# Professions in a globalizing world: towards a transnational sociology of the professions

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**Introduction**

Neo-Weberian theories provide comprehensive analysis of the actors, strategies, power relations and knowledge-claims associated with the institutionalization of a profession in the national context (Abbott, 1988; Burrage et al, 1990; Johnson, 1972; Larson, 1977; Parsons, 1954; Freidson, 1994; MacDonald, 1995), emphasising both the supposed functional role of professional projects (the setting and maintaining of standards in relation to competence and ethics) but also the more political and self-interested dimensions of such projects (the creation and maintenance of monopoly, restriction in numbers of practitioners and the maintenance of exclusivity that helps sustain fee levels and social standing). Yet this focus on the political-economic underpinnings of professional projects - i.e., the intricate negotiations between the professions and other actors such as the state that lead to the maintenance and reproduction of professional practices, privileges and values - has failed to keep up with theoretical debates taking place across the social sciences about the new spatialities of political economies. Specifically, there is a paucity of studies of the impacts of globalization on professionalization strategies and tactics and the implications for neo-Weberian theorisations of professional projects.

The paucity of studies of professional sociologies in an era of globalization is surprising given that there is an extensive literature that traces the emergence of the interconnecting networks and flows which lead to what Castells (2000) terms the 'network society', what Urry (2000) calls a 'sociology beyond societies' and what Hannerz (1996) refers to as 'transnational connections'. There is no lack empirical study of the globalization of individual professions and professional service firms (Beaverstock et al., 2010; Cooper and Robson, 2006; Evetts, 1998, 2002;

Faulconbridge, 2009; Faulconbridge et al, 2008; Faulconbridge and Muzio, 2007; Flood, 1995; 1996; Fourcade, 2006; Morgan and Quack, 2005). But the implications of such empirical studies for neo-Weberian theoretical framings of professional projects continue to receive limited attention. This lack of analysis is problematic because of the well documented rescaling of governance agents both downwards (sub-national level) and upwards (supra-national level) as part of the globalisation of economies, firms and politics, something which has created in the professions as in other governance regimes a spatio-temporal 'crisis' in which neoliberal agendas lead to the hollowing-out of the nation-state and the emergence of multi-scalar governance systems (Djelic and Quack, 2003; Jessop, 2000, 2005; Suddaby et al., 2007; Swyngedouw, 1997). Specifically, in the professions globalisation has created a situation in which the national actors assumed in existing neo-Weberian to be powerful and the regulators of professional projects have to learn to coexist with equally powerful and effective supra-national actors, something which transforms professionals sociologies.

This paper therefore examines how neo-Weberian conceptualisations of the professions might more effectively take account of the increasingly transnational orientation of professional projects and sociologies. Specifically, the paper considers the implications of the way many of the most powerful actors involved in the institutionalisation of professional privileges and practices more and more seek to develop professional regulations, norms and cultures outside of the confines of Westphalian state regimes through forms of transnational professional project tied to the imperatives of neoliberal capitalism. A transnational sociology of the professions that takes account of such developments is constructed by, firstly, drawing attention to

the effects on professional projects of the supra-national mobility and connections of professionals, their work, clients and governmental actors. In addition, secondly, the paper shows how the global professional service firm has itself become a site of professionalization and an actor in professional projects. This leads, thirdly, to the development of a rescaled version of neo-Weberian theories of the professions which revises and reframes in particular the ideas developed by Abbott (1988), Abel, (1988) and Burrage et al. (1990) in order to better pay attention to a series of new research questions emerging from a transnational sociology of the professions. These questions relate to the ways in which power and legitimacy are gained from multi-scalar projects involving interactions between national and supra-national actors and the effect on professional projects and practices of such rescaling. The paper concludes by highlighting the centrality of a transnational sociological analysis in future work on the professions. It shows that interactions between national and supra-national actors, rather than national or supra-national actors operating in isolation, need to be at the centre of analytical attention because increasingly these interactions define processes and controls that are central to two important areas of research interest: controls on access to professional domains and on ethical, normative and fiduciary standards within those domains.

