

Professionalization by Interdisciplinary Cooperation? Strategies of Social Workers in the Context of the Swiss Child & Adult Protection Authorities - Project funded by the Swiss National Scientific Foundation (SNF 10001A_162835).

Summary

The project aimed at analysing the dynamics of interdisciplinarity within the Swiss Child and Adult Protection Authorities (CAPA). On the bases of the revision of the Civil Code in 2008/2013, these authorities had to be newly created in most cantons, particularly in order to satisfy the requirement of interdisciplinarity (according to the French version of art. 440 CC) or professional competence (“Fachbehörde” according the German version of the same article).

The theoretical frame of reference relied mainly on the power theoretical strand of the sociology of professions (notably Abbott, 1988). Within this frame and based on the Abbottian notion of arenas of interprofessional competition, we were particularly interested in the mutual positioning strategies of members of the different disciplines brought together in the new organisations, in particular of jurists and of social workers as the two presumably largest professional or disciplinary groups. If these processes take place in the workplace as the principal arena observed, the workplace arena has been shaped in the legislation process, i.e. in the arena of politics. Thus, we were also interested in reconstructing how professional or disciplinary discursive strategies and politics had led to the current text of art. 440 and to its prevalent interpretations on the federal and cantonal levels. For both arenas, we expected positioning strategies to be linked to (mutually perceived) disciplinary knowledge bases, their field-specific value and legitimacy. As the outcome in the political arena is expected to be conditioned by the political-institutional framework on each level, so are the strategies (and their effects) expected to be dependent on the organisational frame, that is on structure and process defined on the cantonal level.

1 Research work conducted

The project was composed of three complementary work packages; accordingly, the current report first describes the work done within each package individually before summarising the combined results.

1.1 WP 1, Qualitative Case Studies: the dynamics of interdisciplinarity and disciplinary positioning within the new authorities (Julia Emprehtinger)

Work package 1 focused on the micro-level processes of disciplinary knowledge and general competence claims. It included qualitative ethnographic case studies with observations and in-depth interviews. We conducted case studies in five CAPA, each one in a different canton, three in the German and two in the French speaking part of Switzerland. In total, we have about 400 pages of field notes. Each case study encompasses eight to twelve field visits lasting from one to eight hours each. The field notes are written in German.

Observations were completed by in-depth interviews. In each CAPA, we conducted an interview with the president/chairman of the CAPA, 1-2 social workers and 1-2 representatives of other professions (law and/or psychology). For each CAPA, we did two additional interviews with social workers from collaborating social services in order to complete the study with an external view on the organization. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. In total, we have 32 interview transcripts in German and French. All field notes and interview transcripts are pseudonymized.

Deviations from the research plan: The research plan for work package 1 included six case studies, four in German-speaking Switzerland and two in the French-speaking part, the first four studies being scheduled in the first 15 months. This schedule proved to be utterly optimistic: Negotiating access and observation opportunities had to be tailored to each individual organisation and were much more time-consuming than expected which resulted in a delay of 9 months for the first case study. Data collection and analysis, too, needed more time than planned because of the variety of cantonal organisation. As a consequence (and partly also due to a maternity leave), field work could only be accomplished in August 2019, and only five cases (in three German and two French speaking cantons) could be done. In order to reduce heterogeneity, we decided to concentrate on cantons with cantonal-level CAPA (as against communally organised ones). In return, this allowed for focussing on the opposition between the two most important structural conditions, i.e. the opposition between judicial and administrative authorities. As it became evident, the integration – or not – in a judicial environment, unquestionably dominated by the legal profession, profoundly affects opportunities and space of action and thus positioning strategies of

social workers and other professionals. Two minor deviations have to be mentioned as well: 1) In one CAPA, we could not realize the interviews with the collaborating social services as despite several demands and promises the examined CAPA did not establish the contact. 2) In one CAPA, we do not have any interviews with social workers as we didn't get in touch with one of the very few ones active there as associated members (a striking feature of the organisation observed).

Preliminary and tentative analyses were presented at various occasions from 2016 on and in several publications (see output data).

