

Interprofessional collaboration: strengthening or weakening social work identity?

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1 Introduction

Across Europe an effective inter-agency interprofessional workforce is now acknowledged by policy makers and strategists as critical for the health, social care and welfare of future generations (e.g. Byrne, 2004; SAMW, 2014). However, as has been noted in social work research and elsewhere, interprofessional partnerships are “hard work”, (Wildridge, Childs, Cawthra, & Madge, 2004, p. 4) may be conflictive and depending on the development of a common terminology (Machura, 2016), rely heavily on interpersonal relationships and groupwork (Pullen-Sansfaçon & Ward, 2014) and may shift the power balance between the professions implied (Salhani & Coulter, 2009).

This chapter examines how the increasing push towards inter-professional collaboration might impact on professional identity in social work, using the recently created interdisciplinary Swiss child and adult protection authorities or courts¹ as an example and field of observation.

In legal commentary and political debate, social work was appointed as one of the key professions next to law. Social workers thus met new opportunities in terms of new positions in the child and adult protection system, particularly that of a member of the decision-making board. At the same time they were confronted with new challenges (or recurring residual ones), namely that of situating their knowledge and experience against that of other professionals in the newly created interprofessional boards, mainly lawyers, but also psychologists and educationalists. With and against them, they had to develop new ways of affirming their professional identity, i.e. of negotiating their disciplinary profile, signature skill set and competences.

The new authorities thus can be seen as new arena of interprofessional competition and, as a corollary, of identity formation. Observing this field in the making is all the more intriguing, as Switzerland's high degree of federalism allows for much variation in organisational structure and thus for studying the interplay of organisational context, professional status, and individual identification processes².

¹ As explained later on, depending on cantonal law, child and adult protection authorities may have different legal status (court vs. administrative) without consequences for their formal function and competences.

² The authors currently explore this interplay with funds by the Swiss National Research Foundation (“Professionalization by Interdisciplinary Cooperation? Strategies of Social Workers in the Context of the Swiss Child & Adult Protection Authorities”). The present chapter reports results from preliminary studies, done in collaboration with Eliane Favre, Véronique Gaspoz, Sarah Jurisch Praz, Dorothea Köppel, Michael Marti, Claudia Peter, Mélanie Peter and with two groups of students during their research course – the authors are grateful for those collaborations as well as for the permission to use the material for the present purpose.

This chapter presents some preliminary reflections on this relationship: the first section discusses basic theoretical concepts, which should allow for identifying the dimensions of observation. For the second step, a brief description of the child and adult protection field in Switzerland is given in order to enable readers to adequately grasp the practitioners' situation. Based on several smaller studies conducted since 2013, the third part, then, attempts at tracing the evolution of the professional field and the roles played by social workers.

2 Theoretical context

2.1 Boundaries of professions and interprofessional collaboration

Traditionally, theories of professionalization focus on the client-professional dyad from which they propose structural requirements of professions and professionalism, as, most notably, specific and systematized knowledge, techniques of diagnoses and intervention, ethical norms as well as control over education and access to the field (Parsons, 1951). Power and conflict theories, in contrast, see professions as groups trying to advance individual status through collective action (Sarfaty Larson, 1977), essentially by limiting access to prestigious and economically attractive occupational fields (Collins, 1990). In this endeavour, the ability to define the framework in which professional action is carried out is a central element in a triple sense: the power to define the theoretical knowledge that gives plausibility to professional practice, the power to define standards of legitimate professional practice and the power to control access to such practice. According to this approach, professionalization is conceptualized as a continually ongoing process in relation to and dependence on the environment. Therefore interprofessional collaboration has to be seen as an arena where rivaling professions sharpen their profile and try to prove the competitive advantage of their specific concepts, diagnoses and interventions (Abbott, 1988). Professionalization, understood as the formation of a profession, is a prominent instance of boundary making, i.e. of the formation of groups by demarcation from other groups (Lamont & Molnár, 2002).

