

Hybrid Professionalism in Municipal Culture: Training, Functions and Identity

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Abstract

This study examines how territorial scale conditions professionalism in fields that lack jurisdictional closure—a condition common to many public-sector occupations but largely unexamined in the literature on hybrid professionalism. It analyzes the case of municipal culture professionals in Galicia (Spain), a field contested by three occupational groups: social educators, cultural managers and sociocultural animators. A mixed-methods design combines a survey of 147 professionals across 313 municipalities with 16 interviews. The results reveal a highly qualified collective (85% with university degrees) but marked disciplinary dispersion, and a functional distribution in which managerial tasks (84.3%) far exceed sociocultural dynamization (29.9%); only 28.5% perceive correspondence between job title and actual functions. The study proposes the concept of territorial hybrid professionalism: municipalities with fewer resources paradoxically sustain closer socio-educational practice, showing that organizational scale, not resource endowment alone, shapes which forms of professional practice are possible.

Keywords

Hybrid professionalism, professional identity, cultural workers, jurisdictional competition, sociocultural animation, cultural management, professionalization, territorial professionalism

Introduction

The sociology of professions has been built largely on occupations that achieved jurisdictional closure—medicine, law, engineering—where credentialing, licensing, and collective organization secured exclusive control over a domain of work (Abbott, 1988; Freidson, 2001; Larson, 1977). Far less is known about occupations that operate durably without such closure: fields where competing groups make overlapping claims, no credential confers exclusive access, and the settlement between contenders is continually renegotiated rather than resolved. Public-sector occupations are especially exposed to this condition, since administrative structures and budgetary constraints shape their jurisdictions as much as professional projects (Evetts, 2011; Noordegraaf, 2015). Yet research on hybrid professionalism has paid little attention to a variable that is unavoidable in local government: territorial scale. Municipalities differ enormously in size, resources and organizational complexity, and these differences plausibly condition which forms of professional practice are possible at all. Whether—and how—scale shapes professionalism in a field lacking closure remains an open question.

This article addresses that question through the case of municipal culture professionals in Galicia (Spain), a region in northwestern Iberia with 313 municipalities of highly heterogeneous characteristics, ranging from urban centers of over 200,000 inhabitants to rural municipalities with fewer than 1,000 residents. These professionals operate at the intersection of public administration, socio-educational action, and cultural mediation, in a field where three occupational groups—social educators, cultural managers and sociocultural animators—compete to define the contents, methods and purposes of public cultural intervention. These three groups are not studied here as separate populations; the survey and interviews target the holders of municipal cultural posts—referred to throughout as municipal culture professionals—whatever their disciplinary background.

Municipal cultural posts in Spain are filled by three occupational groups with distinct training traditions—social education, sociocultural animation, and cultural management—but none constitutes a regulated profession for access to these posts: there is no enabling qualification, no dedicated professional college, and no profession-specific regulation. They operate within a legal framework that recognizes culture as a citizen right yet makes almost no cultural service mandatory and defines no professional profile to deliver it. This legal fragility—a constitutional right without mandatory professional provision—is the structural condition within which the jurisdictional dispute analyzed here unfolds, and it means that the forms of professionalism emerging in each territory are shaped by administrative structure as much as

by professional agency. The regulatory and occupational specifics are set out in the study context section below.

Research on cultural workers in Europe has addressed their precarity (Belfiore, 2022), the competing institutional logics of cultural organizations (Góral, 2025, 2026), professional rationalities in publicly funded institutions (Lindström Sol, 2023) and shifting employment conditions (Ellmeier, 2003), but has not examined how territorial scale configures the professionalism emerging from jurisdictional disputes. In Spain, empirical work has documented the training profiles and working conditions of municipal cultural professionals (Martinell & Marcé, 1995; Ortega et al., 2019; Pose-Porto, 2006), the tension between the two paradigms (Caride, 1998; Ventosa, 2002; Úcar, 1992) and the institutional development of cultural policies (Bonet & Négrier, 2018; Rius-Ulldemolins & Rubio-Arostegui, 2016; Zallo, 2011); recent research confirms the persistence of training-function misalignment (Consello da Cultura Galega, 2024; Gradaílle Pernas et al., 2024). None of this work applies the sociology of professions at the municipal level, and no study addresses this collective in Southern Europe from that framework. This article contributes to filling these gaps.

The primary focus of this study is the relationship between territorial scale and forms of professionalism, examined through the lens of jurisdictional disputes in the cultural field. Three research questions guide the analysis: (a) what is the training and disciplinary configuration of municipal culture professionals, and how does it reflect the absence of jurisdictional closure?; (b) how does the tension between cultural management and sociocultural animation logics—the two dominant professional paradigms in the field—manifest in the functions actually performed, in the perception of professional (mis)alignment, and in the constraints imposed by the administrative structure?; and (c) how does territorial scale condition the forms of professionalism that emerge from this tension? To address these questions, the study combines two analytical levels: the system of professions (Abbott, 1988), which accounts for the competition between occupational groups for jurisdictional control, and individual professional practice (Noordegraaf, 2007, 2015), which captures how professionals combine competing logics in their daily work. Social educators, the third competing group, predominantly align with the sociocultural animation logic; their jurisdictional claim operates through the argument that cultural work is a legitimate field of social education practice (the position defended by the Galician College of Social Educators, CEESG). The central argument is that the jurisdictional dispute has become a permanent structural condition that generates forms of hybrid professionalism (Noordegraaf, 2007, 2015) whose configuration depends critically on territorial scale, producing a paradox in which municipalities with fewer resources maintain greater proximity to socio-educational practices—not merely as a professional choice but as a consequence of the administrative and resource constraints that shape workplace jurisdiction.