**The Sociology of the Professions: From globally universal to nationally contingent**

The sociology of the professions was born with a distinctively Anglo-American focus which identified the professions as associations of gentlemen that emerge autonomously to institutionalize and regulate a specific area of practice (Johnson,

1972; Larson, 1977). Whilst some authors emphasized the functional, public spirited and even civilizing intentions behind these initiatives and drew attention to the way professional guilds allowed knowledge bases, ethical and altruistic values and standards to be upheld in relation to public safeguard services such as law and medicine (Carr-Saunders and Wilson, 1933; Parson 1954), others connected professional projects to the exercise of power and pursuit of self-interest by elite groups that seek to create a monopoly for their services and restrict numbers in a profession so as to maintain fee levels and social standing (Johnson, 1972; Larson, 1977). All, however, at first suggested that professionalization was a bottom up process which developed independently from the state's direct intervention. Indeed, many of the traits which underpin orthodox understandings of professionalism such as independence, autonomy, discretion, collegiality, partnership and self-regulation were said to be born out of this peculiar pattern of institutionalization in which professional guilds actively defend their right to exclusively provide services.

Such perspectives dominated the study of the professions for many years, with work tending to abstract and generalize what are peculiar characteristics of particular professions (law and medicine) in specific historical and geographical contexts (19th century Britain and America) as universal and intrinsic features of professionalization (Evetts, 2003). From early on, then, the sociology of the professions had a propensity to take the professions as a universal phenomenon unaffected by time-space heterogeneity. The double volume by Burrage and Torstendahl (1990) and Torstendahl and Burrage (1990) operated, however, as an important correction to such spatially-challenged conceptualisations.

*Nation-states and professional projects*

Burrage and Torstendahl (1990) and Tostendahl and Burrage (1990) show, through the study of professionalization patterns in 'continental' societies which are generally characterised by a strong and interventionist state and a large and powerful civil service apparatus, that the relationship between the professions and the state involves more than a universal form of compromise. In particular, they show how the state is directly involved in the institutionalisation, reorganisation and regulation of professional expertise and is the main end-user of professional and technical services in a number of contexts (Freidson 1994). This is a very different situation to that observed in the Anglo-American world where the autonomy of the professions from the state has been seen as a founding feature of professionalization.

Recognition of diversity in approaches to professionalization heralded a renaissance for the sociology of the professions. A recasting of theoretical analysis took place as recognition of top-down processes of profession formation tied to state interest, power and agency drew scholars' attention to previously ignored actors in professionalization processes. Perhaps of most significance in this regard is the work of Burrage et al. (1990) who provide an actor-based framework to account for the intricate interactions and fluid negotiations between the different agents involved in professional projects. These interactions and negotiations relate to two key objectives of professional projects: the ability to control, through a licensing process, access into a profession (*regulation of the production of producers)* and the ability to control, through deontological codes and self-regulation, the behaviour of qualified

professionals (*the regulation of the production by producers*) (Abel, 1988). The four actors identified in the work of Burrage et al. (1990) are:

1. Practitioners who through their professional association seek to identify, carve-out and protect an area of exclusive competence so to maximize financial and status rewards.

2. Users of professional services who, through their demands and expectations, shape the way the professions practice and organize themselves.

3. States who either grant autonomy and self-regulation to professionals and their associations (Anglo-American context) or actively license and regulate them as a 'quasi' civil service (Continental European context).

4. Universities which produce the knowledge-base of the professions and provide the credentials (an approved degree) that support closure regimes.

Burrage et al. showed how, across national boundaries, these four actors played historically different roles in the establishment and regulation of professional occupations whilst also influencing the day-to-day practice of professionals and understandings of their duties, responsibilities, loyalties and ethical standards.

