

RN19 - Sociology of Professions

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Too protected? Boundaries, Barriers and Belonging in the Sociology of Professions

Professions are historically related to (national) welfare states, sheltering professional groups and services from market forces. From a sociological point of view the barriers and boundary work around professions have been and are considered as ambivalent. On the one hand, true or pure professionalism is understood as specialized expertise work which needs autonomy and space to manoeuvre independent from or beyond political or economic constraints. On the other hand, exclusivity may have protected professions against enhancing diversity, innovation and modernisation in general.

After fundamental structural changes in the name of new public management, professions are confronted with competitive market conditions on different levels while also actively expanding their domain beyond national welfare states. At the ESA 2019 conference we would like to strengthen the sociological understanding of these developments, in the light of the broader conceptualization and theorization of contemporary professionalism. The following questions will guide the discussion:

- How does professionalism legitimize and set distinctions under new conditions of work?
- To what extent does social closure still define professionalism?
- What kinds of persistent or novel forms of inequality – in particular related to gender differences – exist within professions and professional projects?
- How do technologies, especially digital technologies, affect protected professional fields?
- How is professional knowledge – and our idea of professional knowledge – changing?
- How are professional ethics construed in professional communities?
- How are professional identities constituted or maybe even blurred under contemporary conditions of work?
- Which new forms of professionalism arise, in teams, networks and collaborative arrangements?

We invite papers, both empirical and theoretical, on established and emerging professions, and concerning these or other related aspects and questions.