Theoretical framework

Jurisdictional disputes and professionalism in the cultural field

As outlined in the introduction, two analytical levels structure the analysis. At the system level, Abbott's theory illuminates competition between occupational groups for jurisdictional control. Each of the three groups mobilizes a different knowledge base: social educators claim cultural work as socio-educational intervention; sociocultural animators invoke community dynamization methodology; cultural managers appeal to planning and service-delivery frameworks. The dispute is not nominal but reflects opposed conceptions of purpose—social transformation versus efficient service provision.

Abbott's (1988) framework highlights two key concepts for this case: jurisdictional settlements and the three arenas of jurisdictional claims. Abbott argues that full jurisdictional monopoly is rare; most professional conflicts result in limited jurisdictional settlements—partial, negotiated compromises that are inherently temporary and evolving (Abbott, 1988). He identifies several forms of settlement, including full jurisdiction, subordination, intellectual jurisdiction, division of labor, advisory jurisdiction, and client differentiation. The relevance of this typology for municipal cultural work is immediate: the competing groups in this field have not achieved full jurisdiction; rather, they have reached unstable, evolving settlements that vary across municipalities. The empirical manifestation of these settlement forms in Galician municipalities—and how they vary with territorial scale—is analyzed in the Results and Discussion sections.

Equally important is Abbott's argument that jurisdictional claims must be validated by three distinct audiences, each operating as a separate arena: the legal arena (courts, legislatures, licensing boards), the public arena (media, general culture, citizen perception), and the workplace arena (the daily scene of actual labor). Abbott (1988) identifies a "profound contradiction" between the formal arenas and the informal workplace arena, where boundaries are constantly blurred through "workplace assimilation". This three-arena model has direct analytical implications for our case, as it allows examination of how the same professional group may hold different jurisdictional strength in each arena—and, crucially, how territorial scale may condition these arena-specific configurations. The empirical application of this model to our data is developed in the Discussion.

At the level of individual practice, Noordegraaf's (2007, 2015) hybrid professionalism framework analyzes how professionals combine contradictory logics daily. The articulation between levels is productive: the irresolution of jurisdictional dispute at field level generates the conditions under which individuals develop hybrid practice at organizational level, exercising the discretion Lipsky (2010) attributed to "street-level bureaucrats".

The two paradigmatic models embody differentiated logics: sociocultural animation, rooted in Social Pedagogy (Caride, 1998; Trilla, 1988; Úcar, 1992) and the French tradition (Gillet,

2006), positions the professional as community mediator; cultural management (Martinell & Marcé, 1995; Rubio-Arostegui & Rius-Ulldemolins, 2012) positions them as resource administrator. These are jurisdictional positions, not merely methodological options.

This tension maps onto Evetts' (2003, 2011) distinction between organizational professionalism—imposed through accountability mechanisms and external control—and occupational professionalism—constructed through shared values and self-regulation. The functional predominance of administrative tasks documented in our Results reflects organizational professionalism, while resistance to abandoning socio-educational practices reflects occupational professionalism. Fournier's (1999) notion of professionalism as a “disciplinary mechanism” is also relevant: the invocation of managerial efficiency reorients practice toward administrative logics.

From pure to hybrid professionalism: an analytical framework

In contemporary public domains, “pure” professionalism based on esoteric knowledge and autonomy (Freidson, 2001) is giving way to hybrid forms combining professional and organizational logics—a dynamic documented across European cultural work (Belfiore, 2022; Góral, 2026; Lindström Sol, 2023).

However, these studies do not address the territorial dimension as a constitutive variable of professionalism, nor do they consider a particularity of the case at hand: the incomplete professionalization of the field. Unlike consolidated professions that possess mechanisms of social closure (Larson, 1977), municipal culture professionals lack an enabling qualification, a professional college, and specific normative regulation. Three collective actors claim to represent the occupation in Galicia—the Galician Association of Cultural Management Professionals (AGPXC), the working group on sociocultural animation and cultural management of the Galician College of Social Educators (CEESG), and the Commission on Cultural Policies of the Galician Council of Culture. Their published position documents and our interviews with their representatives reveal divergent definitions of the occupation, none of which has become a shared professional project; these are analyzed in the Discussion. While these professionals also operate as cultural intermediaries (Maguire & Matthews, 2012), the professionalism framework is more productive for our purposes as it captures jurisdictional competition dynamics that intermediation theory does not.

