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The Enactment of Professional Boundary Work: A Case Study of Crime Investigation

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Abstract

Professional boundary takes place as actors negotiate occupational boundaries and division of labour. In this article, we examine the conditions of defensive, accommodating, and configurational boundary work in the context of crime investigation. We analyse how professional boundaries are negotiated as civilian investigators become involved with policing. The article is based on 71 interviews with civilian and police crime investigators from a variety of investigation units in Sweden. Findings show how policing as a professional field is shifted as civilians from a wide variety of backgrounds and with varying motivations enter the occupation. Defensive boundary work that devalued civilians was widely occurring. However, boundary work that focused on learning, collaboration, and training was also occurring in high-status units. The discussion focuses on how power asymmetries impact boundary work when professions are undergoing change. This study exemplifies how organizational actors navigate, defend, and challenge their positions as professional boundaries are negotiated.

Keywords

Boundary work, professionalism, crime investigation, police, policing

Introduction

When a new occupational role is introduced to a professionalized setting, challenges and tensions can be expected (Franzén, 2019). In these processes, previously negotiated organizational boundaries, occupational jurisdictions, and division of labour become renegotiated as changes prompt boundary contestation and rearrangements in how actors relate to each other (Abbott, 1995). In this paper, we seek to examine the different forms that occupational boundary work takes on in different contexts. Specifically, we analyse the contextual conditions associated with different types of boundary work. We draw on data from crime investigation work practice, where civilian crime investigators (hereafter abbreviated CI) are making entry on a broad scale into police organizations, thereby redrawing many established occupational demarcations. Theoretically, we aim to contribute to the literature on boundary work, as we set out to examine contextual and organizational conditions that are associated with what we, with inspiration from Langley et al. (2019), call defensive, collaborative, and configurational boundary work. With some variation in vocabulary, these dimensions of boundary work have previously been discussed and defined in the literature, notably by Apesoa-Varano (2013) and in reviews by Langley et al. (2019) and Akkerman and Bakker (2011). As stated by Quick and Feldman (2014), boundaries are multifaceted and can be seen both as barriers and as junctures, and boundary work is highly dynamic and follows various trajectories.

Much literature on occupational boundary work has described various forms of boundaries as well as the negotiations of those boundaries that constitute boundary work. Still, the question of why boundary work takes on different forms and trajectories has been less studied. In this regard, a common line of thought has been that asymmetries in power and social status have been associated with defensive boundary work (Bucher et al., 2016) while trust amongst actors and belonging to interprofessional communities of practice has been related to collaboration and efforts to blur boundaries (Johannesen, 2018; Meier, 2015; Weber et al., 2022). Nevertheless, many questions are still unanswered regarding this theoretical inference. For instance, it is well established that power can be drawn from many sources, that power dynamics are often complex, and that various types of boundary work can exist simultaneously and on different levels (Fleming & Spicer, 2014). Building on these notions, we set out to explore how different types of boundary work are related and how the organizational context influences boundary negotiations.

To achieve this objective, we draw on empirical data from the context of Swedish crime investigation. As mentioned, there is currently an influx of civilian CIs into police institutions in Sweden, as well as in other countries (Rice, 2020). This development has been referred to as the civilianisation of policing (Kiedrowski et al., 2017). What makes the case of civilian crime investigators CIs particularly interesting from the perspective of boundary work is that crime investigation involves a broad spectrum of organizational units with an internal hierarchy and varying levels of specialisation. In this sense, investigative units that are more administratively

oriented, such as volume crimes, are lower in status than more specialised investigation domains such as severe crimes, murder investigation, and organized crime (Haake et al., 2023; Lindberg et al., 2023). Likewise, regarding specialization, investigations targeting cyber-crime, white-collar crime, and domestic violence involving children would demand specific competencies from investigators. Considering the current large-scale increase of civilian crime investigators, many of these are also newcomers to the police. These conditions mean that civilian CIs are a diverse group in terms of backgrounds, competencies, and specialization. With this variation, it can be expected that aspects such as social status and trust vary within the group and that various strategies of boundary work will also be evident. In short, aspects such as these are important to consider regarding how civilians and police officers negotiate occupational boundaries.

With crime investigation as an example, the purpose of the paper is to explore how types of boundary work are related to organizational contextual conditions as civilian investigators are negotiating occupational boundaries.

Theoretical framework

In the following, we will describe our analytical framework, which separates three distinct types of boundary work. This framework will subsequently be used to analyse boundary work in different contexts of crime investigations. We draw on Lamont and Molnár (2003) to define boundaries as symbolic and social in nature. This means that boundaries are seen as "conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorize [...] people and practices [...]". In this sense, boundaries are established as individuals struggle—and come to agree over—meaning. Lamont and Molnár (2003) also put forth how social boundaries are objectified forms of difference that can result in unequal distribution of resources and opportunities. Thus, when symbolic boundaries are widely agreed upon, they take on a constraining character as taken-for-granted patterns of social interaction. This perspective on how boundaries are formed is close to a "negotiated orders" perspective on boundary work (Apeaso Varano, 2013) where boundary work can be seen as a social negotiation process. Negotiated orders stem from an interactionist, micro-sociological perspective on organizational phenomena emphasising how everyday activities and practices at workplaces link up to social structures (Lawrence and Phillips, 2019).

The previous literature on boundary work has mainly focused on *defensive boundary work*. Studies of defensive boundary work regularly set out to analyse how organizational actors use self-protective mechanisms such as affirmation of differences, conflict, exclusion, and protection of legitimate membership to distinguish themselves and defend status positions (Allen, 2000). As stated by Langley et al. (2019, p.707), defensive boundary work can thus be said to entail a process in which actors are "working for boundaries" by establishing and defending differences. Put somewhat differently, Liu (2018) described defensive boundary work

processes through the notion of boundary making, which denotes the process by which professional groups seek to maintain and defend boundaries by exclusion. As stated by Bucher et al. (2016), these defensive strategies often involve enforcement of one party's interest upon others, thereby limiting the agency of other actors.

While defensive boundary work has been a central focus of research, negotiations of boundaries may also take on different forms and to more fully understand the intricacies of boundary negotiations, we need to extend our understanding of how boundary work is enacted. Drawing on Langley et al. (2019), we will here describe collaborative and configurational boundary work as two complementary approaches to defensive boundary work.

Collaborative boundary work entails boundary negotiations that take several actors' interests and motivations into account, thereby changing, developing, and negotiating extant boundaries (Langley et al., 2020). This phenomenon has also been described in terms of boundary-blurring, or transformative boundary work (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011; Liu, 2018; Weber et al., 2020). A common feature of these concepts is that boundaries entail social and symbolic interfaces between groups, and deployment of boundaries is a contested process (Lamont & Molnar, 2003). As such, actors can strive to blur boundaries (Johannessen, 2018) and boundary work can thus function to connect actors to each other (Christiansen et al., 2017; Kerosuo and Engeström, 2003; Quick & Feldman, 2014). Examples of collaborative boundary work include translation efforts in which actors adapt their language or expressions to create shared domains, aligning among differences (i.e., recognizing distinctions and finding ways to connect them) or decentring differences (i.e., making extant differences obsolete or meaningless; Quick & Feldman, 2014).

A third type of boundary work has been described as *configurational*. This means the actions that organizational actors undertake to facilitate the boundary work of others (Langley et al., 2019). Following Lunkka et al. (2021), configural arrangements can be defined as the conscious use of boundaries to shift or reconfigure how interaction takes place in organizational contexts. As Langley et al. (2019) stated, configurational arrangements can be based either on the separation of activities (thus creating isolation) or consolidation (thus creating interaction), so that new spaces and places for action and learning open (Lindh Falk et al., 2016). Lunkka et al. (2021) discussed configurations in terms of the creation of settings or spaces in which various interests and groups can transcend and interact on different premises than what usually is possible. Similarly, Kersch (2015) discussed configurational boundary work in terms of the creation of learning spaces in which employees' personal agency was supported. In the following, we present an empirical study wherein the broad theoretical categories of *defensive*, *collaborative* or *configurational* boundary have guided the analysis.

The research setting

The research setting for this article is Swedish police crime investigation. Within the Swedish police system, civilian CIs work alongside with police CIs at all types of investigation units such

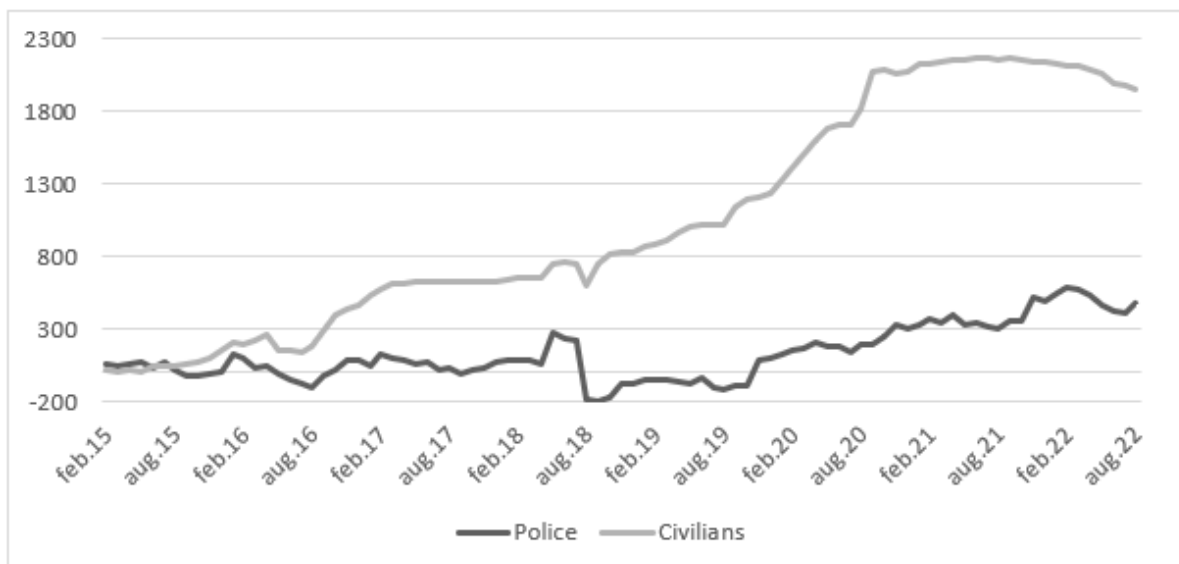
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as special victims' investigation, eco-crimes, cyber-crimes or severe crime investigation. Moreover, civilians and police investigators conduct similar work tasks such as leading investigations, conducting interrogations and victim interviews, and compiling investigation reports. There are few formal differences in work tasks between civilians and police investigators and these have to do with legislative boundaries surrounding the police mandate (Police Authority, 2018). For example, civilian CIs are not armed when on duty and are not allowed to enforce coercive methods in the same manner as their police colleagues.

In numerical terms, 10,852 individuals (of whom 3,202 were civilians) were full-time employees within investigative units in 2022 in Sweden. As Figure 1 indicates, the share of civilian CIs has grown over time relative to their police colleagues.

Figure 1

Civilian and police employees in investigative units over time



The influx of civilian investigators is related to political ambitions to increase the number of employees within policing and to address major challenges in solving crimes and handling increased workloads (Police Authority, 2022). However, the integration of civilians into the police force has not been without problems. Civilians differ demographically from their police colleagues. One example of this is gender distribution: Whereas police investigators are 58% male and 42% female, the percentage of civilian investigators is 27% male and 73% female. Civilians are also to a higher degree holding academic degrees and a larger share of them have higher education, whilst police investigators have basic police training as their primary educational background. With a changing workforce in investigation, conflicts have risen, with arguments that civilian investigators entail a form of “blue washing” that undermines police professional efforts and reduces the status of the police profession (Police Union, 2022).

Methods

The data collection in this study consists of 71 interviews. Of these, 56 are interviews with civilian CIs from 11 types of investigative units. Complementing these interviews, 15 interviews were conducted with police CIs (from 4 different types of investigative units), see Table 1. With this sample, the article mainly focuses on boundary work from the perspective of civilian CIs as most codes and categories were generated from interviews with civilians. The choice to focus on the civilian perspective is motivated by the fact that civilian CIs are in one aspect trying to increase their access to, and participation within the highly instituted setting of policing (Lindberg et al., 2023). It can also be argued that civilians are in a contested position within the police force (c.f. Haake et al., 2023; Rice, 2020). With these characteristics, we expect boundaries as well as boundary work to be visible from the perspective of civilians as they as a group regularly encounter exclusion and inclusion through manifestations of boundaries. Whilst the focus is on the civilian perspective, interviews with police CIs have also been included in the analysis. These mainly serve the purpose of adding a contextual understanding, substantiating interpretations, providing other points of view, and examining if there were contrasting pictures. As Table 2 indicates, the gender distribution amongst civilian CIs was 14% male and 86% female and for police CIs were 46% male and 54% female. This sample mirrors how an influx of civilian CIs means that more female employees are making an entry into policing. Furthermore, table 1 shows that most of the interviewed civilian CIs had higher education degrees, with social work as the most common educational background. Furthermore, the most common units these individuals worked at were volume crime and domestic violence.

Table 1

Participants

Civilians (n=56)

Gender	Unit	Educational background	Degree subject	City size**	
Male	8 Volume crime	21 Higher education	47 Social work	11 Large city	20
Female	48 Domestic violence	11 Upper secondary education	7 Criminology	7 Medium City	17
	Serious crime	6 Other (military, voc., phd studies)	2 Law	7 Small city/rural area	19
	White-collar crime	5	Political science	5	
	Youth crime	3	Psychology	3	
	Environmental crime	3	Sociology	5	
	Special Victims Unit	3	Other	9	
	Work incidents	1			
	Cyber crime	1			
	Intellectual Property	1			
	Traffic investigation	1			

4Police (n=15)

Gender	Unit	Educational background	Degree subject	City size**	
Male	7 Volume crime	5 Upper secondary education	8 Social work	1 Large city	3
Female	8 Domestic violence	5 Higher education	5 Law	1 Medium City	5
	Serious crime	3 Military	1 Psychology	2 Small city/rural area	7
	Youth crime	2	Education	1	

**Definitions derived from Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions. Large city >200,000; Medium city 50,000-199,000; Small city/rural area <50,000

Data collection

We recruited participants for this study partly through information at an internal training event and through information on the police intranet web page where we asked for civilian and police CIs to participate in the study. Before we commenced data collection, we obtained informed consent from all participants. Thereafter, the authors and two research assistants conducted interviews during 2020 and 2021. These revolved around topics and sensitising concepts (Bowen, 2006) such as investigators' backgrounds, trajectories into the police, experiences of interprofessional collaboration, learning of the occupation, and career possibilities. Interviews varied in length from approximately 45–90 min, and due to social restrictions

following the COVID-19 pandemic, interviews were conducted using video conferencing software. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim before further analysis.

Analysis

To analyse various boundary work strategies and the conditions surrounding these, we took inspiration from Srivastava and Hopwood (2009) and their abductive approach to data analysis. This meant that initial topics and concepts were coded from the interviews on par with theoretical exploration and reading into the research field. We first coded all data into the background investigative unit, role, gender, experience, and geographical place of work. We did this to be able to control for background factors in relation to qualitative findings. Thereafter, the analysis proceeded in three cycles: Examples of boundary work were coded into the theoretical categories of *defensive*, *collaborative* or *configurational* boundary work (see theory section). thereafter, these broad categories were explored more in detail as we analysed concept dimensions for each type of boundary work (see Tables 2, 3 and 4). We analysed these themes “axially” (Saldana, 2021) by cross-examining different types of boundary work in relation to our previous codes regarding background and contextual factors. Using this approach, we were able to relate types of boundary work to types of investigative units, gender, and investigators’ experiences.

Findings

Crime investigation is an occupational field that is undergoing change as the number of civilian CIs increases. The interviews provide a rich dataset wherein mainly the civilians’ experiences of boundaries in work practice become visible. As we will explain, these boundaries also impact how advantages and benefits are distributed within the social system of crime investigation. In the following, we present our findings regarding defensive, collaborative, and configurational boundary work through data structures and exemplifying quotes to portray how boundary work was described in various investigative contexts.

Defensive boundary work

It can be concluded that the participants had many examples of defensive boundary work wherein the boundaries between civilians and police officers within investigative work practice were upheld, mainly through exclusion mechanisms. From the perspective of civilians, these types of boundaries were highly visible and limiting in their daily work practices, placing them in a contested position. Common descriptions of this contested position were that civilians were said to have to work harder, to prove themselves, and to earn their place in the police organization. Specifically, we identified four types of defensive boundary work. These were occupation-cultural, jurisdictional, and organizationally oriented defences, as well as an emphasis on differences that were expressed by civilians themselves (see Table 2 below).

Table 2

Defensive boundary work

Boundary work	Function	Examples
Defence of occupation culture (police)	Emphasising a professional boundary through police specific narratives and symbols	Police mindset, police gear (badge, uniform, weapons),
Jurisdictional restrictions (police)	Defending the core tasks of investigative work practice	Civilians are unauthorized to conduct work tasks associated with investigative work practice
Organizational restrictions (police)	Keeping civilians out from key positions, safeguarding the professional core	“Glass ceiling,” civilians not eligible to apply for positions
Emphasising difference (civilians)	Coping, justifying one’s position	Civilians are educated, specialists, subject-specific experts

As Table 2 indicates, *occupation cultural defence* entailed examples of how civilians experienced how police made use of a pattern of specific occupational narratives, customs, and symbols to demarcate and emphasise occupational differences. Occupation cultural markers in this way functioned in an exclusionary manner, entailing an enacted boundary between civilian CIs and their police colleagues. Examples of police-specific narratives were storytelling about a common background, training, or occupational socialisation through the occupational experiences of policing (such as patrol policing). As the following quote emphasises, civilian investigators experienced that police officers shared a cultural bond that civilians would not be part of:

Many of the police officers have worked with incredibly special incidents. I mean, everything from collecting body parts from a train rail to breaking up fights and all sorts of things like that. And there is this, if not pride, so at least a certain mentality that comes with those types of experiences. You must get through them, and this coping is a collective experience that brings people together. [...] I get the feeling that those who are police officers are proud that they have earned their uniform [...] This brings about a certain pride, or poise, depending on how you see it. (male, civilian, interview 4)

This quote describes, from the perspective of an outsider, how a strong cultural bond in the shared history and previous experiences amongst police-trained investigators could work in an exclusionary manner. Interestingly, while cultural boundaries may be informal and ideational, this boundary would regularly “materialize” in tangible symbols and markers that were imbued with meaning, such as the police uniform, the service weapon, or the police badge and badge wallet. In turn, these symbols produce effects as they are used purposefully, as the following quote exemplifies:

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...At court proceedings, police are exempt from having to go through the security check, but this does not extend to the civilian CIs. The police cruise through while the civilians must queue with the suspects and the others to be searched before entering. The police show their badge and are allowed to go in one direction and then the civilian CI arrives and is referred to another queue. (male, civilian, interview 32)

This quote exemplifies how symbols guide others outside the police to recognize the difference between police officers and civilian CIs, thereby reinforcing this difference.

Extending our analysis of cultural exclusion, we also identified instances of rule-based or *jurisdictional boundaries* in the daily work practices of civilian CIs. These types of boundaries can be seen as highly institutionalized and “ascribed”, thus stipulating what different categories of employees within the police are allowed to do. For instance, Police CIs were allowed to initiate investigative and coercive measures such as picking up suspects for interrogations, seizing objects, calling for premise searches, collecting DNA samples, or informing suspects of their rights. None of these actions were available for a civilian CI to initiate, thus restricting their professional autonomy and leaving civilian CIs unauthorized to conduct central work tasks. By extension, the consequences of this boundary were that a horizontal division of labour is upheld and defended, as police CIs have a greater leeway for action and exclusionary work tasks.

The participants also reported several *organizational restrictions* that would entail boundaries between civilians and police officers. While jurisdictional boundaries often had their foundation outside the police (in legislation, etc.) organizational restrictions would be internally determined but could be so with reference to external jurisdiction. Organizational boundaries tended to restrict the possibility for civilian CIs to develop within the organization. Several career opportunities would be closed for non-police employees because they would be based on a police-specific rank structure, thus creating hindrances and effectively blocking out civilian CIs. The following quote exemplifies this tendency:

[...] There are people who get skipped over, and it is hard to do anything about it in this organization. The police have their [rank structure]: they begin as assistants, next they become inspectors, and then they move on from there [...] But it is harder to say what positions correspond to your civilian competence [...] It is difficult. You can become group leader and principal investigator as a civilian, but for instance, I recently saw that they had a job opening in the special investigation unit. They were looking for staff in City A. I thought that job sounded interesting. But only police criminal inspectors could apply. That means a lot of experience, and an eligibility requirement to have been a police officer for 10 to 15 years. (male civilian, interview 32)

While not always visibly present in the day-to-day practice of CIs, these types of organizational boundaries would surface over time, reducing the possibilities for civilians to develop within

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the police and specialize vertically as well as horizontally. A consequence of this was that formal hierarchies (position-based power), as well as specialization (knowledge-based power) would be harder to acquire for a civilian CI than for a police CI.

In the light of these defensive dimensions of boundary work, a fourth defensive strategy was described as initiated by civilians themselves. We termed this the *emphasis of difference*. By emphasising and constructing themselves as different from the police, this difference, which would often be a drawback, could be redefined as an advantage and a factor that legitimized a civilian CIs place in the organization. The emphasis on difference would be socially oriented, and about civilians seeking out the company of other civilians to acquire social support and build a sense of belonging in a challenging work environment. As one Civilian CI who worked with volume crime puts it:

Me and another [civilian] CI started at the same time, and we ended up sharing an office. Naturally, we started to hang out together, and we have continued to do so. We found a couple of others who also were “outsiders” and who wanted to interact with us—turns out that we are all civilians. There was probably no thought behind it, rather, we just ended up the way we did. [...] I spend time with the ones I like. And they happen to be civilians. (female, civilian, interview 39)

In addition to this focus, emphasizing difference could also be about safeguarding specialization, such as specific knowledge domain (e.g., IT, Cyber), or conversely, the experience of higher education and various generic competencies that stemmed from that.

