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The sociology of professions and the study of the academic profession

Elias Pekkola, Teresa Carvalho, Taru Siekkinen & Jan-Erik Johansson

Introduction

In this chapter, we will discuss the development of the literature on the sociology of professions. The sociology of professions is a wide research area. Sometimes called the theory of professions, it has a well-known and universally accepted corpus of literature that is often referenced by the scholarly community. Because professions are defined in their context and by their corresponding researchers, the literature and its interpretations have varied over time. In addition, the overall developments of the social sciences and related fields are well observable in the research on professions.

The remainder of this chapter is organised as follows. Section 2 will first provide a brief overview of the development of the research tradition on professions in the context of the development of the social sciences. In Section 3, we will briefly introduce the academic profession, as defined by profession theorists and higher education scholars. Section 4 will discuss the current research on academic professions. In conclusion, Section 4 will present

tentative research problems that could be approached using the framework of the theory of professions as well as the limitations of this approach.

The development of the theory of professions

The roots of studies on professions can be traced back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Like most fields of sociology, the role and impact of classic writers such as Marx, Weber and Durkheim have been crucial in the development of the sociology of professions. However, the sociology of professions as a distinctive field of study is said to be born in the latter half of the 20th century.

Many attempts have been made to summarise the development of the theory of professions (Adams 2015; Collins 1990; Dubar & Tripier 1998; Evetts 2003). Depending on the author, the development is divided into 3–5 stages. For simplicity, we will divide the theory's development in two phases: foundations and contemporary research. From the foundational literature, we distinguish two waves: functional and interactional research. We will also categorise contemporary research into systemic and organisational wawes. By dividing the development into these two phases and four waves, we lose certain variations in the literature, but at the same time, we increase the clarity of the typology. Thus, we hope to provide understandable information for readers unfamiliar with the research area.

In most literature reviews, the development of the sociology of professions is described as an independent trajectory. However, we consider that the sociology of professions was not developed in a vacuum. Consequently, we believe that it might ease readers' understanding of how the phases of the study of professions emerged, when it it's described in relation to the more generic developments of the social sciences. Thus, we will contextualise the development by providing insights into the development in other fields of the study of administration, management and work.

Foundations: Professions and power

The initial development of the foundations of the study of professions largely focused on the United States, particularly North America. The first classical studies on professions discussed their functions and traits in the context of occupations. The second major development, the interactionist tradition, shifted the emphasis to interactions between professions and their clientele, particularly in terms of analyses of power.

The functionalist research tradition is widely based on the seminal work of Parsons (1954) on the functions of societies. He discusses the functions of professions in contrast to bureaucracy and businesses or markets. In his studies, he emphasises the role of motivation and the values of professional work. In addition, many trait theoretical studies on professions were conducted during the 1940s and 1960s, which resemble management studies on manager traits. The idea was simply to distinguish professional work from other work and professionals from other employees. The following are some of the commonly cited characteristics of professions (see Goode 1957; Millersson 1964; Parsons 1954):

1) Shared ethical code, values and moral
2) Altruistic mission
3) Esoteric knowledge and intellectual supremacy
4) Intrinsic definition of qualifications, quality of work and new members
5) Organised union

Nevertheless, critiques by subsequent generations of professions researchers in the functionalist tradition laid the foundation and raised fundamental questions that are still relevant to researchers today. Implicitly, all professions researchers face the demarcation problem and distinguish professions from other occupations, although they criticise the simple and seemingly objective definition as positivistic.

In addition to the functionalist approach, interactional research is generally included in the group of classical theories in the sociology of professions. Researchers of the interactionist approach began with a critical perspective

of the functionalist analysis and methodological tradition of the Chicago School. The School emphasised the use of participant observations and life stories to analyse the professional practices of members of a professional group. By analysing these practices, the sociological problem in professions analyses shifted to strategies used by professionals to be recognised and socially legitimated in terms of possessing a monopoly over a specific task in the division of labour.