Most significantly for our argument here, the theoretical contribution of Burrage et al. (1990) redirected studies of the professions towards the sustained analysis of time-space variations in the status and role of professions such as law and medicine. Most recently this has led to the framing of inter-national differences within broader debates about the varieties of capitalism (Buchner-Jeziorska and Evetts, 1997; MacDonald, 1995; Faulconbridge and Muzio, 2007; Morgan and Quack, 2005). Nationally-specific professional projects have been shown to lead to:

- Variations in the knowledge base of the professions. In all contexts, knowledge-based credentials act as an important device for controlling standards of practice and regulating entry into a profession. In some contexts (such the UK and USA) the profession, through its representative body and through negotiations with the state, defines the knowledge-base of practitioners and the credentials needed to claim a professional title. In other contexts (e.g. Italy) the state acts more autonomously to define the knowledge base and training program. The result of both nationally specific priorities and systems of defining knowledge bases is important differences both in the content and processes of education (e.g. law degrees) but also in the cultures and values of professionals (e.g. their ethical dispositions) (see Krause, 1996; International Journal of the Legal Profession, 2002; MacDonald, 1995).

- Variations in the role of the professions in society. For example, in the Anglo-American context the autonomy of the legal profession has allowed it to develop a close relationship with business over the past century. In contrast, in Germany the control of the legal professional by the state and the definition until recently of professionals such as accountants and lawyers as civil servants has emphasized professional services as forms of technical expertise rather than as value-adding commercial resources (see Morgan and Quack, 2005; Flood, 2007; Faulconbridge et al., 2008). This has in turn generated different understandings of professional responsibilities and practices and until recently limited the development of large commercially orientated professional services firms in Germany.

- The commitment of particular governments to neo-liberal programmes of reform has a series of important and nationally distinct implications for the professions (Muzio and Ackroyd, 2005). Particularly noteworthy is the distinction in the European context between UK and Continental Societies. In the UK context we have seen the partial dismantling of professional monopolies and the liberalization of markets for expertise, the introduction of 'corporate' ownership structures and 'private sector' management practices and techniques as well as the reduction of public expenditure on professional services. In continental societies, however, reforms have been much more cautious, slow, piecemeal and contested with the result that the system of the professions operates with a great deal of continuity (Reed, 2007).

*Scale-jumping in studies of the professions*

In effect, then, work on the sociology of the professions has 'jumped scales' and moved from the universal in the form of studies of Anglo-American professional projects which were assumed to have global relevance, to the national through the study of state-specific projects and their inter-national similarities and variations. This switch in emphasis was important for sustaining the intellectual vibrancy of scholarly work on the professions. But, this recognition of the importance of geographical sensitivity in the sociology of the professions has led to the fetishising of one scale, in this case the national, at the expense of others scales that are just as important in theoretical conceptualisations. It would be possible to develop such an argument by calling for more emphasis on the regional and local dimensions of professionalism and professionalization, something particularly significant in the US context where

state-level registration and professional associations have long been important (Krause, 1996). Here, however, the aim is to develop a more detailed analysis of the implications of the transnational spaces that now pervade negotiations in professional projects.

The rest of the paper considers how the development of various forms of transnationality impact upon the functional and political dimensions of professional projects, in particular in the European context. This is done by focusing on two specific areas of rescaling which illustrate the impacts of globalization on the professions: the rescaling of the agents of regulation in the professions and the rise of the global professional service firm (GPSF) as an actor in professional sociologies. The outcomes of such developments are referred to as a *transnational* professional project, and not a global project, so as to draw attention to the way dialogue, conflict and compromise between supra-national and national actors increasingly generate regimes that shape the regulation of professionals and their activities (see Djelic and Quack, 2003; Halliday and Carruthers, 2009).

**Professions in a globalizing world I: The rescaling and emergence of supra-national governance actors**

One of the most provocative debates over the past twenty years has centred on the changing role of the nation-state in light of the emergence of new governmental agents that operate at the supra-national but also sub-national level (see for example Bauman, 2000; Held et al., 1999). Swyngedouw (1997) adopts the term

'glocalization' to capture this process and the apparent pincer movement from 'above' (e.g. the World Trade Organization) and 'below' (e.g. local social movements) that has changed the nation-state's role in governance. This has led to sudies focussed on the *interrelationships* between different scales and the way the nation-state interacts with supra- and sub-national agents as part of contemporary governance regimes (Dezalay and Garth, 2002; Slaughter, 2004).