In recent years, interprofessional collaboration has increasingly attracted attention, especially in the field of health and social care. Complex needs of clients on the one hand, the division of labour and corresponding specialization on the other, enforce collaboration between specialists from different professions (Pullen-Sansfaçon & Ward, 2014). In this sense, the positive effect of co-operation – of unifying different competences and knowledge to offer the best intervention – is put forward. In much the same way and with reference to the work of Susanne Leigh Star (Leigh & Griesemer, 1989), Lamont and Molnár (2002, pp. 180-181) point out the connecting, bridging and inclusionary potential of boundaries, i.e. of the boundary as a prerequisite of collaboration. This is undeniable, but the aspect of competition between different professions that collaborate is irrefutable when it comes to question like: who has the sovereignty of interpretation concerning diagnosis, intervention, and inference. Or: how is the definition of a possible common profile negotiated? Furthermore,

using the concept of separating *and* connecting boundaries allows for conceiving of interprofessional collaboration in different variants, from an interdisciplinary approach – where disciplinary boundaries are maintained – to a transdisciplinary approach – where disciplinary boundaries are dissolved and a new common knowledge base is created.

Framing professionalization in terms of boundaries and boundary making also allows for a further question in more exact terms, that of the relation between profession and professional knowledge: if one distinguishes, as Lamont and Molnár (2002) suggest, between symbolic and social boundaries, then one may ask questions about how symbolic boundaries or conceptual distinctions are affected by social boundaries and *vice versa* or how symbolic boundaries can be crossed without crossing social boundaries (or the other way round in the case of interdisciplinary co-operation). One can also ask who has the power to establish or cross boundaries and identify which mechanisms permit this. Thus, with regard to social mobility (upwards as well as downwards within scales of professional prestige) the permeability of group boundaries, and hence the properties of boundaries and the social and symbolic crossing strategies available, become a key element (Boen & Vanbeselaere, 2001).

2.2 The individual and the collective processes of identification

Professionalization and boundary work have been situated, so far, as collective processes of a profession's development. However, collective mobility strategies must not be seen in isolation from individual positioning strategies and individual professional identity construction. Both levels mutually condition each other. To state it with Jenkins (2000): individual identity does not make sense without collective membership, and the collective does not exist without individuals producing and reproducing it in practice.

In this sense, it is instructive to look briefly at processes of professional identity development. On the individual level, Cohen-Scali (2003) distinguishes between *socialisation for work* (through education) and *socialisation by work* (through work experience). The latter is essential at the beginning of a career, but remains important, for the development of professional identity during professional activity, above all in case of career transitions. Ibarra (1999) shows the importance of role models at the workplace for selecting and learning a new professional role: individuals learn from peers who convey a certain interpretation of the job. This interpretation, however, is held to be a collective one too – whether it be in line or not with the model proposed by *collective professionals*, i.e. by members of the professional community working, at some distance to “ordinary practice”, for the development of the profession at different levels, notably education, research, and policy-making (Scott, 2005).

Drawing boundaries or boundary work is a key component of identity work, and both are done in collaboration by individual practitioners and collective professionals. In the production of any collectivity to which practitioners refer to, two elements are decisive: the self-description of the group and the categorization from outside the group (Jenkins, 2004). This dialectic understanding of identity construction assumes identity as

something procedural, negotiable and flexible. For identity as for professional boundaries, the question is one of the power relations between in- and out-groups: who has the power and sovereignty to impose basic categories and standards and thus set boundaries against those of others. With regard to interprofessional collaboration within the same team, several collectivities (own profession, organisation or a newly created transdisciplinary network or universe of discourse) might be at disposal as reference for an individual practitioner. Thus one may further ask how such “offers for identification” are prioritized and selected. What are the consequences for the individual practitioner and the profession’s collective identity?