Collaborative boundary work

In addition to defensive boundary work, many initiatives to bridge boundaries could be identified in the empirical material. These strategies would occur simultaneously with or in direct response to defensive boundary work. Table 3 displays the main strategies by which collaborative boundary work took place in the context. In essence, these strategies for boundary work entail ways to relate and socially interact to minimize the impact of boundaries, resolve boundaries, or work around and downplay boundaries. In contrast to defensive boundary work where boundary defence often entailed a division between civilian and police CIs, collaborative strategies of boundary work would regularly include civilians and police CIs working together.

Table 3

Collaborative boundary work

Boundary work	Function	Examples
Teamwork in case work	Increasing capacity through collective effort	Working together in specialized or high-profile investigations
Partnering civilians and police	Working together to be fully operational	Working in pairs, doing tasks together
Downplaying difference	Simplifying workflow	Letting the differences go unnoticed internally and externally

As Table 3 indicates, a common strategy of collaborative boundary work was when CIs worked in a *team-based manner* on their cases. In these instances, they described how work took place in a sense of urgency, and extant boundaries were often transferred so that police, as well as civilian CIs, would work side-by-side to progress in an investigation. This approach to investigating was common in large-scale or high-profile crime investigations wherein much information had to be processed. In these instances, the primary objective of teamwork was not to bring civilians and police CIs together; rather, this was a consequence of the need to increase the capacity in investigations through collective effort.

A similar strategy for collaboration was when civilians and police CIs were paired. This could be done to circumvent the jurisdictional restrictions of civilians so that whenever CIs foresaw that they could benefit from having full decision-making power, they could pair up, ride together to distant locations or do work tasks together. While this strategy meant that more human resources were used, CIs would often describe their work strategy as rewarding, since they would learn from each other's experience while working cases. As stated by one civilian CI working with severe crimes:

There are many police officers who are extremely skilled detectives, and I respect their skills. They can do things that I cannot. That is exactly why it is so good [that different people] know different things. And as soon as we start to work together, we get good. That's why it's so beneficial to work in pairs: Four eyes, two brains, four hands [...]. In this way, we achieve a high tempo in case work, everybody helps, pushing each other forward. Then it doesn't matter who is a civilian and who is a police CI. (female, civilian, interview 29)

While the team and partner approach to collaborative boundary work mainly differs in terms of the scale and amplitude of social interactions, a third approach to collaboration was to *downplay the boundaries* and differences between civilians and police CIs. This strategy of boundary work is in a sense in opposition to the defensive strategy of emphasising difference as this approach meant that civilians would hide, or at least not showcase their civilian status

unless it was called for. Frequently, this led to people both outside the police, as well as inside the organization, assuming they were police CIs, thereby granting them the same status and treatment. This could be done in relation to external parties, such as in witness interviews, but it could also be a strategy internally, in relation to colleagues within the police. As one female civilian CI stated:

[...] I was up in [City A], and myself being a civilian, I got a police team made available to me to support the mission—it was about bringing in a suspect. So, I briefed the team. I shared the mission plan, and when I informed them, I just introduced myself as interrogator and the person responsible for the mission. I ended the briefing by saying that I was a civilian, and this really made an impact: many of them reacted very positively and were like “Oh, how nice, how talented you must be.”

So, I noticed the impact, if I had [introduced myself as a civilian] and put it first, half of them would have stopped listening right there. But I put it last and got a lot of positive reactions. The moral of the story is that you must be smart, that’s just how it is. (female, civilian, interview 22)

An interesting point that concerns all the collaborative strategies is that these were often described in relation to large-scale and highly specialized crime investigations. One reason for this may be the fact that these units are used to working together, while smaller, more mundane investigations are often led by a single CI. Large-scale investigations often revolve around serious crime and demand more specialization, something that also means that civilians with special skills would be valued by the organization on that basis, and this would also motivate police as well as civilians to try to work close together, bridging their differences.

Configurational arrangements

We now turn to describing configurational boundary work as it was described from the perspective of civilian investigators. Configurational boundary work in this regard revolves around the organizational arrangements that the CIs had experience with and that were put in place to bridge boundaries, facilitate cooperation, and overcome obstacles related to boundaries. Thus, configurational arrangements have similarities to collaborative boundary work with the major difference being that configurational boundary work was more clearly institutionalized initiatives aimed at reconfiguring how interaction takes place in organizational contexts. From the interviews, most of the examples of initiatives were aimed at increasing collaborative work practice and learning between civilians and police CIs. In overview, we identified five configurational boundary work strategies which we divided into two dimensions. See A and B in Table 4, below:

Table 4

Configurational boundary work

A) Training as configurational boundary work		
	Function	Example
Training to fit	Decrease lines of difference through training	Introduction/induction, learning “the ropes,” routines, etc.
Training to gain qualifications	Qualifying to conduct work tasks	In-service training and internal qualifications
Police training for civilians	Immersion	Making police officers out of civilians
B) Organizational configurational boundary work		
	Function	Example
Changing the rules	Expanding the mandate of civilians	Delegating tasks, extensive interpretation of statutory rules, etc.
Organizing collaborative spaces	Drawing on interprofessional knowledge	High profile and specialized investigative units with various competencies involved

As Table 4 indicates, the first dimension of configurational boundary work revolves around *learning-focused configurations*. These were mainly attempts on an organizational level to use training and continuing professional development to help civilians become immersed or accepted in the police organization. The most obvious configurational initiative in this regard was to provide police training for civilian CIs through an internal police training initiative financed by the police authority. Through this programme, the boundary between civilian and police CIs would be completely dissolved; civilians through this arrangement become police CIs, thereby reaching immersion within the professional community of the police. The initiative was a clear dividing line. Critical voices emphasised that the initiative devalued the status of the civilian CIs, was costly, and would probably have little impact. Others saw it as a possibility to be more fully integrated into policing. As one civilian CI expressed it:

I think it's a fantastic way to get people committed and new skills into the police force. The purpose of the in-house training initiative is not to work with beat-policing, although they will certainly do that for a while, but it is the investigative work that is in focus. In a way, the ones who go through with it will be employees who are to be reckoned with, they will be part of the occupational community, they get a new skill set, they will be accepted in all contexts, and they will have the power to “enter all rooms” within the police. (female, civilian, interview 34)

The quote quite clearly expresses how the configurational arrangement of in-house training ultimately would dissolve a boundary between civilian and police CIs, by giving the former the same professional and jurisdictional mandate as all police officers.

Other, less immersive training initiatives were also common, such as training civilian CIs to overcome jurisdictional problems. In this regard, civilian CIs could do in-service training to

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gain the authorization to function as primary investigators, or conduct certain types of interrogations that they, contrary to their police peers, would not have the right to do without specific qualifications. Similarly, some training, such as induction programmes and mentorships, was also reported to contribute to the socialisation and onboarding of civilian CIs more broadly into the police, as these types of training activities were directed at “learning the ropes” of investigative work practice.

While training ultimately is about achieving various changes by exposing actors to experience, a second dimension of configurational initiatives instead revolved around *changing the organizational boundaries*—that is, the prerequisites for work—rather than striving to change the individuals doing the work. A common approach in this regard was that the police organization locally would make beneficial interpretations of rules, or even change how rules were to be applied, so that civilian CIs would gain the authorization to conduct work tasks, thereby overcoming the jurisdictional boundaries that would hinder them. A commonly occurring narrative was that rule applications had become more liberal over time, as the number of civilian CIs had increased:

What we're allowed to do has simply been expanded. For instance, to notify suspects of the suspected crime [with or without having an attorney present] was something we could not do before, but now we can hold these initial interrogations... The same goes for serving a suspect with documents and things like that. Similarly, it was completely closed for a civilian CI to lead investigations, but that has changed, and now we see civilians working as principal investigators. Of course, there are still things we can't do. Negotiation for example, to work those types of incidents, one needs to be armed. (female civilian, interview 40)

As our interviews were done nationwide, we noted that an expanded mandate for civilian CIs was a broad trend. However, we also noted that rule interpretation seemed to vary depending on what precinct an investigative unit was in, so that things that are allowed in one part of the country would be prohibited in another, even as the police authority would be the same. Local interpretation of rules and legislation thus had a real impact in this regard.

A second approach to configurational arrangements was also to locally organize collaborative spaces in which civilian CIs and police would interact and work closely on a regular basis. One prominent example of this entailed investigation units in which a pluralised, multi-functional approach to investigation was encouraged. These units were characterized by highly complex cases requiring several specializations. As such, the configurational dimension of boundary work was often visible and associated with specialized, high-status investigative units, where the police authority needed different perspectives to coincide to successfully deal with case-work. In more mundane, day-to-day, volume crime investigation, these efforts to get CIs to collaborate were less common.

Discussion

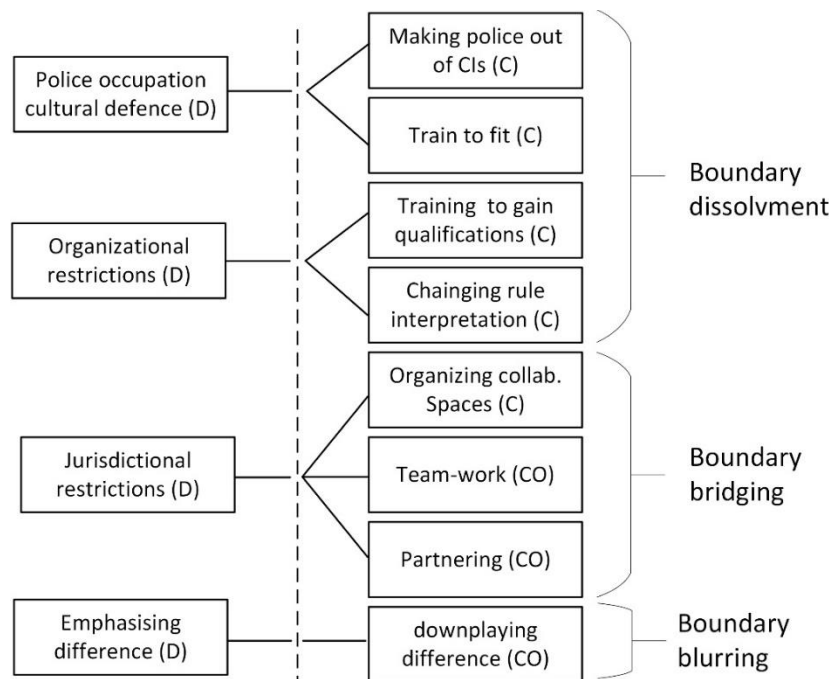
We have analysed variations of boundary work in an occupational field that is being differentiated as civilian investigators from various backgrounds make an entry into work practice. While the literature on boundary work strategies has proliferated, little attention has been paid to the question of how different types of boundary work are linked and how contextual conditions impact how boundary work is enacted (Langley et al., 2019). Our findings show that defensive, collaborative, and configurational boundary work were present in investigation work practice, and furthermore, we identified a variety of approaches to boundary work within these broad categories. We now turn to discussing these findings from two perspectives. First, we discuss how different types of boundary work may intersect. Second, we address how contextual factors such as power asymmetries and, specifically, social status, impact how and why different types of boundary work are enacted.

Connecting types of boundary work

As noted, different types of boundary work could often be talked about in an interrelated fashion, where a defensive mechanism often simultaneously could be mirrored by an opposite simultaneous or sequential boundary work strategy. As stated by Quick and Feldman (2014) as well as Langley et al. (2019), this multiplicity is to be expected as boundaries are not fixed but rather constantly negotiated. Similarly, Lawrence and Phillips (2019) highlighted the importance of examining what resources and practices are involved in such negotiations and on what levels different types of boundary work are enacted. In Figure 2, we have connected defensive boundary work strategies (on the left) to collaborative and configurational boundary work strategies (on the right) to visualize how different boundary defences and strategies to counter boundary defences are related.

Figure 2

Connecting defensive, collaborative, and configurational boundary work



D = defensive, C = configurational, CO = collaborative

Figure 2 indicates that cultural and organizational defence strategies were mostly counteracted with configurational arrangements. For instance, local civilian CIs or police detectives would themselves have little leeway to change organizational restrictions or cultural defence. Rather, a more institutionalized approach would be needed such as investment in continuing professional development and training, or an organizationally sanctioned mandate to interpret rules in a new way. Cultural and organizational boundaries are in a sense police-internal, thus demanding a more structural or configurational approach where the goal is to change the current practice by dissolving boundaries. Interestingly, in relation to cultural defence, this dissolvment would not primarily entail addressing cultural issues, but rather changing the status of civilians into becoming police detectives, thereby transforming their professional selves into insiders.

In relation to jurisdictional boundaries, such as externally determined legislation, the findings point to the conclusion that local initiatives were more common here to counter boundaries. Examples included coming together within units by partnering or working in a collectively oriented manner. These initiatives enabled the involved detectives to work around, bridging legislative boundaries so that work could continue. Finally, we identified the defensive strategy of emphasising difference and the countering collaborative strategy of downplaying difference as two identity-centred strategies of boundary work as these strategies revolve around how civilian CIs define themselves as part of the police organization. Whilst the strategy of defining oneself as other than police serves to create an alternate identity position for

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civilian CIs, the collaborative strategy of defining oneself as like police functions serves to blur the boundary, thereby making it less tangible.

In conclusion, different types of boundary work requires different types of resources from the involved actors: Configurational boundary work was related to occupation cultural and organizational defence mechanisms, while collaborative boundary work was carried out more autonomously by individuals engaging in identity-centred “self-work” (Lawrence & Phillips, 2019). While this conclusion shows that boundary work strategies don’t form in isolation, but rather as different positions in ongoing negotiations and struggles over meaning, the question of in what contextual conditions different types of boundary work are mobilized in the organisation remains to be discussed.

Social status of work and boundaries of work

A clear tendency is that collaborative boundary work strategies and configurational arrangements structured to facilitate interaction were associated with more specialized—and in essence “high status”—types of investigative practice while defensive boundary work was common throughout the organization. Furthermore, many of the configurational arrangements were focused upon learning and in-service training. From previous research on continuing education, it has been established that there is a “Matthew effect” (Merton, 1968) in how training and organizational resources are allocated. This means that training and development initiatives are often provided to those who work in high-status environments within an organization. Considering this conclusion, the finding that configurational investments are directed to highly specialized investigative units is expected. However, current research on boundary work has suggested that “...higher-status professions tend to defend existing boundaries while lower-status professions strive to change them” (Bucher et al., 2016, p. 465). The quote describes how position-based power asymmetries have been described to relate to defensive boundary work as professional groups want to safeguard a privileged position (Abbott, 1995). That high status resonates with defensive boundary work is a recurrent theme in the literature. For instance, Allen (2000, p.84) studied stories of nurses and how contrastive rhetoric constructed social differences between the occupations of nursing and medicine on the one hand and differences between nursing expertise and other forms of knowledge held by assistants and support staff on the other. While recent research has stated the likelihood for high-status social roles within organisations to entail a propensity for boundary defence within that organisation, this tendency was not evident in the empirical material studied here.

There may be many potential reasons why high-status investigation practices were not more clearly associated with boundary defence. For one, employment in highly specialized investigation units is seldom the first contact with investigation work; rather, these types of units are workplaces that CIs advance towards over time. Thus, much of the defensive boundary work may take place in other contexts within the police that civilian CIs encounter prior to

working with, for instance, serious crime. Connecting to this, the civilians who work in highly specialized investigation units are themselves often specialists, holding high levels of expertise within subject domains for which the police may lack knowledge. Examples include specific aspects of forensics or technological expertise. With complex, large-scale investigations, wherein various knowledge domains are important for a successful outcome, it follows that knowledge sharing becomes highly valued.

These factors may explain why collaborative and configurational boundary work was more common in these settings. Other research to point in this direction: Meier (2015) studied disciplinary boundaries and collaboration in emergency medicine, and showed how trust, knowledge sharing, and relational coordination may dissolve disciplinary boundaries. Meier concluded that trust entailed a precondition for collaboration, but it was also central in realising collaboration. Similar conclusions were drawn by Weber et al. (2022), who discussed how “benevolence-based trust” was associated with collaborative boundary work. In essence, this type of trust involves consideration of others’ interests and needs as well as a disposition to compromise. As stated by the authors, benevolence-based trust therefore creates conditions for psychological safety, which in turn allows the involved parties to discuss alterations of boundaries. It is not unlikely that in large-scale investigations, wherein collaboration is a prerequisite for success and wherein different CIs bring different types of expertise to the table, this may create other types of power differentials than those that are based on professional belonging. The dynamics of large-scale investigative work may simply reduce the difference, and by extension, this reduces the mechanisms for defensive boundary work. As such, this paper points to the conclusion that in studies of boundary work, social status is an important driving force for groups and individuals. Given that investigative work is becoming more specialized and characterized by knowledge diversity in the light of knowledge developments such as digitalization, new forensic methods, and transnational crime, specialists are needed within this work and are valued based on their complementary spheres of knowledge (Deslauriers-Varin & Fortin, 2021). While this study has begun to describe how various forms of boundary work relates to status and knowledge within investigation, these relations might also be further explored. For instance, the sample of the present study mainly focuses on the civilian perspective, and among civilians, female detectives are in the majority. Indeed, gender is an important marker for status and to explore the ways male and female investigators experience boundary work is an interesting avenue for further research. Similarly, the results of this study may also spur further studies focusing on how police detectives experience boundary work in relation to the inflow of civilians into policing.

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Two Approaches to School Counseling as a Profession: From Boundaries to Core

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Abstract

The literature on school counseling as a profession has emphasized the classic boundaries approach, which perceives the profession's jurisdiction as a product of a power struggle for a distinct uniqueness. This paper aims to provide an alternative approach, in line with current approaches to professions. The author establishes a core-characteristics approach, highlighting the profession's core character as its source of legitimacy, encouraging continuous education and adapting to dynamic contexts. This mixed-methods study investigated the perceptions of school counselors and teachers regarding the status and sources of the counselor's legitimacy. The findings show that school counselors were recognized as influential professionals, and their main source of legitimacy was deemed to be character attributes, more than knowledge and education. Differences in perceptions were found vis-à-vis the profession's multi-specialist contexts. Further examining the core characteristics of the profession may enhance its legitimacy and help it thrive.

Keywords

School-counseling, profession, core, boundaries, specialization, teachers

Introduction

Counseling has historically struggled to consolidate its status as a profession (Mellin et al., 2011). The challenge of defining school counseling as a profession is intensified by having role ambiguity and multiple role definitions (Havlik et al., 2019), accelerated alterations (Chandler et al., 2018), and an overlap with similar professions (Antunes-Alves, 2010).

School counseling is set in a frequently changing landscape. It was initiated from vocational counseling at the turn of the 20th century; then, following the emergence of humanism and world wars, its focus shifted toward supporting students at risk as child and adolescent specialists; subsequently, legislation for the mainstreaming of special education students moved the focus toward diversity and needs of special populations (Blake, 2020).

Consequently, the school counselor's role often varies among schools (Popov & Spasenovic, 2020) and includes promoting the mental, social, academic, and career development of students and staff and advancing their optimal functioning and well-being. Their tasks span diverse areas of activity, including working with wide populations within and outside the school and assisting with various needs. By operating individual, group, and system interventions, they function "in a manner similar to" (Kolbert et al., 2022, p. 2) mental health therapists and provide individual counseling to at-risk students, assist special needs students, accompany educational teams in their work, and more.

Although differences exist among school counselors in different countries, they commonly share the vague nature of the profession, resulting in a low public understanding of its value, and an ongoing seek for recognition as unique and influential within both the mental health care services and the educational system (Harris, 2014; Heled et al., 2022; Phi Delta Kappan, 2016; Shimoni & Greenberger, 2014). This recognition is significant in achieving satisfaction among the counselors and their clients, reinforcing counselors' sense of capability, and ensuring their commitment to the profession. A well-recognized professional identity grants practitioners a sense of stability, security, and pride in the practice of their profession (Remley & Herlihy, 2014). The future of a profession depends largely on the extent to which its members develop a sense of commitment, yet studies indicate a low degree of counselors' commitment to continue practicing counseling (Heled et al., 2022; Kim & Lambie, 2018).

The literature on school counseling as a profession has emphasized the prevalent ambiguity of school counseling in terms of a lack of the profession's distinctiveness due to poor boundaries. This classic boundaries approach perceives the profession's jurisdiction as a product of a power struggle for a distinct uniqueness. However, current discussions about professions highlight the importance of trustworthiness in the context of dynamic workplaces, based on the inner nature of professions. This discourse offers new insights into the process of recognition of school counseling as a profession.

In line with current approaches to professions, this paper establishes a new core-characteristics approach to school counseling as a profession, aiming to enhance its recognition as unique and influential. The present study examines the views of counselors and teachers on aspects that may indicate their preferences regarding the (new) core versus the (classic) boundary approaches.

Two approaches to the profession: Boundaries and core

This paper is the first to discern two approaches to the profession of school counseling: the classic boundaries approach and a new approach, which will be termed the core approach, developed by the author in line with the literature on current approaches to professions. While both strive to legitimize the profession as unique, they differ in their perspectives on the purpose and the sources of legitimacy. The boundaries approach emphasizes the profession's legitimacy as a product of a power struggle for a distinct uniqueness, where professionalism is grounded in formal education. On the other hand, the core approach presents the legitimacy of a profession based on continuous education, focusing on the core character of the profession, which is ever-adapting to dynamic contexts.

The classic boundaries approach

According to the boundaries approach, professions are shaped out of conflicts on boundaries as a turf-driven matter. They gain recognition over subfields that remained securely protected within their bosom, while other occupations had taken some subfields away from them (Abbot, 1988, 1995).

