

Professionellt gränsarbete – socionomexemplet

av

Andreas Liljegen

Akademisk avhandling

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Fakultetsopponent är professor Lennart G. Svensson,
Institutionen för sociologi, Göteborgs universitet.



GÖTEBORGS UNIVERSITET

Göteborgs universitet, Institutionen för socialt arbete,
Box 720, 405 30 Göteborg

Abstract

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Author: Andreas Liljegren

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The focus of this thesis is on boundary work both as a phenomenon and a theoretical tool, and consists of the manuscripts of four articles and an introduction. One way of perceiving professions is in terms of a landscape metaphor. In this perception of professions, boundaries and boundary work define and separate professional groups by means of dividing social space into sections, over which different groups struggle to establish and maintain control. Different actors make claims on a specific set of boundaries and, in this way, boundary work can be described as either an implicit or explicit claim-staking activity. The first article, *Key metaphors in the sociology of professions: Occupations as hierarchies and landscapes* is written in English and offers a comparison between the landscape metaphor and another way of perceiving professions, that of the hierarchy metaphor. If boundaries and boundary work are the most central concepts in the landscape metaphor, *closure* plays a similar role in the imagery of hierarchies. One conclusion drawn in relation to the two metaphors is that, whilst the landscape provides a finer-tuned theoretical tool, an advantage with the

hierarchy metaphor is that it has stronger rhetorical clout.

The focus of the second article, which is written in Swedish, is on professional boundary work conducted in a Swedish social welfare department between two groups of qualified social workers, and analyses a specific example of intra-professional boundary work. Among the conclusions is that both groups make different claims in the conduct of relational and motivational work carried out from a holistic perspective.

The third article, *Pragmatic professionalism: Micro level discourse in social work*, focuses on boundary work in relation to two ideal types of logic; occupational and organizational professionalism. Perhaps the most important difference between these logics is that, in occupational professionalism, authority is built on trust in the professionals' education and ethics, whilst in organizational professionalism it is grounded in regulation and control expressed, for example, in rules, regulations and routines. The article deals with how two groups of social workers in Swedish welfare departments position themselves in relation to these logics. Among the conclusions is that the groups relate to the logics in a pragmatic way, making claims on the occupational professionalism but, at times, falling back on organizational professionalism.

The fourth and final article, *The heroine and the capitalist: The professions' debate about privatization of Swedish social work*, analyzes boundary work conducted in four professional social work journals in the context of debate about privatization. The debate can be described as a struggle with a professional ambivalence towards privatization. This ambivalence is, for instance, evidenced in the metaphorical descriptions of those involved as either heroines or capitalists.