2.3 Social work as source of identification in interprofessional relations

As the focus is on professional identity in social work, it might be useful to take a glance at social work as a collective identity and its usefulness for practitioners for the positioning in inter-professional collaboration. Current literature on social work in interprofessional collaboration offers a wide range of views, but is, in general, not very optimistic with regard to social work’s ability to develop a sharply contoured as well as recognized role profile. Their particular signature contribution and hence their function often seem far less than obvious. The absence of a solid knowledge base has led some scholars to focus on the integrative, transdisciplinary identity of social work (Büchner, 2012). Thus, Oliver (2013) stresses the “boundary spanning” role of social workers, and others underline their interpersonal and processual competences and their values (Korazim-Körösy, Mizrahi, Bayne-Smith, & Garcia, 2014) or their expertise in group dynamics to foster successful collaboration (Pullen-Sansfaçon & Ward, 2014). For Maddock (2014) it is the interprofessional communication and role negotiation skills regarding the own expertise and competence, that social workers lack in interprofessional teamwork. Dewees sees another crucial point for social workers’ success or failure in collaboration with other professions: they find themselves caught between the values of client advocacy and of a team consensus about an adequate distributive intervention strategy (Dewees, 2005).

To state the problem with reference to one of Abbott’s central concepts, one might say that social work claims a comprehensive and thus diffuse jurisdiction (Scherr, 2002). Being the process manager able to address the client to specialized services supposes a broad (as opposed to deep) knowledge of neighbouring disciplines. One could thus argue: if modern society is characterized by an advanced division of labour (and thus specificity, as Parsons (1951) would have had it), social work is characterized by the opposite of conveying a general (over-)view. If comprehensiveness and, as a corollary, diffuseness are cornerstones of social work’s collective identity, the question inevitably arises of how the profession as a whole and individual social workers manage to communicate their identity and profile within their own group. And subsequently, how they manage to defend them *vis-à-vis* their environment, and especially against neighbouring, and potentially competing professions.

2.4 Significance of the organisational context

Like other professionals, social workers rarely work independently, but most often embedded in organisations. As a consequence, they are not only committed to their profession's principles, but also to the organisation's values, its norms, classifications and procedures. According to Bommers and Scherr (2012, p. 192ff.), we may distinguish three types of organisation that frame social workers' professional action: public welfare administration, social work organisations, and organisations belonging to specialised subsystems dominated by other professionals (like courts or hospitals). Each type produces different constraints, and thus gives different leeway for collective and individual professional discretion and strategies of preserving professional autonomy (e.g. (Lipsky, 1980; Sosin, 2010).

Concerning social work, the child and adult protection authorities may be counted among the organisations of this third type. Even though most of them are administrative authorities, their overall identity is framed by the administration of justice. They are, thus, typically headed by non-social work, mostly legal, professionals, leaving social workers in a position of professional "heteronomy" (Abbott, 1988; Scott, 1969; Scott, 1992). This normally implies working under the supervision of somebody applying professional standards other than the own one, based on other professional classifications and thus elementary symbolic boundaries.

Whatever the dominant profession (if any), organisation imposes classifications and hierarchies of its own, in line with its stated goals, with its history and with the vested interest of its members; among these classifications, those defining conditions and status of membership are of particular importance (Jenkins, 2004).

In this way, organisations form arenas of interprofessional competition, defining the rules and resources (not least in terms of symbolic power) that weaken or strengthen individuals and groups in their intra-organisational competition (Abbott, 1988). The organisational frame is thus expected to be important if not decisive for the outcome of jurisdictional competition.

If organisation is an variable structuring interprofessional competition, it can also be seen as source of institutional logics and as such a reference for individual identity construction (Barbour & Lammers, 2015). We might, in consequence, differentiate between *professional* and *organisational* dimensions of a practitioner's work identity. Within the organisation, group boundaries might then (individually) be drawn along different criteria, e.g. according to organisational or managerial choices as well as individual identification preferences. With respect to social work, the study of the Swiss child and adult protection authorities might contribute to an understanding of how organisational "identification offers" are received by social workers and how this might be related to collective identification support within the profession.