More practically, the interactionist wave can be called power and monopoly approaches. It is a part of the more generic changes in social science research throughout the 1960s and 1970s. The social sciences were politicised during those decades, particularly regarding the role of Marxist theory. The emphasis in professions research shifted from functions and traits to the work of professions, in general, and power relations between professionals and their clientele, in particular. Professions were seen in the context of the state machinery, representing the capitalist regime and socialising citizens. The question regarding the relationship among professions, knowledge and power has also been approached from several leftist (critical) angles (i.e. Grams, Althusser and, later, Hirsch). Although loud and popular, the Marxist approach was not the only framework used to analyse interactions between professionals and other parts of society. Another major school of thought at the time was the Weberian approach or the often-called neo-Weberian approach. It can also be termed the interactionist approach, regardless of its different intellectual roots and normative assumptions. Neo-Weberian researchers were interested in the power of professions and analysed society using Weberian concepts such as social closure, authority, monopoly, legitimacy and dominance. Weberian analyses emphasise market regulations by professions using authority, knowledge and regulations. Further, Foucauldian analyses of professions have often been mentioned under the interactionist label, although the golden age of this strand of research does not fit the chronological sequence of the tradition in its entirety.

Three authors were key in the development of research on the power of professions: Johnson (1972), Larson (1977) and Freidson (1974). Johnson

(1972) reflected on the power relations between professionals and their clients. Larson (1977), adopting a historical perspective relating to professional projects that professions have constructed with the development of capitalist societies or economies, sustained the notions of monopoly and social closure as fundamental in this relationship. Finally, Freidson (1974) stated that a profession could be interpreted as a form of organisation of the labour market on the basis of three fundamental elements that sustain its power: autonomy by controlling the nature of the work and how it is done; monopoly of an area of specialised knowledge, which sustains the autonomy, and credentialism (a form that assumes a gatekeeping role), which allows access to the profession only to those who possess occupational or institutional credentials.

Contemporary: Systems and organisations

During the period 1950–1970, with help from the classics of Western sociology, professions researchers laid a strong foundation for the study of professions and their influence in society. The next shift in studies occurred in the 1980s, when researchers' interest turned towards the system of professions and their organisations.

The third major research tradition can be called systemic. This tradition stems from systems theory, in particular, research on open systems and contingencies in the organisational environment. The main idea underpinning systems theoretic analyses is that society is a systemic apparatus in which all systems and subsystems are somehow connected, depending on the level of analysis. Organisations, or professions, cannot be analysed separately from other organisations. Analyses of a closed system in a stable environment were considered inadequate, and researchers began emphasising turbulent environments, openness of systems (i.e. contingencies and resources) and dynamic relations among various actors and professional groups.

In the sociology of professions, Abbot's (1988) study is particularly noteworthy, in which he describes the dynamics between different professions and their jurisdictions. In addition, he discusses how areas of expertise

(jurisdictions) are gained and maintained in ever-changing environments (technological, social and cultural) and that different professional groups have the authority and legitimacy to provide solutions to the same social problems across different time periods. He defines alcoholism (and the profession providing treatment for it) as changing from sin (priest) to criminal activity (lawyer), social problem (social worker) and, finally, illness (medical doctor). He further argues that there are no predefined areas of knowledge and professions and that they are dynamic and interrelated.

Markets and organisations are becoming increasingly important in the context of changing professions (Brint 1994). Professions are "both a type of organization and a type of status category" (Brint 1994, 23), and this aspect leads to emphases on the historical perspective; social organisation and status category both change and develop by nature. Evetts (2009; 2011) describes how changes in professionalism have been influenced by new public management: from occupational professionalism that emphasises, for instance, collegial authority, trust and autonomy to organisational professionalism that focuses on, for example, rational-legal forms of authority, hierarchical structures and managerialism. However, and interestingly, when organisational principles, strategies and methods affect occupational identities, structures and practices, the questions have to do with which aspects change and which ones remain to be constructed and controlled by professionals.

Thus, the fourth step in research can be called the organisational or managerial study of professions. Recent reviews of the sociological literature (Adams 2015; Brock & Saks 2015; Saks 2016) reveal that research attention has shifted to the various challenges faced by professional groups within organisations. This is a dominant trend in both the sociology and management literature on the theoretical perspectives of neo-Weberianism and neo-institutionalism (Brock & Saks 2015). Classical theorists defined tensions between professions, and their employer organisation (Freidson 2001), consequently evolving with neo-liberal and managerial tendencies. Further, a blurring of boundaries between professions and organisations and the growth of professional–managerial hybrids have been acknowledged. Hybridism

has been increasingly used to overcome the notion of professionalism and managerialism as opposite dimensions or distinct institutional logics (Bevort & Suddaby 2016; Carvalho 2014; Carvalho & Santiago 2015a; Noordegraaf 2015; Noordegraaf et al. 2015; Olakivi & Niska 2017). Simultaneous changes in how knowledge is produced and disseminated, along with higher education institutions losing their monopoly, question the relevance of scientific knowledge and credentialism in sustaining professional projects (Carvalho & Santiago 2016a).