Methodology

Study context: Occupations, training and regulation

The three occupational groups that fill municipal cultural posts follow distinct training and regulatory pathways. Social education (educación social) is a collegiate profession with a 240-ECTS university degree regulated under the Bologna framework and historically linked to social pedagogy; its professional body defines cultural mediation as one of its core competencies (ASEDES, 2007). Sociocultural animation (animación sociocultural) is certified through a

higher vocational qualification within the Sociocultural and Community Services family. Cultural management (*gestión cultural*) long lacked a specific undergraduate degree, with training channeled through postgraduate programs. A dedicated four-year degree was authorized in Galicia only in 2021; its first cohorts had not entered the labor market when our data were collected, so it is not reflected in the training profiles reported below, but it constitutes an active and datable closure attempt whose effects remain to be seen. Occupational recognition, meanwhile, remains partial: the national employment services created a specific entry for cultural managers only in 2012, nested within a broader category whose official label refers to social-work support and does not mention culture (FEAGC, 2012).

Access to municipal cultural posts occurs through competitive public-employment examinations across three qualification bands, with entry requirements and job descriptions set independently by each municipality. The federation representing cultural managers has repeatedly proposed a standard correspondence between titles, functions and qualification bands (FEAGC, 2019), but these proposals are not binding, and empirical studies of Spanish municipal cultural workers consistently report heterogeneous titles, variable contractual status and no common functional profile (Bernal Ruiz, 2009; Ortega et al., 2019).

The legal framework combines a strong declaration of rights with minimal service obligations. The Constitution establishes access to culture as a citizen right and assigns cultural promotion to the autonomous communities; local-government legislation lists cultural promotion among municipal competences, but the only mandatory cultural service is the public library, and only in municipalities with more than 5,000 inhabitants. A 2013 reform further narrowed municipal discretion by repealing the provision that had allowed complementary cultural activity. Galician regional legislation likewise lists cultural activities and facilities as a municipal competence without specifying professional requirements.

This configuration contrasts with contexts where the occupation is state-certified: in France, the “animateur socioculturel” holds a structured diploma pathway and a dedicated occupational code (Bock, 2022), while in the Nordic countries municipal cultural workers operate within strong welfare-state structures. The Spanish case therefore represents a field where a recognized public right coexists with an unregulated professional workforce—precisely the configuration in which jurisdictional settlements remain provisional.

General design and methods integration

This study is embedded within a broader investigation using a mixed-methods design integrating convergent and sequential explanatory models (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Data from two phases were used: the survey of cultural professionals (Phase 3) and in-depth interviews (Phase 4). Integration was carried out at three levels: in design (quantitative findings informed qualitative sampling), in analysis (systematic comparison of quantitative patterns with qualitative narratives), and in interpretation (construction of a joint narrative articulating both types of evidence).

Quantitative phase: Survey of professionals

A questionnaire of 59 items (16 closed, 8 Likert-scale, 35 open), designed following survey research principles (Fowler, 2014), was administered to cultural professionals across all 313 Galician municipalities. Data collection spanned August 2022–December 2023 across four phases, including final-phase telephone administration to maximize responses. Of 313 questionnaires sent, 189 responses were obtained (60.4%), of which 147 corresponded to professionals effectively performing cultural functions as a principal or significant responsibility of their position. The 42 excluded responses corresponded to municipalities where cultural functions were assumed directly by political office-holders or staff without stable connection to the cultural area. Territorial distribution: A Coruña 64 (43.5%), Pontevedra 32 (21.8%), Lugo 31 (21.1%), Ourense 20 (13.6%), with response rates ranging from 21.7% (Ourense) to 68.8% (A Coruña) of municipalities per province. Data was processed using SPSS v.28 with descriptive statistics and chi-square tests for categorical associations when expected frequencies permitted.

Qualitative phase: In-depth interviews

Thirteen professionals were intentionally selected using maximum variation criteria (Kvale, 2007): territorial diversity (rural, rururban, urban), training profile (education-related and non-education-related), predominant intervention model (sociocultural animation and cultural management), professional experience (under five years, 5–20 years, over 20 years), and type of contract. Professional experience was included as a selection criterion to capture potential generational differences in how the two logics are understood and combined. Interviews were semi-structured, conducted between September 2022 and March 2023, with durations ranging from 52 to 108 minutes (mean: 75 minutes). No time limit was imposed; interviews concluded when both researcher and participant considered that the topics had been sufficiently explored. Interviews were conducted in Galician. Participants were recruited independently across different municipalities, with no professional connection. Thematic saturation was pragmatically assessed by tracking the emergence of new codes: the final three interviews generated no new categories, though they enriched existing ones. Fewer than the twenty initially planned (five per province) were achieved, as recruitment constraints required adaptation; the reduction affected mainly urban profiles in Lugo and Ourense, limiting generalizability in those contexts.

