recognition to the coach's professional activity, on the basis of self-regulation, avoiding strict closure based on qualifications.

Regulation as an "injunction" by clients to "ensure professionalism"

The fears expressed by potential clients with regard to coaching were the risks of sectarian affiliation, of collusion between the coach and the coachee, and of intrusion of the company into the employee's private life. Professional associations tried to reassure potential clients, that is, the "prescribers" and recruiters of coaches (HR managers), as well as coaches, by means of some "impersonal devices of trust" (Karpik, 2010), designed to limit the risks of malignancy and opportunism in the absence of state regulation. All associations drew up codes of ethics, with common criteria such as "confidentiality" or "the coach is prohibited from exercising any undue influence". These devices can be interpreted as responses to the "injunction to ensure professionalism" (Boussard et al., 2010) expressed by client organizations that needed to be convinced not only of the advantages of coaching, but also of the quality of this service and its providers.

Dissemination through the alliance with internal actors inside client organizations

Once the professional territory had been secured, which made the exchange of services possible, it was necessary to introduce and set up coaching within client organizations. The role of internal actors in organizations in supporting dissemination needs to be emphasized (Sturdy & Wright, 2011). Rejecting a unitary view of the client being the organization, I identify three kinds of internal actors who played a role in the dissemination of coaching: executives who became in-house coaches; HR managers; and senior company executives. The professional group of coaches had to find ways to make alliances with them, to ensure that they were not only "interested" but also "enrolled" (Callon, 1984). These actions resulted in the lasting integration of coaching into companies as a HR management tool.

Client professionalization for heterogeneous professionals

I would like to draw some general conclusions by analyzing the relationship between the three dimensions of the framework (within, between and beyond), used to study the heterogeneity of the professional group. In my case study, the key dimension is "beyond",

insofar as it shows how the professional group of executive coaches has governed the increasing role of the client through a "client professionalization" process. I examine the links between this process and the heterogeneity that is found within and between, by discussing more broadly the hypothesis that "client professionalization" contributes in several ways to heterogeneity among corporate professions.

First, "client professionalization" strategies are mobilized particularly by occupations that are composed of heterogeneous workers and people excluded from the classical job market, such as independent professionals. Furthermore, its specific strategies facilitate the access of these heterogeneous workers to more prestigious occupations that they would otherwise have failed to attain because of a lack of traditionally recognized professional features. By their alternative conceptions of professionalism, through "linking and extension" (Eyal, 2013), these strategies reinforce the position of these heterogeneous professionals and their less classical trajectories. Conversely, their heterogeneous trajectories explain part of this new kind of client-oriented professionalism.

Heterogeneity can first be related to alternative work arrangements. The internal composition of the "self-employed" category is hard to identify (Leighton and McKeown, 2015), because of its wide heterogeneity (Semanza & Pichault, 2019). New forms of contingent work and independence such as freelancing and self-employment offer new job opportunities to more diverse categories of people, some of whom were previously excluded from the job market. In France and in other countries such as the USA, self-employment has been considered as a way to reduce unemployment (Kerjosse, 2007), even if it is not the main explanation for the rise of alternative work arrangements (Katz and Krueger, 2017). For women, contingent work is a way of re-entering the job market after a period of inactivity (Landour, 2015) and self-employment can help to maintain a professional activity after dissatisfaction with the organization (Mallon & Cohen, 2001). Self-employment through which coaching is mainly practiced has brought back to the job market several categories who had been excluded from it: in the first place, women, spouses of senior executives, who had quit the job market to raise their children; but also a certain kind of senior executive, more vulnerable to unemployment and less employable, who had been dismissed as a result of redundancy plans or restructuring. Against the broader backdrop of outsourcing and offshoring of well-paid middle-class jobs (Barley, Bechky & Milliken, 2017) and career stagnation within large organizations, self-employment is gaining new appeal by promising to meet the current aspirations for freedom and autonomy (Leighton & McKeown, 2015; Menger, 2002; Semenza & Pichault, 2019). Many former executives who turned to coaching, including women and some atypical men who experienced a glass ceiling or a personal breakdown, fall into this category. However, these new forms of independence offer only job opportunities and do not imply any professional protection in themselves (Maestripieri & Cucca, 2018); on the contrary, they can lead to some forms of precariousness (Murgia, Maestripieri & Armano, 2017). Independent professionals even

face a “social paradox” between the persistence of professionalism as a reference model and the risk of downward social mobility related to their non-conventional job status (Semenza & Pichault, 2019).

The process of “client professionalization” shows how the “social paradox” experienced by independent professionals can be solved in practice on an institutional level. Contrary to more classical forms of professionalization, these new strategies contribute to allowing individuals from a broader spectrum of social categories to become professionals, to secure their own professional territory, and to make their occupation widely recognized as a new profession. Previously, coaches could never have performed traditional forms of professionalization in France, where three types of recognized professionals (psychiatrists, psychologists and psychoanalysts) dominated mental health and where PSFs ruled consulting. It is the emphasis, in the conceptions of professionalism, on client-relationship skills, that has given these atypical professionals access to rewarding positions that they would not otherwise have been able to attain. First, forms of closure based on skills rather than on qualifications enable them to bypass the traditional barriers of professions. This is seen in the trajectories of eclectic trainers and consultants, some of whom had few formal qualifications, but who turned to coaching and gained symbolic advantage without a degree. This is also the case of senior executives who changed careers. Even though their qualifications had nothing to do with their new occupation, a short period of training was enough because they could capitalize on their previous experience and status as managers. Coaching can even give access to more prestigious and better paid positions than the ones obtained with a protected degree in psychology. Some of the graduate psychologists introduced themselves to their clients not as psychologists but only as executive coaches. Additionally, a differentiation process which values multiple skills rather than searching for strict social closure also contributes to heterogeneity amongst professionals. This strategy protects people who are at the fringes of the consulting world, who practice multiple activities to satisfy their clients’ needs and who have a more diversified social profile than the consultants employed by professional service firms. The strategy of dissemination through collaboration with internal actors also gives more value to another type of professional, especially former clients who reskill as coaches and come to the new occupation with a different background, such as former executives who turn themselves into coaches. Finally, the new kind of regulation is close to what Wedel (2009) calls “coincidence of interest” —the opposite of “conflict of interest” —, which is typical of “flexians”, the new kind of professional, consultant or academic that represents business interests and whose activity permeates the boundary between public and private. These more heterogeneous professionals can find in this new kind of regulation a way to reconcile and even to give value to their multiple affiliations, instead of seeing them as “conflicts of interest”. It is thus the “client professionalization” process that can integrate new categories of workers into a relatively secure professional territory, whereas independence only offers

new job opportunities and may even lead to precariousness. People who are either remote from the professional world—like housewives or self-employed individuals offering a variety of services—or threatened within it—like fired executives or women experiencing job dissatisfaction—find a way to enter or to maintain themselves in highly skilled occupations. The strategies of "client professionalization" give heterogeneous workers resources to access valued positions, either to experience social promotion or to limit social downgrading.

This result is also found in other independent professions such as real estate agents and more broadly in "commercial" professions whose relationship to clients is central, both in the work arrangement and in the work activity itself (Bernard, 2012). Real estate agents illustrate a heterogeneous professional group who access middle-class positions without "academic capital" or "economic capital" (Bourdieu, 1979). They achieve this by mobilizing what Bernard (2012) calls "uncertified cultural capital", which consists in skilled use of language and familiarity with ways of being from intermediate or higher social backgrounds. This notion is close to Bourdieu (1979)'s "incorporated cultural capital" but also refers, in a broader sense, to cultural resources acquired in the course of heterogeneous socialization experiences that can be used to support economic success (Bernard, 2012). That also means that the heterogeneity of the professionals' experience conversely nourishes the kind of professionalism involved: it leads them to develop soft skills which are crucial in the relationship to clients, and which help them to build an extended network. Inadequate qualifications or multiple activities are no longer obstacles in themselves to professionalism; as they provide heterogeneity, they can extend the scope of the professionals' competencies and of their networks of potential clients. It was advantageous for coaches, for instance for women advising their spouses at home, to value and commodify their skills, and by doing so they were extending the reach of their expertise network, as dietitians did with medicine and nutrition science (Brady, 2018). Against this backdrop, heterogeneous professionals, by the inner diversity of their socialization experiences as well as a more extended social composition and multiple activities, may contribute to "extension and linking" (Eyal, 2013). Heterogeneity is thus also a resource for professionalization, in the sense of the extension of the network of expertise (Brady, 2018).

The alternative, client-oriented approach to professionalism can finally give a new legitimacy to the less classical trajectories and new status of independent professionals. Some of them, such as executive coaches, even see this new model as an alternative to the classical conception of monopoly and exclusion based on qualifications. Coaches can be partly seen as "issue professionals" (Henriksen & Seabrooke, 2016), who share a normative mission and address a societal issue. The mission they claim to have – to "develop the potential" of the individual – is consistent with a liberal ideal that challenges the power of traditional professions. As they intervene in large organizations and spread their conceptions within them, they might be seen as active agents of a social change that

contributes to the decline of the social recognition of professions based on qualifications – at least to its symbolic decline, in line with the "new spirit of capitalism" (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2006). The respective weight of the traditional professions and of these new forms of professionalization (Barley et al., 2017; Brès et al., 2019) must be assessed. The question is whether these new strategies are now decisive criteria to access professions. As the traditional professionalization process is becoming more difficult, the client-centred approach seems more appealing. This even leads to question whether the examples of traditional professions (mainly medicine and law) were simply deviant extreme examples of a process that happened to work for them, rather than an institutional model that could be replicated by others.