Scholars and practitioners have been concerned about the disregard of professional principles by the spread of managerial influences. However, debates have moved beyond confrontation between the two principles of professionalism and managerialism to building more consensus-based ideas regarding how both principles could benefit each other in daily practices (Noordegraaf 2015). This new type of professionalism is a hybrid of professional and managerial principles. According to Noordegraaf (2015, 6, 12), hybrid professionalism is about professionals treating cases within a well-managed organisational context; it is "meaningfully managed professional work". Noordegraaf also describes the "beyond hybridity" model, which describes situations in which professionals consider organising to be an important task, that is, professionals deal with contradictions between professional and managerial principles, wherein organising becomes part of the job (Noordegraaf 2015).

There have been two key developments in the hybridisation of organisations. First, increased development in inter-organisational interactions has resulted in hybrid contracting arrangements between different organisations. Such arrangements require new ways of assessing risk and accountability, which raises the need for managerial skills to deal with assessing such risks and new accountability structures (Miller & Kurunmäki 2008). The second development can be observed between public and private organisations: the mixing of public policy goals and profit motives within public–private partnerships and state-owned organisations as well as privatisation, commissioning and contracting out arrangements, signified as part of the new public management

(NPM) doctrine, that demand increased awareness of business management practices among professional ranks (Johanson & Vakkuri 2017). In certain cases, strong professions have shown willingness to incorporate managerial knowledge into their professional practices, such as medical doctors in Finland compared to their counterparts in the United Kingdom (Kurunmäki et al. 2008). Theoretically, therefore, developments in hybridisation might erode the organisational control of professionals (see Noordegraaf 2007).

A fundamental change within the confines of a single organisation has been the adaptation of team-based organisations comprising multi-professional workgroups that combine the expertise of numerous occupational groups. Together with other developments in flexible specialisation and a decrease in the levels of hierarchy, new organisational forms work against occupational segregation between professional groups. Consequently, team-based organisation not only emphasises equality between types of expertise within the work group, but also decreases the possibilities of resorting to collegial decision-making within a single professional group (Janhonen & Johanson 2011). Overstating the influence of new organisational practices on the control of professional work is unnecessary, as professional status is protected by extra-organisational guarantees in educational requirements that are stipulated in legislation and protected by the professional group itself. The fundamental change brought about by the new organisational order is that professional groups are less able to insulate themselves from interactions with, and the influence of, other occupational groups that do not allow professional closure.

It is premature to define the current school of thought in the sociology of professions. However, there have been at least two attempts to define recent research. Some researchers argue that Western societies have faced so many fundamental changes that the concept of profession is hollowing out, for which changes in the labour and educational structures in Western societies are mainly responsible. In many Western societies, higher education has been massified for several decades, becoming a universal phenomenon. It also means that poorly paid jobs have become knowledge intensive. Currently, there are several "precarious" occupations that are independent of time or

space, often requiring a highly skilled workforce and individual commitment, and that have become part of the identity of workers. The old professions are becoming more middle-class and female dominated and losing their traditional foundations, that has been based on elite and male domination. Some professional occupations are still more elite than others, but their power is defined though methods that are different from those adopted by traditional professionals. Conversely, for similar reasons, some researchers suggest that the study of professions has made a full loop and that researchers are beginning to question what professionals are and how they can be distinguished from other groups. Table 1 summarises the development of the sociology of professions and its implications for research.

Table 1. Development of research into professions

Phase	Research objective	Questions	Phenomena
Functional 1940–1960	Societal functions of professions Traits of professions	What is a profession? How are professions defined?	Altruist missions
Interactional 1960–1980	Power of professions Professions and the objective of work	What do professions do in relation to other groups? How do they use power?	Relation between professions and clients
Systemic 1980–1990	System of professions Professionalisation	How do professions interact? How do professions evolve, develop and maintain?	Relations and demarcation of professions
Organisational 1990–2010	Professionals managed internally and by organisations Changing occupational professionalism, organisational professionalism, hybrid professionalism	How do managerial principles change occupational professionalism? How can professionals be well managed inside organisations?	Relationship and tensions between occupational and managerial principles, values and practices Professionals working in organisations.
2010– to date	Fundamental changes in Western societies, production and the role of knowledge; managerialism causing the hollowing out of professionalism Professions–organisations relations, beyond hybridity Closing the circle and going back to basics		

Other conceptual dimensions and definitions

The chronological typology of theory development is a one-dimensional approach to the sociology of professions. There are other important dimensions that one should be aware of when reading the literature on professions. These include contextual (geographical or cultural), historical (chronological) and conceptual (substantive) dimensions.