Transcriptions were produced using the Whisper v3 automatic speech recognition model, executed on the infrastructure of the Galician Supercomputing Center (CESGA), and manually reviewed to ensure accuracy. Thematic analysis followed the principles of constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014). ATLAS.ti software was used to manage the data corpus—organizing transcripts, applying codes, and retrieving coded segments—but all analytical decisions (code creation, category formation, theoretical integration) were made by the research team through iterative close reading and discussion. Coding proceeded in three phases—open, axial, and selective—generating 47 initial codes, grouped into 12 intermediate

categories and, finally, four selective categories: training configuration, jurisdictional disputes, hybrid professional identity, and territorial conditioning. Member checking with four participants representing diverse profiles produced nuances in the “active resistance” category—participants stressed that their resistance was pragmatic rather than ideological—but did not modify the categorical structure.

Participants are identified by codes (PAC-001 to PAC-013) encoding territorial context, training profile, predominant model, and professional experience. Quotations include contextual information in parentheses and have been translated from Galician.

A second interview strand targeted the collective actors that claim to represent the occupation in Galicia. Semi-structured interviews (mean duration 90 minutes, in person or online) were conducted with the president of the AGPXC, the coordinator of the CEESG working group on sociocultural animation and cultural management, and the coordinator of the Cultural Policies Commission of the Galician Council of Culture. These interviews explored each organization’s origins, membership, relations with public administrations and, centrally for this analysis, how it defines the occupation and conceptualizes the relationship between cultural management and sociocultural animation. Their accounts were triangulated with each organization’s published position documents. Together they provide the evidential basis for the analysis of competing jurisdictional strategies presented in the discussion.

Ethical considerations and reflexivity

The research followed institutional ethical regulations for social research. Informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymity were guaranteed. The study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the University of Santiago de Compostela. No conflicts of interest exist. This research was funded by the Ministry of Universities of the Government of Spain under the University Teacher Training Programme (grant FPU19/02860).

The principal investigator has previous professional experience in sociocultural animation, which facilitated field access but also carried a risk of interpretive bias favoring the socio-educational model. To mitigate this risk, several strategies were implemented: member checking with diverse participants, review by researchers with different disciplinary orientations, and explicit attention to discordant data—particularly the perspectives of professionals who embrace the managerial model without identity tension.

Results

Academic training: High qualification with jurisdictional dispersion

Table 1 synthesizes the training profile of the professional collective, revealing high academic qualification alongside notable disciplinary dispersion that has direct implications for the jurisdictional configuration of the field.

Table 1*Training profile of municipal culture professionals (n=147)*

Dimension	Category	n	%
Maximum level of training	Long-cycle university degree or equivalent	50	34.0
	University diploma	45	30.6
	Master's degree	15	10.2
	Higher vocational training	15	10.2
	Bachelor's degree (Bologna)	12	8.2
	Upper secondary education	7	4.8
	Doctorate	3	2.0
Main disciplinary areas	Education Sciences and Pedagogy	48	32.7
	Economics, Business and Tourism	11	7.5
	Law and Legal Sciences	10	6.8
	Philology and Linguistics	10	6.8
	Humanities	8	5.4
	Behavioral Sciences	7	4.8
	Other areas (>10 distinct fields)	53	36.0

Note. Author's elaboration from survey data.

A bivariate analysis of training levels by disciplinary area was considered, but the cell frequencies for several combinations were too low ($n < 5$) to permit meaningful statistical interpretation. Descriptively, Education Sciences professionals are predominantly concentrated at the long-cycle university degree (Licenciatura) level (reflecting the pre-Bologna Diplomatura en Educación Social), while Economics/Business professionals show greater dispersion across degree levels.

Crucially for jurisdictional analysis, Education Sciences predominate (32.7%), reflecting historical links between cultural action and social education in Galicia, while the presence of more than fifteen knowledge areas evidences the absence of a jurisdictional credential—unlike the certified pathways described in the study context above. This pattern of training fragmentation in the cultural field has also been documented at the broader European level (Sternal, 2007). Participation in continuing education is high (67.3%) but engagement with professional networks remains low (46.2%), evidencing weak occupational professionalism (Evetts, 2003). Although 85% hold university degrees, only 43% of positions required one (Pose-Porto & Caride, 2022): only 12.1% of civil servants are classified in group A1, while 34.8% are in C1; among contract staff, only 12.2% reach the highest group while 45.9% remain in the intermediate one. Professionals with master's degrees and long experience thus often occupy auxiliary-level posts—a structural mismatch between qualification and institutional recognition that, in Abbott's (1988) legal arena, denies a highly educated workforce formal

jurisdictional standing. Among those with specialized training, concentrations appear in General Cultural Management and Sociocultural Animation (9.5%), Cultural Services and Industries (6.8%), Heritage and Museology (3.4%), and Education and Cultural Mediation (2.7%), with a notable absence in emerging areas such as cultural technologies (Abbott, 1988).

Professional functions: Multi-functionality and jurisdictional misalignment

Table 2 presents the distribution of functions, evidencing the preeminence of management tasks over sociocultural dynamization. The percentages are not mutually exclusive, as each professional performs multiple functions simultaneously: the most frequent concentration is between three and seven simultaneous functions per professional (over 70% of the sample), with exceptional cases of between eight and twelve functions, particularly in rural municipalities. The most common combinations group management-coordination with design-planning and administrative management, constituting a predominantly managerial functional core. Only a minority combines this core with sociocultural dynamization functions; these professionals are, empirically, those who embody the hybridization that this article theorizes.