Therefore, *the purpose of defining the profession* is to achieve recognition of a monopoly of expert knowledge, by the professionals and others. Insofar, literature on school counseling as a profession has focused on its struggle for legitimacy and status. Its essence has been described in terms of distinctive boundaries and unique features:

[...] by those who belong to it and by those who do not practice it, enabling distinction between groups. The perception of the profession's unique features by its practitioners, professionals in adjacent fields, supplementary professionals [...] affects professional status and practitioners' appreciation of the historical sources and building blocks that comprise the profession. (Heled & Davidovitch, 2021, p. 65)

The nature of the counseling profession makes it difficult to agree on what distinguishes counselors from other helping professionals (Antunes-Alves, 2010). Antunes-Alves (2010) elucidated that school counseling can be described as falling somewhere between psychology and social work, based on its history, and as falling somewhere between education and psychology because its literature, theories, and role models come from these two fields.

According to Antunes-Alves (2010), while other mental health practitioners, such as psychologists, have earned unchallengeable professional recognition, school counselors are still

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fighting for their recognition. The literature on the school counseling profession has been following this hierarchy perspective of the professions as constantly struggling for upward movement and/or against downward movement (Liljegren, 2012), and called to define the profession's unique identity rather than only one that "imitates" other professions in the field of mental health or education (Pelling & Whetham, 2006), and thus to promote its significant legitimacy as perceived by others (Reiner & Hernandez, 2013).

According to the classic boundaries approach, boundaries are what constitutes a profession, focusing on the jurisdiction of what is done and by whom (Liljegren, 2012). While counseling has similarities with mental health therapy (Skovholt & Rønnestad, 2003), in many schools the role of the school counselor has been limited to referring students to specialists when responding to mental health or diagnostic needs (Zagelbaum et al., 2014). Mecadon-Mann and Tuttle (2023) elucidated that this approach delineates the scope of work for school counselors as to not diagnosing students but recognizing how a student's diagnosis can potentially affect the student's ability to achieve success, providing brief counseling in the school setting and supporting the student in obtaining outside services if long-term clinical/mental health counseling is needed.

According to Dimmitt and Zyromski (2020), this is a limited focus of the counselor's role that weakens the counselor's recognition as a unique powerful professional, within both the mental health care services and the education systems. Referral of students to community mental health professionals may undersell the competencies of school counselors, assuming they cannot adequately serve students with mental health needs, while schools are not benefitting from the work that could be provided by a high-level educated mental health professional who is already on site (DeKruyf et al., 2013).

Blurred boundaries coexist also between school counselors and one of the important groups of professionals within the school system, the teachers. Teachers constitute an integral part of the vision of school counseling, whose perceptions of school counseling as a profession might have an impact on its status as a profession (Beames et al., 2022; Cholewa et al., 2016). Teachers generally believe that counselors have a greater role in screening for mental health problems, teaching social-emotional lessons, and referring to other services (Franklin et al., 2017). Yet, teachers want more mental health training to increase their own literacy and competence, and a growing number of teachers participate in in-service courses studying counseling "tools" (Whitley et al., 2013; Winter et al., 2005). To the boundaries approach, these conditions exacerbate the difficulty of school counselors in defining their unique role and their professional "added value" in the school workplace.

In sum, according to the boundaries approach the purpose of defining the school counseling profession is to achieve a recognition of its status based on distinctiveness, as perceived by the professionals and by those who do not practice it.

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Source of legitimacy: Theories that underline boundaries conceptualize professions in terms of conflicts, power, and exclusiveness, and describe professions as competing for expertise-based jurisdiction (Abbott, 1988). The strength of a profession's claims is based on the possession of expert knowledge, the "currency of competition" (Abbot, 1988, p. 102). These claims have warranted professionals their elevated roles in society (Larson, 2013). Accordingly, the professionals' unique knowledge, not possessed by others, constitutes a source of power and status (Moore, 1970) and may accord practitioners a sound basis for understanding their work. Knowledge and expertise are central to claims of the professions (Mellin et al., 2011).

School counseling strived to attest to its quality and to distinguish itself from a *semi-profession*, based on a recognition of the possession of unique knowledge and exclusive tasks that constitute its sources of power. A semi-profession is a field whose status as a profession is perceived as less legitimized, missing the systematic theoretical body of knowledge that reflects unique expertise (Burrage & Trosendhal, 1990; Howsam et al., 1976). To empower the status of the profession, counseling communities have joined the agenda of attributing importance to an advanced level of education. Following early definitions of professions (Greenwood, 1957), in many countries (according to Popov and Spasenovic, 2020, this includes most of the states of the U.S.; countries in Europe such as Ireland or Croatia; and Israel which was studied in the present research), school counseling involves common abstract knowledge acquired by a master's-level degree education, as a source of legitimacy and status.

The boundaries approach focuses on controlling distinct subfields based on formal education, which positions legitimized professionals within the hierarchy of professions. These distinct fields should be based on clear role definitions, while the roles of school counseling are vague, constantly changing, and all-encompassing. As a consequence, professionals are trained to be proficient in a wide range of roles and tasks, resulting in confused school counselors with low self-efficacy (Chandler et al., 2018).

The core approach

The core approach suggests that professions are shaped out of recognition of their core character. They attract and lose various subfields because they are closer to or further from their inner nature.

The purpose of defining the profession, according to discussions on professions in the last two decades, has shifted from questions of structure and function, power and privilege, to highlighting the fluidity of a professional workplace and the mobilization of occupational groups (Münste & Scheid, 2017; Suddaby & Muzio, 2015). Changing needs, professionals' personal inclinations, and diverse expectations, are linked to extensive transformations in the modern working world, with epochal changes accompanying transformations in the system of professions. Instead of focusing on occupations striving towards constructing boundaries that will

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distinguish them from competing occupational groups, this process is perceived as signifying a need for a narrative of recognition, trust and accountability in a dynamic world.

Sources of legitimacy: According to the core approach, a profession is defined by its core "character" rather than its functions or boundaries. This core is manifested in the internalization of attitudes and perspectives, adopting the professional culture, language, and ethics, and acquiring a personal commitment to professional ideas (Hill, Bandfield, & White, 2007; Skovholt & Ronnestad, 2003). Indeed, counselors develop professionalism by undergoing a change both at the intrapersonal and interpersonal levels, starting from the stage of counseling students (Brott & Myers, 1999).

Abbott (1988, 1995, 2005) offered a re-analysis of the social work profession. Similar to school counseling, this profession is dealing with concerns about the profession's sources of legitimacy, which Abbott (1995, p. 561) termed "the heart of the field." To Abbott, social work has emphasized formal education as its foundation. However, the public's image of work was to help people. The central public legitimacy comes not from science; instead, it is based on a character trait, that the public trusts.

The core of the profession in these terms is set within the professional character. The aim of the profession is not a stable entity, nor a final achievement, but a continuous and dynamic process of interpretation and customization, which is shaped by contextual workplace factors. Within these ever-changing processes the profession's core character is firmed rather than its boundaries.

The Australian Council of Professions provided an agreed definition of professions, in which expert knowledge is combined with trustworthiness (Baumfield et al., 2023). The legitimacy of who can perform the work and what is needed to perform and evaluate it (Freidson, 2001) may be strengthened based on two central sources: the profession's knowledge that adapts to new niches following changes in the workplace (Abbott, 1995), and having the trustworthiness of the public-partners in its character.

The legitimacy of the profession may stem from the ability of professionals to abstract their knowledge, to trustworthily solve novel problems, and to adapt their practices to new niches (Abbott, 1995). Moreover, the identity of a profession reflects its unique knowledge, as manifested by the respective professionals in relations with colleagues, clients, and members of complementary professions (Antunes-Alves, 2010; Woo et al., 2014). These should be examined within and adapted to changing contexts. Frost (2001) elaborated on these connections, arguing that continuing education is needed for professions to replenish their knowledge base, thereby renewing their claims of expertise and maintaining their status in society. Frost (2001) stated that if the claims for professionalism are based on learning and expertise, and this claim for expertise is vulnerable, continuing education and defining specializations within the profession should be seen as a central question in terms of the future of the profession.

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The profession is perceived as always predisposed to change, with other parties interacting with the professionals and influencing the content of their roles. Opening up to new niches and specifications may serve as sources of legitimacy.

Lengthy and systematic continuous learning is particularly central to counseling as a helping profession (American School Counselor Association, 2019; Smith & Robinson, 1995), but the tracks for counselors' continuing professional expertise are unclear and further complicated by their vague nature (Konstam et al., 2015; Remley & Herlihy, 2014). Many professions, including the "ideal-typical" professions such as law and medicine, are moving rapidly away from rigid structures, having more internal diversity in terms of careers, with several subfields and different levels of certification (Abbott, 1995). Abbott suggested that professions would be forwarding their claims within the workplace and before the public.

The present study

Despite the change in its status in recent years, the preoccupation with establishing a "distinct definition" of school counseling has increased in many countries (Shimoni & Greenberger, 2014). For example, in Israel, where the present study was conducted, the role of the school counselor may vary among schools, but they share the ambiguity, changes, and overlap with similar professionals. Heled and Davidovitch (2021) described school counseling in Israel and elucidated that since the profession of school counseling has not yet managed to develop a clear sense of professional identity and role definition, others define the role of the school counselors and dictate what counselors should do in the schools, resulting in counselors' engagement in various administrative and educational tasks that are not unrelated to the counselor's work. Moreover, their role combines the performance of planned tasks and providing immediate responses to unexpected demands of the education system.

According to Casula et al. (2021), inquiry is a *process* where inductive and deductive activities can occur simultaneously or in a back-and-forth manner. They suggest using a *working hypothesis* as a conceptual tool that furthers investigation in its early or transitioning phases (instead of inductive/deductive dualities) and to describe how a topic is new or reference change. When using a working hypothesis, the picture's interpretation is new, and its application is anchored in resolving problematic situations by the inclusive of the many views of participants (multiple realities). Mixed methods support such research (Casula et al., 2021).

Aiming to resolve the problematic situation of the school counselors' ongoing seek for recognition as unique and influential professionals within the mental health care services and the education systems, this research utilized a mixed-methods exploratory sequential design (Hirose & Creswell, 2023), in which the findings of the first qualitative phase of the research guide the development of the quantitative survey.

This paper presents the quantitative phase of the study, following the qualitative phase findings. The qualitative phase included 20 in-depth interviews with school counselors about

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sources of strength and difficulty and perceived future. The qualitative findings encompassed three main themes: the struggle and need to be recognized as unique and influential; personal characteristics over knowledge and education as the main school counselors' sources of legitimacy; and school counselors' future picture including optional specializations and positions.

This led to a deductively quantitative examination of a new approach to school counseling through the multiple realities views of both counselors and teachers, as teachers constitute a dominant part of the vision of school counseling and impact its nature and its status as a profession (Beames et al., 2022; Cholewa et al., 2016). The study examined their perceptions regarding three aspects that may indicate the applicability of the core approach to contribute to resolving the problematic situation:

1. Present status of the profession: To what level is the school counselor perceived by teachers and counselors as unique and influential? The boundaries approach fits where power is the source of the problematic situation, that is where the professional is perceived as influential to a low degree, and the counselors perceive their uniqueness to a higher degree than the teachers. However, a core approach fits if school counselors are perceived as influential and their uniqueness as vague, by both teachers and the counselors themselves.
2. Sources of legitimacy: Is professional knowledge and education (following the classic boundaries approach) perceived as the school counselors' main source of legitimacy, or their intrapersonal and interpersonal characteristics (following the core approach)?
3. School counseling domain: The profession should be studied not as a fixed thing, but rather as a contested matter (Abbott, 1995). If the core approach is to be applicable, it needs to be explored while understanding its context. The challenges of school counseling are rooted in its workplace and demands. Therefore, participants were asked about their preferences regarding school counselors' specialization (therapy/academic-oriented), and their anticipations concerning optional positions of the school counselor (within and outside the school context).

The study further examined whether and to what extent differences exist in the way each of those aspects is perceived regarding role (counselor/teacher) and level of education (bachelor's degree versus advanced degrees).

Method

Participants

In the quantitative phase, there were 311 participants (134 school counselors and 177 teachers). Of the *counselors*: 88.1% were women; 29.3% held bachelor's degrees, 70.7% advanced

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degrees; 38.6% worked in elementary schools, 61.4% in secondary schools; the average age was 37 years (SD=8.77); an average of nine years in professional practice (SD=7.45). Of the *teachers*: 84.1% were women; 73.1% held bachelor's degrees, 26.9% advanced degrees; 51.6% worked in elementary schools, 48.4% in secondary schools; the average age was 38 years (SD=10.28); an average of 15 years in professional practice (SD=10.15).

Procedure

Based on the theoretical background and a content analysis of the interviews in the qualitative phase, a questionnaire was formulated; it was subjected to the review of three experts from the fields of counseling and methodology, and only items for which there was 100% consensus were left in; The questionnaire was administered to a pilot sample of 34 students who were studying toward their master's degree in counseling; some of them were teachers and some were actual counselors. Pursuant to the participants' comments and reliability tests, several alterations in style and editing were made and the final version of the questionnaire was prepared. Questionnaires were distributed personally to counselors and teachers using a snowball sampling method. The response rate was 95%. Confidentiality and anonymity were assured and honored.

Instruments

Parallel versions of the questionnaire were administered to counselors and teachers, and included the following items and scales:

1. Perceptions of the school counselor as a unique and influential professional

This aspect was measured in three parts: (a) A scale including six-point Likert scale items, examining the perceptions regarding the school counselor in terms of being influential in schools. The Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .819, reflecting good internal consistency. Example items are: "The counselor has a central position at school"; "The counselor has the power to influence the school system".; (b) A question concerning the uniqueness of the assistance rendered by the counselor: "If the school were to obtain additional hours, would it be preferable: to give them to the counselor / to give them to assistance inside classrooms?"; (c) A scale including six-point Likert scale items, regarding the uniqueness of the counselor in the education settings. Example items are: "If teachers had the time, they would almost not need a counselor at school"; "If every teacher were to learn 'counseling' principles, he would almost not need a counselor at school". The Cronbach's alpha was acceptable (.639).

2. Sources of legitimacy

This aspect was measured in a question in which the participants were asked to choose the counselor's main source of legitimacy (one option) from a list. A categorical index — *the source of legitimacy* — was constructed, containing two categories: *Professional* (knowledge, education, skills) and *Personal* (personality and relationships with others at school).

3. School counseling domain

This aspect was measured in two parts: (a) Participants were asked to indicate their preferences on six-point Likert scale items, including fields of additional specialization for the school counselor. A Varimax free factor analysis with an orthogonal rotation yielded two factors that contributed jointly to the explained variance of 49.07% (the first 30.51% and the second 18.56%): Factor 1 — *a therapy-oriented specialization* (e.g., family-therapy, group-therapy, coaching) and Factor 2 — *academic-oriented specialization* (e.g., assessments and special needs teaching methods). Table 1 presents the factor loadings and Cronbach's alpha measures; (b) A question about various anticipated positions of the school counselor asked the participants to choose one out of a list of options, that included positions inside and outside the school (a full-time job in school counseling; supervision; school-management; private clinic).

Table 1

Continuous Education Specializations: Factor Loadings and Cronbach Alpha Reliabilities

Item	Factor loading	
	1	2
Factor 1: Therapy-Oriented		
Family therapy	.708	
Parental guidance	.693	
Group therapy	.691	
Coaching	.618	
Therapy methods (art, music etc.)	.604	
Factor 2: Academic-Oriented		
Assessments		.845
Special needs teaching methods		.749
Psychodidactic diagnosis		.701
Cronbach alpha reliability	.712	.707

Findings

Perceptions of school counseling were as follows:

1. Perceptions of the school counselor as a unique and influential professional

A scale consisting of 6-point Likert items was used to measure to what level counselors and teachers perceive school counselors as influential professionals in schools. The results indicate that school counselors were perceived as influential professionals in schools by both counselors ($M=5.20$, $SD=0.64$) and teachers ($M=4.48$, $SD=0.95$). However, a two-way (2×2) (role x level of education) analysis of variance indicates that teachers perceived the counselor

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as less influential than counselors [$F(1,296)=51.96$; $p<.001$]. No effect of level of education was found.

To test differences regarding the question of whether to give extra hours either to the counselors or to assistance inside classrooms, a χ^2 analysis was performed, yielding significant differences as regards role [$\chi^2(1)=59.64$; $p<.001$]. 80.7% of the counselors believed that it was preferable to give counselors extra hours, while only 30.9% of the teachers did. No differences were found regarding level of education.

On the scale consisting of 6-point Likert items regarding the uniqueness of the counselor in the education settings, both counselors ($M=3.76$, $SD=0.79$) and teachers ($M=3.49$, $SD=1.04$) perceived the uniqueness of the school counselor to a moderate degree. A two-way (2×2) analysis of variance was conducted to examine the differences as regards roles (counselor/teacher) and level of education (bachelor's degree/advanced degrees). Results showed a significant effect of role [$F(1,295)=10.96$; $p<.001$] where counselors perceived the uniqueness of the counselor at a higher level than teachers. Additionally, a significant main effect of level of education was found [$F(1,295)=6.69$; $p<.01$], revealing that holders of advanced degrees ($M=3.45$, $SD=0.88$) perceived the uniqueness of the counselor at a lower level than holders of bachelor's degrees ($M=3.76$, $SD=1.00$). No interaction was found.

Sources of legitimacy: The participants were asked to choose the counselor's main source of legitimacy from a list including *professional* (knowledge, education, skills) and *personal* (personality and relationships) aspects. 37.9% of the participants chose the professional aspect as the main source of the counselor's legitimacy (32.5% chose skills, 4.3% chose knowledge, and 1.1% chose education), while 62.1% of them chose the personal aspect as the main source of the counselor's legitimacy (44% chose personality and 18.1% chose relationships). No significant differences were found as regards role and education.

2. School counseling domain

Participants were asked to indicate their preferences related to an option of an additional specialization in counseling, including *therapy-oriented specialization* and *academic-oriented specialization*. An analysis of variance with repeated measurements found an interaction [$F(1,302)=32.48$; $p<.001$]: there were differences between counselors who preferred *therapy-oriented specialization* more than the teachers [$t(302)=4.05$; $p<.001$] and a preference among the teachers for an *academic-oriented specialization* [$t(302)=3.33$; $p<.001$].

As to the anticipated positions of school counselors, among counselors, 35.1% chose a private clinic, followed by supervision (33.3%), a full-time job in school counseling (26.3%), and school management (5.3%). Among teachers, percentages of choices were: supervision (37.3%), a full-time job in school counseling (31.4%), a private clinic (23.5%), and school management (7.8%).

Discussion

In the last decade, the preoccupation of school counseling with questing for recognition has increased (Chandler et al., 2018; Shimoni & Greenberger, 2014). This paper marks the first attempt to apply current approaches to defining the profession of school counseling.

The findings revealed that school counselors were perceived as influential professionals in the education system, both by counselors and teachers. However, the exclusivity of the counselor was perceived to a moderate degree. According to the boundaries approach, the school workplace's nature may pose a threat to the counselor as an exclusive professional who cannot be replaced. Yet, the boundaries approach fits where power is the source of the problematic situation, that is, where the professional is perceived as influential to a low degree. However, the results seem to support the core approach, as the school counselors were perceived as influential by both teachers and the counselors themselves.

The classic boundaries approach has been fueled by the ambiguity of whether the school counselor is a special professional, or an educator with special training for counseling in the school (Cashwell et al., 2009; Cinotti, 2014). The fact that the counselor is a part of the available staff at school makes it necessary to gain uniqueness, opposing claims by which the need for counselors is due to time constraints of the teachers who therefore are not able to respond to their students' emotional and more personal needs (Tatar & Bekerman, 2009). If teachers view school counselors as supplements to their own role in teaching and learning, they may seek support from any available source without considering the unique professionalism of the counselor.

On the other hand, the core approach suggests a different view and a solution to the profession's problem of ambiguity and low status. If school counselors' uniqueness is perceived as vague by the counselors themselves, and if character rather than formally acquired knowledge is the school counselor's main source of legitimacy, as the findings demonstrate, then while teachers can acquire basic counseling courses, a long-term study dedicated to the character core of a counselor is necessary to professionally fulfill the role. To earn the recognition of uniqueness, developing the core is needed.

Antunes-Alves (2010) found that counselors did not value the advantages of having a Ph.D., indicating that it would not make them better counselors as will a continued practical experience: "Participants valued wisdom over knowledge" (Antunes-Alves, 2010, p. 134). Similarly, in the present study, professional characteristics of knowledge and education were perceived to a lower degree as the main source of legitimacy of the counselor than the intrapersonal and interpersonal characteristics. The present findings align with previous research findings (Amin et al., 2016), where the host of personal attributes was considered a major factor in counseling, along with the combination of interpersonal skills and sufficient knowledge about the issues involved, with no difference as regards level of education. This coincides with

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Abbott's (1995) suggestion to focus on character, and therefore on what can be done by no other professional.

Continuous learning and specialization are significant components of a profession and may serve as legitimizers (Abbott, 1995; Frost, 2001). While teachers preferred that counselors specialize in their upskilling continuous education in *academic-oriented skills* (e.g. assessments and special needs teaching methods), counselors tended to specialize in *therapy-oriented skills* (e.g. coaching and therapy). According to the boundaries approach, these well-expressed differences in preferences between teachers and counselors may result in undervaluing counselors' uniqueness, leading to dissatisfaction among counselors (Blake, 2020; Havlik et al., 2019). As a result, counselors may feel unfulfilled when they spend their time helping students with academic administration, despite their desire to focus on counseling activities that reflect their professionalism (Mau et al., 2016). Moreover, Astramovich et al. (2013) suggested that teachers are equally competent to perform duties in all domains except for mental health counseling, inasmuch as teachers are typically trained at the bachelor's level, which is adequate for academic and career domains that may not require graduate-level training. However, school counselors are typically trained at the master's level and possess more advanced skills (see Harris, 2014: Globally, school counseling is a graduate profession, where a master's degree in counseling is either required or highly desirable, and internationally the majority of school counselors have a teaching qualification or a teaching experience in addition to their bachelor's degree in teaching, psychology, guidance, and counseling, or social work).