As noted above, existing studies of the professions often take for granted the ability of national agents (whether professional associations or governments) to accomplish the two pillars of professionalization, the regulation of the production of producers and the regulation of the production by producers. However, regulatory frameworks such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the European Union (EU) have begun to challenge such nationalistic assumptions. For example, the European Union has been responsible for the development of a number of 'hard', legally binding frameworks that regulate aspects of professional projects. Legislation in the form of the EU's First General Systems Directive, the Directive on Professional Qualifications (2005/36/EC) and the EU Services Directive are connected to the EU's long term vision of ever closer political union which involves the harmonisation of economic regulation. The creation of a single market in professional services and qualifications is seen as a necessary step towards this objective. The First General Systems Directive and the Directive on Professional Qualifications (2005/36/EC), for instance, seek to extend the provisions of single market logics to include professional services through the establishment of common deontological expectations and standards of practice and through the reciprocal recognition of national qualifications across the entire Union (Evetts, 2002).

In essence, these EU directives mean that a professional qualified to practice in one European country also has the right to practice in any other European country, subject to the successful completion of a transfer 'test'. For example, the Qualified Lawyer Transfer Test (QLTT) allows a lawyer qualified in an overseas jurisdiction to practice in England and Wales and is an increasingly important pathway into that profession – indeed in 2003-04 23% solicitors in England and Wales had qualified through this route (LawBritannia, 2009). Similarly, the case of Italian law students - almost 600 in 2009 (Marraffino, 2009) – studying in Spain where a university degree is sufficient to qualify as a lawyer in order to avoid the lengthier and more bureaucratic Italian state exam is another example of how supra-national regimes may be said to be compromising national closure regimes. A similar story can be told outside of Europe in relation to the World Trade Organization (WTO) and its General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) article VI:4 (see Arnold, 2005; Terry, 2008) which is favouring the de-regulation of the global market for professional services, even if this involves challenging the local policies of democratically elected governments.

The ever growing number of supra-national professional associations that now coexist with national associations also exemplifies the emergence of transnational professional projects. Organizations demonstrating this trend include the European Federation of National Engineering Associations (FEANI) and European Federation of Engineering Consultancy Associations (EFCA), the International Bar Association and the Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe, the World Medical Association, Association of International Accountants (AIA), and the International Union of Architects. These groups are increasingly actors in the institutionalization of new

professional jurisdictions and in the re-regulation of professional service markets (Evetts, 1995). Crucially, this role includes leading discussions about the operation of closure regimes which control the production of providers (Evetts, 1995). For instance, supra-national bodies are involved in the award of qualifications and the certification of competences (e.g. EurIng in engineering), the regulation of professional practice through the development of deontological codes (e.g. the Council of Bars and Law Societies in Europe's 'European lawyer' common professional standard) and the provision of continuing professional education (e.g. the International Union of Architect's international system of continuing professional development). This reveals that the professional association now needs to be considered as potentially having an international dimension and capability as part of a broader shift towards 'transnational markets and international divisions of labour' (Evetts, 1995: 772).

The functional and strategic implications for professional projects of the types of changes described above are significant. In particular, the rise of supra-national professional bodies and regulatory agencies suggests that the nation-state is no-longer the only scale at which access to the profession or professional standards are controlled. Most significantly for the argument here, the transnational mobility facilitated by emerging supra-national regimes might be said to undermine the long standing assumption that practitioners operating in a national profession sphere share a common, nationally specific foundational knowledge base and qualification trajectory, whilst also apparently lessening the ability of a national association to define and police its own boundaries. And this rescaling of governance regimes is not the only way that transnational forces now affect the professions.

**Professions in a Globalizing World II: The Rise of the Global Professional Service Firm**

The global professional service firm (GPSF), employing thousands of professionals in dozens of jurisdiction and generating multi-million pound profits, is probably one the most notable examples of change in the contemporary professions. The term 'global' is used to describe these firms because the very large accountancy (e.g. PriceWaterhouseCoopers), law (Clifford Chance), architecture (Aedas) and engineering (Arup) firms seek to develop worldwide business models that are disconnected from national regimes. Professional firms have, of course, had a foreign presence in the past. However, the logic, characteristics, extent and use of international offices has changed significantly in the past twenty five years as the work, structures, and practices of firms have evolved in line with the development of 'global' strategies.