Conclusion

This paper contributes to the study of the increasing heterogeneity among corporate professions and their conceptions of professionalism. It applies the analytical framework proposed by Parding, Bellini and Maestripieri to study professionalism in its heterogeneity—"within", "between" and "beyond"—to the case study of executive coaching and coaches. It thus shows that a new professional way to govern marketization, in the "beyond" dimension, can contribute to the inner heterogeneity of the professional group, "within", as well as to its heterogeneity "between" its professionals and other competing occupations. In other words, heterogeneity comes as a result of the more interwoven relationship between clients and professionals.

Heterogeneity first comes from a new kind of professionalization, "client professionalization" (Author, 2019), intended to account for emergent corporate occupations practiced outside of large organizations, by independent professionals. "Client professionalization" indicates more broadly a new model of professional response to manage the challenge of marketization and the more interwoven relationship between professionals and clients. Heterogeneity is also found in the social composition of professionals themselves, which is diverse among the self-employed. Some social categories of workers, who were remote from professions or even excluded from the labour market, make their way to professionalization through these client-oriented strategies. "Client professionalization" can then be seen as a way to integrate more heterogenous professionals into corporate occupations. Its main strategies can allow them to secure a professional territory and not only to find new job opportunities through independent work status. These strategies act as resources for these heterogeneous workers as they enable them to become professionals and to attain positions that they would not have been able to reach otherwise. They act as resources because they are founded on principles other than "exclusion and monopoly", such as "generosity" and "co-production" (Eyal, 2013), which gives new value to an extended network and collaboration with multiple stakeholders. It is the emphasis, in these conceptions, on client-focused skills, that gives atypical professionals

access to rewarding positions. Their heterogeneous socialization experiences, due to irregular careers, inadequate qualifications or multiple activities, cannot be reduced to obstacles to access professions, as in the case of a classical professionalization process. They offer new competences which are crucial in the relationship to clients and which gain new value in this new form of professionalism.

The article is based on the case of executive coaching and coaches, but this result is also found more broadly in "commercial" professions, mostly practiced by independent professionals such as real estate agents (Bernard, 2012), for whom the relationship to clients is crucial, both in the work itself and in the access to valued social positions. It suggests the need for further research, on other emergent corporate professions such as public relations (Reed, 2018) or corporate social responsibility practitioners (Brès et al., 2019), who already share many of the alternative conceptions of professionalization. The question of the relative weight of these new professionalization strategies and of the more classical ones must be assessed, to engage in the debate on the "changing nature of work" (Barley et al., 2017) and its effects on social morphology—although the answer depends on national context. This question must be asked, as in the organizations in which they intervene, some heterogenous professionals such as executive coaches are prone to defend their new conception of client-oriented professionalism based on "extension and linking" (Eyal, 2013). In line with the broader rhetoric of the "new spirit of capitalism" (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2006), which gives new value to "project" and "network", this new conception is likely to challenge the foundations of classical professions.

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Labor Insertion of Italian Professionals in Valencia: Between Emerging and Traditional Professions

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Abstract

This paper presents the first results of a case study of Italian professionals' mobility to the city of Valencia (Spain), highlighting the heterogeneity of the labor insertion paths within and between groups of emerging and traditional professionals. A qualitative method was used: 25 in-depth interviews and a two-year observation in virtual and real communities were carried out. According to our analysis, the heterogeneity of the labor insertion itineraries, revealed by the migrants' narratives, can be understood by taking account of the various combinations of social, economic, and cultural capital with which the Italian professionals were endowed.

Keywords

Migrants, observation, labor insertion, Italy, Spain, social capital, cultural capital, segmented labor market

Introduction

The traditional professions enjoyed what was broadly recognized as a "golden age" in the middle of the 20th century (Gorman & Sandefur, 2011, p. 277), but in the last decades of that century, standard Fordist employment in general and the professional world in particular underwent transformational changes. The bursting onto the professional work scene of large companies as employers (Leicht & Fennell, 1997), the increasing transnationalization of professional labor markets (Harvey, 2011), and the occurrence of *emerging professionals* (EMps) (Maestripieri & Cucca, 2018) (e.g. in advanced digital services), based on expert knowledge but lacking the autonomy, service orientation, or prestige of *traditional professionals* (TRps), have deeply transformed professional work.

In short, as Bellini and Maestripieri (2018) argue, professional groups have had to deal with an increasing process of differentiation and heterogeneity, within and between professions, even more pronounced after the last economic crisis. The research presented in this article explores this process in a special group of professionals, namely migrants, through a case study: the labor market insertion of Italian professionals in the city of Valencia. The case of Valencia is particularly interesting because the city is characterized by its very extended secondary segment of labor market and few opportunities of good jobs in the primary sector (Casado-Diaz, 2000; Ingellis & Esteban, 2020). It does not offer the opportunities of global cities such as Madrid or Barcelona. This is the context with which the migrant professionals considered here have to deal to achieve their labor insertion.

The general objective of our research is to analyze the way in which Italian self-employed professionals overcome the social closure of the primary sector, highlighting the heterogeneity between and within the emerging and traditional professionals observed and the factors influencing that heterogeneity. The primary segment, comprising well-paid jobs with all social guarantees and permanent contracts, is characterized by exclusionary social closure processes, while the secondary, relatively open segment, is considerably more precarious. It is very difficult for migrants to enter the primary segment of the local labor market. Within this framework, the specific objective is to explore the impact on the labor insertion process of the three forms of capital identified by Bourdieu (1986): economic (EC), social (SC), and cultural capital (CC).

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 reviews the literature on professions, its recent redefinition process, and theoretical perspectives on immigrants' labor integration. Section 3 details the research methods used and the sample observed. Section 4 presents the research results organized by themes emerging from the analysis. Discussion and conclusions end the paper.

Theoretical framework

Redefining professionalism: From traditional to emerging professions

The traditional professions, such as medicine, law, architecture, and a handful of others, enjoyed what was broadly recognized as a "golden age" in the mid-20th century (Freidson, 2001, p. 182; Galanter & Palay, 1991, p. 20-36; Gorman & Sandefur, 2011, p. 277). In most cases, professional knowledge was certified by the state as qualifying its possessors, sometimes exclusively, to provide services within certain defined areas of need. In many professions, especially medicine and law, practitioners worked largely in private practice, alone or in relatively small partnerships, which afforded them considerable control over the content and economic conditions of their work. The local nature of most professional practice reinforced the growth and persistence of strong local professional communities. Finally, in this context, professionals had higher incomes and social status than those pursuing almost all other occupations.

The functionalist theoretical orientation that prevailed at the time gave prominence to professions as one of the institutions sustaining social order. Scholars devoted a great deal of effort to defining the concepts of profession and professionalism without achieving a clear consensus (Carr-Saunders & Wilson, 1933; Cogan, 1953; Goode, 1969). Four central attributes of professionalism emerge from this body of scholarship: (a) expert knowledge, (b) technical autonomy, (c) a normative orientation toward the service of others, and (d) high status, income, and other rewards. Expert knowledge is the sine qua non of professional work. All professions draw on a body of knowledge composed of formal, abstract principles (Abbott, 1988; Goode, 1961), grounded either in science or in moral thought (Rueschemeyer, 1972).

Years later and from a neo-Weberian perspective, professions have come to be defined in the Anglo-American context in terms of exclusionary social closure in the market based on the establishment of legal boundaries creating ranks of insiders and outsiders, with associated privileges accruing to insiders in terms of income, status, and power through credentialism (Saks, 2010). As such, professionalization can be viewed as a strategy to limit and control the number of entrants to an occupation, thus preserving or increasing its market value (Parkin, 1979), to derive control by producers over consumers, including the manner in which their needs are to be addressed (Johnson, 1972), and to legitimize occupational independence over technical decisions and the organization of work (Freidson, 2001).

Furthermore, in the case of immigrants, the group of professionals considered in our study, many other factors can obstruct professionals' incorporation into the labor market but also contribute to achieving this incorporation. From a neo-Weberian perspective, we will

consider not only exclusionary social closure but the three “fundamental guises” of capital identified by Bourdieu (1986):

> as economic capital, which is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights; as cultural capital, which is convertible, on certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications and social capital, made up of social obligations (connections) which is convertible, in certain condition, into economic capital. (p.84)

More specifically, cultural capital can exist in three forms: in the embodied, objectified, and institutionalized states. The accumulation of CC in the embodied state (i.e. what is called culture or cultivation) becomes an integral part of the person when converted into a habitus, in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body; in the objectified state it takes the form of cultural goods (pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines, etc.) and in the institutionalized state it is materialized as academic qualifications. It is a guaranteed competence; it is officially recognized.

Studies in recent decades have investigated the impact of social capital on the labor market insertion of foreign professionals (Portes, 1998). Also in the case of SC, the literature recognizes in Bourdieu the author who conducted the first systematic analysis and defined the concept as “the aggregate of the real or potential resources linked to the possession of a lasting network of more or less institutionalized relations of knowledge and mutual recognition” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.178).

The important roles that social networks and social capital have in the economic insertion of immigrants into the receiving societies have already been sufficiently contrasted. It is common for immigrants to accumulate social capital by belonging to personal networks (constituted by kinship bonds, friendship, etc.) and by their participation in diverse civil society organizations (ethnic, sport, religious, communitarian, etc.). When networks are well developed, they make available to most community members the possibilities of obtaining work and other resources (Choldin, 1973).

