Professionalisation and quality management: struggles, boundaries and bridges between two approaches

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Abstract

The quality of adult educators is on the agenda of European educational policy and the scientific community in Europe. In these contexts, professionalisation and quality management are often conflated. This paper is based on the hypothesis that quality management and professionalisation follow two different approaches. The paper outlines the two approaches with a focus on their two different logics. After a brief comparison of the two approaches, the paper examines the conflation of these two approaches in the expertise Key competences for adult learning professionals (Research voor Beleid, 2010). The paper ends with a plea for acknowledging the boundaries between professionalisation and quality management, and shows ways of building bridges between them without neglecting their essential differences.

Keywords: professionalisation; professionals; quality management; standards; key competencies

Introduction

In European Union (EU) documents, adult education and learning was for a long time only included in general discussion of lifelong learning. Adult education and learning in its own right has only been addressed in EU documents since 2006. Two documents in particular – *Adult learning: It is never too late to learn* (European Commission, 2006) and *Action Plan on Adult learning. It is always a good time to learn* (European Commission, 2007) – focus specifically on adult education and learning. In both documents, the question of how to ensure quality in adult education can be found (European Commission, 2006; European Commission, 2007). The 2006 document

draws a broad picture of quality in adult education, including teaching methods, staff, providers and delivery as aspects of quality in adult education. The 2007 document identifies the staff involved in delivery as 'the key factor' for the quality of adult education. It announces the developments of standards for adult learning professionals as well as for providers and for the accreditation of providers. The idea is to develop quality in adult education by setting standards.[1]

In 2010 the study *Key competences for adult learning professionals* was published by the European Commission (Research voor Beleid, 2010). It proposed a framework of competencies for adult learning professionals. Within this framework, seven so-called 'generic' competencies and 12 specific competencies were described. These competencies should be fulfilled in a summative way by the staff of each adult education provider. The study set out competencies which adult education providers should fulfil at an organisational level and competencies which individuals should fulfil personally. With this study the EU is fostering its plan of formulating competencies as standards for adult learning professionals (European Commission, 2007).

Taking into consideration the discussion on adult education professionalisation and on quality management in adult education, this paper is based on the argument that there are two different logics: the logic of professionalisation; and the logic of quality management. Professionalisation focuses primarily on the development of people and specific groups of people working in a field of action; quality management focuses on the development of an organisation and its processes, often with the goal of a certain standardisation. In the present European discourse, we see a danger of the quality management approach dominating the professionalisation approach. In order to improve adult education significantly in daily practice beyond an inflation of quality certificates as proof of performance, we propose to consider and discuss seriously the advantages and limitations of both approaches. Therefore, our paper follows the core questions: what is the logic behind the approach of professionalisation on the one hand and quality management on the other? How can both of them contribute to an improvement in adult education?

Therefore, we elaborate firstly on the logic of the approach of professionalisation in adult education. Secondly, we outline the logic of the approach of quality management. Thirdly, we outline differences, struggles and boundaries between these two approaches. Finally, we try to build bridges between professionalisation and quality management.

Professionalisation in adult education

The term 'professionalisation' can be understood in various different ways (Gieseke, 2010). In this paper it should be discussed as a process. In the discussion of professionalisation in the educational context, this process is focused on two different perspectives: one perspective refers to professionalisation as the process for developing a profession (e.g. adult education); and the other perspective understands professionalisation as a process of developing professionalism for people working in a specific field (e.g. adult education). These two processes do not contradict each other. Nonetheless, their primary focus is different, as will be explained in the following section.

Professionalisation as a process towards developing a profession

The term 'profession' has its roots in the early modern age in continental Europe. According to Stichweh (1996), the development of professions is embedded in the transition of the society of the Middle Ages to a functionally differentiated society. The universities of the Middle Ages had four faculties: the faculty of philosophy offered the degree of 'magister', which gave access to the three other faculties – law, medicine and theology. Graduates of these three faculties belong to one of the three original professions. A profession implies several privileges for its members. In the twentieth century, characteristics of several professions were researched by sociologists studying various professions. From the perspective of power, the universities and their established professions brought a new, independent power into the context of the state and society.

According to Mieg (2003, 2005), the Anglo-American discussion uses the term 'profession' for professionally organised groups. This means that the way a qualification is acquired and the access to the market, as well as the standards for its performance, are clearly defined. In Anglo-American contexts, professions are normally developed by the initiative of groups (bottom up), whereas the development of professions in continental European contexts is seen traditionally in a top-down way by the state. Observing professions in central Europe, there are several hints that the top-down ways are dissolving and that bottom-up ways are becoming stronger nowadays (e.g. the strength of professional associations).

In a classical way, a profession is described by several characteristics. There are lists which name up to 28 characteristics (Perks, 1993, pp. 12-14). The most common characteristics are:

- scientifically based specialist knowledge with a specific subject terminology
- theory-based academic qualification pathways
- specific norms and codes of ethics
- professional autonomy
- client-based and social interactions
- self-control by professional associations
- supporting public welfare.

Professions are researched from several theoretical approaches. Depending on the theoretical perspective, some characteristics are more prominent than others. From a system-theoretical view, Stichweh (1996) focuses on client orientation. Oevermann (1996) develops a perspective of an ideal type of professional action, so professional autonomy, academic qualification and professional socialisation are at the centre of his approach. Freidson (2004) understands professionalism as the third logic beside the logic of the market and the logic of hierarchical administration. The characteristic for professions is that their logic is based on the specific, complex professional action of a professional group. Because of this, professionals are characterised by their self-organisation and by the self-regulation of a professional group. Based on this sociological discussion, professionalisation would mean to develop a joint framework of adult education as a classical profession. Looking, for example, at Germany, one of the first countries with an institutionalised education for adult educators, we will show some efforts that have been made to develop adult education as a profession.