Contextual dimension

As is well known, context matters in the study of governance, power, work and societies. In the study of public administration, the most important contextual dichotomy can be made between continental and Anglo-American societies and administrative (legal) culture and traditions. In this tradition, even basic terms such as the state, public, policy and law are variously understood. While reading and applying the literature, these differences must be carefully considered, and this holds true for the study of professions.

In Anglo-American (mainstream) studies on professions, the assumption of a strong civil society is crucial. The role of professions in Anglo-American societies is often considered a counterbalancing force between the state and citizens acting in the markets. Professions are considered actors who define themselves and their working environment. In the continental tradition, professions are often strictly connected to the state and professionals, who are often civil servants. Here, profession is often defined in the context of the public sector. As Bertilsson (1990) explains, the role of markets differs between these two traditions:

In the one (liberal) case, we speak of professions regulating the markets and, in turn, being regulated by the markets; and in the other (welfare) case, [we] speak of professions regulating the law and in turn, being regulated by the law. In the first case, an important device to allocate social goods is by means of the supply and demand by markets and in the other case, by means of law. One could speak of these two mechanisms as monetization and juridification, respectively.

In the past few decades, we have been able to observe the convergence of political systems and the hegemony of certain (OECD-led) neoliberal policies. However, the NPM critique often offers a rather simplistic picture of the resemblance of the challenges, problems and tendencies facing public administrations in different countries. The variation in administrative cultures remains wide, and the differences are significant. Nevertheless, in the global tendencies of developing professional services, the differences are still deeply rooted in the culture and practices of the professions. Thus, the Anglo–American literature cannot be applied directly to the continental reality.

Historical dimension

Professions can be approached from historical perspectives, as practiced by many scholars as they sought to derive their own typologies of professions. Elliot probably provided the most famous approach in the 1970s. According to Elliot, professions can be divided into three distinctive groups. The first group is the so-called "status" or "traditional professions" that are linked directly to societal power (e.g. priests and officers and, more recently, lawyers and medical doctors). This group of professions has evolved as a process of transforming feudal estates under the control of a central power, with help from university education. The second group of "new" professions are the so-called "occupational professions" that have emerged to meet societal needs, such as social workers and accountants. The third group are educational professions that are part of the occupational system and, at the same time, an integral part of the educational system which lays the foundation for the occupational system (e.g. professors and teachers).

Brante (2010) further developed this historical analysis of professions. Accordingly, professions can be classified into six groups on the basis of the context of state and governance development. His typology is described in Table 2, which shows that while the state is developing, it needs new types of professions to implement its policies and to control new areas of reality. It also provides an opportunity to consider the development of the academic

profession alongside this more generic development, as well as the role of universities in the professional game and in government.

Table 2. Development of professions
(adapted from Brante 2010)

	Pragmatic organisation	**Professional prototype**	**Essence (command of…)**
Nation state (1550 →)	State bureaucracy, army	State servant (e.g. military and civil)	Social order and cultural identity
Aesthetic state (1750→)	Cultural institutions	Architect, artist	Symbolic expressions
Industrial state (1850 →)	Factory	Engineer	Non-social environment
Welfare state (1935 →)	People-processing (service) organisations	Physician, teacher	Normality (social environment)
Neoliberal state (1985→)	Stock market or private company	Consultant	Investments
International state or supranational (1990 →)	Supranational organisation	Supranational servant	Social order and cultural identity

Conceptual dimension

In the study of professions, two concepts are of utmost importance: professionalism and professionalisation (Evetts 2013). The study of professionalism addresses professionals' values, norms, discourses and identities. The study of professionalisation examines the societal role of professions. Research on professionalisation has three dimensions:

1) Power relations between professionals and clients
2) Relationships between professions and other occupational groups
3) Relationships between professions, government and other societal groups.