Coming back to professionals in general, the 1980s and 1990s were decades of profound changes in the professional world. Professional work became increasingly dominated by large organizations as employers, as clients, and (especially in medicine) in other roles involving the imposition of external controls over individual professionals (Leicht & Fennell, 1997). Markets for professional services and professional labor became increasingly transnational (Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2008; Harvey, 2011). Professions also underwent a demographic transformation: as higher education expanded and legal changes mandated equal access to higher education for a variety of historically excluded groups, the membership of most professions began to include growing numbers of young people, ethnic

minorities, and women (Epstein, 1993). At the same time, professionals selling their services in open markets faced threats to their ability to limit competition among their members. Yet another source of change has been the emergence of new occupations (e.g. in advanced digital services) based on expert knowledge but lacking the autonomy, service orientation, or prestige of *traditional professions*; their different philosophical basis has challenged traditional understandings of the professional role (Gorman & Sandefur, 2011). These *emerging professionals* (Maestripieri & Cucca, 2018) have assumed the market logic as naturally constituting their essence, while not perceiving the insecurity determined by exposure to the market as a problem (Murgia, Maestripieri & Armano, 2016).

Bellini and Maestripieri (2018) rightly argue that in today's global world and particularly after the last economic crisis, professional groups have had to deal with a pervasive process of differentiation and heterogeneity. Accordingly, the authors identify three dimensions of analysis. First, *differentiation within professions* implies the inclusion of previously excluded groups such as women, immigrants, and young people from the lower and middle classes. But "differentiation within" also refers to the positions in the labor market that each practitioner can access. There is increasing heterogeneity in the way professional work is contracted out, which also increases the degree of insecurity of expert labor. Additionally, neoliberal processes of deregulation have eroded the capacity of professional groups to secure their status.

The second dimension is of changes *between professional groups*. This is a typical neo-Weberian analytical perspective that focuses on the interactions between different occupational jurisdictions (Abbott 1988), especially the dynamics of professional power (Johnson, 1972) and the mechanisms of exclusionary social closure (Macdonald, 1995; Parkin, 1979) which determine the success of a "professional project" (Sarfatti Larson, 1977). This approach represents professions as hierarchically differentiated groups and the analysis focuses on inequalities between groups (Saks, 2015).

In this paper we focus on both of the above dimensions to explore how these categories apply to the special case of professionals who migrate. We seek to identify differences between TRp and EMp migrants and within each group, observing labor market insertion processes in the light of their endowment of capital in Bourdieu's perspective.

Method

The empirical research employed two ethnographic techniques: in-depth interviews and observation among the online and offline Italian communities in Valencia. The ethnographer was an Italian immigrant researcher, who had been a member of the community as an Italian for three to four years before the research started. She was thus a participant observer as member of the community, but not as a professional.

According to Lester (2020), it is possible when doing online observation to collect data either by reading texts produced by those being observed or by interacting online with people as a researcher. In our case, the majority of the material was collected by taking extracts of texts produced by the subjects as they discussed and interacted among themselves, without regard to the purposes of the research. Thus, the influence of the researcher as participant was very limited and the texts are not reactive to the research process. The fieldwork, which was ongoing at the time of writing, began in February 2017 with multisite virtual ethnography in two Facebook groups ("Italiani a Valencia" (Italians in Valencia) and "Italiani di Valencia" (Italians form Valencia)) and a WhatsApp group. Following Spradley's (1980) classification, our observation was at degree 2 (passive observation), being covert during the first four to five months, rising to degree 3 (moderate overt participation) for the remaining time. The researchers used the covert phase to accurately formulate the research problem, taking into account the main issues emerging from the online community by adopting a bottom-up perspective. Observation was also useful as a way of verifying the information obtained in the in-depth interviews, to check its quality and to see at what extend were shared in the community.

According to the ethical guidelines of the Association of Internet Researchers (2012), such use of covert observation presents no ethical problems in this case, for two major reasons: the first related to the issue of consent and the second to the public/private nature of the contents. First, after the short covert phase, the subjects were able to withhold their consent to participating in the overt phase, lasting more than 2 years. Secondly, according to Jones (1997), one of the prerequisites for an online community is the existence of a common public place where members can meet and interact. The material from which our data was extracted was produced to be shared and discussed among more than 20,000 members of such a community. McKee and Porter (2009) offer a heuristic which is useful when making decisions about informed consent. They connect the issue of public/private distinction to the degree of interaction with the researcher and to the vulnerability of the subjects regarding the issues being analyzed. In our case the degree of interaction was very low, we analyzed no-sensitive issues, and no harm was done to subjects by making public the discussions that had appeared in the Facebook groups. Finally, the anonymity of the subjects was strictly respected.

The Facebook groups were very heterogenous, including an active population, aged 16-64 years, with very diverse migratory projects. Furthermore, some people had lived in Valencia for more than 15 years, some had arrived recently, and others still lived in Italy, planning to move to Valencia.

The majority of the 25 in-depth interviews were conducted intensively between May 2017 and spring 2018. The real-life observation began at the same time as the interviews and was still in progress at time of writing.

The interview sample comprised 16 males and 9 females, aged between 30 and 49 years. The great majority were highly educated, 17 having completed tertiary education and four having studied less than two years at university, while the remaining four had completed secondary education. As for employment, 8 were in traditional professions (lawyer, architect, medical doctors etc.), 7 were new-generation professionals with jobs related to the digital media, 4 were professionals in the field of wellness and beauty (physiotherapists, personal trainers), and 4 were chefs in Italian restaurants. Sixteen of the 25 interviewees had a partner and at least one child, the remainder being single. In the in-text quotations, each interviewee is identified with a code comprising their number in the list of interviews, their sex (M/F), and their age in years.

The interviews explored the following issues: sociodemographic characteristics, employment situation prior to migration, previous migration experience, the migration decision (how the idea originated, how they made the decision, how they found the information, etc.), motivation, the migration process, labor and social insertion in the hosting context, its satisfactory and unsatisfactory elements.

It is a known fact (Becker & Geer, 1957) that in research interviews and in everyday encounters (including social media), people tend to exaggerate their own agency in regard to positive achievements and to downplay their own agency in the face of failures. In this research, the focus on the process more than on the achievements, and the observation of the discussions among migrants has made it possible to control for this so-called attribution error (Gilbert & Malone, 1995).

In the analysis applied to the in-depth interviews and to the texts published in the online community, we addressed the following questions: 1. What were the main paths followed by Italian professionals entering the Valencian labor market? 2.Was there more heterogeneity within or between groups of professionals analyzed in terms of labor insertion paths? 3. What influence did the three forms of capital have on this heterogeneity? 4. Was there a transnational professional space in which these immigrants lived?

Findings

Traditional and emerging professions: Between barriers and facilities

Our observations of the online communities and during the meetings among Italian migrants allowed us to identify some professional profiles as significantly recurrent, which is why we included those professionals in our sample. All of the subjects included in our sample were self-employed at the time of the interview. The lack of data on the commercial and professional activities of Italians makes information from observation the closest to reality available.

According to the definition by Maestripieri and Cucca (2018) of emerging and traditional professionals, we can divide our sample into two groups: 14 EMps (web designers, digital freelances, translators, well-being professionals, etc.) and 11 TRps (lawyers, medical doctors, architects, chefs in Italian restaurants, etc.).

The digital freelancers were experts in social media, marketing online, currently working in a global digital environment, who had chosen Valencia as a migration destination mainly for lifestyle reasons (Ingellis & Esteban, 2020) and low taxes. The well-being professionals were mainly personal trainers or beauticians with expert knowledge, targeting a high-spending clientele by providing high quality services and products, using Italian raw materials, considered the best quality in Spain, and branding their products and services as "Italian style" to make their clients feel special.

Something similar applies to the Italian chefs. They were not simply restaurant owners and chefs, but people with expertise in Italian cuisine, technical autonomy, and high status in their social and professional context. Italian restaurants included in our sample were considered exclusive places to have high quality meals. The literature considers that all of these elements are sine qua non of professional work and provide a sort of social closure for others trying to enter that market. This social closure was guaranteed by the nature of their product, Italian cuisine, distinct per se from Valencian cuisine. Furthermore, they offered regional, typical, and folk cuisine as a social distinguishing strategy to close that market to competitors such as Argentinians serving the massive tourist demand for Italian restaurants.

Finally, our sample included liberal professionals as the most traditional category, even though they were also involved in significant transformations such as the digitalization of many tasks, the progressive blurring of national frontiers, especially within Europe under the common European legal framework, and the progressive deregulation of the labor market, which introduced a novel element of insecurity into their status.

Labor trajectories and labor insertion paths: Heterogeneity within and between professional groups

In order to understand the migrant Italian professionals' labor insertion, assuming a neo-Weberian perspective, we focused on two points: 1. continuity/discontinuity between the labor trajectory before migration and the occupational position in Valencia; 2. labor insertion steps taken in the local labor market, highlighting the heterogeneity both within and between the two groups (EMps and TRps).

Labor trajectories prior to migration

The pre-migration occupational positions of the interviewees were very diverse. We identified multiple typologies of labor trajectories prior to migration. The analysis revealed three particularly recurrent occupational backgrounds: those with a very fragmented

itinerary, those who had a 'standard position', mainly self-employed, and those who began their working lives abroad.

First, our sample contained people who had had fragmented and intermittent trajectories in Italy, occupying various positions from helping in the family business to scholarships, to short work experience with temporary contracts

> I worked on a cruise ship (salary 900 euros per month), as a football, swimming, basketball, and athletics instructor (salary 200 euros per month). In Naples, I worked as a steward at the Napoli football stadium. I always worked for someone else. I had never been self-employed until I set up my physiotherapy clinic in Valencia. 8_M_40

The second profile is that of people coming from the primary segment of the Italian labor market, with a linear and continuous trajectory. Some of them were liberal professionals in consolidated sectors such as medicine, architecture, or law, while others successfully ran their own businesses.