However, the core approach to professions suggests that differences in preferences between teachers and counselors regarding the counselors' specialization do not reflect a disagreement between teachers and counselors. Instead, they map onto the multi-specialist domain of school counseling (Beames et al., 2022) and highlight precisely the advantage of the profession being flexible and contested, as school counseling allows for these two domains. Since the core is the character and the tasks may vary, this raises the question of whether school counseling can be placed not only in schools but also in private clinics, as the counselors have opted.

Contribution

The core approach contributes to the school counseling profession by offering an alternative to the boundaries approach by shifting the focus from conflicts over status and analyzing lists of roles, to crystallizing the profession's character. However, the attributes of this core are yet to be studied. In striving to distinguish the counseling profession, past studies have noted the counselors' need for differentiation vis-à-vis other helping professions (Hill et al., 2007), and found that, unlike psychology, which counselors have perceived as emphasizing testing, and unlike social work, which they perceived as focusing on systemic issues, counseling was

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perceived as grounded in a developmental, prevention, and wellness orientation toward helping (Mellin et al., 2011). It is important to continue clarifying this issue both through research and through policy to shape and define the unique core and develop the expertise of school counselors. Further studies are needed to examine the profession's language, culture, attitudes, and ethics through qualitative and quantitative studies, and to characterize the profession. It is suggested to single out specializations that utilize a language that is common to professionals in their ecosystem while holding a unique counseling methodology that might serve their practice (Astramovich et al., 2013; Kress & Eriksen, 2010).

This research may contribute to the field of professions in several ways. The case of school counseling demonstrates that a profession can be perceived as having an influential and central role although not perceived as having discernable knowledge. Knowledge can be acquired by others as well, but the professional owns the profession's 'character'. Furthermore, the research demonstrates a desire of professionals for a non-fixed profession, which allows them to apply the 'character' in diverse contexts such as a private clinic. This aspiration may characterize professionals from other professions as well. Finally, the approach that professions are shaped out of recognition of their core and inner nature can serve other professions (Abbott, 1995), particularly the helping professions, and it is recommended to continue and explore this approach.

The study was conducted in a single country and, as mentioned, school counseling practices may vary between countries and among different schools. Therefore, the objective of this paper is not to establish an international claim but to emphasize the importance of exploring the profession's core characteristics in a dynamic view. Further research is required in other contexts and with additional stakeholders such as students, parents, psychologists, principals, and policymakers, to understand their interactions and better comprehend the contextual issues associated with the nature of this profession. The recognition of counselors' expertise is influenced by evidence of specialized training, in addition to the behavioral evidence of expertness and reputation as an expert (DeKruyf et al., 2013; Heppner & Pew, 1977; Strong, 1968; Woo et al., 2017). These elements need to be further studied by examining perceptions as well as behavioral interactions in various contexts. We should understand the processes of learning the core, both through formal programs and informal workplace interactions and at various career stages (Baumfield et al., 2023).

Finally, policymakers should acknowledge the need to entice high-level counselors to remain in the school system. In the present study, counselors opted for a position in a private clinic. While this position may uphold a core dynamic approach, it weakens the bond between professionals and the school system. Moreover, advanced degree holders found the counseling profession less unique. These findings highlight the importance of placing continuous education and specialization, elements that have been neglected so far, in the foreground as factors to be examined in future studies, re-focusing on education not only as a formal source of

legitimacy but as a source for the development of the core and the legitimacy of the profession in the eyes of the professionals themselves. Among the various factors that may influence choosing a workplace, offering continuing education on the core of the profession is one way to support professionals and grant them the status of vital professionals.

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Professional Regulation and Change in Times of Crisis: Differing Opportunities Within and Across Ecologies

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Abstract

This paper analyses the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis on professional regulatory change in two Canadian provinces, drawing on ecological theory. The dataset, constructed using web-scraping techniques, includes all laws and by-law modifications concerning regulated professions enacted during the first 18 months of the pandemic in Quebec and British Columbia. Data show that the crisis prompted regulatory changes but that the impact and nature of these changes varied depending on the structure of the ecology of professional regulation in each province. Furthermore, crisis-related concerns were more likely to induce or accelerate durable changes if they intersected with pre-existing, ongoing professional projects. Our findings have implications for theorizing crisis-related regulatory change and demonstrate the value of a comparative approach to studying professional ecologies and state-profession interfaces.

Keywords

Professional regulation, COVID-19, ecologies, change, Canada.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic affected work and employment globally, altering work content, availability, workloads, and location, as well as the health risks associated with working (Fana et al., 2022; St-Denis, 2020). Particular attention has been paid to the impact of the pandemic on health professionals like nurses and doctors in hospital settings, emphasizing high work demands, burnout and strain (Dos Santos, 2023; Lavoie-Tremblay et al., 2022), and crises in the healthcare system generally (Denis et al., 2021). Outside of hospitals, research has explored the expansion of remote work and virtual practice, as well as financial precarity and work stoppages experienced by those in private practice (Brondani et al., 2021; Hedden et al., 2023). Research has also noted shifting scopes of practice for health professionals during the pandemic (Adams & Wannamaker, 2022; Bowman, 2021). Less attention has been paid to the impact of the pandemic on professionals practising outside the health sphere. Nonetheless, they, too, experienced changes to the conditions, content, and location of their work (Fore & Stevenson, 2023). Many of these pandemic-induced changes to work are temporary, but some could be more permanent, and hence they deserve more attention.

In Canada — where regulated professions are governed at the provincial level — these changes to professional work necessitated alterations to policy and regulations because professionals' scopes of practice are usually detailed in legislation and regulations. Canada is more likely to experience such alterations than countries like Australia and the United Kingdom, where professionals' scopes of practice are less often specified in legislation (Adams & Wannamaker, 2022; Leslie et al., 2018). Canadian provincial governments seeking to make more efficient use of the healthcare labour force during the pandemic altered scopes of practice through a variety of orders, by-laws, and regulations. Non-health-regulated professions were also affected. The pandemic prompted additional alterations to rules around telework and virtual practice, continuing competence and entry-to-practice, and, in some professions, facilitation of inter-provincial mobility (Myles et al., 2023). These pandemic-induced changes brought challenges for professional workers, but also opportunities to expand scopes of practice, and alter modes of service delivery.

All told, Canadian provincial governments passed hundreds of orders, regulations, by-laws, and pieces of legislation altering professional regulation and professional practice during the first 18 months of the COVID-19 pandemic (Canadian Institute for Health Information [CIHI], 2022). These policy changes impacted who performed certain tasks and how tasks were to be performed. Although many of these orders and by-laws were intended as a temporary response to the pandemic crisis, some are leading to longer-lasting changes. Exactly what changes were made and how they were made varied across provinces, as each has its own professional system. In this paper, we draw on ecological theory to shed light on these inter-provincial differences in both responses to the crisis and in the opportunities presented to professional groups to expand their authority and scope of practice. We focus on two Canadian provinces with different regulatory structures — Quebec and British Columbia (BC)

— to understand the changes made to the work of regulated professionals during the opening 18 months of the pandemic (2020-2021). Through our analysis, we seek to understand: (1) what changes were implemented to scopes of practice and professional work in both provinces; (2) how these changes differed across the two provinces with their distinct regulatory structures (ecologies); and (3) whether some professions were able to seize the opportunity provided by the pandemic to further a professional project. Through these analyses, we shed light on how the nature of ecologies, and the relationship between professions and the state, shape ecological change. In this way, we suggest hypotheses, indicators, and methodological strategies to advance the use of a comparative lens in research on the regulation of professions and to explore the impact of crises on the redistribution of opportunities in regulated professions' ecologies.

Ecological theories of professions

According to ecological theories of professions, professions exist in a system or ecology wherein professionals jockey for space and authority over a jurisdiction or field of practice with other professionals (Abbott, 1988; Liu & Emirbayer, 2016). Professional groups advance claims to stakeholders in linked ecologies, especially the state ecology, to lay claim to a space or jurisdiction and win legislation granting them market privileges (Abbott, 2005). Advancing claims to jurisdiction involves “boundary work” — generally defined as a process whereby one group distinguishes itself from another (Liu, 2015, 2018; Lamont & Molnar, 2002). When professionals conflict with others over who does what, they advance a claim to having superior knowledge, training, and expertise which they assert enables them to provide safer, more effective, and more efficient services than others. Although Abbott (1988) emphasises conflict among professions over space (jurisdiction) within the profession's ecology, more recent research highlights that collaboration is also central within the system (Liu, 2018; Noordegraaf, 2020). Whether by choice or by force, inter-professional collaboration results in the sharing of a jurisdiction (Abbott, 1988). Collaboration provides some stability within the profession's ecology, although ongoing boundary work can produce tension.

States are not simply third-party arbiters within the professions ecology, but rather, in Abbott's (2005) ecological theory, the state system is an ecology itself and one that is linked with the professions ecology. The linkage between state and professions ecologies is an important one, as the state can recognise claims to a jurisdiction within the system of professions, impacting professional divisions of labour and authority within the system. The state system can also benefit from the professions ecology and may exchange or share information, personnel or resources with it, bolstering parties' own efforts to secure space or legitimacy in the state system (Adams, 2018; Liu, 2015). Abbott (2005) argues that regulatory outcomes typically achieve some goals within both the state and professions ecologies, and may result from an alliance among actors across ecologies. Moreover, issues can emerge that provide “dual rewards” or opportunities for stakeholders in both ecologies. Abbott refers to such is-

sues as “hinges”. Although the professions and state ecologies are analytically distinct, in reality, these ecologies can overlap (Adams, 2018). Overlap occurs when ecologies share personnel (such as when professionals serve in government and state offices and state actors participate in professional regulation) and when interactions among actors across ecologies shape outcomes in both ecologies (Liu, 2015). “Hinges” also contribute to overlap. The overlap between professions and state ecologies is particularly evident in the area of professional regulation, which involves state actors and professional groups collaboratively establishing through legislation a framework to determine who is competent to practice professions safely and to hold professional workers accountable for their actions.

Beginning in the 1970s, a new ecology began emerging in the space where the professions and state ecologies overlap in Canada (Adams, 2024): an ecology of professional regulation. Key actors in this ecology of regulation include professionals and members of the public serving on regulatory bodies and the state actors working in offices and departments that collaborate with and oversee regulatory bodies’ activities. Activity within ecologies of professional regulation is structured according to legislation passed within the state ecology, and it has implications for actors in the professions ecology. As in other ecologies, groups within the ecology of professional regulation jockey for jurisdiction, credibility and authority: some professional regulators are more influential than others, and there is often tension between state actors and professional regulators. The structure and boundaries of this ecology of professional regulation differ across regions. In Canada, Quebec is unique in having a single ecology encompassing all regulated professional groups because of the nature of regulatory legislation in that province. In some other provinces, there is a single legislative framework for health profession regulation (such as in British Columbia), and other regulatory frameworks apply to other professions; here, there may be multiple ecologies of professional regulation.

For Abbott (1988, 2005) and other advocates of an ecological approach (Blok et al., 2019; Liu, 2015, 2018; Liu & Emirbayer, 2016), ecologies are spatial and interactive. Individuals and groups within an ecology are embedded within a particular social-historical landscape, and within that ecology, their boundary work involves contests over space. One advantage of this focus on space and interactions is that it draws attention to the activities of actors and groups within particular social-historical settings. Indeed, ecological theory draws our attention to state and professional actors and how their interactions shape legislative outcomes and the provision of expert services within and across social-historical contexts. Nevertheless, there has been a dearth of empirical research comparing the nature or structure of ecologies — and the linkages or overlap between them — across locale. To elaborate, the structure of the ecology of professional regulation is quite different across regulatory regimes. There are different regulatory bodies regulating different professional groups in each. They interact with different state offices and actors within their respective ecologies of professional regulation. Whether these differences in regulatory structures shape interactions and outcomes within and across ecologies is unknown. That is, we lack understanding about how ecologies differ

generally and how differences in the structures of the ecologies of professional regulation specifically impact the course of social change. Ecological theory has tended to focus on interactions among actors within an ecology, but it has not fully considered the relevance of the structure and make-up of such interacting ecologies in shaping outcomes.

One limitation of ecological theory is that change within and across ecologies is somewhat under-theorized. Since ecological theory focuses on space, Abbott's (1988) discussions of ecological change focus on social trends that create or eliminate jurisdictions (task areas). Technological change, for example, may create new task areas, as it eliminates others. Another source of change concerns actors' boundary work as they battle for space within the ecology (Liu, 2018). The generation of new knowledge may also help a group advance a jurisdictional claim and strengthen its boundary-making (Abbott, 1988, p. 96). Any change impacting one profession necessarily impacts others as it creates ripple effects throughout the ecology. Change in one ecology can also be spurred by developments in a linked (or overlapping) ecology (Abbott, 2005). A change in government priorities, for instance, can have implications for professional regulation, potentially favouring some professionals more than others or reducing professional influence more generally.

However, change may be provoked by events external to any single ecology (or others linked with it), like wars, shifts in public values, or global crises. The impact of such changes is rarely uniform: some segments within an ecology may benefit more than others, altering the resources professions can draw on in their battles over space (and legitimacy, remuneration, and so on). The COVID-19 pandemic was one global event that strongly impacted both professions ecologies and state ecologies around the world (Adams & Wannamaker, 2022). Its impact on the ecology of professional regulation, however, remains to be explored.

Our research addresses a limitation in ecological theory and gaps in previous research. We examine whether the structure and nature of the ecology of professional regulation shaped the manner in which the external crisis of the pandemic generated change within the professions ecologies through a comparative case study of British Columbia and Quebec, Canada. We focus on policies implemented during the first 18 months of the COVID-19 pandemic in these two provinces to change who does what in the professions ecology. Our focus is on changes to professionals' work, specifically, their scope of practice and how they do their work. We also consider whether some professions were able to advance their professional projects and expand their jurisdictions within the professions ecology during the crisis. Accordingly, our research questions are as follows:

- 1) What changes were made in the two provinces? How did the changes differ across the two provinces, with their distinct regulatory structures (ecologies)?
- 2) Did the pandemic create opportunities for some groups to advance their scopes of practice? What conditions affect which groups can take advantage of these opportunities?

Before providing details about the study and our data, we first describe the two regulatory contexts.

Quebec

The ecology of professional regulation in Quebec — referred to in that province as the “professional system” — is tightly integrated. The ecology consists of all self-regulating professions governed by a single framework law, the *Professional Code*, adopted in 1973. They are accountable to a single (state) oversight body, the “Office des professions du Québec”. Some professions (such as optometrists and architects) are also governed by separate pieces of legislation, which may be specific to that profession or cover an entire sector (e.g., different health laws affect the work of psychologists or speech-language pathologists), but even in such cases, these laws refer to (are embedded within) the Professional Code. Most often, legislative changes affecting specific professions or sectors are made through direct amendments to the Professional Code: the latest is the *Act to amend the Professional Code and other provisions* (Quebec, 2020a), which affected both the general governance of professional colleges, the distribution of authorised acts in dentistry, and the delegation of controlled acts in architecture.

The health sector differs slightly in that, from 1998 to 2009, it served as a test bed for a series of reforms intended to extend to the entire regulated professional system. These reforms include the introduction of the concept of “reserved acts”, more focused than the former “exclusive fields” established in 1973 and more apt to be shared by several professions. Reforms also include the concept of multi-professional colleges and a more formal process regarding the demands of groups who wish to join the professional system. All these reforms were implemented through laws amending the Professional Code and specifically aimed at the health sector, primarily the *Act to amend the Professional Code and other provisions as regards the health sector* (2002, regarding “physical health”) and the *Act to amend the Professional Code and other provisions in the field of mental health and human relations* (2009). To this day, these laws, and especially the regulations stemming from them, remain the main channels for changing the rules regarding the health professions. Changes to the reserved acts or their interpretation require the approval of the *Office des Professions, as do changes concerning training (whether initial or continuing) or admission to the profession* for locally or internationally trained candidates.

Despite reforms, the Quebec professional system remains centralised. There are 55 regulated professions governed by 46 professional colleges, all reporting to the Office des professions and governed under the Professional Code and, in some cases, legislation related to the Code. As a result, “the professional system includes approximately 900 regulations, the largest volume in the Quebec government” (Quebec Interprofessional Council [QIC], 2021), with all changes going through the Office.

There are signs that both the state system and professional regulators are willing to reduce this political and administrative traffic, although without questioning the integrated nature of the system. The main sign is the creation in 2017 of a "Commissioner for Admission to Professions" position to oversee the admissions processes of the 46 colleges. Another indication is the mobilisation of professional colleges, especially since 2019, who deplore how cumbersome and slow the regulatory process is. Finally, the routine of always having the same minister (traditionally the Minister of Justice) be in charge of overseeing the professions was broken in the summer of 2020: the assignment was given to the Minister of Higher Education in 2020-2022 and to the President of the Treasury Board in 2022, in part for contingent reasons but also because of a new recognition of the impact of professional system issues on health sector policy and on the public sector in general.

British Columbia

The ecology of professional regulation is less integrated in British Columbia. Indeed, it may be more appropriate to refer to ecologies plural, as professions are regulated under several pieces of legislation. Until recently, most professions in BC were self-regulating, and legislation recognised a regulatory body (called a society, association, or college) governed by a board composed of elected professionals and appointed public members, subject to general oversight from a government ministry office. Health professions have been governed by regulations under the *Health Professions Amendment Act* (British Columbia, 2003). Legislation passed in November 2018 and implemented in February 2021 brought several professions in the building and resources sector together under one *Professional Governance Act*. This legislation governs engineers and geoscientists, professional foresters, applied science technicians and technologists, applied biologists, agrologists, and, most recently, architects. These professions continue to be self-regulating, but the framework of the act has brought more standardisation to their activities and processes and subjects them all to the oversight of the Office of the Superintendent of Professional Governance, which is housed in the Office of the Attorney General.

Recently, new legislation to govern BC health professions has been passed (but at the time of writing, not enacted). In 2020, there were 25 healthcare professions governed by 20 regulatory colleges under the 2003 Health Professions Act (HPA) (the number of regulators dropped to 18 in 2021 following some amalgamations). Each college was empowered to govern many aspects of practice, including registration, professional conduct and discipline, under the oversight of the Ministry of Health. The Act itself is very general; many details, including which professions are governed under the act and what their scopes of practice are, are detailed in regulations and by-laws under the Act. This legislation was designed to be flexible — regulation change is much easier to implement than legislative change — but with so many colleges and everything from public appointments to by-law changes requiring ministerial review, it is considered cumbersome. For these and other reasons, the Ministry of Health in British Columbia pursued a “modernisation” project, passing new legislation to reduce the number

of regulatory colleges to six, increase public representation on regulatory bodies, eliminate self-regulation by decreasing professionals' participation on regulatory bodies, increase oversight by establishing a Health Professions Review Board, and change disciplinary processes (British Columbia Steering Committee on Modernization of Health Professional Regulation, 2020).

Several other professions in the province — including lawyers, accountants, land surveyors, social workers and veterinarians — are regulated under separate acts. Regulatory oversight has been assigned to various government ministries (including the Office of the Attorney General, the Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development, Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries).

Overall, in 2021, professional regulators in British Columbia were governed under numerous pieces of legislation and overseen by separate government ministries and offices. Thus, the ecology of professional regulation in British Columbia is less co-ordinated than in Quebec and may be best characterised as several linked ecologies rather than a single ecology. State-profession relations are complex and variable.

Methodology

This paper relies on the analysis of laws and by-law modifications concerning regulated professions enacted from March 4, 2020, to November 11, 2021, in the provinces of Quebec and British Columbia. Data were taken from a broader project that included three distinct datasets: regulatory change (laws and by-laws), media discourse, and professional bodies' output, all of which were intended to serve different research purposes. The analysis we present here is based solely on the regulations dataset, which is the most appropriate for a comparative analysis of the ecologies of professional regulation across province and state-profession relations.

This dataset was constructed by applying web scraping techniques to the public electronic libraries, giving access to all laws and bylaws of Quebec and British Columbia. For Quebec, the data collection was based on a set of 3327 documents taken from the Gazette officielle du Québec¹, exported in "PDF" and "txt" format and then queried. For British Columbia, data was collected on a set of 2141 documents from the BC Laws library, queried via the Civix Server API² and then exported in PDF and txt format after identification. For British Columbia, given the online format of directives, the search was augmented by the manual collection of 48 public health-related documents: all the "Office of the Provincial Health Officer Orders" (45 documents) and all the "Medical Health Officer Orders" (three documents) issued during

¹ *Gazette officielle. Part 2: Laws and Regulations*, <https://www.publicationsduquebec.gouv.qc.ca/en/gazette-officielle/gazette-officielle-du-quebec/part-2-laws-and-regulations/>

² <https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/template/complete/api/index.html>

the review period. For both provinces, the search included all regulatory changes that occurred during the review period.

Data collection was done in two steps. The first step was an automated collection using the R programming language (version 4.0.4)³. This sweep included all documents containing direct reference to a professional regulatory body (e.g. “Chartered Professional Accountants of British Columbia”) or reference to a reserved professional designation (e.g. “professional accountant”). These two types of mentions were classified separately. This collection allowed us to isolate 597 documents in Quebec and 244 documents in British Columbia. The second step was a human evaluation of the selected documents in order to reject irrelevant documents (due to typos or ambiguous search terms). After this cleaning process, the final dataset includes 280 documents from Quebec and 195 documents from British Columbia.⁴ Despite varied document formats, both provinces underwent the same procedure, ensuring the collected data represent the entirety of regulatory documents mentioning professional regulatory bodies or reserved professional designations within the complete regulatory landscape of each province. The remaining documentary differences are, therefore, indicators of the distinct ways in which the two provinces utilise regulatory pathways to impact regulated professions.

The data were interpreted using a neo-institutionalist lens (Powell & Bromley, 2015; Rizza, 2008) and a propositional analysis method, which allows both the thematic comparison of documents and their recombination into a series of defined episodes that can be properly contextualised (Drisko & Maschi, 2016; Née & Véniard, 2012).