1.2 WP 2: The political struggle for interdisciplinary authorities: analysis of professional-political discourses (Evelyne Thönnissen)

Work package 2 aimed at identifying disciplinary competence claims at the macro-level of political discourse linked to the creation of the CAPA, a process that spanned the 20 years from 1993 (mandate given to a first expert group) to 2012 (final cantonal legislation on CAPA structures).

Contrary to current public discussions and polemics about the CAPA, the discourse that led to the CAPA legislation was predominantly an expert discourse. This is reflected in the data corpus which consists, for one part, of expert reports, the documentation of consultation procedures ("Vernehmlassung") as well as of the minutes of the parliament and of the legal affairs committees of both federal councils. Data were mostly gathered on the federal online-platform and via access requests to the legal affairs committee.

The other part of the data corpus consists of 49 articles published in the Journal for Child and Adult Protection ("Zeitschrift für Kindes- und Erwachsenenschutz" ZKE / "Revue de la protection des mineurs et des adultes" RMA; formerly Journal for guardianship matters) in the time range from 2000 to 2016. The journal is published by the Conference of Child and Adult protection (KOKES/COPMA) and covers predominantly legal, but also social, ethical and political topics of the field. Authors as well as readers of this journal represent the range of actors and professions active in this field, with a dominance, however, of the legal profession and of legal topics. These texts were easily accessible and of great value to the research, especially to reconstruct the different arguments used and positions occupied by representatives of different disciplines (law, social work, pedagogy and psychology).

In addition, a data corpus with texts from each of the five cantons of WP 1 was constituted. However, besides legal texts, access to reports of experts and working groups who prepared cantonal legislation proved to be more difficult than on the federal level.

The data are analysed according with means of a discourse analysis based in the sociology of knowledge (Bosancic & Keller, 2016; Keller, 2011).

Deviations from the research plan: as only 5 case studies were done in WP 1, only 5 were done in WP 2, too. In return and contrary to the research plan, texts from ZKE/RMA which proved to be more informative for analysing professionals claims on the national level than parliamentary documents could be included in the analysis.

First analyses were presented by Evelyne Thönnissen in June 2017 at the Congress of the Swiss Sociological Association and at the 4th Congress of the Swiss Social Work Society in September 2018.

1.3 WP 3: Online census on structure, processes and interpretation of interdisciplinarity (Elisa Favre, Peter Voll)

In order to test hypotheses drawn from the case studies, but also to have more generalisable results and a broader picture of the situation of the CAPA across Switzerland, an online census was started in November 2018 and completed in January 2019 (January to March 2019 for the Italian version). Sending of the survey-link was precluded by a paper-based announcement to each organisation, two reminders were sent by e-mail before closing the survey.

The questionnaire was addressed to the presidents/chairpersons of the 134 authorities listed in the (exhaustive) national directory held by the KOKES/COPMA. 74 of them answered the questionnaire themselves which amounts to (rather satisfactory) participation rate of 55%. Presidents were asked to forward the questionnaire to the other board members of which 176 completed a usable questionnaire. As there is no register of "ordinary" board members and the total number of members is, therefore, unknown, an overall participation rate cannot be calculated. Based on the chairperson's indication concerning the overall number of board members, 50% of the permanent board members seem to have answered the questionnaire which amounts to an estimated overall response rate (by permanent members) of roughly 28 % (or some

30%, if we add the 22 answers coming from CAPAs whose president was not among the respondents (195 of an estimated total of 600 members). Participation was slightly biased in favour of administrative authorities (56% against 50% of the chairpersons in judiciary authorities). To our knowledge, this is the first nationwide data base on CAPA-structure and processes.

The questionnaire was first elaborated in French and German and then translated to Italian. It comprised 4 main parts:

- professional background and demographic data of survey participants
- structure and process of the CAPA (addressed to the presidents only)
- perception of work by APEA members (skills required, challenges, etc.)
- perception of own and other disciplines and of interdisciplinarity.

The mean time for completion was between 26' for presidents and 18' for "ordinary" full members.

First results were presented in August 2019 at the 14th Conference of the European Sociological Association.