> I have always worked in Milan. I worked as a pediatric optometrist in the private sector. I have always worked in the private sector. I usually go back to Milan to work because I have my patients there and I do my check-ups in a friend's office. 10_M_45

Finally, we found that some professionals in our sample had started their careers abroad, having never worked in Italy. Some began work in Valencia, while others had arrived there with experience of working in other countries, including Portugal, Germany, the United Kingdom, and France.

> I spent a year on Erasmus in Brussels, because my specialization at the university, in philology, was French…. And then I worked for another year in Marseilles, at the Consulate as translator from French to Italian, and I also did some work, managing the cultural activity of the Italian Institute of Culture, which is like an organization attached to the Consulate, so I stayed there for 6 months. Then I spent a couple of months in Liverpool, where I met my ex-girlfriend, and then I've been here in Valencia for four to five years. 15_M_33

Exploring the differences between emerging and traditional professionals, we found that pre-migration fragmented, and precarious trajectories were more common among EMps than TRps. The TRps either had a consolidated business or standard professions in Italy or had begun their labor trajectory abroad, whether in Valencia or in another country.

Another difference is that among the EMps we found slightly more continuity with the prior trajectory in Italy than among TRps, while the latter tended to have changed occupation after migration. For example, it was common for digital freelancers to continue in Valencia the same occupation as in Italy, simply seeking to make it more sustainable and less

precarious by migrating from Italy to Spain for the more favorable regulatory framework and lower taxes.

While in terms of linearity of trajectory there was low heterogeneity within each group (EMps being more precarious and TRps more linear), the trajectories of the TRps were notably more heterogeneous than those of the EMps in terms of continuity between their previous trajectory and their occupational situation in Valencia: the former simply sought to make their businesses more viable and less precarious by changing location, whereas the pre-migration itineraries of the latter were more varied.

Labor insertion paths

As for labor insertion paths in Valencia, the analysis revealed two different itineraries: those who passed through a first stage as salaried workers and only afterwards started their own businesses, contrasted with those (the majority in both groups) who set up a business or began their professional activities immediately on arrival in Valencia.

In the former case, the migrants first worked in sectors with high labor demand and easy access, but with poor working conditions, that is to say in the secondary segment of the labor market. Many took jobs in restaurants, bars, or real state agencies or as office employees of other professionals. Their need to find work quickly, in order to earn enough to cover their basic needs, drove them to enter the secondary segment of the labor market, performing unaccustomed salaried work. When asked about their first salaried jobs, many spoke of poor working conditions, low wages, excessive overtime, very informal labor relations, and so on.

Time was an important consideration: either the length of the process for liberal professionals to obtain legal recognition of their qualifications, or the time it took to achieve the Spanish and/or Valencian language proficiency essential to practice their highly skilled work. Starting work as employees gave them an income while waiting for recognition, learning Spanish, and socializing themselves to the local working environment.

> Well, actually when I had to get my degree approved, I obviously needed an income and started working as a commercial agent for an Italian company. I was working for 8 years and after I got my degree approved ... I decided that I had studied for too many years to give up my profession. I went to law school and gradually I started to practice in law office. 18_M_43

Among people on the second itinerary, not all had followed the same path. The discourse analysis revealed the existence of two typical trajectories. First, we found those, such as chefs or digital freelancers, who had moved their own (or their family's) business from Italy to Valencia.

> We have always had restaurants or cafes in Naples and when I decided to move to

> Valencia, I sold everything and bought one here. 20_M_42

> I have always worked as a freelancer, ...I asked my existing clients: Would it be OK with you if I moved to Spain? I explained the reasons why I was moving to Spain, so they said it was fine, they were reassured. And moving my clients with me made it a smooth process. The good clients who earn me my bread are Italians, the ones I had before moving. 4_M_45

In the case of the digital freelancers, the difference in taxation between Spain and Italy was one of the reasons most often given for migrating. Many participants reported that before deciding where to move to, they had researched the fiscal conditions in European countries to identify the most favorable for the self-employed in terms of lower taxes, easy bureaucracy, and less paperwork. Spain had emerged as one of the best options.

> In Italy if you earn more than 30,000 euros you must pay 60% tax, so you practically work for the state. Here it's around 30% and they also provide services that in some way compensate you for what you pay. 26_M_36

The migration project of these freelancers was also facilitated by the nature of their work as able to be done anywhere, which freed them of any territorial or customer-related restrictions.

An alternative self-employed trajectory was followed by those who, having decided to move to Valencia for reasons unrelated to labor (love or lifestyle, among others), had to think of or search for an opportunity to develop an economic project in order to make the migratory one viable and had chosen to create their own business because of the advantages of flexibility and autonomy offered by self-employment. Many started by taking advantage of depressed property prices in Spain to use the proceeds of the sale of their Italian homes to buy two or three flats in Valencia, which they rented to tourists, thus securing a modest income.

> Eh, my economic project has been to invest in apartments, so now I'm in tourist rental, so I have my income naturally recorded, everything and, after that I invested, since anyway, being on my own with two children, I cannot yet return to my original work… as a midwife, I decided to cultivate my passion for aesthetics and nails, so I took courses… 25_F_45

Once they had successfully completed the labor socialization process (training, language learning, recognition of their qualifications, etc.), some years later they started their new businesses, using the economic capital accumulated by selling their second or third property at the new market prices in a real estate sector which had by now recovered.

In terms of heterogeneity between the emerging and traditional groups, we must emphasize that there were few differences in terms of the number of steps taken to enter the labor

market or to go straight into their permanent occupation. The complexity or simplicity of the labor insertion process was not determined by membership of the EMp or TRp groups, but much more influenced by other factors, such as the phase of their lifecycle at the moment of migration: the earlier in the cycle, the simpler it was. The major complicating factors were the need to retain local clients or to satisfy the Spanish regulatory framework, such as obtaining recognition of their qualifications for liberal professionals or fulfilling local health and safety requirements for beauticians.

More relevant is the extent of heterogeneity within the EMp and TRp groups. The main difference for the former concerned their clientele: the digital freelancers, having clients from all over the world or from Italy, were able to maintain a certain continuity and needed no time to create their own local market, while the beauty and well-being professionals had to certify their competence to do business in Spain and had to create local client networks. Among the TRps, the labor insertion process was much more complicated for liberal professionals than for chefs, who could buy a local restaurant as a going concern, with little need for paperwork. According to our observations, the liberal professionals tended to be older than the other migrants, probably because of the time it took to enter the primary segment of the labor market, which was very closed and where there were onerous entry requirements.

Factors influencing the different labor insertion strategies: Economic, cultural, and social capital

Another objective of our research was to explore the impact on the labor insertion process of Italian migrants to Valencia of the three forms of capital: economic (EC), social (SC) and cultural (CC). Their economic capital, derived from the sale of their homes and/or businesses in Italy, increased in value during the migration for two reasons: because housing prices in Italy (especially in the North of the country) were higher than post-recession prices in Spain and because of the higher value of a business in a context of lower taxation.

Economic capital seems to have been relevant for half of the members of both the EMp and TRp groups. The only significant difference between the two was in how they used this capital. Among the TRps, those who used EC for their labor insertion were the chefs of Italian restaurants, whereas the liberal professionals hardly did so. As for the EMps, almost all of those who used their EC did so to buy housing, because the very attractive property prices in Spain following the bursting of the real-estate bubble allowed them to reduce the current costs of the insertion phase of the migration.

However, the form of capital which was most frequently observed to have facilitated the labor insertion of migrants was not economic but cultural.

Furthermore, following Bourdieu's (1986) definition of the forms of CC, we can state that the key to labor insertion was not the institutionalized form of CC, on account of the long (3-4

years) and complicated process of recognition of qualifications, which acted as a formal and institutional closure of the primary segment of the labor market. The interviewees' discourses reveal that alongside a strong sense of autonomy, the skills on which they relied to insert themselves in the labor market were those of detecting and exploiting the opportunities offered by the local context, of managing complexity and change, and of solving problems.

> I decided to migrate to Valencia because there was a business opportunity, it had an important port, and it was a growing city. Although the country was in crisis, its alcohol-related business was booming. 3_M_49

It was thus more a matter of embodied CC, accumulated and internalized during prior experience in the family business, or during the labor socialization process in the Italian context, where self-employment is twice as common as in Spain (Ingellis & Calvo, 2015).

As for the comparison between EMps and TRps in terms of heterogeneity, it is worth underlining that EMps were more homogeneously endowed with embodied CC than their counterparts in the traditional professions, where we found more internal heterogeneity. Embodied capital predominated in the case of chefs, institutionalized capital for the liberal professions, and mixed cultural capital among those with previous migration experience.

According to the migration literature (Portes, 1998), the third form of capital, SC, is a key asset in migrants' social and labor insertion. Ethnic communities, once organized through local ethnic associations, nowadays create "weak ties" (Granovetter, 1973), or trust links, through virtual communities. In our case, the virtual communities not only represented an ideal place for migrants to socialize (meet people, promote meetings, share hobbies, etc.) and to transfer the basic information needed to install themselves in Valencia, but also played a key role in providing labor opportunities. On one hand, many self-employed migrants advertised their business at little or no cost in virtual communities with more than 20,000 members, representing a very powerful 'shop window', and on the other hand, they facilitated the matching of labor demand to supply, with numerous postings of vacancies, mostly in hotels and Italian restaurants seeking Italian workers.