3 The social context: Child & adult protection authorities in Switzerland

Switzerland has a strong tradition of citizens' voluntary participation at all political levels (including decision-making in social welfare or education). In line with this tradition, the pre 2013 child and adult protection authorities (so-called tutelary authorities) were composed of laypersons on the local level (Häfeli & Voll, 2007; Voll, 2006). Exceptions were to be found in some French-speaking cantons which had already organised the former child and adult protection authorities in courts, and in some bigger cities where the responsibilities had already been professionalized (albeit not necessarily around social work). The revision of the Swiss Civil Code thus not only brought about a fundamental shift in the law from a control to a protection perspective, but a comprehensive reorganization of the competencies for decision-making.³ Unsurprisingly, the revision, the status and the composition of the new Child and Adult Protection Authorities (for convenience, the acronym CAPA will be used) were among the most controversial issues in the reform procedure (Häfeli, 2013a). The compromise finally adopted was centred on the notion of a "specialist authority" composed of at least three members of different disciplines (art. 440 CC).

The formal professional qualification of these members is subject to debate. Commentators (e.g. Hausheer, Aebi-Müller, & Geiser, 2010) agree on the requirement of having at least one lawyer and having also members qualified in other relevant disciplines, notably psychology and/or medicine/psychiatry and social work. Besides these minimal exigencies, the cantons are free to design the authority's organisation according to their needs and traditions. Accordingly, we find, across the cantons, a panoply of CAPA structures (in the narrow sense of the decision-making board), surrounded by an equally impressive diversity of auxiliary services (CAPA in the wider sense), in which lawyers, social workers, psychologists, and other professionals may play quite different roles. Three of the most important dimensions of variation concerning the organisation of these authorities are (for a general overview Häfeli, 2013b):

- *legal status*: in some cantons, the CAPA is part of the court system; in others, it has administrative status.
- *eligibility criteria* for board members and presidency: some cantons explicitly require professionals of social work being members of board, others only state eligibility criteria in terms of degree but not of discipline; some reserve the presidency to members of the legal profession, others do not.
- *permanent vs temporary / associate membership*: in several cantons, non-legal professionals have the status of associate members ("*assesseurs*") which are associated on a case-by-case base, according to competencies assumed to be necessary. Most CAPA, however, are composed of permanent members.

³ The revision of the Civil Code of 2013 referred to in this chapter materially concerns the law on adult protection only. The child protection section was revised earlier, in 1976/1978, but because the adult protection authority also "carries out the tasks of the child protection authority" (art. 440 al. 3 CC), the organisational and procedural changes apply to the child protection system as well.

Other differences, such as size, structure, composition and function of the auxiliary services, or as the wider context of local/cantonal social assistance organization have to be considered important as well. Equally, the continuity or discontinuity of former structures and players in the new system, should not be ignored (Emprechtinger et al., 2016). Especially in municipalities where the social services had a decisive role for preparing decisions of the lay authorities, the creation of a professional authority exercising its role as decision-making and supervisory authority had a major impact on the relationships with these social services.

The nationwide compulsory transformation from lay to professional interdisciplinary authorities changed, and potentially boosted, the role of social work in the field of child and adult protection. As professional group with comprehensive experience in the implementation of protection measures as guardians or deputies to child and adults and, in a great number of municipalities, in preparing the decisions that the lay authorities then formally adopted, social work was appointed as one of the key professions next to law. This opened new opportunities in terms of new strategic positions in the child and adult protection system – that of a member of the decision-making board.

4 Some observations on the interplay of organisation, profession and individual identification

As outlined above, the CAPA are an interesting field for observing dynamics and processes of interprofessional negotiation of jurisdiction roles and signature competences. Twenty six different cantonal legislations offer as many different organisational frames that have an important impact on collaboration and identity construction of the involved individuals as well as professional groups. The following reflections emerged from several different empirical research and evaluation projects in the context of the CAPA since their start in 2013. Empirical material consists of interviews, focus groups, documents as well as observations of the media discourse, conferences, and discussions with key persons. Data were not collected in order to treat the question asked in this contribution, but allow valuable insights in the interaction of interprofessional collaboration and professional identity with special regard to the impact of the organisational context.