The emergence of GPSFs has been partly driven by the globalization of the consumers of professional services (usually large corporations) who themselves often adopt 'global' models of operation and increasingly demand seamless and consistent services worldwide (Beaverstock et al., 1999). Contrary to assumptions in earlier versions of the sociology of the professions, users are, then, increasingly asking professionals not to fulfil their role as it is defined and understood in their host national jurisdiction, but to operate globally and disconnected from national regimes whenever possible (Quack, 2007). Consequently, many GPSFs employ locally qualified and regulated professionals in every market they operate in but ask these

professionals to adopt global standards of professional practice. Indeed, today a significant amount of the work performed by GPSFs is not national in focus but draws on the expertise of cross-border multidisciplinary teams which stitch together global products, services and deals generating in the process new global arrangements, practices and knowledges (Faulconbridge and Muzio, 2007; Quack, 2007; Morgan, 2008).

GPSFs represent, therefore, a vehicle for the sustained interaction between different national varieties of professionalism and the rescaling of the mechanisms of the control of production of and by producers. For example, one approach developed by GPSFs is the design of strategies intended to allow the transcending of local versions of professionalism and the development of a cadre of truly global practitioners. As part of attempts to guarantee consistency in client experience, GPSFs use global practice groups and global recruitment and training schemes that have at their heart attempts to create a new form of what might be termed global 'organizational' (Faulconbridge and Muzio, 2007, 2008) or 'commercialised' (Hanlon, 1998) professionalism. These forms of professionalism do not emphasise the values or norms of professional production associated with any one jurisdiction, but instead seek to exploit and develop global, cosmopolitan professionals who are detached from national professional regimes and who support their employing firm's attempts to develop global professional standards (Sklair, 2001). Similarly, the use of selective in-house training to develop global professionals has become an increasingly important strategy for GPSFs. The decision of large UK based law firms to opt-out from the Law Society's standard Legal Practice Course and develop, in conjunction with commercial providers such as BPP, their own programme of education tailored to the

realities of corporate work is symptomatic of the strategies GPSFs use to try and disconnect themselves from national professional systems and contexts (Malhotra et al., 2006: 194). As is the related development of global firm-specific academies, such as the Clifford Chance Academy, which are used to train and socialize lawyers and to provide continued professional development where needed (Faulconbridge and Muzio, 2009, 2012). All of these training programs are, at least in part, designed to instill the global values and skills required to perform as a global corporate professional in a GPSF. And such training also therefore constitutes part of a firm-driven process of professional identity formation and regulation (Cooper and Robson, 2006; Suddaby et al, 2007; Anderson-Gough et al, 1999; Grey 1998, 1998; McKenna, 2006). This involves the inculcation of appropriate behavioural norms, cultural values, presentational styles and approaches to professional practice (Covaleski et al., 1998). I.e., the development of the knowledge and beliefs that underlie understandings of appropriate standards of production by professional producers.

The theoretical tools of the sociology of the professions need refreshing, therefore, to enable them to take account of the role of the firm as an actor alongside other national but also supra-national actors in the regulation of production of and by producers. Developing such theoretical tools is the task of the next section of the paper.

**Professions beyond the nation state: transnational professional projects and sociologies**

It would seem that globalization is increasingly reshaping the realities of professional projects and their functional and strategic outcomes. Five levels of analysis are,

therefore, proposed as the foundations of a transnational sociology of the professions. Each level represents the revision and rescaling of the widely used framing provided by Burrage et al. (1990) in order to take account of the multi-scalar influences on the regulation of production of and by professions in the current era.

1. *Clients.* By demanding national but also global advisory packages and consistent solutions across multiple jurisdictions, clients are key actors who promote potentially contradictory scales of governance and create demand for global approaches to professionalism. For example, whilst some clients may be national, others promote new practices and regulatory standards that are global and designed to facilitate their own cross-border work. In particular these clients may seek to reform the professions in line with a new compact and neoliberal agenda concerned with removing restrictive barriers and opening up domestic markets to global trade and investment flows (crucially including investment and trade in professional services themselves).