Each selected regulatory change was coded in a 17-entry grid. Besides general information (which occupations are affected, in which industry), the most important items for this paper were to determine: if the legislator explicitly linked this regulatory change with the pandemic crisis; whether or not this regulatory change built on a pre-pandemic issue; whether the document referred upfront to professional orders or legislation (e.g. Professional Code or Health Professions Act) or rather its effect on professional regulation was incidental; whether the regulatory change affected the content of the work, the admission of professionals, training or the governance of professional colleges. Finally, the identification of co-occurrences al-

³ Data collection was done using the packages “tidyverse” (1.3.0), “data.table” (1.14.0), “here” (1.0.1), xlsx (0.6.5) and uuid (1.0.1). The extraction of the text was done using the packages “pdftools” (2.3.1) and “tabulizers” (0.2.2).

⁴ The proportion of rejected documents is higher (317/517) for Quebec because it was used as a first test, leading to improved collection operations and a lower rejection rate (49/244) for BC. Of the 195 documents analysed in BC, 30 had been among those identified manually. To our knowledge, the separate disclosure of regulatory documents by BC’s Public Health Officer is a unique case in this province, so that the legislative databases of the two provinces remain comparable, both being composed of a search encompassing all regulatory documents produced by the provincial legislature during this period.

lowed us to determine propositional clusters and thus to reconstruct a series of defined episodes linking multiple documents to a common context (e.g. the reform of the correctional system in Quebec). Documenting these contexts was made possible by complementary documentary searches and, in the case of Quebec, by consultation with representatives of the Quebec Interprofessional Council, a body representing professional colleges.

These various indicators make it possible to analyse shifts in the ecology of professional regulation and the professions ecology, including the following: the use of regulatory changes to alter professionals' scopes of practice and how they do their work; the relationship between these regulatory changes and pre-existing professional projects; whether or not they were related to the pandemic crisis, including whether the changes related to the crisis were truly new issues or the continuation of pre-existing issues. The choice to compare Quebec and British Columbia is justified by both the similarities and the differences between the two provinces. In terms of similarities, both professional systems are of comparable size, share several legal features, and were already considering significant reforms prior to the pandemic. The comparable size and traits underscore the significance of Quebec's centralised ecology of professional regulation in contrast to British Columbia's less centralised system.

By comparing the two provinces, we can address our research questions and shed light on the impact of the pandemic crisis on specific professional projects in health care. In so doing, the study has both theoretical and methodological significance: it not only nuances ecological theory but it also demonstrates how a few indicators can be used to characterise the differences between the ecologies of professional regulation in two provinces.

Findings

Part A: What changes were made, and how did the changes differ across provinces?

By analysing all laws and by-law modifications concerning regulated professions enacted from March 4, 2020, to November 11, 2021, by Quebec and British Columbia, we explored how professional work changed during the pandemic and how the changes varied across provinces (and ecologies of professional regulation). Table 1 presents the number of modifications in each province impacting regulated professions in the healthcare sector and regulated professions not in health. The table also provides insight into the regulatory dynamics by categorising documents explicitly referencing a professional regulatory body (college, order, association) and those with explicit reference to legislation governing the professional ecology (e.g., Health Professions Act or Code des professions). These two categories, while not mutually exclusive, serve as indicators of the professional regulatory ecology, revealing aspects such as the diversity of regulatory pathways employed and whether changes affecting professionals necessitate, or not, engagement with specific legislation, state bodies, or professional colleges.

Table 1

Laws and by-laws modifications concerning regulated professions in Quebec and British Columbia, March 4, 2020, to November 11, 2021

	Total number of documents (March 2020 to Nov. 2021)	Number of documents referencing a professional regulatory body	Number of documents referencing legislation governing the professional system
Québec	280	156 (56% of total)	125 (45% of total)
<i>Qc – healthcare only</i>	145 (52% of total)	73	71
British Columbia	195	167 (86% of total)	126 (65% of total)
<i>BC – healthcare only</i>	144 (74% of total)	134	110

These basic indicators highlight major differences in regulatory practices within the two provinces, with their distinct ecologies of professional regulation. Quebec produced significantly more regulatory activity, in part because this activity extended more widely to sectors other than health: the healthcare sector accounted for only 52% of Quebec documents, compared with 74% in British Columbia. In Quebec, regulation of professions requires more interaction between the state and professions ecologies. Quebec's regulatory activities also take more varied forms: in British Columbia, the vast majority of by-laws, especially relating to healthcare, contained a direct reference to a professional college (167 out of 195, or 86%) and often to a piece of legislation like the HPA (126 out of 195, or 65%), while such references were much less systematic in Quebec (56% and 45%, respectively). These variations have a number of implications, not least methodological, since they affect data collection and interpretation. For example, collecting regulatory texts based solely on references to regulatory bodies or specific laws would yield incomplete data, with the degree of incompleteness and induced biases varying across regimes. Therefore, a comprehensive collection should also encompass references to reserved professional designations, as done here. Conversely, such an inclusive collection furnishes efficient indicators for promptly discerning key features of a given ecology of professional regulation and laying a valid foundation for comparison.

Other indicators (Table 2) describe the content of the regulatory activities. These give more information about the influence of the pandemic crisis on the regulation of professions. We look at three indicators here.

Table 2

Content of laws and by-laws modifications concerning regulated professions in Quebec and British Columbia, March 4, 2020, to November 11, 2021

	1 Link with pandemic	2 Affecting the performance of a restricted task at work	3 Restricted task + Link with pandemic	4 Affecting licensing	5 Licensing + Link with pandemic
Québec (n=280)	71	146	39	72	18
<i>Qc – healthcare only</i>	53 (75%)	79 (54%)	29 (74%)	49 (68%)	18 (100%)
BC (n=195)	39	41	33	6	5
<i>BC – healthcare only</i>	35 (90%)	36 (88%)	29 (88%)	5 (83%)	5 (100%)

In column 1, we classify each law or by-law modification as related or unrelated to the pandemic. Pandemic-related regulatory modifications weigh roughly the same in both datasets (25% for Quebec and 20% for British Columbia) and, not surprisingly, are mainly concerned with the healthcare sector. But, as in the rest of the corpus, this focus on healthcare was more exclusive in British Columbia (90% of pandemic-related regulations) than in Quebec (75%), where legislators have used more "pandemic regulations" in other sectors, such as notarial and land-related activities. The impact of the pandemic in Quebec, therefore, was felt more throughout the professions ecology, but in BC it was felt primarily within the ecology of health profession regulation.

In columns 2 and 3, we indicated whether a regulatory modification affected a particular profession's rights to perform a restricted task at work (e.g. prescribing medication, interpreting an X-ray, vaccinating) and, if so, whether or not this change was related to the pandemic. Regulatory changes concerning restricted work tasks are of strategic importance for professional projects. Apart from the pandemic, they are approached very differently in Quebec and British Columbia. In Quebec, no less than 52% of all regulatory activities relating to professions (146 out of 280) affected work tasks in a variety of sectors, compared with only 21% (41 out of 195) in British Columbia, where this was predominantly limited to healthcare. Pandemic-related measures were more similar, although they appear to have been a mostly crisis-specific response within healthcare in British Columbia (29 out of 33, or 88%, were healthcare-related); this was less the case in Quebec (29 out of 39, or 74%). These figures provide an additional indicator of structural differences between the ecologies of professional regulation in the two provinces (column 2) while suggesting that the crisis appears to have a standardising effect on regulatory practices, albeit only to a certain extent (column 3).

In columns 4 and 5, we indicated whether a change affected admission to a profession and, if so, whether or not this change was related to the pandemic (e.g. a fast-track prompted by the state of crisis). This type of regulatory change was far less frequent than the previous one (26% of Quebec documents and 3% of British Columbia documents), but it was strongly stimulated by the pandemic crisis, and exclusively in the healthcare sector: 100% of licensing modifications linked to the pandemic focused on healthcare in both provinces. Here again, it appeared as a crisis-specific innovation in British Columbia, and in Quebec as a more familiar tool (see Column 4) whose use was only amplified by the crisis.

Overall, the tables reveal that, during the review period, regulatory change impacted a more diverse range of professions in Quebec, but predominantly health professions in BC. This appears to reflect the nature of the ecology of professional regulation in each province. In Quebec, with its singular ecology, the impact of the pandemic was felt in a wider range of professions, while in BC, it was felt primarily within the ecology of health profession regulation. Moreover, Quebec made more changes during the pandemic, and the province also made more changes that seem less related to the pandemic but rather reflect issues raised prior to the pandemic. This difference may reflect the broader observation that the Quebec ecology of professional regulation requires greater interaction between professions and the state, and the various pieces within the ecology are highly integrated. This is expressed in the data by the number of regulatory changes produced by the state, in the variety of sectors concerned, and in the types of interventions since Quebec's regulatory changes more routinely affect work tasks and admission. Finally, the data show that these differences are partially smoothed out when regulatory measures concern the pandemic, but only up to a point, as contextual particularities also appear in measures aimed at the pandemic crisis.

Part B: Pandemic-spurred opportunities for health professional projects.

In our next stage of analysis, we took a closer look at a series of defined episodes, reflecting interactions between professions and the state over professional work tasks and licensing. Episodes were constructed by first selecting documents affecting reserved work tasks or licensing, then grouping these documents based on the professions involved and whether or not documents were related to the pandemic crisis. The overall picture, all sectors included, is in line with the results discussed above. Looking more closely at health professions alone, we can see that some professions were able to take advantage of an opportunity provided by the pandemic to alter their scope of practice or licensing in some manner. We identified nine different episodes in Quebec (involving a total of 42 documents) and six episodes in British Columbia involving a total of 28 documents (see Table 3). Of these episodes, six in Quebec and six in BC involved health professions experiencing alterations of their list of restricted tasks (an alteration of their scopes of practice) linked with the pandemic. In each province, five of these episodes advanced a professional project already in progress or altered the scope of practice of an existing health profession. From this, we conclude that the pandemic crisis

has accelerated specific professional projects that were already underway, especially towards greater delegation of reserved acts to non-medical regulated health professions.

Table 3

Episodes of regulatory activities affecting restricted professional tasks in Quebec and British Columbia, March 4, 2020, to November 11, 2021

	Total number of episodes affecting a restricted task at work	Restricted task + Link with pandemic	Task + Pandemic + Advance existing professional project
Québec – all sectors	16 episodes (involving 105 documents)	9 episodes (involving 55 documents)	n.a.
Québec – healthcare only	9 episodes (involving 54 documents)	6 episodes (involving 42 documents)	5 episodes
BC – all sectors	10 episodes (involving 36 documents)	7 episodes (involving 31 documents)	n.a.
BC – healthcare only	6 episodes (involving 28 documents)	6 episodes (involving 28 documents)	5 episodes

Certain changes were common to both provinces. In both, crisis policies accelerated reforms to scopes of practice that were already underway, concerning the prescribing and management of drugs, expanding the scope of practice of pharmacists and nurses. Both Quebec and British Columbia adopted emergency, pandemic-related measures for this purpose through various documents between May 2020 and December 2020. To be sure, the details were strongly influenced by the local context: in British Columbia, this reform was prompted by another crisis, the opioid crisis, and many of the new powers given to pharmacists and nurses were specifically aimed at prescribing and treating drugs for substance addiction (through regulations adopted from July 2020 to October 2020). In both provinces, however, the pandemic-related measures granted additional rights for pharmacists and nurses to prescribe, adjust or substitute drugs, often with the declared purpose of alleviating physicians' workload (through regulations adopted between March and December 2020). For example, a December 2020 Quebec by-law accelerated the adoption and expanded the scope of the already planned reform of pharmacists' work, invoking "1. the current COVID-19 pandemic is putting increased pressure on the healthcare system; 2. the urgent need to free certain professionals, notably family physicians, from certain services that can be provided in pharmacies" (Quebec, 2020b, p. 5169A). In British Columbia, from May to September 2020, opioid-related modifications that extended nurses' ability to order lab tests was also expanded due to the pandemic.

But some professional projects have been accelerated by the pandemic in just one province. In Quebec, the pandemic crisis justified accelerating the implementation of regulations concerning the professionalisation of psychosocial assessments in prisons, benefiting criminologists and psycho-educators — notably via a ministerial decree of April 2021 that linked this issue with the extension of pandemic emergency measures to mental health services (in other decrees of December 2020 and July 2021).

Secondly, broader measures, such as COVID testing or vaccination, although not initially targeting particular professions, nonetheless intersected with specific professional projects, depending on the situation. Similar situations were observed in both provinces. This is the case for midwives, to whom the crisis measures gave more extensive rights — in Quebec to prescribe certain drugs and tests (as of April 2020), in British Columbia to order certain laboratory tests (in documents from June 2020 to June 2021). In both cases, these reserved activities anticipate sustainable gains for the profession.

Other situations depended on local contexts. For example, paramedics in British Columbia gained the right to conduct COVID-testing, first in November 2020, with increased autonomy in May 2021. Conversely, Quebec paramedics never received this right: even though some local health authorities entrusted them with testing tasks during the summer of 2020, they expected a ministerial decree that never materialised. Quebec paramedic representatives protested because the right to COVID-testing would have advanced their long-standing demands for greater autonomy in front-line patient assessment. Similarly, respiratory therapists in Quebec had demanded in 2019 the right to vaccinate in order to strengthen their position in front-line practice. They, therefore, saw the pandemic crisis as an opportunity to renew their demand for the right to vaccinate, which they obtained by ministerial decree in December 2020. Once again, this situation appears specific to Quebec (Fardeau, 2023).

The mentioned episodes show how crisis measures can directly intersect with ongoing professional projects — whether the state system planned for it or not. These intersections stimulated the development of non-medical professions such as midwives, nurses, paramedics and pharmacists.

Conversely, other episodes suggest that crisis measures not aligned with underway professional projects can reinforce the status quo. The data include two subsets of episodes hinting at this direction. The first subset corresponds, in Table 3, to the single episodes in each province that affect tasks but not professional projects. They feature documents (ten in Quebec, five in BC) that were adopted to deploy emergency health measures, including by restricting access to places or services; they all designate only medical doctors with the authority to issue authorisations or certifications, replicating a default disposition common in many other regulatory texts. The second subset of episodes concerns the admission of foreign-trained professionals. Despite this being a prominent issue before and during the pandemic crisis, governments produced few regulations on the subject. In Quebec, although the crisis prompted

significant regulatory activity for the temporary licensing of students and retirees (13 pandemic-related documents from March 2020 to July 2021), it did not accelerate the licensing, even temporarily, of foreign-trained health professionals (zero pandemic-related documents). Similar dynamics occurred in British Columbia. This may suggest that global issues relating to the ecology of professional regulation as a whole, but without roots in pre-existing professional projects or in a specific professional ecology, did not inspire consequent modifications in times of crisis.

While not all episodes or alterations to scope of practice intersected with pre-existing professional projects or significantly altered scopes of practice, the pandemic spurred opportunities for reform that some health professionals — like pharmacists and nurses — were able to benefit from through expanded jurisdictions. Moreover, opportunities varied across province. Pre-existing concerns in each province (the opioid crisis in BC, mental health in prisons in Quebec) shaped change, indicating that pre-existing conjuncture, by definition subject to important variations across local contexts, might be a decisive factor during a crisis. It is less clear that the structure of the ecology of professional regulation impacted opportunities in the health sphere, but it appears to have shaped opportunities outside healthcare, which were largely lacking in British Columbia, unlike Quebec.

Conclusion

This paper explored professional regulatory change during the COVID-19 pandemic in two Canadian provinces. Our research was informed by ecological theory and aimed to shed light on how the nature of an ecology of professional regulation impacts regulatory reform in response to crisis through a comparative study.

Our first research question asked what changes were made to professional regulation in the two provinces during the first 18 months of the pandemic and whether the nature of these changes appeared to be influenced by the distinct regulatory structures in each province. Our data analysis identified that many changes were made impacting professional regulation in each province, including changes to scopes of practice, work tasks, and entry to practice. More changes were made in Quebec generally, and this was particularly the case for professions outside of the health sphere. In British Columbia, fewer changes were made, and the vast majority of these changes impacted health professions. Following our analysis, this difference can be accounted for by the distinct ecologies of professional regulation in the two provinces. In Quebec, there is one tightly integrated ecology, encompassing all professions and requiring a great deal of co-ordination between state, professions and professional regulators. As Abbott (1988) has argued, a change to jurisdiction in one ecology can have ripple effects throughout that ecology. Here we see the impact of the pandemic crisis was felt throughout these ecologies, including outside of healthcare. In contrast, in British Columbia, there are multiple ecologies of professional regulation. The pandemic primarily led to changes

in the ecology of healthcare profession regulation, but not others. Data showed that the structural differences between the two regimes were partially smoothed out when regulatory measures related to the pandemic, but only up to a point, as contextual particularities also appear in measures aimed at the pandemic crisis.

Our second research question asked whether the pandemic created opportunities for some professional groups to expand their claims to jurisdiction and their scope of practice. To answer this question, we did follow-up analyses on specific episodes — clusters of changes that together affected and altered professions' "restricted tasks" or scopes. Again, there were fewer of these episodes affecting non-health professions in British Columbia than in Quebec. Looking just at healthcare episodes, we find that the pandemic provided an opportunity for several professions in each province to advance a professional project — many of which were begun prior to the pandemic. Professions like nursing and pharmacy were particularly advantaged in both provinces. Despite similarities across provinces, there were some differences as well, highlighting that context continues to matter. In this manner, the pandemic crisis accelerated the implementation of pre-existing reform projects, and, in the health sector, it has encouraged the delegation of reserved acts from the medical profession to other healthcare professions. The ecology of professional regulation shaped how these changes were implemented, even as many of the changes made were similar across provinces.

Importantly, none of the changes made altered the ecology of professional regulation or the division of labour between professions and the state within that ecology. However, change was already underway in BC, with the Professional Governance Act implemented during the pandemic and a new division of jurisdiction within the ecology of health profession regulation created through legislation (implementation in progress at the time of writing). In Quebec, the pandemic has spurred conversations about changing reserved acts and scopes of practice more broadly in the health sphere, but the ecology of professional regulation itself remained unchanged during the period of our study.

Although more work remains to be done to unpack regulatory change within Canada (and, comparatively, internationally), our current research makes the following contributions to ecological theory. First, our research highlights that the pandemic was a crisis that generated change within the ecology of professions (respecting who does what), but its impact on the structure of the ecology of professional regulation is less clear. Second, our research highlights that the impact of change varies depending on the nature and structure of the ecologies of professional regulation involved, as shown in our comparison between Quebec and British Columbia. The pandemic had a broader impact in Quebec since the ecology of professional regulation is more inclusive and state-profession relations are more integrative in that ecology. Finally, crises can create hinges — such as concerns about access to services — that impact both the state and professions ecologies, but not every group within an ecology will benefit equally: data suggest the hypothesis that crisis-related issues are more likely to induce or

speed up durable changes if they intersect with pre-existing and ongoing professional projects. On a methodological level, our research demonstrates that collecting data about regulatory changes provides a practical way to detect and characterise differences between different ecologies of professional regulation.

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School Counsellors' Professional Practice in Health Promotion, Prevention and Remedial Work in Swedish Schools

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Abstract

According to the *Swedish Education Act*, schools in Sweden must provide comprehensive student health services to foster an inclusive and conducive learning environment, promoting students' well-being and knowledge development. As part of a multi-professional team, school counsellors are essential in achieving these goals. However, national guidance lacks details on the role of school counsellors in health promotion, prevention and remedial efforts. This study addresses this knowledge gap by examining aspects of school counsellors' professional work using theories of professions. Open-ended answers in a survey distributed to school counsellors in Sweden were analysed through content analysis. Findings show that remedial work primarily focuses on individual students' social issues through conversation-based interventions. Preventive work targets groups and the broader school environment, often involving tasks like policy development. Health promotion work stands out with its educational component, where school counsellors are involved in Life Competence Education, often in collaboration with other school professionals.

Keywords

School counsellor, school social work, health promotion, prevention, remedial work, professional jurisdiction

Introduction

According to the *Swedish Education Act* (Skollagen, 2010), all schools in Sweden at the primary and secondary level must have access to comprehensive student health services. The overall goal for student health work is the same as for the entire school — to create an equal and inclusive school with a good learning environment that prevents illness and strengthens both the student's well-being and their knowledge development (Hjörne & Säljö, 2021). The school is expected to provide students with high-level knowledge and skills to enable them to shape their health actively (St Leger, 2001). School counsellors, together with other professionals such as teachers, nurses, psychologists and special educators, are part of a school-based multi-professional team: the student health team. According to the Education Act, the student health team shall work to promote students' learning, health and development towards the goals of education. The student health team and its professions are expected to primarily work on health promotion and prevention to achieve the overall goal. Health promotion aims to strengthen or maintain students' physical, mental and social well-being, with the intention of strengthening their opportunities for participation and confidence in their abilities. Preventive work aims to reduce the risk of ill health by reducing the influence of risk factors on the individual and, at the same time, strengthening the protective factors (Socialstyrelsen & Skolverket, 2016). Health promotion and prevention efforts can be individual, group or structure-oriented and should be characterised by a salutogenic perspective. Student health services and the work of school counsellors can also be remedial.

Remedial work refers to efforts to deal with problems and situations in school, in a group, or with an individual student. In the Education Act, the student health professions are described as a group of professions with different jurisdictions but with the shared task of working together around the students' health. The school counsellor is responsible for the school's psychosocial efforts. The Education Act is formulated as a framework law and does not provide detailed descriptions of the concrete contents of the school counsellor's work or how it is to be conducted. In the national guidance documents for student health services (Socialstyrelsen & Skolverket, 2016), school counsellors' work and tasks are painted in broad strokes and do not contain concrete descriptions of their duties. Despite a statutory welfare policy mission with a focus on health promotion and preventive work, research (Akademikerförbundet SSR, 2021; Kjellgren et al., 2023; Linblad & Backlund, 2017) shows that school counsellors work focuses more on remedial work rather than to fulfil the Education Act's intentions regarding health promotion and preventive work.