In terms of comparisons between traditional and emerging professionals, it is notable that while pre-existing social capital (often a friend or partner) was very important in the insertion process for the former, it was mostly irrelevant for the latter. Digital workers did not need contacts: they had clients from all over the world, being naturally immersed in a global market, and excluded local clients because the local prices of their services were very low.

Transnational professionalism: Living between two professional communities

Although the migration motive was not related to professional factors (Ingellis & Esteban, 2020), many interviewees explained that they had found a new sustainable equilibrium in costs and income of their professions by taking advantage of living between two professional

communities in two ways. On one hand, they enjoyed the benefits of living and working in Spain, where taxes and the cost of living were lower, the services were better, and the paperwork and bureaucracy were much easier and less time-consuming; on the other, they earned good incomes by maintaining clients in Italy or elsewhere in the world who were willing and able to pay more than most local clients. This was especially true for the digital freelancers. While technological changes were opening the door to global competition, they were also making possible new individual strategies to overcome the associated problems. By maximizing their incomes and reducing their costs, the EMps were ultimately able to continue practicing professions which, in their country of origin, were suffering a progressive worsening of working conditions that was making them unsustainable. Furthermore, for the TRps, migrating was a way to enter professions subject to a stricter social closure in Italy. Membership of professional associations in Spain is significantly easier for lawyers, architects, medical doctors, and so on, because they do not need to pass a difficult entrance exam. They found that the expenditure of time and effort required to overcome the language barrier and to obtain the recognition in Spain of their institutionalized cultural capital was much less onerous than passing an entrance exam for a traditional professional association in Italy, representing a classic insiders' protection strategy. Many self-employed Italian professionals remarked on the generally less rigid legal framework in Spain, which applies equally to well-being and Italian cuisine professionals. Migration had been used as a strategy of differentiation from the Italian professional community, because moving to Spain facilitated the surmounting of the severe problems they had faced before their migration. Intra-national professionalism represents a new frontier for professionals in a globalized world, where intra-national heterogeneity allows individuals to find their own strategies for building a sustainable balance in the long term, to overcome the deterioration of working conditions; in a word, their precarization.

Discussion and conclusion

In this paper we have presented the results of a study on a group of Italian professionals who migrated to the Spanish city of Valencia and inserted themselves in the local labor market as self-employed. Although these results are not representative of the entire population and were potentially influenced by the sample selection procedure, we have tried to draw attention to an emergent phenomenon that is sufficiently interesting and unexplored to be worth studying. Some theoretical insights come from this initial exploration. To make more visible the main results, we organized them in the following table.

Table 1. *An overview about heterogeneity within and between EMps and TRps*

	Within		Between	
Labor trajectory phases	EMps	TRps	EMps	TRps
Prior migration	Homogeneity: 1.Precariouseness 2. Prevalent embodied capital accumulation 3. Continuity between the two phases	Homogeneity: 1.Standard work itineraries 2.Institutionalized capital accumulation 3.Discontinuity between the two phases	Heterogeneity	
Insertion itinerary in Valencia	Prevalent heterogeneity depending on the need to have local clients or not, and depending on having to adhere to the local regulatory framework or not	Prevalent heterogeneity. The homogeneity refers only to the long time required to get the formal recognition of their academic degree	Heterogeneity among all the cases. Being EMp or TFp appears not highly relevant to understand that heterogeneity between the two groups except for the more streamlined recognition of embodied versus institutionalized capital	

Source: Authors' elaboration

Applying the definitions of EMp and TRp to our sample, we compared the labor insertion itineraries of the emerging and traditional professionals and assessed the extent of heterogeneity existing within and between these two groups. We found that the most significant difference was that in Italy, the EMps were mostly precariously employed or self-employed and had faced some difficulties in practicing emerging and unregulated professions; migration to Valencia allowed them to consolidate their professional status because a better balance between costs and incomes in Valencia made their economic and social condition more sustainable. Among the TRps, we found people who had radically changed their labor trajectory or had begun their working life abroad. By contrast, membership of the EMp or TRp groups was not in itself very relevant in determining the immigrant labor insertion paths in the destination city. We can conclude that the EMp and TRp concepts are not powerful enough when applied to migratory trajectories, although they are able to capture the reduced social closure mechanisms for EMps compared with TRps.

Regardless of their emerging or traditional status, all professionals had to find ways to adapt and find opportunities in the new context.

The role of the several forms of capital that migrants brought with them seems to be more significant in accounting for the observed heterogeneity in labor insertion paths within and between groups of Italian professionals. This does not mean that membership of one or the other professional group was unrelated to the possession of relevant capitals, but merely that the relationship of this membership to professional capital endowment needs a specific analysis which could represent a new and very interesting issue to explore. Perhaps the only visible connection, at this time, is that having accumulated an institutionalized cultural capital or human capital before migration is more common among TRps, while embodied capital is more often an attribute of EMps. The formal recognition of their degree in Spain makes more complicated and long their itinerary sometime obliging them to change radically their profession. At this stage of the work, we suggest that more than membership of one or the other group, what made the difference was a reliance on a local clientele, having to adhere to the local regulatory framework, and having to wait several years, in the case of some TRps, for formal recognition of their qualifications. In this sense, belonging to traditional professions entails more difficulties in continuing the professional trajectories of the country of origin.

A further analysis focusing on the effect of lifecycle on the labor integration itineraries of the several professional groups, or second-generation insertion, might add significant evidence toward an understanding of the factors inhibiting or facilitating the intra-European immigration of professionals.

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The Challenging Integration Paths of Migrant Health Professionals: The Case of Filipino and Indian Nurses in the UK

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Abstract

This article examines the role of institutional factors in shaping the integration paths of migrant health professionals. For this purpose, it draws on two studies focusing on Filipino and Indian nurses working in the UK which rely on quantitative and qualitative methods, including a web survey and semi-structured interviews. The analysis shows that inequalities have arisen from differentiation processes induced by changes in the institutional settings. Furthermore, inequalities are often reflected in poor working conditions. The authors have identified restrictive rules on immigration and access to the profession as a source of uncertainty, and reveal the differentiation of entry paths, with those arriving through an international recruitment agency more frequently disappointed with their working conditions.

Keywords

Globalization, immigration, inequality, institutions, integration, nursing, professions, recruitment.

Introduction

This article carries out a reflection on how globalization impacts professions in contemporary society. It does so in the awareness of globalization's dual character as a

provider of both challenges and opportunities for professional workers. In addition, it focuses on the *outcomes* of change and the *institutional factors* that contribute to explaining them.

Globalization has loosened the boundaries between professional systems. As noticed elsewhere, "it is now common for professionals from different countries and educated within different systems of professions to provide professional services side by side" (Bellini & Maestripieri, 2018, p. 8). This fact has important empirical implications that can be framed in the theoretical discourse on *differentiation* leading to increasing *heterogeneity* within and between professions.

Differentiation and heterogeneity are straightforward terms that imply a growing division of labour among professions and professionals. A new division of labour was already implicit in the post-industrial transition (Bell, 1973; Touraine, 1969). This process can be understood in the Durkheimian terms of the *functional specialization* of occupations and individuals, in the Weberian terms of *hierarchical differentiation* based on the unequal distribution of power between professional groups (Saks, 2015), or in the Marxian terms of *class exploitation*. Since the 1970s, the number of professionals and the occupations subjected to professionalization have increased at a steady pace, but the social meaning of professional work has changed profoundly. Established professions have lost their power to control the labour market (Haug, 1975; McKinlay & Arches, 1985; Oppenheimer, 1972), while new professions have arisen that rely on weak institutions and are exposed to market competition (Hodgson, Paton, & Muzio, 2015; Muzio, Hodgson, Faulconbridge, Beaverstock, & Hall, 2011). In general, professional jobs no longer ensure adequate rewards in terms of revenue and recognition (see, for instance, Alacevich, Bellini, & Tonarelli, 2017; Maestripieri & Cucca, 2018). Moreover, professionals are affected by *marginalization* (Butler, Chillas, & Muhr, 2012) and *precarization* (Murgia, Maestripieri, & Armano, 2016).

Insofar as it creates the conditions for an international division of labour, globalization transfers competition to a global scale. This change has led to the growing importance of peripheral countries in the geography of professions but also implies rising inequalities related to new forms of exploitation.

To give substance to these seemingly abstract speculations, the article draws on a case study, namely that of *foreign-educated nurses* (FENs) and, in particular, the experiences of Filipino and Indian nurses recruited by healthcare organizations in the United Kingdom—the latter defined as *internationally recruited nurses* (IRNs). What makes this case valuable is that the Philippines and India are the two biggest providers of foreign-born health workers for OECD countries, while the UK is their primary destination in Europe. In this context, we focus on two critical processes: first, the *migration flows* of skilled professionals; second, global-scale *recruitment practices*. These processes are intertwined and shape FENs' employment patterns and working conditions. On the one hand, they create favourable

conditions for migrant workers to enter the UK's nursing profession, resulting in changes in its social structure. On the other hand, they give rise to inequalities and forms of marginalization as the expression of differences in treatment based on multiple factors, ranging from *ethnicity* and *immigration status* to the *recruitment channel*, *type of employer*, and *employment contract*. However, this is a result of policy changes; noticeably, their situation has worsened, especially since the crisis of 2008, as a consequence of government funding cuts to the National Health Service (NHS) and the introduction of stricter rules on immigration and migrant workers' access to the profession.