2. *Practitioners*. Practitioners are increasingly also multi-scalar actors in the contemporary period. Increasingly an elite group, which may operate in opposition to other groups and is often formed by individuals working for GPSFs, champions supra-national regimes that support their particular economic and political interests. Accountants and lawyers especially are tied into a symbiotic relationship with the masterminds of the neoliberal order that inspires WTO activities and initiatives such as the EU Service Directive and GATS (Arnold, 2005; Dezalay, 1995 Greenwood and Suddaby, 2006; Suddaby et al, 2007). Consequently, the professional association has in some cases acquired a supra-national dimension as it represents the interests of

transnational professional elites and engages in a sustained dialogue not only with the nation-state and its institutions but also with agents of supra-national governance such as the EU or WTO as part of attempts to promote regulatory conditions designed to facilitate cross border professional work.

3. *Universities.* Whilst continuing in many ways to fulfil the role laid out in the framework of Burrage et al. (1990), universities now increasingly provide credentials that also facilitate supra-national professional mobility. Indeed, through processes such as the Bologna reforms in the EU which seek to create an aligned system of university education in Europe, universities are being encouraged to position themselves as providers of credentials that have transferability outside of the national realm and which meet standards set by supra-national actors who promote a transnational knowledge economy (see Cooper et al., 1996).

4. *Governance regimes*. Whilst still being important, the state as an actor in professional projects now sits alongside and engages in dialectic negotiations with supra-national institutions such as the WTO and EU. Such negotiations are a fundamental part of the transnational world the professions now inhabit (Djelic and Quack, 2003; Halliday and Carruthers, 2009) as the role of the nation state gets 'hollowed out' and redefined compared with the Westphalian assumption in existing neo-Weberian theorisations. It seems important, therefore, to take account of the role of transnational governance regimes produced through dialogue and compromise between national and supra-national actors in the regulation of the production of and by professional producers, in particular because the way regimes lead to potential convergence (common cross-border standards) and simultaneously geographical

fragmentation (locally specific forms of implementation and enforcement) is little understood but potentially has a major effect on twenty-first century professional projects.

5. *The firm.* As a new actor not considered in Burrage et al.'s original faming of professional projects, employing organisations have the ability to short-circuit systems of regulation and, through their activities and strategies, can build new national but also global models of professionalism and professional practice. In particular, through their training, socialization and regulation processes, firms become important actors controlling production by producers, whilst also influencing regimes associated with the production of producers, in particular through their lobbying activities which are targeted at organisations such as the WTO and supra-national professional associations. The effect of firms thus needs to be considered as a central part of a transnational sociology because of the increasingly powerful role of GPSFs in choreographing professional regimes.

The implications of the re-scaled and updated framework outlined above are multiple. In terms of the production *of* producers – i.e. closure regimes – the framework highlights how forms of cross-border mobility negotiated by initiatives such as the EU Service Directive, together with initiatives by supra-national professional associations targeting educational credentials and qualifications (for instance the EurIng initiative), mean that possession of a coherent, nationally specific body of knowledge is not always essential to practice in a country. The control of national actors over membership access to professional communities is not, therefore, always assured as existing theory assumes. Instead, it is the complex dialogue between national and

supra-national actors that needs to be the focus of analytical attention if contemporary sociologies are to be understood. This dialogue does not remove national regulatory powers or roles. For example, transfer tests such as the QLTT discussed above are set and assessed by national professional regulators as part of their agreement to recognise transnational regimes. Meanwhile, Cooper et al (1996) reveal that the EU's Eight Company Law Directive and its application to the accountancy profession was reacted to differently across Europe with both nation-states and national professional associations fighting to protect their interests when compromised by the directive. This led to changes in the wording of the directive and the granting of certain amount of discretion to national regulators when implementing the bill. Nonetheless, the development of transnational regimes does force the nation-state and other actors assumed in neo-Weberian theory to be powerful to coexist and cooperate with forms of supra-national authority, something which inevitably changes the role and impact of national institutions.