Aim

The aim of this article is to examine the work of school counsellors in promoting health, preventing issues, and providing remedies. Specifically, the study focuses on the performative aspects of their work (Brante, 2014; Molander & Terum, 2008), which includes the central topics or problems that prompt their professional efforts and the actions or activities they take to alleviate problems and promote positive development (Abbott, 1988). The study also

looks into the recipients of their interventions (Molander & Terum, 2008) and the extent to which school counsellors can independently and actively make decisions based on their competence (Abbott, 1988; Freidson, 2001).

Background

In the middle of the past century, the Swedish state began to link health-related goals to the school's mission. Teachers became essential for conveying society's message about healthy habits to children and to the home (Guvå, 2009; Hammarberg, 2014; Isaksson & Larsson, 2012). In addition to the teachers' pedagogical role, school health care was introduced with a clear medical focus, which became part of a national programme for increased public health. During the 1950s, the idea emerged that interventions of a more social character were needed; people began to talk about socially-oriented student care focusing on psychosocial problems, where the counsellor's main task was to be an intermediary link between school, home and child welfare authorities. Socially-oriented student care would contribute to facilitating the work of the school's teachers. The increased attention to mental and relational ill health in children meant that the number of school counsellors increased at the country's schools (Guvå, 2009; Hammarberg, 2014; Isaksson & Larsson, 2012).

During the 1970s, discussions about the tasks and duties of school counsellors intensified. Social anxiety was increasing in a society where such issues as social life, abuse and integration received greater attention than before (Isaksson & Larsson, 2012). It was emphasised that the school counsellor's work would be preventive, while at the same time, there was an idea that the students' health and well-being were a concern for everyone who worked in the school (Isaksson & Larsson, 2012).

Since the turn of the century, attention has been drawn to the need to coordinate and integrate medically oriented school health care and psychosocially oriented student care, as well as to link the school's special educational efforts more closely to the activities of school health care and student care. These ideas resulted in an amendment to the Education Act in 2010. The schools were now required to integrate and coordinate medical, psychological, psychosocial and special educational interventions and to have access to the relevant competence. The law covers preschool classes and primary and secondary schools, that is, large parts of the Swedish education system for children and young people (Skollagen, 2010). The previous organisational division between school health care and student care was thereby abolished. In its place, the new *student health services* were established (Guvå, 2009).

Traditionally, school counsellors in Sweden have had training in social work and a degree of Bachelor in Social Work (Isaksson & Larsson, 2012; Jansson et al., 2022; Skolverket, 2022). School counsellors in Sweden are predominantly women (92%) who work full-time (77%) and are employed in public schools (89%) (Akademikerförbundet SSR, 2021). Since the introduction of the School Act in 2010, the number of school counsellors has more than doubled to 3,120 positions in Swedish public schools (Sverigers Kommuner och Regioner (SKR), 2023a).

School counsellor is an organisational title indicating a specific position within the school's organisation and thus does not fall within the scope of the definition of a classic profession (Brante, 2013). Unlike a traditional definition of profession, social workers, including school counsellors, can be described as a semi-profession or a welfare profession (Brante, 2013; Stichweh, 2008). Regardless of the debate about a specific definition of the concept of professions and its content, in this article, school counsellors are meant as a professional group that is primarily active in the service sector and is knowledge-based, sometimes with several years of higher education, vocational training and practical experience and can therefore be equated with a profession and is studied from a professional theoretical perspective.

Theoretical framework

Based on Abbott's theory (Abbott, 1988), this article considers the student health services and school as a "system of professions" where jurisdictional boundaries are drawn. Professional studies have traditionally taken a static view of the occupational system and have mainly focused on identifying the characteristics that distinguish occupations from other occupational groups and how these characteristics relate to their economic and social power. Abbott provides a more complex analysis of the relationships between professional occupations and the forces that shape these relationships over time. Although Abbott's theory is based on classical professions and has been criticised for overemphasising its global generality, the theory has had an enormous scholarly impact (Brante, 2014) and has previously, albeit sporadically, been used in studies of teacher and school counsellor professionalism (Hordern, 2024; Isaksson & Larsson, 2017).

Jurisdiction refers to the specific niche in the labour market that a profession operates in and claims to control. In a metaphorical sense, jurisdictions can be likened to the plot boundaries of the professional landscape in that they separate different professions' domains of tasks and expertise from one another. Jurisdiction constitutes the assignments, tasks and control that a profession maintains and claims in the societal division of labour (Abbott, 1988). Jurisdiction also means that a profession has control over specific knowledge and certain tasks and strives to monopolise these. Professions articulate their jurisdictional claims in competition with other professions in the workplace. The claims are also made in what Abbott (1988) terms public and legal arenas. The public arena consists of public opinion, in which politics forms an important part. In the legal arena, which Abbott equates with the administrative, planning and legislative structures of the state, professional groups try to win legal recognition from the state. The legal arena can provide formal control over work, which means that the state controls the jurisdiction of professional groups through legislation and administration. For the school counsellor, the provision of a statutory requirement of access to school counsellors and a focus on health promotion and prevention work can be examples of formal control.

Another central aspect of jurisdiction is that it points out the content of the tasks to which the profession's efforts are directed. A distinguishing feature of professional work is that professionals provide services to solve human problems (Abbott, 1988). The problems may concern individuals, such as individual students or teachers, or groups and organisations, such as classes or school organisations. Built into the concept of jurisdiction are notions that professions claim "problem areas" or a specific "theme" to maintain the jurisdictional boundary.

Jurisdiction can also be linked to the profession's knowledge, methods, and interventions. *Interventions* can be understood as actions or activities carried out to solve or alleviate a specific problem or promote positive development. Problem-solving occurs through the application of specialist knowledge (Abbott, 1988) and professional judgment or discretion (Molander et al., 2012). According to Abbott (1988), problem formulation and problem-solving can be understood in terms of diagnosis, inference, and treatment, which are fundamental activities in professional work regardless of profession. Diagnosis can be understood in terms of the profession acquiring an overall picture of the client's problem to decide whether it is a legitimate area of work for the profession. Abbott uses the term inference to refer to the reasoning that is made and the time that passes between diagnosis and treatment. Carrying out diagnosis and treatment, and thus succeeding with inferences, gives professionals control.

An important aspect of jurisdiction is professionals' freedom of action or autonomy. From a sociological perspective, the study's analytical concept of *professional autonomy* can be understood as room for manoeuvre and be defined as the professional's ability to independently and actively make decisions and act based on their competence (Freidson, 2001), their organisational context (Evans, 2013), and the prevailing laws and regulations (Dworkin, 1977). In other words, freedom of action is not entirely free of limitations, but is affected by society and by organisations' structures and organisational conditions. These limitations may mean that specific actions or alternatives are difficult or impossible to implement, while others appear more prominent or may be implemented more easily. These theoretical assumptions can be used to analyse school counsellors' professional practice in health promotion, prevention, and remedial work.

Method

The study collected data via a web-based survey consisting of 91 questions addressed to Swedish school counsellors. The survey contained questions with fixed and open-answer options. In the present study, the data consisted of responses to the following three questions, which were analysed through qualitative content analysis: *What health-promoting interventions do you make? What preventive interventions do you make? What remedial interventions do you make?* The questions had open answers where the respondents described their efforts in their own words.

The ambition of the survey was to reach all school counsellors in Sweden. At the time the questionnaire was distributed, there was no register of school counsellors in Sweden. According to statistics from Sweden's Municipalities and Regions (SKR, 2023b), when the survey was sent out in 2019, there were approximately 2,600 full-time positions as school counsellors in Swedish municipal schools. There were, however, no statistics on how many school counsellor positions there were at independent (private) schools in Sweden. It was also unknown how many persons were actually employed as school counsellors. The survey was therefore distributed via email to members of the trade union organisation Akademikerförbundet SSR, which has approximately 1,400 individuals in its member register who have stated that they work as school counsellors. Respondents were also recruited through the Association of School Counsellors' Facebook group and a profession-specific Facebook group for school counsellors, "Bollplank för Skolkuratorer". The chosen distribution channels ensured that a significant majority, although it is unclear how large, had been invited to respond to the survey. When the survey ended in October 2019, 451 responses had been received. Of the 451 respondents who answered the survey, the three open questions were left unanswered by 78 (health-promoting), 66 (preventive) and 59 (remedial).

Data analysis

Although the data collection tool generated both quantitative and qualitative data, this study is mainly based on qualitative data. Data analysis was performed based on directed content analysis introduced by Hsieh and Shannon (Assarroudi et al., 2018; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The analysis focused on manifest content (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). The first step was to read through the data material several times to create an understanding of the whole of the material. Then, a categorisation matrix was created based on the theoretical concepts of the purpose: *problem*, *recipient of interventions*, *interventions*, and *professional autonomy* and a test coding of the material was carried out to reinforce the understanding of the material and validate the categorisation matrix. Units of meaning were identified, guided by the theoretical assumptions and condensed, categorised, and sorted under the theoretical concepts. The categories were assessed according to internal homogeneity, that is, how the categories interrelate, and external heterogeneity, namely the degree to which differences between categories are apparent (Patton, 2015). Finally, the categorisation was reviewed, moving back and forth between the empirical data and the theoretical system to verify the meaningfulness and accuracy of the categories and the placement of categories within themes (Patton, 2015).

Methodological reflections

To achieve reliability, the study has considered transferability, dependability and credibility (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). To facilitate the transferability of the study's results, the contextual conditions, selection, characteristics of the respondents, and the analysis process are clearly described (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004).

The respondents

A total of 451 school counsellors answered the survey. Of these, 91.8 percent were women and 8.2 percent were men. The age distribution was slightly skewed, with a typical value of 32 years and a mean and median of 43.7 and 43 years, respectively (standard deviation 10.71). Of the respondents, 77.5% worked full-time. It is somewhat more common for male school counsellors to work full-time (86.5%, as compared to 76.7% of women). The difference seems significant but should not be over-interpreted due to the small percentage of men. To summarise, the typical school counsellor is a woman in her 40s who works full-time and holds a Bachelor in Social Work.

Ethical considerations

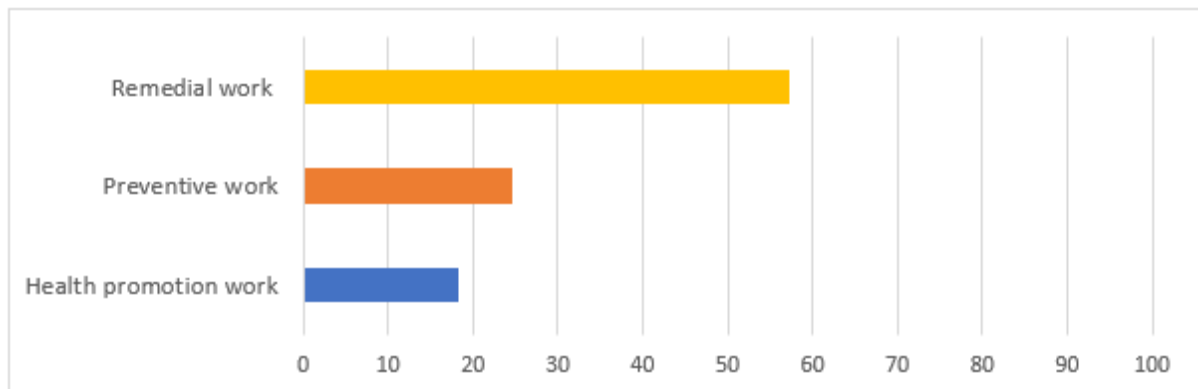
In Sweden, research involving human subjects is regulated by the *Act Concerning the Ethical Review of Research Involving Humans* (Lag om etikprövning av forskning som avser människor, 2003). Exceptions are made for research that does not involve sensitive personal data, and that does not involve physical intervention or damage. The current study is non-interventional and does not require ethical approval, as it does not handle sensitive personal data, and respondents cannot be identified in the survey. Due to the selection procedure, the authors never had access to any register to identify respondents. The research has followed ethical guidelines according to standard codes and the Swedish Research Council's recommendations for good research (ALLEA All European Academies, 2017; Swedish Research Council, 2017). Ethical considerations have permeated the entire research process, from providing respondents with information to assuring confidentiality and disseminating results. The research process has been handled with openness, sensitivity, honesty and scientific impartiality (Cohen et al., 2011).

Results

The results are based on the analysis of the school counsellors' descriptions of health promotion, prevention and remedial work. Initially, the respondents were asked to what extent they engaged in health promotion, prevention and remedial work. The school counsellors' estimate of the division of labour shows that almost 60 percent of the working time is devoted to remedial work (Figure 1). The remedial work thus takes up the most significant part of the school counsellors' work and permeates the school's social work.

Figure 1

Time Spent by School Counsellors on Health Promotion, Prevention or Remedial Work



Note: Measure of central tendency calculated on the extent and percent of working hours per week.

Remedial work

Problems

The problems and tasks that school counsellors encounter in their professional work tell us something about the measures they later apply. In connection with the remedial work carried out by school counsellors, conflicts and incidents of harassment in various forms appear as prominent themes in their descriptions.

I help in various crises, including fights between students and trying to resolve them, contacting parents and more. (No. 309)

I investigate, remedy and follow up harassment. (No. 86)

Conflicts appear between students, meaning that a large part of the school counsellors' remedial work is to deal with these conflicts in different ways.

Conversations based on incidents of harassment between students. (No. 423)

The conflicts sometimes seem to be between students, but can also be between students and teachers.

Conflict resolution between students and teachers. (No. 255)

Incidents of harassment are also a recurring theme in the remedial work of school counsellors.

[...] work with cases of harassment and bullying. (No. 199)

Overall, school counsellors' descriptions highlight a multifaceted role in addressing interpersonal conflict, harassment and bullying within the school community.

Recipient of interventions

Within the school counsellors' remedial work, it is clear that the focus is on offering support and services to individual students. The school counsellors, for example, provide individual support and conduct motivational talks to motivate students for support and empowerment.

Individual support/motivational talks, participate and motivate students for support and change. (No. 414)

Targeted interventions at the individual level in complex situations, motivational conversations, [Cognitive Behavioural Therapy] CBT-talks. (No. 293)

The remedial work of the school can involve counsellors, parents or guardians and teachers, but the emphasis is still on meeting the individual needs of each student. It means that the student is still the recipient of the intervention.

Support for individual parents and/or students is often in the form of guidance counselling and collaboration with teachers and other staff at the school. (No. 316)

The remedial efforts of the school counsellors are designed to support and help the students with their individual needs. In addition to having contact with the students, their parents or guardians and other school staff regarding the student's problems, the school counsellor also works with other authorities.

Contact with social services, BUP [Child and Adolescent Psychiatry] and other authorities in student matters. (No. 439)

In summary, the school counsellors offer individually adapted support and motivation efforts. This takes place primarily with individual students but can also include other actors. Whether it is individual conversations or contact with other authorities and other people, the individual student's situation and needs are always at the centre of the school counsellors' remedial efforts.

Interventions

The individual-oriented perspective, where the counsellor seeks "solutions" to the individual student's problems, is also clearly visible in the descriptions of interventions. The school counsellors describe that the counselling effort can have different purposes, orientations and constellations. However, it is counselling with individual students that is the dominant and preferred effort.

Counselling with individual students who wish to meet with a counsellor (investigative, supportive, advisory, motivational) of different nature. (No. 286)

Counselling in other forms and constellations may include parents or guardians, mentors, or other school staff, but the individual student's situation is still the focus.

Counselling with students and guardians, as well as many cases the principal and other professionals in the student health team. (No. 35)

Other interventions in the remedial work include those that, in the analysis, were categorised as initiating contact with other social institutions. *Initiating contacts with other social institutions* means that the school counsellors report, forward information or refer individual students and their need for support to other authorities such as social services or Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (BUP). In addition to conversations and activating other social institutions, other social support for individual students seems to be common.

I accompany [students] to meetings with social services, meetings to plan care efforts, to the job centre, treatment units, sampling [of specimens], rehabilitation, etc. (No. 75)

Social support for individual students means that the school counsellors provide more general and sometimes practical support in difficult and complex situations. This can mean supporting students subjected to abusive treatment, or more practical support for students in different situations.

Professional autonomy

The results show that in their remedial work, the school counsellors have considerable room for manoeuvre and power when assessing and implementing interventions for the students. An indication that school counsellors have significant professional autonomy is that their descriptions contain few references to collaborating or obtaining support from other professions in the student health services or the school's pedagogical professions. They obtain information from others but do not collaborate or receive support. This can be interpreted as professional autonomy. Their professional collaborations are outside the school's world, and they do not need to obtain anyone else's approval to seek these contacts. In other words, in their remedial work, the school counsellors have considerable room for manoeuvre and power when it comes to assessing and implementing interventions for the students. The school counsellors have a role in offering support and help to the students and often have contact with various authorities, give advice and support, and handle student matters.

[...] contact with health centres and psychiatry, contact with social services, [...] (No. 396)

The results indicate that the school counsellors are the primary actors in the remedial work and take on the overall responsibility for coordinating and implementing the efforts. Although collaboration with teachers, principals and other staff may occur in meetings and conversations, it is clear that the school counsellors are primarily responsible for implementing the efforts.

In summary, the results show that school counsellors have responsibility and considerable room for manoeuvre when assessing and implementing interventions for students. They play

a central role in offering support and assistance to students and are the main actors in contacts with authorities and providing advice and support. Although collaboration with other staff may occur, it is clear that the school counsellors are responsible for implementing the interventions and meeting the student's needs.

Preventive work

Problems

The school counsellors' descriptions of the preventive work highlight problems or themes with a broader and more comprehensive focus than in the remedial work. In preventive work, the problems shift from conflicts and incidents of harassment between individual students to questions about values, safety, equal treatment, and school attendance and absence. These themes characterise most measures within the preventive work and appear to be a significant part of it. The preventive work could be characterised as work with the school's psychosocial environment. A concrete example is the school counsellors' work with fundamental values in the school by informing students and teachers about the school's work with these values.

I hold presentations on the school's policy against discrimination and harassment. (No. 169)

In the classroom and talk about lots of different ethical issues. (No. 325)

Another example of interventions in preventive work is school climate work.

School climate council with students and school safety group with staff. (No. 275)

The preventive work within the school counsellors' activities aims to create a safe and inclusive student environment. By focusing on values, safety, equal treatment, and attendance, and participating in parent meetings to manage conflicts, the school counsellors strive to prevent problems and promote a positive school environment.

Recipient of interventions

In preventive work, there is a shift from the individual student's situation and needs to addressing groups or classes of students as recipients of interventions. One might think that this strategy aims to act preventively and reduce the risk of problematic situations arising.

I work with specific classes where you can see early on that there may be problems in the future. I work with collaboration, strengthening the group, etc. (No. 194)

In preventive work, unlike remedial work, the efforts are directed at students in groups or students in general. The school counsellors work actively with specific classes where problems can be identified early on. They try to prevent problems and promote a positive school environment by focusing on cooperation and strengthening the group.

Although the students are the main focus of the school counsellors' preventive efforts, the efforts are only sometimes directly aimed at the students themselves. This work may also include administrative tasks, such as creating and maintaining plans or collecting information via safety surveys.

I participate in the work of annually revising and working according to the school's plan against discrimination and harassment. (No. 141)

I design surveys for safety and security, map safety and security at the school, identify risks or problems and find ways to prevent them. (No. 86)

These efforts can be seen both as targeted at students and as a method to provide the school management with relevant material for systematic quality work. In this way, the school management can be regarded as a recipient of the school counsellors' efforts. Although students are the focus of these preventive efforts, they are not always directly aimed at the students but at the school management. Other professions in the school also become recipients of the school counsellors' services in preventive work. Teachers are recipients of services such as tutoring.

Consultation/guidance for teachers to handle their assignments as a teacher/mentor. (No. 125)

Interventions

In contrast to the remedial and health-promoting work, the school counsellors describe the preventive work as more administrative. This may include well-being or safety surveys, classroom observations, and mapping of learning environments or specific classes.

...surveying the students' well-being and sense of safety and security. (No. 122)

Analysis of attendance five times per semester together with local student health services. Subsequent interventions can sometimes be of a preventive nature. (No. 328)

Observations in different learning environments, compiled and forwarded to school management. (No. 114)

Another administrative task is to create and maintain school policy, which means that routines or policies are formed to handle different situations within the school.

I participate in the work of designing various school policies. Crisis policy, issues related to alcohol, tobacco and narcotics, policies against harassment and discrimination etc. (No. 87)

In a similar way to remedial work, counselling is described as a central effort in preventive work. However, the counselling's nature and focus differ somewhat from how it is described

in the remedial work, where it was clear that the conversations focused on individual students' need for advice and support. In the preventive work, there is also individual counselling, but the school counsellors' descriptions show that they have a clear orientation towards being preventive.

...conversations with students to identify risks such as unnecessary stress, places in the school where you can feel unsafe, and practice alternative ways of handling conflicts. (No. 25)

It should be noted that the school counsellors do not describe precisely what makes the conversations preventive. Instead, the descriptions seem to suggest that the conversations, regardless of their nature, can also have a preventive effect.

Professional autonomy

In preventive work, the profession of the school counsellor appears as collaborative rather than actively acting independently and on its own. It is emphasised that the school counsellor participates in various activities to promote the safety and well-being of the students.

I participate in safety walks with students, I participate in parent meetings with information, I especially monitor groups of students who, from our experience, end up lagging behind in their studies and get high absenteeism, etc. together with others in the student health team. I participate in sex education, work on values and equal treatment. (No. 7)

In addition to participating in various meetings and events, school counsellors point out that they also participate in sex education, work on fundamental values, and anti-discrimination work.

I participate in the work with action plans, for example around "routines, documentation and responsibility", "Secrecy and non-disclosure in school", crisis policies and support in connection with reports to the social services. (No. 114)

The school counsellors collaborate with various actors within the school to implement preventive measures rather than leading the work independently. They also appear to delegate assessments and decisions to others within the school based on investigations they have conducted themselves.

Health promotion work

Problems

The school counsellors' descriptions of the health-promoting work elevate the more concrete questions about values and the psychosocial environment to more general life competence-oriented questions. For example, it may include sex education led by nurses, or teaching about stress and mental health.