Table 2

Main functions performed by municipal cultural professionals (n=147, multiple response)

Function	%
Management and coordination of cultural activities	84.3
Design and planning of cultural programming	59.1
Administrative and financial management	53.7
Sociocultural dynamization and citizen participation	29.9
Management of cultural facilities and spaces	27.2

Note. Percentages do not sum to 100% as this is a multiple-response item. Mean number of functions per professional is between 4–5. Author’s elaboration.

Deeper analysis reveals additional patterns. The most frequent type of misalignment is performing functions of a higher professional category than formally assigned (17.7%), followed by tasks unrelated to the cultural domain (11.6%) and responsibilities outside the assigned category (7.5%). In territorial terms, municipalities under 5,000 inhabitants concentrate functional overload and non-cultural tasks, while those over 50,000 concentrate higher-category functions performed without formal recognition or remuneration—quantitative support of what Abbott (1988) describes as different workplace settlements emerging in different organizational contexts.

The gap between the 84.3% dedicated to management and coordination and the 29.9% performing sociocultural dynamization functions constitutes the central empirical finding of the jurisdictional reconfiguration of the field. The causal attribution of this displacement, however, requires nuance: increasing administrative complexity and the lack of active citizen demand operate simultaneously, and the existence of professionals who maintain animation practices in equally bureaucratized contexts indicates that bureaucratization is not deterministic on its own.

The interviews illustrate this complexity. A professional in a rururban context with over 20 years of experience describes the tension:

My employment contract says I am an administrative auxiliary with the functions of cultural animator technician. The title is cultural animator technician, and the category is administrative auxiliary. [...] We try to slip in, let's see, there are some animation things, but no. Essentially cultural management. When we analyze offers, proposals, and so on, the goat goes to the mountain [i.e., old habits die hard], and we go to the analysis from that socio-educational perspective. (PAC-003, rururban, education profile, sociocultural animation, >20 years)

This testimony reveals a deep identity tension: the professional acknowledges that their practice is “essentially management” but maintains a socio-educational orientation as an interpretive framework that guides their decisions, even within the managerial frame. At the other end of the spectrum, an urban professional with less than five years of experience describes entirely administrative functions:

The actual functions I perform right now are drafting specifications for public tenders, writing reports of all kinds. [...] In general, a good part of my work has to do with drafting specifications and reports. [...] I believe that by definition a culture technician is a special administration technician. Special means they contribute knowledge that, in principle, another cannot. So, insofar as my function is ninety-something percent administrative and legal right now, I am performing more the functions of a general administration technician than a special administration technician. (PAC-004, urban, non-education profile, cultural management, <five years)

The misalignment between formal job title and actual functions, synthesized in Table 3, constitutes a structural indicator of jurisdictional indefiniteness. Only 28.5% of professionals perceive full correspondence, while 40.7% express some degree of disagreement.

Misalignment was assessed through a combination of survey items and interview data. The survey included a Likert-scale item asking professionals to rate the correspondence between their official job title and their actual functions, as well as open-ended items inviting them to describe discrepancies. The categories of misalignment (performing higher-category functions, executing non-cultural tasks, assuming responsibilities outside one's assigned category)

emerged inductively from the open-ended responses and were subsequently validated through the interviews, where participants were asked to describe their daily functions and compare them with their contractual designation.

Table 3

Perceived correspondence between job title and actual functions (n=123)

Degree of correspondence	n	%
Fully agree	35	28.5
Partially agree	38	30.9
Partially disagree	21	17.1
Fully disagree	29	23.6

Note. 24 professionals did not respond to this item, possibly due to ambiguity of their contractual situation.

Author's elaboration.

Analysis of association between municipality type and misalignment distribution yielded a chi-square result that, while not reaching conventional statistical significance ($\chi^2=11.83$, $df=6$, $p=.066$, Cramér's $V=.22$), shows a pattern consistent with the qualitative evidence: in rural municipalities, misalignment is predominantly linked to functional overload and assumption of non-cultural tasks, while in urban municipalities it concentrates on performing higher-category functions without corresponding formal recognition. Given the mixed-methods design, this quantitative pattern is interpreted not as a standalone finding but as one element within a converging body of findings that includes the qualitative data presented below.

Professional identity: The emergence of hybrid professionalism

Table 4 presents the distribution of contractual job titles, which maps the jurisdictional dispute as materialized in administrative structures. The coexistence of "sociocultural animator" (25.2%) and "culture technician" (15.0%) as the two most frequent professional titles materializes the jurisdictional dispute at the terminological level. The datum that 15.6% corresponds to political office-holders indicates that in a significant proportion of municipalities cultural action remains un-professionalized; this figure would be amplified if the 42 excluded responses were included, as these corresponded to municipalities where cultural functions were assumed by political figures or non-specialized staff.

Table 4*Contractual job titles for cultural work positions (from the broader sample)*

Job title	%
Sociocultural animator	25.2
Political officeholder	15.6
Culture technician	15.0
Administrative staff	6.8
Cultural manager	4.8
Employment and local development agent	4.8
Culture and youth technician	3.4
Other titles	24.4

Note. Percentages are calculated over the total of responses received (n=189), including those subsequently excluded from the analytical sample. Author's elaboration.