Here, we provide new evidence of concerns that emerged from previous studies, interpreting their implications from a specific theoretical perspective, and looking at health professions as "global" professions—that is, professions engaged in intense processes of transnational migration, mostly from the Global South to the Global North. In the next section, we present this perspective, problematizing the consequences of professional migration. Furthermore, we draw on neo-institutionalist theory to create an interpretive framework for the outcomes of this process in terms of differential integration paths and rising inequalities. After that, a methodological section describes the research design and methods. The analysis then develops in two stages: based on survey data, it gives evidence of the poor working conditions of nurses coming from abroad; based on semi-structured interviews, it traces the causes of the inequalities by looking at the institutional factors most likely to influence migration flows and assimilation processes. The conclusions focus on professional change in the context of the broader processes of change affecting contemporary society.

The rise of global professionalism in healthcare

Globalization has redrawn professional geography and morphology (see Dent, Bourgeault, Denis, & Kuhlmann, 2016). Nowadays, it is relatively simple for professional workers to travel across country borders to provide professional services. This change has been possible not only because *services* are increasingly provided by global professional firms, namely multinationals that dominate global professional markets (Muzio & Kirkpatrick, 2011), but also because *careers* are becoming "boundaryless" (Cohen & Mallon, 1999). This has multiple implications in terms of how professionalism is interpreted and performed, from the development of transnational careers to the emergence of new "local" ways of practising a profession: the former case presupposes the rise of international jurisdictions, involving the standardization of careers; the latter implies that the same—country-based—regulations can have different—culturally influenced—outcomes.

As Bourgeault, Wrede, Benoit, & Neiterman (2016) notice, the transnational migration of professionals is not a new phenomenon in human history. As the authors point out, human capital flows are linked to the colonial nature of relationships between nations. Colonial powers contributed to shaping the professional systems in the colonies. In this context,

migrations reflect the North-South divide, with high-skilled professionals emigrating from source countries in the Global South to destination countries in the Global North (see also Kapur & McHale, 2005). Of course, this is truer for the UK and Commonwealth countries, which had maintained formal ties, but now form a free association. What is new today is the number of countries involved, the pace of the movements, and the impermanency of the choices (see De Haas, Castles, & Miller, 2020).

Following Bourgeault et al. (2016), we assume that professionals' spatial mobility develops along different paths, depending on the travel capacity of professional expertise. As the authors remark, healthcare still is characterized by a low degree of mobility due to its being tied to country-based institutional settings and professional regulations (see Bourgeault, Neiterman, LeBrun, Viers, & Winkup, 2010; see also Wrede, 2010). However, the demand for healthcare workers in the Global North has grown continuously due to the ageing of the population, the rise in multiple chronic conditions, and the ageing of the local health workforce. Consequently, health professional recruitment has developed as a transnational industry (see Pittman, Folsom, & Bass, 2010).

The attention of sociological literature has been centred on the problem of the *integration* of migrant health professionals in the destination countries, which involves *professional acknowledgement* and *socio-cultural assimilation*. Moreover, most of this literature has focused on experiences of *discrimination and racism* at the workplace (for the nursing profession, see Allan, Larsen, Bryan, & Smith, 2004; Dicicco-Bloom, 2004; Hagey, Choudhry, Guruge, Turrittin, Collins, & Lee, 2001; Kingma, 2006) and *organizations' internal logics* (Finotelli, 2019). From this point of view, local contexts inevitably influence integration processes.

This article shifts the focus to the *institutional factors* that regulate migration flows and shape the paths of migrant health professionals' socio-professional integration. Neo-institutionalism provided the theoretical basis for the analysis, particularly when looking at the interconnections between labour migration, the labour market, and welfare institutions from a political economy perspective (see Portes, 1995). Indeed, recruitment processes (a mix of *community* and *market regulation*) rank among the most influential institutional arrangements (see Campbell, Hollingsworth, & Lindberg, 1991; Hollingsworth & Boyer, 1997), along with the rules regulating immigration (*state regulation*) and access to the professional labour markets (*associative regulation*).

The international recruitment of nurses has become a "necessary labour market" to manage shortages, while a range of government policies, often unrelated to migration, create a demand for migrant labour (Ruhs & Anderson, 2010). Moreover, healthcare facilities in high-income countries have outsourced international recruitment to specialist agencies. A full-chain industry that arranges nurses' migration and work-related services has flourished. International recruitment agencies have become "gatekeepers," playing a critical role in the

social processes underlying healthcare work's global commodification (see Connell & Stilwell, 2006; Findlay, McCollum, Shubin, Apsite, & Krisjane, 2013).

Scholars have looked at the role played by international recruitment agencies not only in serving as "lubricators" for the migration flows of health professionals (Salt & Findlay, 1989) but also in channelling them beyond patterns rooted in family networks or colonial ties (Ball, 2004; Connell, 2010). In this sense, agencies can be seen as "globalization agents," which contribute to turning health professions into "global professions" (Bludau, 2010; Findlay et al., 2013).

Research methods

The analysis that follows is based on data from two research initiatives promoted by the International Labour Organization (ILO) within the framework of the Decent Work Across Borders (DWAB) project and conducted by one of the authors, Davide Calenda, between 2013 and 2015. Both studies targeted FENs working in the UK—specifically, Filipino and Indian nurses—focusing on different aspects, namely *working conditions* and *ethical recruitment practices* (Calenda, 2014; 2016). Calenda carried out additional research at the beginning of 2020 to collect up-to-date information.

The two studies relied on both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection. Data were gathered from first-hand sources in the participating countries: the UK, Philippines, and India.

In the study on *working conditions*, ten semi-structured interviews were carried out with key informants (see Appendix: list of interviews). A reasoned procedure was followed to identify the key informants among representatives of relevant institutions such as regulatory authorities, professional associations, and trade unions. Then they were contacted and interviewed in 2013. Given the explorative nature of the fieldwork, the interviews were adapted to the interviewees' roles and the type of organization worked for. Their aim was to acquire information on past and current trends in international staffing, nurse recruitment practices, the regulatory framework, and policy issues.

In addition, a web survey was addressed to Filipino and Indian nurses working in public and private healthcare facilities in the UK.[i] This research tool aimed to gather information on the nurses' backgrounds and working conditions.[ii] In total, 433 responses were collected from March to June 2013. Almost eight in ten respondents were women, the majority of whom aged between 31 and 40 (for more details, see Calenda, 2014). Most of them were from India.[iii]

In the study on *ethical recruitment practices*, the fieldwork was carried out through the analysis of documents and semi-structured interviews with key informants. A total of twelve interviews were done with the managers of recruitment agencies and other key informants

in the participating countries, in particular three in the UK, four in the Philippines, and five in India (see, again, Appendix), in 2014. Their aim was to talk about the agencies' choices and approaches and other significant issues.[iv]

A few remarks are necessary regarding the age of the data and the survey sample quality. As already mentioned, the data were collected between 2013 and 2015, which makes them dated, considering that in the meantime Brexit has occurred, and migration policies have changed. These altered circumstances made additional research necessary. Additional on-desk research and interviews with key informants have been carried out to update the picture. Focused interviews were administered by e-mail or videoconference with ILO officers and social researchers. However, the 2013-2015 data have maintained their explanatory power concerning the impact of globalization on professionals' migration dynamics, the related problems of socio-professional integration, and rising inequalities. Moreover, the use of a non-probability sample prevented statistical inference. In addition, when combined with the data collected through semi-structured interviews, the survey data gave an essential contribution to understanding the phenomena being studied. Indeed, the analysis benefited from a "mixed-methods" research design prioritizing qualitative method (interviews) while using quantitative methods (the survey) in the preliminary phase.

Unequal working conditions

Labour issues arising from the growing presence of FENs in the UK have been addressed by trade unions, which have fostered research since the mid-2000s (see Pike & Ball, 2007; UNISON, 2009). These studies have helped identify a set of problems, such as *job and sector segregation* (the tendency to use FENs in the private sector rather than in the "secure" public sector), *barriers to professional development*, and *discrimination practices* in the workplace. These problems reflect well-known patterns of labour market segmentation. However, a narrowed focus on the UK case allows us to appreciate how their impact has varied over time, depending on changes in the political and economic spheres (see "Immigration rules and professional regulation").

The survey conducted in 2013 drew a similar picture (for an extensive analysis, see Calenda, 2014). Three quarters of those in the sample entered the UK during the period of mass recruitments, between 2000 and 2005. In a favourable economic situation, the National Health System (NHS) pursued workforce expansion across the health professions, including international recruitments from the Philippines and India. Most respondents followed a *typical entry path*: they successfully registered with the UK's Nursing and Midwifery Council (85 per cent); then, they started to work as nurses in the private sector, in residential care or nursing homes (87 per cent); finally, they turned to the NHS (which was the current employer for 70 per cent of the total respondents). Most of them (85 per cent) were employed on an open-ended and full-time contract.

Several studies have suggested that the easiest way for employers to deal with the funding cuts in the public health sector was to reduce personnel and intensify work shifts and workloads (see, for instance, Aiken, Sloane, Bruyneel, van den Heede, & Sermeus, 2013). Changes in immigration rules also influenced the way employers use migrant workers, raising the risks of unfair treatment in the workplace. FENs are vulnerable to such pressures.

The survey revealed that many respondents deemed their *employment situation* to have worsened since they started to work in the UK: half of them, for instance, affirmed that they had experienced a decrease in job security; almost 30 per cent reported a reduction in career development opportunities. A substantial number expressed dissatisfaction with the *quality of work*: more than one third complained that their role, work duties, and responsibilities were not in line with their rank or qualifications; around 30 per cent criticized their managers for not recognizing their efforts, and the lack of autonomy in organizing their work; 60 per cent even reported that they were often forced to work unpaid extra hours.