The academic profession as a profession

The study of the academic profession has been both attached to and disconnected from that of professions. There are two main approaches to describing the

development of the study of the academic profession. First, we approach it from the viewpoint of the literature on the sociology of professions, and second, we describe the applications of the sociology of professions and related studies on the academic profession in the context of higher education (higher education studies). We will first provide a brief overview of the literature on the academic profession in the sociology of professions. Next, and more importantly, we will describe the study of the academic profession on the basis of the tradition of higher education studies.

The academic profession is considered a "basic" profession alongside status and traditional professions. It is considered a component of educational professions because its members are part of the educational system. However, professors differ from school teachers because they also educate teachers and conduct research. Furthermore, drawing on the Humboldtian tradition, academics are expected to perform the dual role of producers (researchers) and disseminators (teachers) of knowledge. It appears that the classical theories in the sociology of professions tend to focus more on the first role, which can be attributed to the relevance of science and scientific knowledge to modern societies.

Irrespective of the consensus that the academic profession (professors) is a profession, there are two main reasons that the study of the academic profession, especially its theoretical development, remains underdeveloped (Pekkola 2014). First, the basic problem is that classical texts are often empirically interested in other professions such as that of medical doctors. This creates a situation in which the academic profession has a differentiated role, that is, it is described as a supporting profession that connects professionals to the system of knowledge. In practice, this means that most established professions writers recognise the academic profession but do not study it. Goode (1969) offers one of the best illustrations of the topic: "Precisely because of the temptation to analyse the academics in length is strong, I shall stifle and simply locate the problem" (p. 306).

Second is the lack of critical studies on the academic profession. In fact, professors themselves are unwilling to criticise their own profession and are

expected to control scientific knowledge. This possibly explain why literature users of coercive and degenerating power in the academic world are generally managers, politicians and markets and not professors. Given these limitations in theory development, the study of the academic profession remains variously uninstitutionalised.

There are at least three approaches to the study of the academic profession in the context of higher education studies. The first and most narrow way of delimiting the study of the academic profession is to focus on studies published in forums of higher education studies, which explicitly refer to the theory of professions. This would entail only a minor difference (publication outlet) between studies on the academic profession in higher education studies and the tradition of the sociology of professions. The second and broader method of defining the study of the academic profession is to consider all studies that explicitly define profession, professionalisation or professionalism as their study object, regardless of the theoretical underpinnings. The third, universal approach is to include all studies on academics, academic work and career and division of academic labour under the umbrella of academic profession (see Table 3).

Table 3. Approaches to the study of the academic profession

Approach	Type of studies
Sociology of professions	Academics as object of the study of professions
Narrow	Theory of professions applied to the field of higher education studies
Broad	Themes of the sociology of professions studied using concepts of higher education studies
Universal	Academic profession as an object of study of higher education

However, none of these definitions is established or commonly used. Thus, when reading the higher education literature on the academic profession, one can expect to encounter everything from the serious sociology of professions (in its multiple variations and rich traditions) to descriptive studies on the well-being or attitude of university teachers and researchers. Unfortunately,

the latter is more often the case. In the next section, we will adopt the broad, though not universal, approach to describe the study of the academic profession in the field of higher education. We begin with basic questions on different theory traditions (see Table 4).

Table 4. Development of research into the academic profession

Tradition	Questions for higher education researchers
Functional	What is the academic profession? How can the academic profession be defined?
Interactional	What is the role of the academic profession for clients and 'lower' professional groups? How does the academic profession use power?
Systemic	How does the academic profession interact? How has the academic profession evolved, developed and maintained?
Organisational	Is the academic profession losing its occupational values and becoming more organisational? How is the academic profession balancing between its occupational and organisational values and demands? Is the academic profession becoming more organisational, and what are the other occupational values?

Foundational

As previously mentioned, the question relating to the academic profession is a tricky one. The academic profession is closely connected to other professions (and sometimes, it is almost impossible to separate). It has a disintegrated knowledge base (disciplinary fragmentation), and it is career-vice fragmented (professors/others) and mission-vice fragmented (teacher/researcher). Clark (1987a) described this basic problem well in a classic text of the study of the academic profession(s). His book on the academic profession in the United States, *Small Worlds—Different Worlds* concludes with the slogan "the one and the many", which suggests a possibility for the common in the fragmented world of academicians. Becher (1987b), the other founding father of higher education studies, describes the same challenge using the following metaphor:

