

The background of the slide is a photograph of a university campus. In the foreground, there are several large trees with vibrant yellow and orange autumn leaves. A paved path leads towards a large, white, classical-style building with a central pediment and columns. Two people are walking on the path. The sky is blue with some light clouds.

The Role of Professionalism and Professional Identity in the Social Work Discourse

PROF. DR. KERSTIN SVENSSON



Theoretical and Empirical Reflections from an International Perspective

- Back to basic, definitions
- An international perspective: Sociology of Professions
- A Swedish example: Social Workers in two fields
- Concluding terms on how to understand professionalism and professionalisation of social work



Concepts with nuances (Horn, 2016)

- **Profession** – to distinguish some occupations from other occupations by certain criteria
- **Professionalization** - the process by which an occupation becomes a profession AND the process when an individual qualifies for a profession
- **Professionalism** – often used in Anglophone countries. Could be similar to German ‘Professionalismus’, Self-conception of a profession.
- **Professionality** – not often used in Anglophone countries. Related to German ”professionalität”, practicing an occupation denoting with particular quality



Being a profession or being professional

Being professional is acting in a certain way

- Being at work
- Take a professional role
- Not being personal or private

Representing a profession is having specific expertise

- Different professions have different expertise
- Professions constitutes a stratum in society
- Professions have higher education



Sociology of Professions

Talcott Parsons (1939):

- 19th century – bourgeoisie
- 20th century – the professional stratum, knowledge society, science, rationalism

Characteristics:

- Education
- Ability to implement knowledge in practice
- Institutional mechanisms for control of a social responsible use of competence



Some central ideas

Max Weber:

Professionalization – Bureaucracy – Rationalization

Power – Closure – Monopoly

Magali Sarfatti Larson (1977): *The rise of professionalism*

Controlling expertise – Ethics – Social Status (Calling)

Andrew Abbott (1988) *The System of Professions*

Social system – Competitions between jurisdictions.



More contemporary ideas of professionalism

Julia Evetts (1999)

A profession is an occupation that is:

1. Knowledge based
2. Providing service in society. Middle class.
3. Self-regulating through licences and routines.

Eliot Freidson (2001)

A third logic based on:

1. Knowledge from abstract concepts and theories
2. Internal division of labour
3. Control of merit and licences
4. Control of education at universities



Is Social Work A Profession? (1915)

Abraham Flexner 1915:

- *amateur-professional*: “Social work is from this point of view **a profession for those who make a full-time job of it**; it is not a profession for those who incidentally contribute part of themselves to active philanthropy” (s.152).
- “But, after all, what matters most is **professional spirit**. All activities may be prosecuted in the genuine professional spirit. - - - Social work appeals strongly to the humanitarian and spiritual element.”

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- **A ”professional spirit” or a disciplinary mechanism?** (cf. Valerie Fournier, 1999).



Definition of social work

Social work is a **practice-based** profession and an **academic** discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people.

Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work.

Underpinned by **theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge**, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing.

<http://ifsw.org/get-involved/global-definition-of-social-work>



Social work ethics

- Social work is based on **respect for the inherent worth and dignity of all people**, and the rights that follow from this. Social workers should uphold and defend each person's physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual integrity and well-being.
- Social workers have a responsibility to **promote social justice**, in relation to society generally, and in relation to the people with whom they work



Professionalism from above or below?

- Sociology of professions often based on Anglophone countries.
- Emphasis on the occupations struggle for influence, closure, jurisdiction etc.
- Acknowledgement from the state, right to give licenses etc.
- Sweden: the state has introduced, formed and defined the professions.
- Which position is valid for Germany ?



The professional landscape

Field/ Generation	Academi u	Education	Social regualtion	Psycho- social integration	Medicin	Techno- logy
Classic profession	Professor	(Priest)	Judges Lawyers	(Priest) Psychiater	Doctor	(Military) Engineer
Welfare profession	Lecturer	Teacher Pre-school teacher	Social worker	Psychologist Counsellor/ Social worker Psycho therapist	Nurse	Engineer
Pre- professio		Head- master/ principal	Police	Coach	Laboratory assistant	

Two branches of Social Workers

Social regulation

- Regulating the population
- Working on the basis of regulations (law)
- Explicit control, implicit support

Psychosocial integration

- Focussed on individuals
- Aimed towards the person's will and self-conception
- Explicit support, implicit control



1. Psychosocial integration

- A group of social workers in a process of professionalisation.
- Is gaining a stronger position in the multi-disciplinary teams where they work.
- Further education and license for Health Care Counsellors.
- Legislation for having psychosocial expertise in schools.
- Still, the managerial agenda with new public management etc. does not facilitate in practice,



2. Social regulation

- A group of social workers in a process of de-professionalisation
- Manual based work in fixed schemes and programmes
- More and more strict guidelines and models
- State focus on "knowledge gap" in the social services rather than on the social workers knowledge
- Tough working conditions
- High level of job turnover -> hard to get support from peers



What is **specific** in being a professional social worker?

Cognitive

KNOWLEDGE/EXPERTISE

Intra-professional

Can we claim explicit, specific expertise and get acknowledgement? How?

Social

INSTITUTION-BOUND

Dependent on the organisational demands.

Tensions between being "civil servant" or "idealist".

What is possible to change from inside?



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