4.1 Boundary work in a “fuzzy transdisciplinary field”

Understanding the significance of interprofessional collaboration as arenas for sharpening professional profile by boundary work (Abbott, 1988), the organisational context as structuring this arena should not be overlooked. The wide variations of organisational models around the same federal core elements described above allow for a rich comparative perspective. As noted, an organisation may offer an open frame for jurisdictional competition or, on the contrary, narrowly determine professional boundaries so that jurisdictional competition is excluded. The CAPA system examined here showed models of both permitting and excluding jurisdictional competition. Two of them will be described hereafter for illustration before going into detail of professional boundary-making in what we've described as the “fuzzy field”.

In the first example, the CAPA has the legal status of a court. Professional judges are permanent members of the CAPA. To fulfil the exigency of interdisciplinarity, further professionals, are case-wise assigned as assessors to the decision-making board. In practice, for every case two professionals with different background (e.g. social work and psychiatry) are attached for the hearing of the case and subsequent decision-making in the board. All the preparatory work, from the initial decision to process a case to social enquiry and mandating external expertise to preparing the hearing and finally draw up the decision, is done by the permanent member of the court and its internal support service, all professionals with law background. Interdisciplinarity comes into play at a point where pre-decisions have already been taken by one profession. The board that was studied in this context⁴ demonstrated a strict division of labour between the involved professions. The professional judge clearly leads in the case, and is responsible for the procedurally and materially correct interpretation of the law. As for the social worker in the board, the judge appreciates the expert knowledge concerning social institutions, the social security system and possible alternatives to a protection measure. The social worker, in turn, benefits from the recognition of her expertise and positively evaluates the prospect of bringing her perspective to bear during the hearing and the decision-making process. The court as organisational context defines very clearly the position practitioners with non-legal background can assume. Boundaries tend thus to be very clear and seem, in this case, to be accepted by the practitioners involved.

In contrast to the first example where the assessors are clearly subordinated to the judge (even if for the decision-making their votes have equal weight), the second CAPA exemplifies a transdisciplinary interpretation of the collaboration within the decision-making board. This authority is an administrative one where all of the board members are permanent employees and have the same status and autonomy for leading proceedings. That means that every board member – regardless of the professional background – has to fulfil the same work during a proceeding he/she is responsible for, from the receipt of a “notification of danger” (signalling a child or adult potentially in danger and need of assistance) to the decision. In consequence, social workers are expected to perfectly carry out the legal elements in a proceeding and *vice versa* lawyers are expected to integrate “*the social*” in their work (to just mention these two professions in the board). A president of such a CAPA-model illustrates this understanding when he says that good board members are social workers with legal competences and lawyers with social work competences. Interdisciplinary dialogue takes place in team meetings where certain cases are discussed in presence of all disciplines, or, informally, in bilateral peer counselling. The hearing normally is conducted by one member only, the decision, then, is taken by the board of three persons. The degree of discussion, however, can vary significantly according to the complexity of a case and the individual decision of the responsible board member.

⁴ The organisational model we studied consists of several different but structurally similar units.

In the first example social workers have a weaker position in status due to different membership statuses of the board members, but have, in turn and due to a clear division of labour, a very clear profile that is recognised by colleagues in the legal profession. Social work identity may be stated as rather strong with distinct boundaries of competences. In the second example, the transdisciplinary CAPA, the status of social workers is procedurally equal to that of lawyers and other professions; it can thus be said to be higher than in the first CAPA described above. But what happens to social work identity if a transdisciplinary understanding of collaboration renders boundaries along professional profiles more diffuse?

Of course, professional boundaries continue to exist in a transdisciplinary model as well, as a CAPA has to meet the formal requirement of different disciplines in the decision-making board. It might also be assumed that board members preserve basic elements of their professional origins in their new identification: they have to adapt to a new common (transdisciplinary) profile, but they do so on the bases of their original categories and distinctions. Observations of CAPA that pursue such a transdisciplinary model did not reveal the way the transdisciplinary common profile is created and necessary skills are negotiated. Nonetheless, the observations allow for some interpretations regarding the ways of boundary-making and jurisdictional claims of social workers in these negotiation processes.