> *The occupants of a space shuttle approaching earth will see, from a few hundred miles, a uniform and undifferentiated sphere. As the distance reduces, land masses can be distinguished from oceans, cloudless from cloud-covered areas. Nearing touchdown, the visibility of the whole planet gives place to a localized but much more detailed view, which may well include coastlines and mountain ranges, forests and lakes, and later, rivers, roads, railway tracks, houses, gardens, trees, and traffic. After landing, the perspective is still more bounded and more detailed—the kind of outlook we ordinarily see as we go about our everyday business. At each successive stage, there is a trade-off between comprehensiveness and specificity. To see the whole is to see it in breadth, but without access to the particular; to see the part is to see it in depth, but without the general overview.*

Adopting a functionalist perspective, Ben-David (1972) maintains that academics could be considered as part of a profession since they have features in common with other professional groups: (i) a higher education degree as a prerequisite to access the profession, (ii) a monopoly in the performance of certain roles in the division of labour, (iii) control over new admissions into the profession and (iv) a professional body controlling its members' conduct. However, he sees discretionary freedom as more relevant. The guarantee of intellectual autonomy was assumed to be essential for the academic profession, since it was also considered necessary to promote science development.

In fact, the reluctance of certain higher education researchers in associating academics with a profession is related to the notion of autonomy, or academic freedom, and the community of scientists. For instance, while Neave (2009; 2015; Neave & Roades 1987) prefers the term "academic estate", Kogan, Moses and El-Khawas (1994) refer to it as an "academic community".

The academic profession is internally heterogeneous and comprises three dimensions of diversity (Teichler 2010). The first is the academic discipline, that is, every discipline has its own culture (e.g. Becher 1989; Välimaa 1998). Second, there are career stages, whereby an academic career is formed through different stages, starting from a PhD student and ending with the position of a professor; the distinctions between the stages are significant and are

exemplified e.g. in different recruitment practices and privileges they enjoy (e.g. Siekkinen, Pekkola & Kivistö 2016). Finally, there is the institutional type: in research-oriented universities, academics must record significant achievements, specifically in research. Despite these differences, the academic profession also shares common characteristics (Höhle & Teichler 2013), for example, the prolonged process of learning and maturation; senior researchers who have accumulated years of work experience after attaining a PhD degree are considered full members of the academic profession. Further, academic careers are highly selective; in every upper career stage, there are fewer positions available. In addition, members of the academic profession enjoy a high level of autonomy.

However, the point of departure for analyses of the academic profession is simply the existence of a profession independent (above) of disciplines that have the following qualities: shared ethical codes, values and morals, altruistic missions, esoteric knowledge, intellectual supremacy, intrinsic definition of qualifications, quality of work and new members and organised unions. Often, the starting point that exemplifies this unity is Perkin's (1969) idea that the academic profession is key in educating all other professions, implying that education is the main function of the academic profession, which has been the case historically. Nevertheless, there are also classical texts such as Weber's (1919) *Science as Vocation*. In the scholarly work, the point of reference in arguments regarding unity is often in relation to epistemological similarity.

Research ethics, followed by academic freedom, is a value that can be considered common to the academic profession. Often, in the context of the academic profession, Merton's (1973) norms (i.e. universalism, communism, disinterestedness and organised scepticism), formulated in his famous book *The Sociology of Science*, are cited as one of the foundations of the academic profession. The third argument regarding the unity of the profession is to refer to the more organisational or institutional values of academic work. Here, Clark (1983) is often referenced when discussing the basic values and common foundation of academic professions. According to Clark, the basic values are social justice, competence, liberty and loyalty. They are seen as the

arguments (or even assumptions or axioms) that are most important to the study of higher education and academic work as a distinctive field and, thus, are rarely questioned.

A well-known definition of academic profession emerged in the 1970s. It is based on the placement of the academic profession somewhere between the scholarly (researchers) profession and faculty (teachers) within the same organisation (university) (Light 1974). Figure 1 is a simplified diagram of the two sides of the academic profession. A member of the profession must possess both scientific qualifications and an institutional position, which are often, but not always, connected to the university's function of teaching. Generic definitions of the academic profession are rare and, thus, Light's definition remains most-often cited.