Sex education groups together with a nurse. (No. 330)

I hold lessons on emotions, life competence. (No. 384)

Life competence education is not a coherent concept with a clear definition, but put simply it can be said that it is the schools' way of organising values-based work and promoting students' well-being (Aldenmyr, 2012; Landahl, 2015; Löf, 2011). As life competence education is not a subject but instead consists of several related ones, it is difficult to clearly distinguish, in addition to the concept of knowledge of life, any specific theme related to it in the health promotion work.

The life competence theme can also be reflected in, for example, various activities that promote social community, physical activity and knowledge about health in general. It can include topics such as diet, sleep, rest/relaxation, stress management, relationships, drugs and sexuality.

...various activities that promote a sense of community, physical activity and knowledge about diet, sleep, rest/relaxation, stress, relationships, drugs, sexuality, etc. (No. 52)

Life competence in health promotion work plays a significant role in the work of school counsellors. The school counsellor's work aims to strengthen students' physical, mental and social health by offering teaching and activities that promote knowledge and awareness of these subjects.

Recipient of interventions

Unlike remedial work, which aims to deal with specific problems or challenges in individual students, health-promoting work is aimed at classes or students in general. A respondent who describes a psychosocial programme on the island of Gotland presents an example of general health promotion work. This programme aims at students in grades 2, 5 and 7 and provides them with knowledge and insights about health.

On Gotland, we have a psychosocial programme that we run in grades 2, 5 and 7, which, among other things, deals with what to think about regarding health. (No. 442)

In addition to specific programmes and efforts, the health promotion work can include collaboration with external organisations. School counsellors can, for example, have contacts with associations outside the school to offer students information about and participation in various activities. This aims to broaden students' horizons and give them opportunities to get involved in various association activities outside of school.

Activities outside school, for example the opportunity to try playing padel tennis, football. Inform about organisations that offer activities, also that organisations and clubs visit the students at the school. (No. 219)

In addition to the above, specific interventions, such as the relationship-building approach described earlier, are also aimed at students within the school. By being visible and accessible to all students, the school counsellors in the study strive to create a safe and supportive environment for students' well-being and development.

Specifically for my role, this means, among other things, having a respectful and low-affective attitude and building good relationships with students and colleagues. (No. 86)

The health promotion work within the school thus underlines the importance of work that aims to promote the health of all students and appears to be focused on supporting students' health and well-being in a broad sense. This distinguishes health-promoting work from preventive work, which focuses more on the school's work environment and the student's behaviour.

Interventions

The school counsellors describe that efforts in the health promotion work emphasise teaching, building relationships with students and supervising other staff within the school. Of the three efforts, it is, above all, teaching that stands out, which is carried out in different forms. The teaching can be informative:

I inform [students] about what you can do to feel good, create good routines, sleep better, and create less conflict. (No. 371)

The teaching can also have more educational starting points:

Class teaching about integrity, emotions, good and bad behaviour on the internet, good and bad secrets, mental health. (No. 33)

The school counsellors describe that the teaching was primarily carried out based on their knowledge base or as ready-made methods or programmes such as DISA (Depression in Swedish Adolescence), MHFA (Mental Health First Aid) or HASP (Health — Work Environment — Confidence — Performance). Some school counsellors referred to the teaching as "psychoeducation".

Creating relationships with the students also appears to be essential to health promotion work. The school counsellors describe that the relationship work occurs both in teaching situations in the classroom and during visits to classrooms. Relationship building is also done outside the classroom and on the school's other premises.

I participate in outdoor days, study trips, parent meetings, open house, Lucia, graduation, school start, etc. I take every chance to meet students in more arenas. (No. 141)

The school counsellors also considered it important to be present during breaks and participate in school meals. They also stated that in the health promotion work, they supervised

other professions within the school. The concept of supervision does not have a clear definition but can be regarded as “a complex concept that seems to be able to mean different things in different contexts” (Skolverket, 2015). It can instead be seen as an umbrella concept that includes other pedagogical methods such as teaching, information and advice (Tveiten, 2014). In the health promotion work, providing guidance to the school's other staff was, for example, described as consultation with educators.

Consultation with educators to discuss protective factors, promote attendance and safety, and peace and quiet for studying. (No. 342)

The school counsellors also describe that they participate in and contribute to comprehensive student health work within the school. This can mean assisting other staff and the school's management with psychosocial skills and being part of professional and organisational meetings within the school, such as student health team meetings.

Professional autonomy

The school counsellors' work and role in health promotion is characterised by collaboration rather than independently leading and carrying out the work. Their descriptions show that the health promotion work is a common concern within the school, rather than one that individual professionals run and carry out. This may involve collaboration with other professions' indirect efforts. The school counsellor often collaborates with the school nurse, not least in what is referred to above as life competence or sex education.

...in collaboration with teachers/the school nurse I participate in lessons about sex education [...] (No. 51)

Health promotion is a common concern that can also be seen in the school counsellors' more general and comprehensive work.

I participate in more extensive discussions at school about health promotion work. Very little concrete health promotion work as such. (No. 162)

This means that the school counsellors describe that they contribute on an overall and general level to develop the organisational aspects of the health promotion work together with the school's staff. This happens in various organisational meetings with educators and the school's management.

Discussion

This article aimed to study school counsellors' health promotion, prevention and remedial work based on four analytical categories: *problem*, *recipient of interventions*, *interventions*, and *professional autonomy*. A summary of the results is presented below, followed by a discussion of an expanded understanding of school counsellors' professional practice.

The results show that the remedial work appears to be oriented toward the individual, with individual students' social problems and needs in focus. The preferred method of intervention for remedial work is conversations. An interesting observation is that the remedial work cannot be planned or standardised in the same way as preventive and health-promoting work. The remedial work has more of an "on-call duty" character where school counsellors, for example, deal with conflicts in the school environment. Notably, remedial work is characterised by a high degree of professional autonomy and what, in Abbott's terms, could be described as full jurisdiction. In contrast to individual remedial work, preventive work is focused on groups and the overall school environment (Abbott, 1988). The preventive work is also more administrative, including creating and maintenance of policies (crisis policy, security policy, etc.).

The outcomes suggest that professional autonomy in preventive work is less extensive than in remedial work. The school counsellors describe their role in this work as more collaborative than independently driven, which means they need to adapt their work to the interests of other professionals. This means that one can argue that professional autonomy is more limited in preventive than in remedial work. The low degree of adaptation to individual students' needs is distinctive for health promotion and prevention work, which instead has a more collective focus on students in groups. The work is addressed to all students within the school or the school environment. Unlike the remedial work, the health promotion work is standardised, pre-planned and cyclically recurring. Specific to health promotion work is that it includes an element of teaching. The school counsellors teach subjects related to life competence to convey information about various health-related areas. The health promotion work is also primarily based on collaboration with other professions within the student health team and other professions within the school. The school counsellors' professional practice is coordinated and contrasted with other professional groups, and their competence becomes one of many. In other words, there appears to be an overlap of tasks and areas of knowledge within health promotion work, which is thus characterised by what Abbott (1988) would call a divided jurisdiction.

Based on the school counsellors' descriptions, the study results show that a significant part of the school counsellors' time, almost 60 percent, is devoted to remedial work with a focus on individual efforts. Compared to health promotion and prevention work, it also appears to be clearer which interventions are given and who the recipient is. The results also show that the school counsellors have clearer professional autonomy in the remedial work than in the other areas. In other words, the remedial work seems to represent the school counsellors' "heartland of work" (Abbott, 1988, p.71). In what Abbot (1988) calls a "system of professions", the Education Act establishes a professional division of labour for the school counsellor and other professions. According to the Education Act, the various professions within student health must cooperate and work towards common goals to promote and prevent health issues. Even if the health promotion and preventive work is both diffuse and subordinate to

the remedial work, it ties the work of school counsellors closer to the intentions of the Education Act. In addition, the school counselling connection to the school, its educational mission, and other professions within the world of the school is strengthened. However, there seems to be a duality or tension in the professional practice of school counsellors. On the one hand, their work involves adapting to the intentions of the law, while on the other hand, it emphasises remedial work.

Welfare professionals, such as school counsellors, preferably work within public organisations where work areas and tasks are characterised by vagueness and changeability. This vagueness and changeability also bring unpredictability, where professional practice requires local and situation-based assessments and adaptations. This means that the responsibility to handle these vaguely formulated problems and tasks rests to a large extent on the organisation or the profession (Hopmann, 2003).

According to Abbott (1988), professions strive to preserve their unique position vis-à-vis other professional groups that claim to be able to deal with similar issues. That is, they seek to maintain full jurisdiction. The school counsellors' descriptions of the remedial work testify to a full jurisdiction. In contrast, as noted above, the health promotion and prevention work is mainly characterised by a divided jurisdiction where school counsellors, in certain parts of their work, need to be more aware of areas of both work and knowledge overlapping with other professions within the school. To maintain one's status and full jurisdiction, one can gradually transform professional services from routine to more sophisticated tasks (Abbott, 1988). In the case of school counsellors, it could be argued that incorporating health promotion and prevention work is a way of expanding the jurisdiction.

It can also mean tensions between the state's goals and the work carried out in practice. A characteristic feature of welfare professions is their close connection to the state (Brante, 2013; Evertsson, 2002; Rothstein, 1987). By providing their services and expertise to the welfare state, these professions have been given the opportunity to shape professional standards and requirements in connection with the state's commitments to welfare policy. The public sector mainly functions as a workplace and source of income for these professions, and the state tries to regulate and influence its dependence on these professional groups through political measures (Bertilsson, 1990; Evertsson, 2002).

This study shows that school counsellors manage this tension between the intentions of the welfare state's policy and how the work is carried out in practice by adapting to a greater extent the requirements that remedial work "requires". At the same time, the remedial work means greater professional autonomy. By examining different aspects of school counsellors' work, this study has revealed the intricate balance school counsellors must maintain between individual-focused support work and collective health promotion and prevention efforts. The study provides an opportunity to reflect on the changing landscape of this profession, where a balance between autonomy and external regulation shapes professional practice.

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When Platforms Challenge Professions: A Clash Between Models of Professionalism Among Swiss Hoteliers?

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Abstract

The sociology of professions has begun to study how digital platforms impact the status and skills of professionals. Our article expands on this line of research by exploring how platforms challenge professions and how professionals react by advocating different types of professionalism. Based on a case study of hoteliers in Switzerland, we look at how the rise of online travel agencies (OTAs) has affected this professional group. Drawing on an analysis of data gathered through interviews with hoteliers (owners, managers, representatives of associations), our findings identify divergent responses to how platforms have undermined the jurisdiction built up by hoteliers. They highlight impacts on the capacity for self-regulation and customer service skills. The article contributes to the literature by showing that platforms foster divisions within occupational groups. Some members use platform tools because they fit their model of management-oriented professionalism. Others distance themselves from them, adopting a defensive professionalism.

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Keywords

Digital platforms, digital transformation, hoteliers, professional jurisdiction, types of professionalism

Introduction

For more than a decade, digital platforms have been actively reshaping various business and professional sectors. In exploring the disruptive effects of the platform economy on capital and labor (Kenney & Zysman, 2016; Srnicek, 2017; Vallas & Kovalainen, 2019), sociologists have focused on the employment conditions of individuals who find micro-work or offer services on platforms (Bergvall-Kåreborn & Howcroft, 2014; Collier et al., 2018). These studies show that platforms cause workforce casualization by promoting self-employment (Prassl, 2018). Much less attention has been paid to the platform economy's significant impact on professions and professional groups (Arcidiacono et al., 2023). And yet, as emerging technologies, platforms are likely to alter the tasks and expertise associated with a profession, if not substantially undermine the ability of professionals to maintain control over their work. Dolata (2019, p. 183) defines platforms as “digital, databased, and algorithmically structuring socio-technical infrastructures that exchange information, coordinate communication or organize work, offer a wide range of services, or distribute digital and non-digital products.” Platforms such as Airbnb or Uber challenge what sociologists of professions broadly call “jurisdiction”—a monopoly on certain activities—by allowing nonprofessionals (flat owners, car drivers) to carry out tasks that had previously been reserved for certified professionals (Abbott, 1988; Freidson, 2001). Platforms also introduce new rules that can reduce professional autonomy, which can be defined as the “capacity for self-management,” i.e., the ability of professionals to organize and assess their own work and to make their own decisions (Blomqvist & Winblad, 2022, p. 66). By positioning themselves as intermediaries, platforms interfere in the material and symbolic relationships between professionals and clients, thereby challenging a key tenet of professional control (Abbott, 1988; Freidson, 2001). Two main features of the platform economy have proven especially disruptive and serve to distinguish platforms from other technologies, such as AI (Meilvang, 2023). First, platforms alter the conditions of the professional-client relationship, mainly by charging commissions on transactions. Second, platforms give clients a certain capacity to assess professional abilities through algorithmically driven online customer reviews (Beuscart et al., 2016; Orlikowski & Scott, 2014).

Based on these characteristics and the sociology of professions framework, this article explores the complex relationship between the platform economy and professional groups to answer the following questions:

1. Do platforms disrupt professional jurisdiction and autonomy? If so, how?
2. How have the professionals concerned reacted?

We argue that some seek to defend their jurisdiction and autonomy by minimizing their interactions with platforms, whereas others see advantages to using these new technological devices in the context of their existing workflows. Our analysis draws on a study of hoteliers, who constitute an interesting case for two reasons. To begin with, platforms, especially online travel agencies (OTAs), have extensively changed the work of these professionals. Despite this fact, hoteliers have rarely been the subject of sociological research outside of tourism studies (Alrawadieh et al., 2021; Buhalis, 2000). In addition, hoteliers are a group that can be sociologically characterized as somewhere between a protected profession and an occupational group (Humair & Tissot, 2011). Therefore, its study allows us to examine how groups that are more or less regulated and protected by qualifications have different resources at their disposal to cope with platform disruptions (Christin, 2017, 2018).

Within this group, our study focused on hotel professionals who interact most directly with digital platforms, that is, those responsible for negotiating commissions, making marketing decisions, managing reservations, etc. Standing at the top of the professional hierarchy, they have the most to lose in terms of jurisdiction and autonomy. In smaller and family-run hotels, these individuals tend to own the establishment. In larger and chain hotels, they tend to be hired managers.

We draw on existing research in the sociology of professions to analyze how the emergence of digital platforms can challenge a professional group's traditional jurisdiction (Abbott, 1988, 2005). Furthermore, our research questions are in line with the major sociological debates on typologies of professionalism and shifts from one model to another. The changes introduced by platforms, that are new incumbents with organizational specificities, can be analyzed according to whether they foster a shift from a type of professionalism based on the defense of traditional jurisdiction to an organizational or hybrid model of professionalism (Muzio & Ackroyd, 2005). Our specific contribution to these debates is to consider which type of professionalism is conveyed by platforms as technological tools. Our article describes how hoteliers have been led to establish new connections with and through platforms, engaging with or keeping their distance from these new players that are redrawing jurisdictional boundaries. Ultimately, we theorize that different forms of professionalism may coexist within the same group, because of how new platform-based technologies divide members.

Theoretical perspectives on platforms and professions

Sociologists interested in the transformation of work have emphasized how digital platforms promote self-employment and task-based work as an alternative to wage-earning (Kenney & Zysman, 2019, Vallas & Kovalainen, 2019). Platforms cast themselves as neutral intermediaries that simply provide access to tasks or clients (Kirchner & Schüßler, 2019), but they use algorithms to control task execution (Rosenblat, 2019). Scholars consider that long-term con-

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sequences will depend on the outcome of various ongoing legal disputes over platform regulation (Collier et al., 2018; Serafin, 2019) and the ability of workers to mobilize and circumvent the algorithmic control (Tassinari & Maccarrone, 2019; Wilkinson et al., 2022).

The sociology of the professions and professional groups can contribute to an in-depth understanding of these dynamics by studying the impact of platforms on different types of professional groups and professionalism. Vallas and Schor (2020) have proposed a useful distinction between “gig workers” who access work through platforms (rideshare drivers, microtaskers, etc.), “crowdworkers” who use platforms to work (tradespeople, artists, etc.), and “architects and designers” who design and maintain platforms. However, these authors remain curiously silent on the impact of platform work on higher-status professions in fields like law, medicine, and education.

Sociologists of professions have only just begun to study the impact of digital platforms on professional autonomy, expertise, and jurisdiction. In the medical field, Pfadenhauer and Kirschner (2017) have shown that the rise of appointment booking platforms has altered the doctor-patient relationship in a way that undermines professional autonomy. Thanks to digital tools, patients can assess healthcare providers based on availability (office hours, appointment delay) and attitude (consultation length, sympathetic guidance). Until now, these criteria involving interpersonal skills have not been considered, as the profession established its jurisdiction on medical knowledge (Abbott, 1988; Freidson, 2001; Hughes, 1984). More generally, the spread of platforms, coupled with increased digitization and reliance on big data (Lester, 2020), has been found to curb a profession’s ability to maintain its monopoly on specific skills and to socialize group members. In addition, key forms of specialized knowledge—such as the drafting of contracts or the review of case law by legal professionals (Flood & Robb, 2019)—can be rendered obsolete or made accessible to a wider audience (Rissanen et al., 2017). Nevertheless, the representatives and members of a given profession may develop strategies to maintain or defend their jurisdiction, strategies best described as manifestations of protective or defensive professionalism (Velthuis & van Doorn, 2020). For instance, professionals could develop their own digital platforms as an alternative to third-party technology (Dubois et al., 2019), claim a unique ability to analyze the associated data (Flood & Robb, 2019), or simply resist the pressure to change their established work practices. Christin (2017, 2018) has carried out an ethnographic comparison of the situation in web newsrooms and criminal courts, where platforms have been introduced to produce information or judicial acts and decisions. She found that “many algorithms are either ignored or actively resisted” by journalists and judges, thereby highlighting the “disconnect” between the modernizing discourse adopted by managers and the professional practices of employees.

Pursuing a similar line of research, our paper explores how platforms disrupt professional jurisdiction and autonomy. It relies on key concepts used in the sociology of professions to describe the jurisdictional challenges faced by all professional groups, especially more prestigious professions that have traditionally built up a significant degree of self-regulation. Over

the last two decades, the classic professional model—based on the ideals of jurisdictional control (Abbott, 1988), peer governance, and official recognition (Saks & Adams, 2019)—has given way to a “hybrid model” (Muzio & Kirkpatrick, 2011; Noordegraaf, 2007). The latter is characterized by the integration of professions and professionals into bureaucratic or market structures, and is shaped by technological and economic pressures and new performance evaluation criteria. The widespread implementation of New Public Management reforms is depicted as a key driver in this transition (Freidson, 2001; Saks & Muzio, 2018). Several studies have analyzed how regulated professions cope with these changes by developing discourses and implementing strategies associated with so-called defensive professionalism. The latter term emphasizes the defense and protection of traditional jurisdictional boundaries, mainly for the benefit of the profession’s elite (Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2008). From this perspective, platforms are more than simply new actors encroaching on professional jurisdictions. Rather, they constitute new organizational and entrepreneurial forms based on algorithmic management (Kirchner & Schüßler, 2019). As such, they have the potential to introduce new rules “from above.” This is a feature of “organizational professionalism” (Evetts, 2011, p. 407), where rules are not established by the professionals themselves but imposed by the organizations within which they operate. In order to analyze the current reconfiguration of types of professionalism, it is therefore relevant to study the ways in which platforms, like other new technologies, including artificial intelligence, machine learning, and algorithms, could thus reshape professional boundaries and forms of professionalism (Adams et al., 2020a, p. 226). Furthermore, their effects on professions and the professionalisms they adhere to might differ depending on different perceptions of professionalism prevalent within a given profession (Maestripieri & Bellini, 2023).

Our analysis builds on this literature to identify the heterogeneous pathways in which the introduction of platforms can impact a profession, an approach that has received little attention in platform economy research (Balsiger et al., 2023). It shows that some hoteliers have embraced a protective or defensive type of professionalism (Muzio & Ackroyd, 2005), relying on “protective shields” (Noordegraaf, 2020, p. 206) to counter the destabilization of their jurisdiction. By contrast, others have followed a more managerial or organizational approach by treating platforms as useful tools and valuable allies. And whereas related divisions already existed within the hospitality sector, we argue that the arrival of platforms has reinforced them.

Case study and methodology

Theoretical relevance of the case study

Like their counterparts in most other countries, Swiss hoteliers have been deeply affected by the rapid expansion of platforms in the tourism industry in the first decade of the 21st century

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(OECD, 2018).¹ They often cite the 2008 financial crisis, which strengthened the Swiss franc at the expense of the country's tourism sector, as a driving force behind efforts to attract new customers by advertising rooms online. By 2022, OTAs were handling 27% of all Swiss hotel reservations, and the total share of online bookings (including those made on hotel websites) was continuing to rise, accounting for 48.4% of all overnight stays (Schegg & Ehrenzeller, 2023). At the time, the leading platforms were Booking.com (with a market share of about 77%), Expedia (15%) and HRS (3%).²

In addition to OTAs, hoteliers have had to deal with the impact of vacation apartment rental platforms like Airbnb. Whereas OTAs act as middlemen by allowing hotels to advertise their rooms online, Airbnb operates as a peer-to-peer network (Gazzoli et al., 2008; Kirchner & Beyer, 2016) that engages in what hoteliers consider unfair competition. This article focuses exclusively on OTAs, which have posed a fundamental threat to professional jurisdiction by limiting the decision-making autonomy of the professionals concerned. By contrast, Airbnb primarily threatens the integrity of jurisdictional boundaries.³

Although seldom studied under this angle, the occupational group of hoteliers shares several features characteristic of professions. Indeed, the professional associations representing a high percentage of practicing professionals negotiate the regulation of the profession with the authorities, especially in times of crisis (Tissot, 2022), monitor qualifications, training, and diplomas, and set up systems for assessing the quality of establishments, determining the services offered to customers. On this basis, hoteliers assert their professionalism (Cheng & Wang, 2015) while having market autonomy to set room rates.