The organisational context as quasi-judicial administrative authority emphasizes the importance of legal correctness of the proceeding. A transdisciplinary profile of a board member is thus based on the knowledge and skills to lead correct legal proceedings. This knowledge, as described in law and books, is comparatively well defined and thus easy to communicate to non-lawyers. Social work knowledge, on the contrary, was much more fluidly addressed in the interviews. Lawyers vaguely named it *“the social”* or *“the way they talk to people”*. Social workers’ statements lacked clear definitions of what particular knowledge other professions should adopt from social work. This might be because the question was not asked specifically. The data suggest, however, that this is, indeed, less clear and thus more difficult to communicate. As social workers in the CAPA often refer to their professional experiences in the former system of child and adult protection, this expertise is less useful for collectivization as social work knowledge and skills.

Therefore, in this case of a new and still “fuzzy transdisciplinary field” where professionals collaborate, it might be suggested that social work identity is not sharpened but rather individualised and thus blurred. If there is no common social work knowledge body – as knowledge is often labelled as individual experience – and, in return, another profession’s knowledge base offers useful elements, professional boundaries of social work tend to be dissolved from inside and outside the profession.

4.2 Collective identification support for boundary-making processes

If the organisational context is promoting the dissolution of professional boundaries and thus leading to a “fuzzy” field of transdisciplinary professionalism, professionals are individually challenged to position themselves

in the board. As outlined above, individual professional experience is often put forward to legitimate the individual exclusive position in the board. The position as a board member in the CAPA is new for social work and so is, more generally, the position as a judge (or quasi-judge in the administrative authorities). Therefore, social workers in this position initially did not have any role models offering possible identities to experiment with. In the absence of such models, the importance of which has been demonstrated in Ibarra's (1999) study on identity construction after career transitions, the question of alternative sources of board members' new professional identity has to be addressed. Basically, one may distinguish two such sources or references of identity: the organisation, as already addressed as structuring element in the previous section, and the profession of social work as collective professional identity.

Social workers in the CAPA are, not merely situated in relation to their profession, but importantly, as members of the organisation. As such they are, quite naturally, developing an identity as board member with their colleagues in their respective authority. In the transdisciplinary model, the identification processes seem to happen, at least in part, collectively across professional boundaries because each member finds herself in a new position. However, the selection criteria of social workers and lawyers as board members seem to differ between disciplines. As the interview data suggest, social workers often were selected not so much for their formal qualification, but for their work experience in the field of child and adult protection or relevant neighbouring fields. In contrast, lawyers did not generally have experience in child and adult protection, their formal qualification was the necessary and sufficient criterion for the membership in the CAPA. Thus, the individual knowledge base referred to as significant experience of social workers couples with an education based collective identity of law; the latter being more prominent in the organisation's identity. If it was clear what social workers had to learn from lawyers in order to correctly function as board members (the CAPA is applying the law thus social workers have to know, too, how to do this correctly, as several interviewees said), it was much less clear what lawyers could learn of social workers besides accumulating their experiences too.

Support for the identity construction of social workers in the CAPA decision-making boards is, secondly, expected to come from social work as a profession. This includes fellow social workers in other CAPA, the Swiss association of social workers, and the collective identity of social work as profession and discipline. In addition, support for the fulfilling of the new role could be expected from those groups who carried out lobbying activities to push social workers in the formally high position in the decision-making boards. Surprisingly, little networking activity is currently deployed to develop a collective social work identity as board members. Special conferences on social work in child and adult protection or special issues of the professional journal only partly focus on the special role of social workers as board members. Mainly, they address social workers in the system of child and adult protection in general. Once again, a comparison with the lawyers in the CAPA is informative: several legal commentaries on the new law on adult protection were published before and after 2013. What is a usual claim