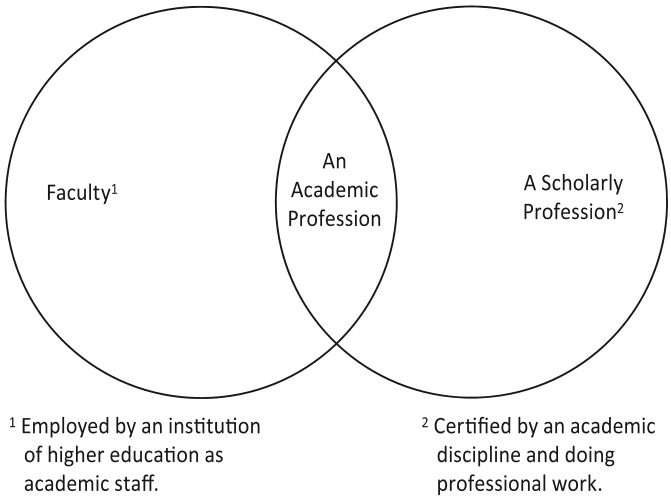

Figure 1. Two sides of the academic profession
(Light 1974)

However, there are limited precise definitions and descriptions of traits and functions amidst a significant number of studies describing the characteristics of the academic profession. Two most important quantitative studies are

those by Carnegie on the academic profession (Boyer, Altbach & Whitelaw 1994) and its successor on changing academic professions (Kogan & Teichler 2007). These two international surveys have produced a voluminous amount of publications: the academic profession survey alone has produced several hundred peer-reviewed articles (Cummings & Teichler 2015). However, theory development has been rather modest.

The study of the academic profession as a group that uses power that delimits or disempowers other groups has been limited. In higher education studies, one is unlikely to find many book chapters and articles critically analysing the use of power by academicians over students or other academicians. However, research on the power (and its misuse) of professors in the context of PhD students, researchers and lecturers are not common. One of the first examples of such a study is the "bible" of higher education studies: Clarks' (1983) *The Higher Education System*. In this volume, Clark describes the arbitrary rule by superiors over the subordinates in the context of professional (professorial) power in universities and professors' collegial authority as a form of Weberian traditional authority that is based on beliefs and not on rational and legal reasoning.

More recently, studies adopting this interactional approach have adopted the perspective of transformation in higher education institutions, particularly accounting for the processes of massification and competition in higher education systems. The increasing presence of "non-traditional" students in post-graduate courses and, more specifically, PhD programmes has propelled researchers to question and analyse supervision experience and, in particular, the relevance of power relations between students and supervisors (Apple 2002; Bartlett & Mercer 2000; Chiang 2009; Delamont, Parry & Atkinson 1998; Guerin & Green 2015; Morley, Leonard & David 2002), the specific nature of supervision work (Halse & Malfroy 2010) and its impact on academics' identity (Crossouard & Pryor 2008; Halse 2011). There is also an almost parallel literature on inequality within the professoriate. Here, studies on gender equality assume particular relevance, although other dimensions, such

as race, class and sexuality, are also considered important (for a comprehensive review, see Muzzin & Martimianakis 2016).

Contemporary

The systemic approach is more common in the study of the academic profession and has been especially popular in research on university—society relations and the role of universities. In these studies, the profession and professional organisation (university) are sometimes confused. In higher education studies, the academic profession often equals the entire university or academic staff, rendering "interactionist" research rather difficult. Presumably, the best-known tradition under this approach is the study of academic capitalism. Slaughter and Leslie (1997) have studied academic work and communities in the context of resource dependency theory, arguing that the academic profession relies not only on state bureaucracy, but also on state-led substitute markets. In these markets, the profession competes more openly with other professions (e.g. consultants, think tanks and industries) than before.

To this effect, Peters, Marginson and Murphy's (2009) book *Creative Economy* reflects on the manner in which technological changes in society promote transformations in the roles of academics, thus raising questions on the effects of changes in how knowledge is produced and disseminated in contemporary societies. Some authors assume the apparent substitution of mode-1 with mode-2 knowledge as a process of de-professionalisation (Welch 1998), even if others have a more positive perspective (Marginson 2009), noting that academics can use creativity to maintain autonomy and academic freedom.

The dominant presence of accountability and quality assurance processes, which demand professional know-how from managers, also questions power relations between academic and non-academic staff (Marini, Videira & Carvalho 2016; Gornitzka & Larsen, 2004), the changing boundaries between the two groups (Akkerman & Bakker 2011; Farndale & Hope-Hailey 2009; Shelley 2010; Verbaan & Cox 2014; Whitchurch 2008) and how professional

identity is being transformed within this process (Graham 2013; Nelson & Irwin 2014; Whitchurch & Gordon 2010).