The data on title evolution further illuminates the dynamic character of jurisdictional settlements. Among respondents, 61.5% report that their position has not experienced changes in its official title, while 23.0% confirm modifications, and 15.6% do not know whether previous changes occurred. Among those who have experienced title changes, the most frequent transformation involves the figure of sociocultural animator (8.2%), followed by culture technician (4.1%). These transformations follow two directions: some move toward greater technical specificity (from generic titles toward "culture technician"), while others reflect an expansion of functions incorporating complementary areas such as sports, youth, or linguistic normalization. In Abbott's (1988) terms, these title changes represent evolving settlements: what was once a clear sociocultural animation jurisdiction is being progressively renegotiated through the administrative renaming of positions—a mechanism that operates in the legal arena (formal contractual categories) even when the workplace arena (actual daily practice) may remain unchanged.

Professionals' own preferred titles reveal jurisdictional aspirations: "culture technician" (14.3%), "culture technician with complementary areas" (6.1%) and "cultural manager" (4.8%)—a claim for technical recognition in the legal arena, combined with acknowledgment of multifunctional workplace reality.

Taken together, these data document a directional shift: the “socio” component is being shed from job titles in favor of technical-administrative designations, a trend consistent with the receding presence of cultural work within the social education field (CEESG, 2025) and with the consolidation of “cultural manager” as the sector’s preferred professional label (FEAGC, 2012, 2019). This can be read as a disciplinary mechanism in Fournier’s (1999) sense, though our cross-sectional data establishes the direction of the terminological shift rather than its causal effect on identity. One interviewee illustrates the tension: his contract states “cultural management technician”, but on his office door he has placed “sociocultural animation technician” because, as he states, “that is what I want to be” (PAC-001, rural, education profile, sociocultural animation, 5–20 years). This act of symbolic resistance reveals that professional identity is not passively received from administrative categorization but actively constructed through everyday micro-practices.

Regarding the preferred intervention model, the questionnaire included a closed question with three options (cultural management, sociocultural animation, and mixed model). The results showed that 56.6% chose the mixed model, 23.1% chose sociocultural animation exclusively, and 20.3% opted for cultural management exclusively. While the closed format with an intermediate option may induce a centripetal tendency, the coherence between this result and the qualitative patterns reinforces its significance. The 20.3% who opted exclusively for management deserve attention: qualitative analysis suggests this group concentrates among urban professionals with non-education training profiles, representing the most advanced form of organizational professionalism (Evetts, 2003) and demonstrating that hybridization is not universal but rather one among several possible identity positions.

The qualitative analysis allows formalization of three identity patterns that correspond to different positionings along the continuum between organizational and occupational professionalism (Evetts, 2003). Table 5 synthesizes these patterns with their defining characteristics.

Table 5*Identity patterns and their relationship with analytical variables*

Pattern	Evetts' continuum	Profile association	Territorial association
Deliberate hybridization	Integration of both logics; occupational values guide organizational practice	Education profile; intermediate experience (5–20 yrs)	Rural and rururban; small to medium municipalities
Active resistance	Practice predominantly organizational; occupational orientation maintained as interpretive frame	Both profiles; variable experience	Preferentially urban; also rururban
Managerial assumption	Organizational professionalism embraced without identity tension	Non-education profile; variable experience	Urban; larger municipalities

Note. Associations are tendential, derived from qualitative analysis of 13 interviews. Not all cases conform to the pattern. Author's elaboration.

The hybridization documented here is not merely a label but a specific configuration of professional practice whose constitutive elements can be identified empirically. Hybrid professionals—those falling within the “deliberate hybridization” pattern—combine: (a) community-facing functions characteristic of sociocultural animation with (b) administrative-managerial functions characteristic of cultural management; they do so (c) guided by a socio-educational interpretive framework that shapes how they approach managerial tasks, while (d) operating under administrative constraints that formally classify them as managers. Because these are multiple-response items, most of the 29.9% who perform sociocultural dynamization functions also perform the management functions reported by 84.3% of the sample; this subset—animation practice retained within a managerial core—constitutes the empirical core of hybridization. In the interviews, hybrid professionals consistently describe this combination not as a choice but as a structural necessity imposed by the absence of specialized support staff, particularly in small municipalities (PAC-001, PAC-003, PAC-010).

The territorial paradox: Scale, resources and forms of professionalism

The territorial dimension conditions forms of professionalism in counterintuitive ways. Among respondents, 76.9% consider that supra-municipal administrations significantly condition their work, rising to 85.7% in municipalities under 5,000 inhabitants and falling to 62.5% in those over 50,000. This differential dependency creates a paradox: rural municipalities, with more limited resources and greater external dependence, maintain significantly greater

proximity to sociocultural animation practices, while urban contexts, with more resources and greater autonomy, develop professionalism more aligned with managerial logic. Greater material resources do not produce stronger socio-educational practice—if anything, the reverse: the same external dependency that signals scarcer own resources coincides with a higher prevalence of sociocultural dynamization in smaller municipalities, while administrative management predominates in larger ones. This pattern is not explained by professional preference alone: it reflects the structural reality that small municipalities lack specialized administrative staff, requiring the culture professionals to maintain direct community contact as part of their multi-functional role, whereas in larger municipalities departmental specialization channels professionals toward administrative tasks.