In terms of the significance for the regulation of the production *by* producers – i.e. the definition and enforcement of standards of practice, professional identities and ethics – the framework outlined above also recognises how systems of control and the standards set are similarly influenced by dialogue between national and supra-national actors. National varieties of values and practices do not melt away as a result of the work of supra-national actors such as GPSFs. But the very coexistence of national and supra-national actors means tensions between the 'local' and 'global' in terms of definitions of standards of practice have to be resolved (see Faulconbridge, 2008; Flood, 1996). For example, whilst the various local offices of GPSFs continue to

operate under national systems of professional regulation, with differences between national arenas in terms of jurisdictional boundaries and accepted professional practices remaining, such differences are constantly being renegotiated as a result of the power of GPSFs and supra-national actors and their 'clashes' with national actors. The suggestion is not that as a result of the power of supra-national actors a process of homogenisation is affecting the regulation of professional production. But, a dialectal process is certainly at work as national and supra-national agents learn to coexist and together produce new compacts. The implications of this dialectic are exemplified by the kind of work completed in GPSF and the questions about professional ethics that arise. As Etherington and Lee (2007, 97-98) note, it is now not uncommon to find "an Australian lawyer working in the Brussels office of a New York law firm on a contract for a Japanese client with a German counterpart, which is governed by English common law, but in which disputes are to be referred to the International Chamber of Commerce's International Court of Arbitration in Paris". In such a scenario the employing firm's definition of ethics may take precedence, leading to a situation in which the regulation of the production by producers potentially occurs outside of the orbit of any one national professional regime. The firm's ethical principles may be based on the norms of a particular national system, for example the firm's home-country. Or they may be based on a peculiar mix of the principles of several national systems, or principles set down by supra-national actors, such as the Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe. GPSF as well as other supra-national actors may, then, be rearticulating established power relations and increasingly recasting professionalism as a matter for organizational and/or transnational rather than occupational and/or national standards (Cooper and Robson, 2006; Suddaby et al 2007; Anderson-Gough et al, 1999; Grey, 1998). Reinforcing this trend, global

users and elite professional practitioners themselves may also be developing their own post-national interpretations of professionalism, the implications of which are unclear. The way the nation-state and national actors conceptualised in existing neo-Weberian theory respond to such issues needs to be at the centre of sociological analysis of the professions.

The transnational sociology of the professions outlined here draws attention, therefore, to the importance of recognising a number of important trends which hinge around the emergence and effects of new forms of power and sources of legitimacy within professional work. Specifically, power relations within professional jurisdictions and definitions of what constitutes legitimate professional practice are now generated in a messy dialogue between national and supra-national actors. Professional projects historically relied on state support - if only because the state can grant monopolies and restrictive arrangements. Thus proximity with state authorities and elites has historically been a key asset within professionalization processes (Larson, 1977). But, in the era of transnational professional projects, professions are also developing key alliances with supra-national entities, meaning their power base increasingly derives from their involvement in neo-liberal agendas associated with the Washington Consensus, a consensus which seeks to 'hollow out' and qualitatively change the role of the nation-state. A result of this re-articulation of power relations, the regulation of the production of producers (e.g. entry to a professional jurisdiction) and of production by producers (e.g. the behaviour and practices of qualified professionals) is increasingly open to multi-scalar, coexisting but potentially also conflicting influences and sources of power and legitimacy. Such multi-scalar sources of power and legitimacy inevitably complicate theoretical understanding of processes

of professionalization. In particular, and as presented in the transnational framework outlined here, they require analysis of a wider range of actors operating at a range of different scales and interacting with one-another to shape contemporary professions and their practices. This generates a series of new questions about the effects on the work and responsibilities of the professions of such multi-scalar sources of power and legitimacy. Here three exemplary questions are highlighted that might form the basis of future research agendas.

First, research needs to focus on the construction of power by regulatory agents in transnational professional projects. Whilst the existence of supra-national regulatory agents and regimes is not in doubt, their effectiveness and powerfulness requires close scrutiny. Existing literature highlights the fragmented, contested and partial nature of transnational regimes (Arnold, 2005; Evetts, 2002; Flood and Sosa, 2008; Halliday and Caruthers, 2009; Suddaby et al., 2007), but the implications of this for both the supra-national and national bodies expected to enforce agreements, and for the professionals who operate within such frameworks, is unclear. Potentially a significant number of 'black holes' might exist as important elements of professional regulation are weakened by the supra-national regimes that have emerged. However, to date it is difficult to tell whether this is the case and whether supra-national regimes make-up for any loss of national control over regimes regulating the production of and by producers. Relatedly, there are also unanswered questions about how incumbent national regulators are responding to the demands of supra-national actors as far as the regulation of both the production of producers and by producers is concerned. As has been discussed here, re-scaled governance regimes often involve negotiated compromises between different agents. Yet little is known about the types