In adopting a boarder perspective, other studies have compared changes under new public management and managerialism in at least two sub-sectors, with higher education and health being more common areas of analysis (Carvalho & Bruckmann 2014; Carvalho & Santiago 2016b; Lounsbury, Pinheiro, Ramirez, Vrangbæk & Byrkjeflot 2016). Within the same trend, changes in the academic profession have been compared with those in the health professions (Carvalho & Santiago 2015b).

Other dimensions in academic profession studies

The development of the academic profession is often described in the context of the development of universities, indicating that the academic profession is largely an organisational profession. While it is difficult to describe the global development of the academic profession, it is futile to detail national developments for international readers. Nevertheless, we will provide a short description of the developments on the basis of Brante's (2010) classification (see Table 5).

The academic profession was conceived before the time of nation states. Universities were developed in the 12th century in the city-states of Italy and in loose European empires at the time. The two best-known models of early universities were the Bologna and Paris models; one was run by students, while the other was professor-centred. Bologna, a well-known and the oldest student-run university, was transferred to a city-state and master-driven model in the 13th century, where professors became salaried professionals. This meant that as early as the 13th century, universities in southern and northern Europe as well as in England were profession-centred and closely connected to the state (and churches). However, these developments occurred before the modern state came into being (which was crucial for the development of the academic profession). It integrated the profession with the societal elite and power structure, and universities were developed as professional bureaucracies.

Because of its dual role, the academic profession has been part of the development of the state and other professions, while continuing to independently develop and expand. In fact, it has served as an important instrument for the state to control the content and legitimisation of the knowledge needed to build the state, economy and society. The group has been controlling degrees, which play a key role in the receipt of societal positions of power. Table 5 describes the development of the academic profession and universities in the context of state development.

Table 5. Development of the academic profession
(adapted from Brante 2010)

	Development of universities	**Role of academic profession**
Pre-state (1100→)	Establishment of student- and professor-run universities	Educating estates, transferring societal power from estates to state and knowledge from church to state
Nation state (1550 →)	Establishment of national universities	
Aesthetic state (1750→)	Establishment of art schools	Socialising national symbols, controlling identity
Industrial state (1850 →)	Establishment of technical institutions and business schools	Educating national industrialists, building national wealth
Welfare state (1935 →)	Mushrooming of social science-oriented institutions	Educating welfare professionals and planners, creating standard supporting productivity
Neoliberal state (1985→)	New role of universities (third mission)	Educating all, building national competitiveness
International state or supranational (1990 →)	Establishment of European universities, chairs and centres	Educating the European elite, transferring national powers to European level

The development described above is more inclined towards the continental context than Anglo-American society. As previously mentioned, the differences between these two traditions ought to be acknowledged in the

study of professions. These differences are evident in the role of the academic profession and its relation to the state, the organisation of universities and the idea of a university as a whole. Table 6 presents some of the major differences relevant to the study of the academic profession.

Table 6. Differences in university traditions

	Anglo-American	**Continental**
Universities	Charity	Public agencies
Professors	Free professionals	Civil servants
Organisation and hierarchy	Collegial Department	Bureaucracy Chair
Idea	Newman (liberal)	Humboldt (professional)
Connection to markets	Tight	Symbolic
Relation to the state	Funding	Legislation and funding

Conclusions

The study of the academic profession has long adopted the concepts of the sociology of professions. However, while this research has been descriptive, it lacks theoretical rigour. A key challenge in the study of the academic profession in relation to the concepts of the theory of professions remains fundamental: researchers study their own profession. This has several implicit and explicit impacts:

1) Research is unlikely to question the societal role and importance (**altruistic mission**) of the academic profession
2) Studies are unlikely to objectively examine academics in relation to university organisations, students and other professions (**power**).

Other challenges include the role of the academic profession in the theory of professions as a legitimate scientific branch of occupational professions. This makes it difficult to study the academic profession in comparison to an independent profession. Many researchers have questioned whether the

academic profession is a profession or a group of professions. However, from a historical perspective, it is fairly clear that the academic profession plays an important role in transferring societal power from estates and families to the state and privileged occupational groups.

The application of the theory of professions remains underdeveloped, despite the large number of publications related to the academic profession in recent years. In particular, critical research on the societal role of academicians and their use of power remains untouched. Thus, we encourage researchers, especially those placed outside of academia, to study the academic profession and work.

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