The interviews reveal the mechanisms. In rural contexts, the human scale facilitates direct knowledge of community needs, personal proximity operates as immediate social accountability, and the absence of heavy administrative structures allows flexibility; the local associative fabric—music bands, women’s associations, cultural groups—sustains participatory practice even when the professional lacks formal time for it (PAC-010, rural, education profile, sociocultural animation, >20 years). In urban contexts, departmental specialization, bureaucratic layering and the technological mediation of institutional relations generate structural distance from the community.

This paradox has its shadows. The extreme multifunctionality of rural contexts—where professionals also cover sports, education, youth and even the municipal census—dilutes professional identity and prevents specialized expertise; community proximity often depends on individual voluntarism rather than institutional structure; and more precarious conditions compromise continuity. Cultural action in rural municipalities is therefore not “better” but qualitatively different: stronger relationally, weaker technically.

Both veteran practitioners (PAC-001, PAC-003, PAC-007, PAC-010) and the representatives of the three collective actors periodize the evolution of the paradigmatic tension into three phases, a reconstruction consistent with documented accounts of Spanish cultural policy over the same period (Rius-Ulldemolins & Rubio-Arostegui, 2016): a period of relatively peaceful coexistence (2000–2008), in which both models operated in differentiated spaces; an intensification of the conflict during the economic crisis (2008–2015), with growing hegemony of the managerial paradigm driven by budget cuts and accountability pressures; and a current phase (since 2015) of searching for synthesis and hybrid models, possibly linked to generational change and the emergence of professionals socialized in a context of greater paradigmatic plurality. This periodization is a reconstruction from professional memory rather than a longitudinal measurement; whether the third phase represents a stable trend or a cohort effect remains open.

Professional recognition: The institutional-social gap

The data on recognition completes the portrait of a field whose institutional position does not correspond to its social valuation. Among professionals, 68.7% perceive positive valuation from the municipal government, compared to 86.4% who perceive positive citizen valuation—a gap of nearly 18 percentage points. This gap is territorially modulated: smaller municipalities show higher but more variable citizen and institutional recognition, respectively, while larger ones show more stable institutional valuation and weaker citizen recognition.

Among those perceiving positive institutional valuation, 43.5% describe it as “quite” valued and 25.2% as “very” valued, while 27.2% feel “little” valued and 4.1% perceive none. Citizen recognition is less variable: 55.1% “quite” and 31.3% “very” valued.

Discussion

The results allow the articulation of one principal theoretical contribution and two empirical findings with relevant theoretical implications for the field of professions and professionalism studies.

Theoretical contribution: Territorial hybrid professionalism

We propose territorial hybrid professionalism to designate a hybridization in which territorial scale operates not merely as context but as a constitutive element of professional configuration. Unlike Noordegraaf’s (2007, 2015) account of hybridization as a response to organizational complexification, our data show that hybridization adopts qualitatively—not merely quantitatively—different configurations depending on scale, occurring through different mechanisms. In rural municipalities, it occurs through the integration of both logics within the same person, who acts as manager and animator simultaneously out of structural necessity. In urban municipalities, hybridization, when present, operates through the aspiration to integrate a socio-educational dimension into a predominantly managerial practice—identity resistance within organizational constraints rather than integration born of structural conditions.

Abbott’s three-arena model illuminates this variation: rural professionals hold stronger public-arena jurisdiction (higher citizen recognition) and workplace versatility but weaker legal-arena standing, while urban professionals show the inverse. This arena mismatch—not professional preference alone—drives the forms of hybridization documented here.

Jurisdictional dispute as permanent condition

The case documents what Abbott (1988) theorized through his concept of jurisdictional settlements: the provisional, evolving compromises professions reach when full monopoly is unattainable. Our data reveals a mosaic of coexisting settlement forms. In rural contexts, the settlement approximates a division of labor: the culture professional handles community-facing work and programming while the mayor or councilor controls strategic and budgetary

decisions (PAC-001, PAC-010). In urban contexts, it resembles subordination: technicians work under political authorities who define priorities, with limited autonomy (PAC-004, PAC-006). Where multiple professionals coexist, client differentiation emerges. Crucially, professionals are not the only ones who are engaged in jurisdictional struggle; they are significantly constrained by the administrative boundaries of local-government legislation and the availability of public resources. None of these settlements is stable: they shift with political cycles, budget changes, and generational turnover, confirming Abbott's insistence that settlements are "rarely full and never final".