In the Swiss context, the small independent operators who historically dominated the ranks of hoteliers were successful in obtaining official recognition and regulation capacity. Founded in 1882, the Swiss Hotel Association sought to protect its jurisdiction and, for a long time, controlled the hotel market through favorable legislation and a patent system limiting the number of establishments (Humair & Tissot, 2011). In the 1980s, the organization successfully adopted a stars-based classification system, a classic example of internal self-regulation (Orlikowski & Scott, 2014). However, the control by the professional organization of market

¹ The research was conducted in 2020 and 2021, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. The latter's impact is therefore not addressed.

² <https://www.hotelleriesuisse.ch/fr/association-et-siege-admin/actualites/news-etude-de-distribution>, accessed on October 16, 2023; <https://www.hotelleriesuisse.ch/fr/branche-et-politique/politique-economique/economie-numerique/ota-lex-booking/download-B73ABF53-A8FA-4D6A-9CAF-4164EFAB5ACB.secure>, accessed on October 16, 2023.

³ With respect to peer-to-peer platforms, hoteliers are primarily interested in ensuring that professional norms (hygiene, safety, tourist tax, etc.) are applied to their emerging non-professional competitors. The containment of "invaders" by subjecting them to existing regulation is a recurrent pattern of professional competition (Abbott, 1988).

access suffered considerably in the course of neo-liberal reforms of the 1990s, when the market was liberalized (Humair & Tissot, 2011). More recently, the stars-based classification increasingly competes with user-based evaluations on platforms (Balsiger & Jammet, 2022). As a result of these changes in regulation and technology, the professional autonomy of hoteliers is increasingly threatened.

Today, the Swiss Hotel Association's 3,000 members represent more than 80% of the country's lodging establishments. Switzerland's highly diversified hospitality sector caters to both leisure and business travelers, including large numbers of visitors to mountain resorts (Humair & Tissot, 2011). As a result, establishments owned by small independents coexist with large properties belonging to international chains, as well as luxury hotels. Nevertheless, the prevailing trend toward concentration⁴ has meant a decline in the number of family-run hotels. This is especially true in the mountains, where the number of nights booked has been falling at the same rate as it has been increasing in urban areas (Swiss Federal Statistical Office, 2020, p. 16).

The main limitation of our case study is the fact that the profession remains highly decentralized in Switzerland with powerful regional professional associations, which potentially increases internal divergences and consequently the coexistence between different types of professionalism.

Data collection

Our fieldwork involved in-person qualitative interviews with hotel owners or managers (n=10) and representatives of their professional associations (n=9, including three individuals who also owned or managed a hotel).⁵ On a day-to-day basis, all these individuals were involved with maintaining professional boundaries through negotiations with external stakeholders (in this case, platform operators) while also making decisions relating to changes introduced by platforms. Each interview was conducted at the research participant's workplace and lasted between one and two-and-a-half hours.

Very early in the study, we discovered that the Swiss Hotel Association and its regional counterparts (two of which were represented in the study) did not necessarily see eye-to-eye on the question of digital platforms.⁶ On the one hand, the national association and a regional

⁴ The number of establishments fell by about 2% in 2018 while the total number of beds remained constant and the average size of a hotel has grown to 57 beds (Swiss Hotels Directory, 2019, https://www.sgh.ch/fileadmin/documents/Downloads/Publikationen_SGH/2019/Jahrbuch_der_Schweizer_Hotellerie_2019.pdf, accessed on January 26, 2021).

⁵ The complete research design also includes interviews with distribution channel representatives (n=2, including one OTA representative), IT services company representatives (n=4), and industry experts (n=4). This article focuses on actors who are dealing with change from within the profession.

⁶ Where possible, we also consulted the activity reports and websites of these professional bodies for insight into how they have addressed the issue of digital platforms.

branch based in a large urban area were more inclined to work with platforms and accept the changes they have introduced. On the other hand, a branch based in a mountain region, whose members were more focused on leisure tourism, was more critical of platforms and their impact. To explore the issue in more depth, we asked the hotel association representatives we interviewed to refer us to 10 hotels with a three- or four-star rating (the most common ratings for members of both regional associations concerned) and that had taken different approaches to dealing with OTAs. This helped diversify the range of individual establishments covered by our study. Based on an assessment of how these different hotels had been affected by the introduction of platforms, we grouped them into three categories defined by property type and market segment: (1) small, family-run mid-market hotels; (2) chain hotels; and (3) independent luxury hotels. Together, these categories are broadly representative of the Swiss hotel industry as a whole. Among the interviewees based in the urban area, three worked at chain hotels (corporately owned or franchises), and four were managers or company executives. By contrast, all research participants based in the mountains were owner-operators of smaller hotels.

Data analysis

Analysis followed an iterative abductive process (Tavory & Timmermans, 2014) that involved a theoretically informed reading of the interview data followed by the identification of core themes through open coding (Miles et al., 2014). The two researchers who conducted the interviews were also responsible for coding the data (using Atlas-ti software). Analysis focused on themes relevant to the relationship between individual hoteliers (and, to a lesser extent, their professional associations) and OTAs. We began by coding references to OTA practices, especially those most likely to be seen as threats to professional autonomy: new conditions imposed by the platforms (commissions, contractual terms, cancellation policies, etc.) and new skills- or technology-based requirements (IT skills, channel management software, point-of-sale systems, etc.). We then classified hoteliers according to whether they felt that their relationship with OTAs opened up new professional opportunities or posed a threat to their ability to make autonomous decisions and to the profession's capacity for self-regulation. Finally, we assessed the extent to which our categories aligned with notions of professionalism that emphasized protecting or defending the profession's traditional jurisdiction, that encouraged closer collaboration with platforms, or that involved a mix of both.

Findings

Our analysis of the interview data highlighted two dimensions of how the introduction of digital platforms has disrupted the capacity of hoteliers as a professional group to manage their own affairs. The first concerns the trade-off between the increased visibility achieved through online advertising and the conditions imposed by OTAs. Some research participants believed that such conditions threatened their professional status by undermining their capacity for autonomous decision-making. This was especially true for small hotel owners who were used to setting room rates by hand and who are seeing this skill called into question. Second, we

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found two opposing perceptions of platforms within the group, depending on whether hoteliers favored a more standardized or more personalized relationship with customers. Research in the sociology of professions has identified claims to offer services tailored to the needs of individual clients as a well-established strategy for defending a traditional form of professionalism (Flood & Robb, 2019; Freidson, 2001; Hughes, 1984). This vision is opposed to external standardized evaluation principles, particularly managerial ones.

Commissions and parity clauses: A threat to professional autonomy?

OTAs have restructured the hotel market by charging a commission on every transaction they facilitate (Kirchner & Beyer, 2016). In terms of the sociology of professions, this provides a classic example of an external actor changing the conditions under which members of an existing profession have traditionally carried out their work while undermining the profession's capacity for self-regulation. In this section, we discuss the different ways in which Swiss hoteliers have reacted to these developments.

Most research participants recognized that OTAs have greatly increased their marketing reach by allowing them to advertise rooms online at a scale they could not achieve on their own. Although commissions have increased the ratio of fixed expenses to sales, many hoteliers have accepted this as a reasonable cost for expanding their customer base, with little impact on their ability to control their own work. For example, the owner-operator of a 20-room establishment argued that platforms provided the only way to reach new customers:

So, I would say that for a small hotel like mine, it's very important to treat OTAs as partners since we can't afford to spend the kind of money on advertising that Booking.com and Expedia spend on our behalf.

The manager of a 300-room international chain hotel put it this way:

I couldn't survive without Booking.com. Just think of the international reach that site gives me. It's enormous. As an individual hotel, I could never achieve that without Booking.com. That's why it's important not to just complain about OTAs. We should also see them in a positive light.

These two interviewees clearly believed that they benefited from allying themselves with their platform-based "partners." By claiming that they "couldn't survive" without platforms, they sought to emphasize crucial benefits over fears regarding increased dependency or lost autonomy. Given that both these individuals managed hotels based in the urban area and sat on the board of the regional hotel association, they were also well positioned to cope with commission charges. In the Swiss context, chain hotels operating in regions that attract both business and leisure travelers, such as the urban area covered by our study, can negotiate lower per-transaction charges based on their annual customer volumes. Meanwhile, better-performing establishments—those that receive consistently good reviews and maintain low

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cancellation rates—can obtain “preferred partner” status, earning them a more prominent position in result lists on OTA websites.⁷ This status, created by the platforms, introduces a new external principle of competition between hoteliers that has not been decided upon by the profession.

While recognizing that platforms provided them with marketing reach they could not achieve on their own, other interviewees were clearly anxious about paying significant commissions to distant intermediaries over which they had no control. Eager for its members to regain full control over their own affairs, the regional hotel association based in the mountains even launched its own commission-free booking platform. As one board member explained:

This means that, every year, rather than being paid to Booking.com, millions in commissions remain in the pockets of hoteliers, allowing them to renovate their properties, to do things that... if they had to pay these commissions to middlemen... well, the money would no longer be in their pockets, they would no longer have access to it.

A broader aim of the initiative was to regain control over the professional group—both financially and symbolically⁸—by assuming the role now played by third-party booking platforms. However, the Swiss Hotel Association and several other regional branches, all of which advocate close collaboration with leading OTAs, have not been supportive. Clearly, this is an instance where digital platforms have divided the professional group. By applying different commission rates, they foster competition between hoteliers. The owner-operator of a luxury hotel in a prestigious mountain resort described how this prevents unified action:

[Three years ago], we launched a campaign calling on all the hotels [affiliated with the resort] to leave Booking.com’s preferred partners system. [...] Out of 40 properties, a dozen said: “I’ll only do it if everyone else does.” [...] We tried to get everybody on the same page, but it just didn’t work out.

Swiss hoteliers have been somewhat more united in challenging another condition introduced by OTAs: so-called parity clauses. Included in the contracts signed by hotel managers and owners, such provisions prohibit establishments from offering lower prices via any other distribution channel, including on the property’s own website or to walk-in clients. Individual

⁷ According to Booking.com website, establishments with this status pay 3% more in commissions (i.e., 15% on each transaction, instead of 12%). Preferred partners get to display “a special ‘thumbs-up’ seal of approval” next to their property page, a measure intended to boost consumer confidence. Supposedly, these hotels “receive up to 65% more page views and on average 20% more bookings.” <https://partner.booking.com/en-gb/help/growing-your-business/increase-revenue/all-you-need-know-about-preferred-partner-programme> (accessed on March 23, 2023).

⁸ The association’s reports show that it is very difficult to estimate exactly what is paid to Booking.com in relation to the new customers it attracts.

hoteliers, especially small independents, see parity clauses as a direct attack on their professional jurisdiction. One association representative, himself an establishment owner, vehemently condemned the infringement on his “commercial freedom”:

Hoteliers have lost the right to offer rooms at a lower price. But that’s nonsense. Just imagine [...]! But that’s nonsense. It’s your business. [...]

And like its counterparts across Europe, the Swiss Hotel Association has publicly argued that parity clauses constitute a major infringement of professional autonomy insofar as they represent an attempt by platforms to overstep their role as intermediaries. The organization has raised the issue with the Competition Commission, the federal regulator responsible for enforcing Swiss competition law. It also sought out allies in its efforts to lobby for better regulation of platforms, a traditional strategy employed by professional groups seeking to secure their jurisdiction (Abbott, 1988; Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2008). However, it proved difficult to find politicians willing to support the cause. It was only after the mobilization of regional tourism representatives and appeals to the general principle of free competition that new legislation protecting hoteliers’ ability to set their own prices was passed in 2020 and implemented in 2022.⁹

Customers versus guests: Customer relations as a skills issue exacerbated by platforms

Generally speaking, the introduction of digital platforms compels professionals to develop new skills and abandon familiar ways of working (Dubois et al., 2019; Meilvang, 2023). Technical skills are required to use digital tools, especially those that make it possible to reach clients (Velthuis & van Doorn, 2020), whereas relational skills are needed to address new market segments and consumer habits (Buhalis, 2000; Gössling & Lane, 2015). We found that Swiss hoteliers were unequally equipped to acquire and use these new skills, with some even lacking websites of their own when OTAs first became popular. On the one hand, larger hotels with a specialized division of labor have been more likely to adopt the digital tools offered by platforms, especially yield and revenue management (RM) tools. On the other hand, family-run hotels have reacted by reviving more traditional approaches to customer care and retention.

Inspired by dynamic pricing models developed for the aviation industry, RM systems are designed to maximize occupancy rates and profitability through the automated analysis of supply, demand, and other market variables (Ivanov, 2014). However, effective RM strategies depend on the ability to forecast demand by market segment, something that can only be achieved by gathering and analyzing large quantities of high-quality data (Ivanov, 2014). Chain and luxury hotels tend to be the only establishments with the financial means necessary to hire staff specialized in these complex tasks or to outsource the work (Melis & Piga, 2017). As

⁹ The revised law is available at the following address: <https://www.fedlex.admin.ch/eli/oc/2022/690/fr>.

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the director of a major chain hotel based in the urban area explained: “We have specialized revenue managers working at our chain’s European headquarters. We recruited them from the aviation sector [...]” The manager of a neighboring luxury hotel pointed out that establishments where there is little division of labor cannot take advantage of these technical tools:

In a small hotel [...] that doesn’t have a marketing manager, a revenue manager, or a sales manager [...], a single person is responsible for reception, service, check-in, answering the phone, sending out email promotions, etc. So, these hotels struggle with online sales. Often, they become too dependent on a single OTA.

RM systems reflect a vision of client relations rooted in management strategies initially developed by marketing professionals, not hoteliers. International customer profiles are assessed based on trends and variations in the travel and tourism sector. With the encouragement of the local tourist office, the hotel association for the urban area has begun promoting this rather impersonal approach to customer relations and the associated skills as the best means of attracting tourists who might otherwise stay at an Alpine establishment:

For Indian, Chinese, and American visitors, [the city] and the Alps are the same thing. [...] The client simply opts for seeing the Alps from [the city], and everyone’s happy. [...] But you wouldn’t get away with telling an English or German tourist that the city and the Alps are the same thing.

In short, the RM systems and customer management concepts associated with OTAs encourage a high level of standardization and a focus on performance, two characteristics “of organizational rather than professional forms of occupational control” (Evetts, 2011, p. 412). For their part, the hotel owners we interviewed in the mountain region remained invested in a very different approach to customer relations, one based on interpersonal skills—precisely the kind of know-how that platforms, focusing on technical abilities, tend to devalue. These hoteliers emphasized how strong relationships with loyal “guests” (their preferred term), who return year after year, distinguish them from large hotels. One even mentioned how he drew his “passion for the profession” from the fact that return visitors “often become friends.” This group saw the personalized treatment of guests as a true mark of professionalism that faced a significant threat from OTAs, whose algorithms continually suggest new destinations and properties to users based on their previous choices. As a small hotel owner explained, this discourages guests from returning to the same hotel: “Customers who reserve their room through Booking.com are customers the hotel will lose.” As part of their commitment to maintaining control over guest relations, some hotel association representatives have criticized the lack of transparency surrounding the collection and use of customer data by OTAs. A representative of the hotel association based in the mountain region put it this way: “[...] people who register with Booking.com are no longer guests of the hotel. Instead, they become clients of the platform.” Committed to preserving a diverse range of small independent lodging establishments, hoteliers in this category also strongly believe that providing a warm welcome

is the best way to build guest loyalty, in contrast to the management-driven approach adopted by other members of the profession, who focus on attracting new customers.

Discussion: Are platforms exacerbating tensions between different types of professionalism?

Our study confirms that changes introduced by OTAs have undermined key pillars of professionalism among hoteliers, namely the capacity for self-regulation with respect to managing reservations and customer relations. In terms of the sociology of professions, platforms are “newcomers” or “invaders” (Abbott, 1988; Muzio & Ackroyd, 2005) that have succeeded in substantially transforming the conditions under which the profession operates, despite their claims to be nothing more than useful frameworks for facilitating certain tasks. Our analysis highlights how research participants not only reacted differently to the situation depending on the characteristics of their hotels, but they did so in a way that reinforced pre-existing divisions within the profession.

Produced within the sociology of professions framework, these findings fill a theoretical gap in research on the relationship between platforms and professions. Relevant work published to date, which has primarily come from either the field of the sociology of technology or that of organizational and management studies, largely portrays platforms as having a uniform impact tied to their use of technology and especially algorithms. By contrast, our analysis shows how the reactions of hoteliers to the rise of the platform economy vary according to the types of hotels they manage, the ways of working that are familiar to them, and their understanding of customer relations. More specifically, the new skills required to benefit from platform-based technologies are much harder to acquire for small, family-owned establishments that lack the human and financial resources at the disposal of large chain hotels.¹⁰ Similar dynamics have been observed within professional groups such as delivery drivers and freelancers (Alasoini et al., 2023).

By continuing to pursue this line of research, scholars can further explore questions regarding how the arrival of platforms brings into tension different ways of practicing and conceiving the profession (Arcidiacono et al., 2023), which reflect different positions, locations, and professional identities. Sociologists of professions have variously described clashes between those who support organizational or professional forms of control (Evetts, 2011); between those who favor defensive or hybrid professionalism (Hodgson et al., 2015; Muzio & Ackroyd, 2005; Muzio & Kirkpatrick, 2011); and, most recently, between proponents of protective and connective approaches (Noordegraaf, 2011, 2020).

Recently, Eyal (Adams et al., 2020a, p. 228) argued that researchers should pay greater attention to the spatial distribution of professionals and how it produces different approaches to

¹⁰ Tourism studies have documented this phenomenon for different types of hotels rather than by comparing them (Buhalis, 2000; Gössling & Lane, 2015).

coping with technological challenges, especially the introduction of platforms. In our case study, hoteliers based in large urban areas, their regional associations, and the Swiss Hotel Association all tended to embrace managerial techniques for advertising rooms and managing clients. This outlook is well aligned with the tools offered by OTAs. By contrast, hoteliers based in the mountain region were more concerned with preserving their professional autonomy and limiting reliance on foreign-owned OTAs, including developing their own platform. These divergences are rooted in different ways of understanding the nature of the profession and how its jurisdiction should be organized. They concern both the way the profession is practiced and the way it is conceived. In an interactionist approach to professional groups, these perceptions crystallize different ways of embodying the professional role, summarized here in the oppositions between host or landlord, manager or owner. This role is part of a professional identity built up through professional socialization: managerial training versus heritage, on-the-job socialization, professional networks, and career models (Dubar et al., 2015).

Based on these divisions, the results of our study finally highlight the need to further examine how different types of professionalism coexist and interact (Adams et al., 2020a, 2020b). Are platforms reinforcing one type of professionalism to the detriment of another within a professional group? Rather than the disappearance of protective or defensive professionalism, our findings point to a clash between it and a more organizational and management-oriented type. Accordingly, sociologists of professions should acknowledge the ongoing tension between these two forms of professionalism rather than associating them with two distinct moments in time.

In the context of our study, some hoteliers were quick to ally themselves with OTAs because they do not perceive these digital platforms as a threat to their capacity for autonomous decision-making. Rather, they see OTAs as a means of enhancing their position and status within their profession. Meanwhile, other hoteliers have been much more reluctant to rely on OTAs. Instead, they emphasize a more classic form of defensive professionalism, seeking both to limit the control exerted by platforms and to maintain a personalized relationship with guests. Unable to counter the power of digital platforms on their own, these hoteliers have had to fight to convince political authorities and economic regulators of the need to address their concerns (Demazière, 2018; Saks & Adams, 2019).

More broadly, we would argue that the impact of digital platforms should be understood in terms of a “set of forces” (Adams et al., 2020a, p. 228) capable of revealing conflicts and hierarchies, both old and new. In the case of Swiss hoteliers, we have shown how the introduction of platforms has amplified external pressures and accelerated the adoption of managerial tools, a well-studied phenomenon in the sociology of professions (Boussard et al., 2010). Because OTAs promote organizational and management-oriented approaches to maximizing occupancy rates and profitability, managerial professionalism—the history of which remains to be written, at least where hoteliers and the hotel industry are concerned—and platforms are mutually reinforcing. Professional organizations play a role in this balance, and research has

not yet focused sufficiently on them. In our case, we have shown that the regional associations (in urban and city areas) did not have the same vision of platforms, which confirms the coexistence of two types of professionalism. We might add that the national association is more inclined to support the same managerial vision as the urban association, as it has close links with representatives of the major cities. On the fundamental aspect of parity clauses, however, it has adopted a classic strategy of protecting jurisdiction by uniting the entire profession behind this objective. This indicates that the divisions are not completely clear-cut, with all professionals ultimately obliged to work with the platforms.

Conclusion

Digital platforms destabilize and reconfigure not only markets but professions as well. By highlighting this fact, our study fills a gap in the literature. On the one hand, we have shown how, beyond organizational and commercial concerns, the introduction of platforms also affects professional jurisdiction. On the other hand, our findings underscore the need for sociologists of professions to continue studying the impact of platforms on various professions. The extent of this impact will depend on the capacity of platforms to alter not only the rules governing transactions and the criteria for assessing performance but also a profession's jurisdiction and capacity for self-regulation.

As discussed above, Swiss hoteliers have reacted to the introduction of platforms in divergent ways. When assessing the relevance of our findings to other professions, researchers should pay close attention to differences in the division of labor within each professional group. Certain members of the profession have more resources at their disposal to cope with the introduction of platforms and, therefore, less to lose in terms of jurisdictional control and professional autonomy. This explains why legal professionals are more reluctant than journalists to changes associated with platforms (Christin, 2017). Expanding the scope of research to encompass professional groups like hoteliers also highlights the appeal of platforms to those professionals more inclined to adopt new managerial techniques and technological tools out of a desire to achieve greater efficiency. Likewise, some legal professionals invest in technology adapted to their area of specialization (Dubois et al., 2019), and some educators and health professionals offer their services via distance learning or advice platforms (van Dijck et al., 2019). From this perspective, recognizing the sheer variety of platforms being introduced helps reveal tensions rooted in different notions of professionalism.

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