of jurisdiction in this sector (as in every sector of new legislation) has also been seen as strong collective support from the legal discipline for their members in the CAPA and the CAPA in general. Social workers heavily rely on these commentaries as well, at least where they have to manage the procedural dimension of child and adult protection. Interviews with social workers that practise as assessors suggest that, in accordance to their clear profile as experts for “the social”, they do much less care about legal issues than do social workers in transdisciplinary boards and that they are thus more focused on their specific professional knowledge. Identification support from collective professionals is thus mainly occurring whether emphasizing on the organisational boundaries (e.g. postgraduate qualification for the field designed for all professionals) or on the professional background (e.g. social work in the child and adult protection system), none of them especially focussing on the specific role of social work in the decision-making board. Finally, several research projects and development projects on tools for social enquiry are in the making or have recently published their results. Consequences for the standing of social work in the CAPA and the usefulness of the obtained knowledge for jurisdictional competition in the interprofessional collaboration in the decision-making boards are still to be observed.

4.3 Boundary-making processes within social work and consequences for professional identity

As the creation of the inter-disciplinary child and adult protection authorities opened up a new profile for social work in the field of child and adult protection, it provoked a necessary differentiation between social workers as members of the decision-making board and social workers executing the decisions that were taken in this board in the function as a guardian or deputy. One might say that an internal stratification of social work is occurring: there are now social workers in the decision-making board who are hierarchically above their fellow social workers in the social services.

In this perspective, it is not only the intra-organisational collaboration in the CAPA that challenges social workers to sharpen their profile, but there is – in most of the CAPA – also an inter-organisational collaboration with fellow social workers that has an impact on professional identity. As mentioned above, social workers were often recruited in the CAPA for their professional experience as guardians or deputies or as secretaries of the former lay decision boards (and sometimes both). Some interviews revealed that lacking profound experience in the field is seen as a disqualification for the position, above all from fellow social workers outside the CAPA. In their new role as board members, social workers still can make use of their experience, but this experience cannot be the basic object of their identification anymore.

Where the presence of social workers in the CAPA is seen as element of a largely functional differentiation within the field of social work, this perception is accompanied by expressions of relief to have a representative of the own professional group (“*someone of us*”) in the CAPA. This relief is based on expectations that these co-professionals assume a bridging function between front line social workers (deputies or guardians) and the

world of the lawyers. If the perception of stratification and hierarchy between CAPA and deputies or guardians predominates, the latter often deny CAPA social workers doing still social work. As the function does not comprise the direct work with clients anymore, it is doubted to be “real” social work. Additionally, CAPA social workers are devaluated as arguing only with paragraphs, just as the lawyers. The differentiation of worksites of the two groups of social workers underlines the different positions in status hierarchy. Due to the common worksite, social workers in the CAPA are, logically, in closer interaction with the other board members than with their professional peers in the social services. To ensure the bridging function to the social workers in the front line services that cooperate with the CAPA and, thus, being successful in (exclusively) occupying this competence within the CAPA, social workers have to make sure that they keep on being perceived as representative of social work. It is difficult to imagine how this could be done without a common abstract knowledge base, and it is equally difficult to imagine how such knowledge could be created as long as the focus is on personal social work experience.

5 Concluding discussion

The reform of the Swiss child and adult protection system brought professions of unequal status and type of knowledge together in one and the same authority and under the rubric of interdisciplinarity. The diverse existing organisational models provide compelling insights into the nature of professional identity in social work. Where this interdisciplinarity is understood as trans-disciplinarity, it is accompanied by a blurred professional identity, as far as it requires negotiation and creation of a common profile. Therefore, the result might not be a combination of the different professions and their disciplinary knowledge, but the outcome of rather vague or even hinted jurisdictional claims as well as of individual positioning strategies. Whether social work identity is strengthened or weakened in interprofessional collaboration depends in large part on processes of negotiation and the individual practitioner’s negotiating skills. If we want to transcend the latter, collective professional identification support is needed, otherwise the generally weak collective professional identity in social work, combined with the blurry profile of social work in agencies like the CAPA, will lead to individualistic strategies of status gain. Such individual strategies might strengthen individual professional identity as social worker (with different collective references), but undermine the positioning of social work as a knowledge based profession and, thus, the ability to make successful collective jurisdictional claims.

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