The pioneering studies promoted by the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) in the early 2000s had already provided evidence of such difficulties. In the same vein, the FENs interviewed by Smith, Allan, Henry, Larsen, & Mackintosh (2006) largely declared that their skills and experiences were not recognized. This scant attention might also stem from the increasing segmentation and hierarchization in the field of nursing (see also Daniel, Chamberlain, & Gordon, 2001; more recently, see Castagnone & Salis, 2015).

The respondents also expressed concerns regarding *equality issues*—specifically, unfair treatment and discrimination in the workplace, driven by ethnic motives and poor diversity management. In fact, six out of ten declared that they had experienced harassment, bullying, or abuse in the previous 12 months, by users, colleagues, or managers. Three quarters of respondents affirmed that ethnic motives were behind these practices.

These findings confirmed what had emerged from prior studies. Allan & Larsen (2003) found that discriminatory practices often originated from managers' poor understanding of integration issues. According to the Royal College of Nursing (2013), one third of the nurses surveyed denounced cases of harassment, bullying, or abuse from teammates or managers. The proportion was higher among ethnic minorities and in the private sector.

The survey data also disclosed that rising inequalities were leading to a higher propensity to *consider re-emigrating*: more than 50 per cent of those who reported experiences of ethnic discrimination in the workplace or worsening working conditions (against 30 per cent of those who did not) were planning to leave the country. When asked about the first reason for leaving, they indicated their disappointment with the working conditions (21 per cent), along with the lack of career opportunities (15 per cent) and, generally, uncertainty about the future (14 per cent). Consistently with previous research (see again Aiken et al., 2013),

the survey results allowed us to hypothesize that discriminatory practices also affect the *quality of care* provided to patients.

Explaining rising inequalities

In the previous section, we showed that the mass admission of FENs to the UK labour market in the early 2000s triggered a process of differentiation within the nursing profession, which brought about rising inequalities in terms of employment situations and quality of work. Against this background, the FENs turned out to be exposed to unfair treatment and discrimination in the workplace, in addition to job insecurity, limited career prospects, and unsatisfactory working conditions. As underlined, the international recruitment of nurses has become a necessary labour market to manage shortages, in the context of a growing demand for migrant labour. Despite their functional indispensability, FENs occupy a low position in the hierarchy of health professionals and often find themselves trapped in exploitative situations. The consequences of these changes go far beyond the professional system, as they are also likely to affect the quality of care. In the following pages, we focus on the institutional factors that explain how we got to this point.

Immigration rules and professional regulation

Institutional factors, such as state rules on immigration and the characteristics of the labour markets in destination countries, play a critical role in shaping the paths of migrant workers' socio-professional integration. In the case of nurses, immigration rules evidently intersect with the rules for accessing the profession imposed by the licensing authorities. Together, immigration rules and professional regulation influence the ways FENs assimilate in the destination countries. Here, problems arise concerning recognition of the skills acquired by FENs in their countries of origin. These problems increase their vulnerability, with the resulting risk of incurring obstacles to professional development or even deskilling.

While state policy in the UK has proven to be effective in shaping the processes of recruiting FENs since the creation of the Colonial Nursing Service in 1940 (Solano & Rafferty, 2006), it has also influenced their positioning in the labour market (Bach, 2010). According to Young (2011), three policy phases can be identified over the last two decades. The first period followed Tony Blair's rise in 1997 and extended until 2006. In 1998, his government launched a policy of expanding the NHS workforce, which paved the way to intense international recruitment, especially from the Philippines and India. The two periods that followed—from 2006 to 2008 and from 2009 onwards—were characterized by gradual restrictions on migration flows.[v] This change reflected a policy shift that aimed to bring in migrant workers on temporary work permits. A points-based system regulating entry routes and permissions was adopted. Furthermore, stricter licensing requirements were established by the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC), making it difficult for overseas nurses to gain registration (Buchan, 2007; Bach, 2010).

Several scholars have contended that such restrictions generate a climate of uncertainty among FENs (see Jayaweera, 2015). Moreover, they sustain that these changes have impacted the FENs' working conditions significantly, influencing their choice of whether to stay or leave the country (Buchan, 2007; Bach, 2010; see also Meardi, Lozano, & Martín Artiles, 2011). Others argue that reductions in the annual admissions of overseas nurses hides downgrading, with FENs being recruited to work as healthcare assistants (Nichols & Campbell, 2010). Following this line of interpretation, some authors have claimed that downgrading increases demotivation and worsens the problematic relationships between nurses and healthcare assistants (Smith et al., 2006; Aboderin, 2007).

There is evidence that moving nursing staff to lower pay bands[vi] was a way to cut costs and that this kind of practice was primarily directed towards those who had not yet secured their legal status in the UK (see Snow, 2009; see also Cangiano, Shutes, Spencer, & Leeson, 2009; Royal College of Nursing, 2013). A key informant from a British trade union reported the case of a Filipino nurse who arrived in the UK in the 1970s and still works despite having reached retirement age:

> She told us that nurses in her trust had been demoted from Band 6 to Band 5.[vii] She said she didn't mind for herself but for younger migrants who risk not being able to match the requirements for applying for permanent settlement. (Trade unionist, UNISON, UK, 2013)

The uncertainty of their legal status exposes FENs to pressures from their employers. Given the centrality of financial eligibility for obtaining settled status, some of them have a higher propensity to accept longer work shifts and heavier workloads.

> They need to keep their job and earnings in order to secure their legal status in the UK. (Trade unionist, UNISON, UK, 2013)

In 2006, the third Blair government removed general nurses from the shortage occupation list, but nurses from the Philippines and India continued to arrive in the UK as students. Student visas became the predominant mode of entry. Key informants confirmed that many migrant nurses arrived as students hoping to work as nurses:

> Students, together with senior care workers, represent the last generation of nurses. Only a few Filipinos have succeeded in coming to the UK as registered nurses in recent years. Many others—we don't exactly know how many—came to the UK via student visas. Senior care workers were hoping to become nurses, but this has not happened due to legal constraints and a lack of job opportunities. (Officer, Filipino Embassy, UK, 2013)

Another key informant from UNISON described what he called the "immigration trap":

> They came as students, but they were nurses in the Philippines and are now working part-time as caregivers. When, in 2008-2009, the government stopped recruiting general nurses, recruitment agencies in the Philippines told them to come as students. Despite being trained and working as nurses, many hoped to find a sponsor to move role and an employer who would hire them. Many came, they found poor-quality courses, and no one told them that they couldn't work. In the meantime, the work permit mechanism was replaced by the points-based system. Many of them became undocumented. The exact number is unknown, but we know that there were a lot of them: an assisted voluntary return programme, mostly targeted to refugees, was offered by a charity in collaboration with the IOM [International Organization for Migration]. The Home Office told the charity that Filipinos in such a situation could also be assisted. In the end, they were in the top ten countries list assisted by the programme. (Trade unionist, UNISON, UK, 2013)

Another key informant explained how the changes described above produced their effects in recent years, from 2016 onwards, with the first cycle of "revalidation"—that is, the three-yearly process requiring registered nurses to demonstrate that they are fit to practice.

> The years from 2016 to 2019 are important, as July 2016 is when English language tests became applicable to EU nurses. Those years were the first cycle of revalidation for nurses. So, nurses could no longer passively pay their fees and remain registered: they had to submit evidence of practice, signed by another registered nurse. I expected a lot of nurses to drop off in that period. From the Philippines data, you can see that only 85 nurses left between 2002 and 2016, while more than 200 left in 2018-2019 alone. Nevertheless, the NMC's revalidation evaluation found that the difference in those leaving the register has been negligible. (Researcher, Anglia Ruskin University, UK, 2020)

After that, Brexit brought further restrictions that are having paradoxical effects. The Brexit-focused agenda of the government led by Boris Johnson gave high priority to facilitating the recruitment of foreign-educated doctors and nurses to respond to the growing need for health personnel (90,000 vacancies in NHS trusts in 2019; see British Medical Association, 2020). The Immigration and Social Security Co-ordination (EU Withdrawal) Bill (2020) imposed stricter controls on immigration, defined and implemented through the Immigration Rules. The latter included a fast-track NHS visa for doctors and nurses, on condition of holding a job offer, speaking English, and being trained to a recognized standard; at the same time, however, they raised the requirements and costs of the immigration application.[viii] The British Medical Association (2020) expressed concern about the disincentivizing effect of such provisions for migrant health professionals working in the

NHS, putting the professional system under stress and affecting "the efficient and safe running of the health service."

Recruitment practices

Other institutions that play a critical role in regulating health professionals' migration flows are market actors, namely international recruitment agencies. The research activities carried out between 2013 and 2015 aimed to fill a knowledge gap, as recruitment practices were poorly explored (see Young, 2013). For this reason, the survey questionnaire included a subset of conditional questions for those respondents who declared that they were recruited before moving to the UK. These questions aimed to check for differences between recruitment channels—whether managed directly by the employer or intermediated by an agency—and to assess their impact on professional trajectories. They were also directed at understanding whether the respondents had experienced problems with the recruitment process. The most frequent problems reported in the literature are: first, insufficient, inaccurate, or misleading information received about the type of employer, the terms of employment, and work tasks; second, the excessive fees charged to migrants by recruitment agencies. The UK Department of Health's (2004) Code of practice for the international recruitment of healthcare professionals[ix] and the World Health Organization's (2010) Global code of practice on the international recruitment of health personnel deemed these practices unethical.

The analysis of the survey data revealed that 60 per cent of respondents were recruited before moving to the UK. Half of them were recruited directly by the employer; the other half were recruited through a recruitment agency. Among the others, almost 25 per cent were recruited by the employer after they arrived in the country: most of them had entered with a student visa; then, they found a job as a nurse and changed their legal status. Focusing on IRNs, six out of ten respondents reported problems with insufficient, inaccurate, or misleading information. A similar picture emerged concerning excessive recruitment fees. Indeed, less than 30 per cent of those recruited through an agency would recommend it to others. The share of respondents who expressed disappointment with the recruitment process was higher among those hired through an agency (see also Pittman, Herrera, Spetz, & Davis, 2012).