2 Main results

As by now, the main results can be summarized as follows:

(1) In the process of *federal legislation*, social work was very early positioned as one of the main disciplines to be represented in the future interdisciplinary boards. In this process, expert actors with credentials in both social work and law played a pivotal role. Despite this early positioning of social work, political discourse first was dominated by what one might call *general professionalization-discourse* which opposed professional (in the sense of expert as well as of occupation) to lay authorities without specifying the kind of disciplinary knowledge and of expert origin besides the legal profession. During the consultation procedure in 2003/2004 it became clear that a majority of cantons would not agree to national homogenisation with respect to organisation and status (court vs administrative) of the authorities, but that the principle of general professionalisation would be largely accepted. From henceforward, but particularly in parallel to the final vote in both federal chambers (2008), an *interdisciplinarity discourse* developed that re-introduced social work as one of the key disciplines it was in the first expert reports. This discourse, again, was primarily advanced by actors who reunited both disciplines in one person, mostly from the inner circle of the VBK/CAT ("Vormundschaftsbehördenkonferenz" / Conférences des autorités tutélaires"), renamed KOKES/COPMA (Konferenz für Kindes- und Erwachsenenschutz" / "Conférence en matière de protection des mineurs et des adultes") by 2010. Referring to Abbott (1988), it can be said that within the COPMA an alliance has been formed to back jurisdictional claims of a particular (and not very prestigious) branch of the legal profession and of social work in this new work field. Representatives of the disciplines psychology and pedagogy were virtually absent in these positioning endeavours.

In 2008 already, the then VBK / CAT published recommendations concerning the organisation of the future CAPA. Based on 110 tasks according to new CC-version which would be implemented in 2013, these recommendations established social work as the second discipline next to law. From here, a diffusion process took place towards *cantonal legislation* where the recommendations along with the Federal Council Dispatch were the discursive base of organisational reform. Structurally, however, reorganisations proved to be strongly path dependent, as they were largely determined by the pre-existing structures and their (in-)compatibility with the minimal requirements of the new federal legislation (see also Emprechtinger et al. (2016)).

(2) Corresponding to the path dependency, the newly established structures offer a *great heterogeneity* of features which differentially condition the interpretation of interdisciplinarity and hence opportunities for disciplinary positioning. Our survey data reveal, among others and with respect to social work, that

- the *presence of social workers* in CAPA varies with the status of the organisation (and thus with linguistic region): whereas social workers make 33% of the permanent board members of the average administrative CAPA (the dominant model in the German and Italian speaking cantons), they are far less represented in the judicial model of the French speaking cantons (16%). The absence of social work competence is not compensated for by social workers in a staff role (12% of the staff being social workers in administrative authorities as against 6% in judicial

authorities). Quite to the contrary: where there are no social workers in the board, there are none in the staff as well.

- the *role* of members, too, varies with the status of the organisation, but also with other elements of structure; judiciary authorities more often delegate adult protection enquiries to outside social services (in child protection cases, the difference is insignificant at the .10%-level), independent of the presence of social workers in the decision-making board; delegation to staff, on the contrary, depends on the presence of social workers in the staff. This implies that social workers on judiciary boards have less direct contact with clients than their fellows in administrative authorities.
- if the frequency of use of formal *fora of deliberation* (notably hearings) varies expectedly with the population base (i.e. the case load), this seems not to be the case with a typical social work forum like “team supervision”; unexpectedly, the use of this and other informal instruments is not correlated with the presence of social workers either. Such fora, however, are supposed to be important for developing a culture of interdisciplinarity.

(3) It seems, thus, that procedures and *interpretations of interdisciplinarity* are largely dependent on organisational and individual contingencies like chairpersons. They and other local pioneers are all the more influential as the CAPA are relatively young organisations and – particularly under the enduring media and political pressure – still “under construction”. Ethnographic observation as well as survey data show different organisational styles between multi-, inter- and trans-disciplinarity, creating different spaces for professional positioning and for demonstrating specific competences. Both also reveal different individual positioning strategies within organisations: Among legal professionals as well as among social workers, those identifying more strongly with their own disciplinary background tend to value their own’s discipline contribution significantly higher than the contribution of the other discipline (psychology being clearly considered less important than the other two).

(4) Finally, ethnographic observation also points to a more complex picture deserving further attention and analysis: when closely following the “arc of work” (Strauss, 1985) from referral to decision, we may detect still another sense of interdisciplinarity: the association of other disciplines in order to create a formal and legal moment for making a decision already made informally – or, in more difficult cases, to make a decision where no decision seems available at all.

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