of negotiation ongoing as part of the re-scaling of professional governance and the inter-national convergence or reinforcement of national variety that results. Accordingly, further research that examines in more detail the characteristics of these supra-national governance regimes and the work of national agents in resisting, agreeing to and enforcing these regimes seems extremely relevant if theories of power and regulation in the professions are to emerge that account for the actions of a range of multi-scalar entities.

Second, and related, an important line of future research might investigate the allegiances and identities of professionals working in a transnational context. As Etherington and Lee (2007) describe in relation to the case of law, when systems of local qualification  (national education) and regulation (the state) are complemented by new forms of supra-national agency and, in GPSFs, by new forms of 'global business ethics', the identity of a global professional becomes exposed to a peculiar mix of competing pressures and reference points. Francis (2005) makes a similar point, again in relation to law, highlighting how the assumptions of regulators and professions themselves about the coherency of professional values need careful consideration in light of the role of the firm as a site of socialisation (see also Anderson-Gough et al, [1999] and Grey [1998] for similar discussion in the context of accountancy). Consider, for example, the increasing role of organizational technologies such as corporate training programmes, mentoring and performance appraisals in disciplining, socializing and regulating individual professionals working for GPSFs. Such techniques coexist with the strategies of other national and supra-national regulatory agents and mean that there are multiple sites 'where professional identities are mediated, formed and transformed' (Cooper and Robson, 2006: 416).

This is particularly important insofar as the regulation of the production by producers is concerned because the organizational processes, standards and priorities of GPSFs could complement if not displace national occupation-wide norms regulating how professional practitioners behave and how professional services are produced, traded and consumed. Hence further studies of professionals themselves and the effects that competing national and supra-national sources of authority and legitimacy have on their identities, practices, and values, seem to be urgently needed.

Third, and returning to important debates in the sociology of the professions about the exclusive and powerful role of professions in society (Abbott, 1988; Johnson, 1972; Larson, 1977), it would be useful to consider if and how emerging transnational dynamics reinforce or undermine the public safeguard role ascribed to the professions. The system of the professions, with its emphasis on occupational licensing, self-regulation and restrictive arrangements, is premised on an understanding of the importance of competency and public service when dispensing professional advice. In many ways, transnational professional projects and their connections to the Washington Consensus are designed to make professional services more market orientated and aligned with the neoliberal doctrines that dominate business. But, few have asked whether recent developments pose risks to the competency of the professions and their ability to perform their broader social function. This is something especially important in the context of growing debates on the involvement of the professions in a number of instances of malpractice from Enron and the recent credit crisis to the Alder Hey children's organs scandal.

**Conclusions**

This paper has documented the development of a number of exemplary dimensions of what have been described here as transnational professional projects and sociologies. It has been shown that, as a result of processes of globalization, actors in contemporary professionals projects increasingly transcend Westphalian state boundaries, something exemplified by supra-national actors such and the WTO, EU and GPSFs. Existing neo-Weberian theory (Abbott, 1988; Burrage et al., 1990; Freidson, 2001; MacDonald, 1995) provides a useful starting point for analysing such developments but a rescaling is needed to recognise the way both the production of producers (closure regimes that restrict access to the professions) and the production by producers (regimes that regulate professional practice) (Abel, 1988) are increasingly influenced by dialogues between supra-national and national actors. Such rescaling acts as the basis for a more effective transnational neo-Weberian theorisation of professional sociologies that is suited to the spatial complexities of professional projects and practices in the twenty-first century. Specifically the paper has drawn attention to the need to replace in neo-Weberian sociologies of the professions the traditional focus on the nation state with broader governance regimes; of inserting a new actor, the firm and GPSFs in particular within existing frameworks; and of understanding users, universities and practitioners as multi-scalar actors. Taking such an approach, we contend, offers a way to reinvigorate theoretical and empirical research on the professions.

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