The data also suggested that the recruitment process experience went on to correlate with working conditions. For example, the respondents recruited directly by the NHS declared that they were satisfied with their working conditions more often than the others. Those who were disappointed with the recruitment process more frequently reported having experienced harassment, bullying, or abuse from teammates or managers.

Analysis of the interviews brought additional elements to complete the picture. A first point is about the codes of practice. These codes rely on voluntary adherence, and there is no

statutory mechanism to ensure compliance. As such, they are difficult to implement. As a key informant explained:

> The problem is that these codes are ineffective, especially because IRNs often have no options other than accepting what agencies offer them. Improvements in the recruitment process hardly come from the nurses' side, and this is a limit. […] We talked to several Filipinos working as nurses in the UK, who mortgaged their houses and incurred debts to pay the agency. (Trade unionist, UNISON, UK, 2013)

That said, one interviewee claimed that the situation had improved following the creation of a list of agencies that adhere to the UK's Code of practice and a support service to help NHS organizations follow its principles. The same person explained how the process works:

> We have an application process: we ask key questions; then, we check. We make spot checks on the agencies' website. […] If we find or hear about a breach of the code, we undertake an investigation process and, in the end, remove the agency from the list. (Officer, NHS Employers, UK, 2013)

Nevertheless, the most effective monitoring tools are "informal networks," through which information and reputation circulate:

> We have a network of employers that we use to communicate. We also have personal networks from which we get feedback. (Officer, NHS Employers, UK, 2013)

A second point has to do with the extension of unethical recruitment practices to persons other than overseas nurses, in which employers play a direct role:

> Unethical recruitment is now affecting senior care workers, either recruited by international agencies or UK businesspeople. […] We organized briefings with [the senior care workers] to understand how they were recruited. We discovered that they were charged high fees. […] We found that they had to pay at least 6,000 pounds to come and be hired here. Agencies go to rural areas, where they know people have lands and properties to loan in order to pay for being recruited. (Officer, Kanlungan Filipino Consortium, UK, 2013)

Two remarks must be made here. First, the channels through which FENs are recruited seem to have a predictive effect on their exposure to exploitation from employers in the UK. IRNs in particular already experience abuse before being recruited. Second, attempts at "soft" regulation, through non-mandatory codes of practice, have proven to be of little effect in preventing unethical practices.

That said, the International Labour Organization (2019) published a guide in the same vein—that is, drawing non-binding principles and guidelines—entitled General principles and

operational guidelines for fair recruitment and definition of recruitment fees and related costs. This document has the merit of defining what is meant by recruitment fees: “any fees or costs incurred in the recruitment process in order for workers to secure employment or placement, regardless of the manner, timing or location of their imposition or collection” (p. 12).

Discussion and conclusions

The analysis conducted in the previous pages brought evidence of considerable heterogeneity in the field of health professions in the UK. The focus on the nursing profession allowed us to show that migrant workers have contributed to increasing heterogeneity. The article has also revealed that this heterogeneity involves differential paths of socio-professional integration and rising inequalities among nurses from abroad as observed among nurses recruited from the Philippines and India. It has also shown that inequalities are reflected in poor working conditions, which, in turn, may affect the quality of care. Although they are considered “essential workers” and give a precious contribution to their host society, these professionals are often overqualified for their jobs and find themselves trapped in precarious employment situations, mostly because of their immigration status.

Restrictive rules on immigration and access to the profession has paved the way to processes of precarization, downgrading, and segregation, putting FENs in a vulnerable position, exposed to exploitative situations. In fact, they are admitted more and more often on a temporary work permit, employed as healthcare assistants, and treated as “foreigners,” regardless of the time spent in the host country and the contribution given to society. In addition, a differentiation of entry paths emerged, with those arriving through an international recruitment agency frequently being disappointed with their working conditions and experiencing cases of harassment, bullying, or abuse. In light of that, the recruitment channel turned out to be a critical variable. The research findings suggested that such abuse is part and parcel of a lucrative recruitment industry, centered on the critical role of private agencies that operate as facilitators of migration flows on a global scale. All in all, Brexit, on the other hand, is an intervening variable that has not altered the picture. What it has done, however, is increase levels of uncertainty, which act as a disincentive for migrant health professionals to come to or remain in the UK.

These findings have remarkable theoretical implications for the study of professions. In general, they allow us to understand how global-scale change processes induce processes of differentiation within and between professions at different levels: macro-systemic (the professional system); meso (professional groups); and micro (professionals). The outcome of this interplay of processes is heterogeneity, above all in terms of inequality.

Drawing on Bellini & Maestripieri (2018), we defined the “within” dimension as referring to the position that each practitioner can access in a given professional labour market,

influenced by individuals' either ascribed (age, gender, ethnicity, and social origins) or acquisitive (education, professional qualification, as well as legal status and language skills in the case of a migrant worker) characteristics. As the authors notice, "differentiation 'within' can […] occur over time, when regulation intervenes to loosen the boundaries of a professional activity or to modify the terms by which social closure is put into practice" (p. 7). "In this sense," they continue, "institutional change can be seen as a form of change which shapes professionalism from within" (p. 7). This is the case of the nursing profession in the UK, where institutional changes (in immigration rules, professional regulation, and recruitment practices) have induced differentiation processes based on acquisitive characteristics (the legal status of migrant worker), inevitably related to ascribed characteristics (ethnicity). These have caused rising inequalities among professionals (at the micro level) and put the professional system under stress (at the macro-systemic level).

Then, we defined the "between" dimension as referring to the interactions between occupational jurisdictions (Abbott, 1988), based on dynamics of professional power (Johnson, 1972) and social closure mechanisms (Parkin, 1979). Although it was not a focal dimension of our analysis, evidence emerged concerning interprofessional (between nurses and healthcare assistants) and intercultural (between foreign and native nurses) conflicts that would require closer inspection. However, a shift in focus to cultural hybridization—defined as a process related to globalization through which "external flows interact with internal flows producing a unique cultural hybrid that combines their elements" (Ritzer, 2010, p. 255)—ought to be considered in order to cast light on an unexplored issue. Indeed, the effects of different professional cultures coming into contact due to migration flows would be worth an in-depth investigation.

An almost neglected perspective is the "beyond" dimension, referring to the bidirectional relationship between professions and society. In this regard, the case of FENs is highly significant. Their professional contribution helps overcome the chronic shortage of nurses in the UK (Buchan, 2007), and therefore mitigate staffing pressures (Health Education England, 2019). Moreover, it ensures the British people a qualified service, which—to put it in terms of "social exchange"—is not adequately recognized or rewarded.

This is truer at the time of writing, as the Covid-19 pandemic is showing. To put it with Buchan & Catton (2020, p. 5), "nurses are at the frontline of the response to the virus, are central to successful progress in suppressing it, and will be the mainstay of post Covid-19 health systems. This has been widely acknowledged but has not come without cost. Nurses have fallen ill or died, […] and many others are experiencing work related stress and burnout." Assessing the impact of Covid-19 and its long-term effects on the supply of nurses will be a major line of research in the next years. Political choices and institutional action will be critical factors to observe. In the UK, it will be interesting to understand how the combined effects of the pandemic and Brexit will affect what, in the event pre-Covid-19 shortages persist, remains a necessary labour market.

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i. A random sample could not be created since it was not possible to access the personal data or contact details of potential respondents. Distributing a web-based questionnaire—directly through the associations and indirectly through the British Malayali portal—was seen as an acceptable solution. The selection criteria included the type of employer, the public or private nature of the healthcare facilities, and the recruitment channel.

ii. Most of the questions were borrowed from a questionnaire used in a survey carried out by the Royal College of Nursing, with its consent, to guarantee the data comparability.

iii. This result is explained by the fact that British Malayali is popular among Indians living in the UK. The Filipino community was the target of the outreach strategy, which was nevertheless not as successful as for the Indian community.

iv. In both studies, the interviews had a variable duration from 45 to 90 minutes. A consent form, prepared by the ILO following strict internal ethical standards, was viewed and signed by each interviewee. The interviews were recorded and transcribed, handled confidentially by Calenda and delivered to the ILO (for more details, see Calenda, 2014; 2016).

v. In 2006, the UK government raised the requirement for applying for permanent settlement from four to five years. A year later, it set new criteria for the renewal of work permits and visas for senior care workers, requiring them to have Level 3 National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) skills and qualifications, along with a higher minimum salary. Then, in 2012 the UK Border Agency (UKBA) introduced changes to employment-related settlement, among which a new pay threshold applying to anyone entering or switching into Tier 2 of the points-based system who would have been eligible to make a settlement application from 2016.

vi. The NHS pay system, covering all directly employed staff, including nurses and healthcare assistants, is based on nine pay bands. Each of them has several pay points. Every year, staff progress to the next pay point.

vii. Band 6 ranges from 31,365 to 37,890 pounds per year, while Band 5 ranges from 24,907 to 30,615 pounds per year, depending on the worker's experience, from less than one year to eight or more years.

viii. The Immigration Rules, published in February 2020, included the following provisions: visa fees of 1,220 pounds per person (900 pounds for those on the shortage occupation list); an increase of the Immigration Health Surcharge (IHS) to 624 pounds (470 pounds for students).

ix. This document has been recently revised and published with a new title, Code of practice for the international recruitment of health and social care personnel (UK Department of Health, 2021).