The organized representation of the field reproduces this instability. Both the published position documents of the three collective actors and our interviews with their representatives reveal three incompatible definitions of the work. The AGPXC proposes a functional hierarchy in which cultural management is the planning and design of cultural plans and programs, while sociocultural animators are field-level implementers "in direct contact with society"; its published job-classification document builds a graded structure of cultural posts and calls for statutory regulation (AGPXC, 2020), a claim to intellectual jurisdiction that concedes execution while retaining conceptual control, aligned with the national federation's definition of the cultural manager (FEAGC, 2009, 2019). The CEESG working group advances the opposite claim, situating both cultural management and sociocultural animation inside socio-educational intervention as specializations on an equal footing—a position elaborated in the profession's own literature, which argues that local cultural management in Galicia is properly a function of the social educator (Ventura, 2020) and that sociocultural animation is a modality of social education (Caride, 2005). The Cultural Policies Commission proposes "sociocultural management" as an encompassing category covering broader domains of everyday life—an advisory jurisdiction that frames the field without controlling practice.

None of these proposals has become a shared position, and the asymmetry of institutional resources helps explain why: social education holds a regulated degree and a professional college but reports cultural work as an area of receding presence (CEESG, 2025); cultural management has a growing associative structure, a recently secured occupational entry (FEAGC, 2012) and, since 2021, a dedicated degree, but no professional college and no enabling qualification requirement for access to municipal posts; and the Council of Culture is an advisory body without employer status. Spanish scholarship has accordingly characterized the professionalization of cultural management as an unfinished task (Ortega et al., 2019), and studies of the Galician sector identify persistent training and recognition deficits (Caride & Pose, 2021). The plurality of legitimate perspectives thus appears less as a transitional deficiency than as a structural feature of a field where no actor commands the resources for closure.

Applying Abbott's framework to an unconsolidated field is defensible: his concept of settlements explicitly accommodates incomplete and evolving arrangements, and recent applications to semi-professionalized fields (Góral, 2026; Jensen, 2019) confirm its analytical productivity where jurisdictional boundaries remain fluid.

The creation of a dedicated cultural management degree in 2021 illustrates the point precisely: it represents a new closure attempt launched from the educational arena, but one that yet confers no exclusive access to municipal posts and has not displaced any competing claim. In Abbott's terms, a credential has been created without a jurisdiction attached to it—a reminder that settlements evolve continuously and that closure requires not only a qualification but its legal recognition as a condition of practice.

The institutional-social recognition gap

The 18-percentage-point gap between citizen recognition (86.4%) and institutional recognition (68.7%), modulated by territorial scale, constitutes an arena mismatch in Abbott's terms: strong public-arena jurisdiction coexists with weak legal-arena standing. This finding suggests that in fields with incomplete professionalization, community-based legitimacy can function as an alternative pathway to professional consolidation—one that operates through the public arena rather than the legal arena.

Conclusion

This study has addressed three research questions about municipal culture professionals in Galicia. Regarding the first question (training configuration and jurisdictional position), the results show a highly qualified collective (85% university graduates) whose disciplinary dispersion across more than fifteen knowledge areas—combined with the absence of an enabling qualification and an occupational classification that does not recognize cultural management as a distinct category—prevents any single group from establishing jurisdictional closure. Where the state does not name an occupation, it cannot confer jurisdiction on it. Regarding the second question (manifestation of the tension between logics), the data reveal a systematic displacement: 84.3% of professionals perform management functions while only 29.9% engage in sociocultural dynamization, a pattern driven not only by bureaucratization but also by a legal architecture that assigns municipalities cultural competence while making almost no cultural service mandatory, and by fiscal rules that narrowed discretionary cultural activity. Only 28.5% perceive full correspondence between their job title and actual functions. Regarding the third question (territorial conditioning of professionalism), the study documents that territorial scale constitutes a structuring variable: small municipalities produce hybrid practitioners through structural necessity, while larger municipalities channel professionals toward administrative specialization. This territorial hybrid professionalism represents the study's principal theoretical contribution.

Abbott's settlements and three-arena concepts have proven productive here. Municipal cultural work is characterized not by a single jurisdictional arrangement but by a mosaic of coexisting, evolving settlements varying across municipalities. The multi-arena mismatch—weak legal jurisdiction, strong public recognition, variable workplace arrangements—constitutes both the structural condition of the field and the engine of the hybrid professionalism documented here.

For policy, the findings suggest that regulatory frameworks should recognize and strengthen the hybrid character of the profession rather than attempting to artificially resolve the tension between management and animation. This implies designing training pathways that combine technical-administrative and socio-educational competencies, developing normative frameworks flexible enough to adapt to territorial realities but precise enough to guarantee minimum standards of qualification, and fostering mechanisms of collective articulation that overcome the current fragmentation of the sector's representation.

Limitations

The 147-professional sample, while comprehensive, is not statistically representative; A Coruña is overrepresented (43.5% of responses vs. 29.7% of municipalities) and Ourense underrepresented (13.6% vs. 29.4%). The exclusion of 42 municipalities without dedicated professionals renders invisible the most de-professionalized contexts. Self-selection bias may overestimate socio-educational orientation. The techniques employed capture perceptions that do not always correspond to actual practices (Jerolmack & Khan, 2014). Qualitative findings rest on thirteen interviews; urban profiles in less-represented provinces are underrepresented. Future research should pursue longitudinal designs, Southern European comparisons, and ethnographic observation of actual practice.

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