In Germany, adult education has been understood more as a mission than as a profession for a long time (Nittel, 2000). First discussions and activities in the 1920s

intended to qualify people for teaching adults (in the so-called 'Deutsche Schule für Volksforschung'). During this time, adult educators were normally people who already had another qualification. For example, school teachers, priests or university professors were engaged in teaching adults. So until the 1950s the idea that adult educators did not need a specific vocational training or even an academic qualification was prevalent. Life experience was considered to be more important than an educational qualification (e.g. Weniger, 1952). This was strongly rejected by Schulenberg (1972) and theoretical reasons for this rejection were given in detail.

During the 1960s and especially in the 1970s, initiatives to enhance professionalisation multiplied in Germany. At university level, a framework for a diploma programme in educational sciences with an emphasis on adult education was developed. This was introduced in several German universities during the 1970s after the decision of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the German Länder (Kultusministerkonferenz, 1969). These developments secured a basis for understanding adult education in the context of education as a science, whereas in the Anglo-Saxon countries it is understood more as technique or art.

During the 1960s and 1970s in Germany introductory seminars and self-study material were developed by the Educational Institute of the German *Volkshochschule* for people working in adult education (Gieseke, 2010; Heuer, 2010). Through the expansion of adult education in the 1970s there was a goal to develop a profession of adult education for staff of the *Volkshochschule* (which was described by the term '*Verberuflichung*'). During that time, adult education providers started to develop programmes to qualify their teachers. Even today, adult education trainers still normally come from professions other than education or adult education. Nowadays, there are around 50 universities in Germany offering adult education as an academic subject. These developments in professionalisation can be understood as initiatives to develop adult education as a classical profession.

According to the characteristics of professions, Gieseke (2002) shows through extensive empirical research that adult education cannot be understood as a typical profession; a one-to-one client relationship is not usual. Normally, adult educators are acting with groups of learners and hence the working context is much more complex and less oriented towards the individual. Individuals are responsible for their own learning, and this aspect makes them less dependent on the adult educator. Therefore the logic of a client-orientation, which implies a hierarchical situation between a professional and a client, does not apply to adult education. Even the aspect of professional autonomy is only relative: there is a conflict between the professional group orientation on the one hand and the market orientation on the other. Adult educators are mostly acting in and for institutions. Nonetheless, they are also depending on an adult education market promoted and framed by new forms of governance which introduce voucher systems and similar instruments of well-controlled liberalism (Käpplinger, 2009).

According to the inner logic of adult education, it has to be asked whether the development of a profession is advantageous. It seems more promising to discuss professionalisation as the development of professionalism.

Professionalisation as a process towards professionalism
One of the first definitions of professionalism in the context of German adult education comes from Tietgens (1988, p. 38). He understands professionalism as 'situative competence' and defines professionalism as 'the ability to use broad, scientifically deepened and diverse abstract knowledge adequate in concrete situations. Or

contrariwise: to acknowledge in just these situations which parts of the knowledge could be relevant.'[2] Gieseke (2010) developed this perspective through extensive empirical qualitative research, and defines professionalism as 'differentiated handling with research results of the discipline, together with interdisciplinary knowledge for the interpretation of an actor's situations in a specific practical field.'[3]

It is also interesting to focus on paradoxical and contradictory situations that professionals have to deal with (Dewe, 1988; Nittel, 2000). They have to act professionally in situations where no concrete, applicable professional knowledge is available. Other authors focus on competence-oriented ways of professionalism. For example, Peters (2004) describes the knowledge, abilities, identity and autonomy which a professional should display.

What does this mean for the (academic) development of professionalism for people working in adult education? According to Gieseke (2010), professionals in adult education are characterised by their interpretation patterns, which enable them to interpret situations from the perspective of adult education. Based on these interpretation patterns, professionals are able to act adequately in practical situations. In other words, professionals are able to put on professional glasses through which they can see situations clearly from the perspective of adult education. Therefore a professional action always needs to be an interpretation of the situation by a person with scientific knowledge. Professional action is characterised by an adequate (not a predetermined) way of acting in a specific situation.

Professionalism in this sense means understanding the situation in which professional acting is taking place. It means a holistic understanding of professionals who have to act on the basis of their combined knowledge, skills and attitudes. So professionalisation means educating people working in adult education. The goal of professionalisation is to support the professionalism of the people working in adult education. With this professionalism a further improvement of adult education can be achieved by the professionals. Where the term 'professionalisation' is used below, it means a process towards professionalism.

Quality management in adult education

The concept of quality and its various summative and formative components (quality assurance, quality development, quality management, etc.) have become very prominent in educational discussion in recent years (Hartz, 2008; Veltjens, 2009). When concentrating here on quality management,[4] quality is seen as something like a guiding concept with a universal meaning when talking about adult education (Hartz & Meisel, 2006). This is rather surprising when considering that the term 'quality' does not originate within the educational field, but stems from the field of economics (Law, 2010; Hartz, 2008). However, the predominance of quality and management even within the educational debate is a good example of the increasing predominance of economic perspectives in the perception of a 'market' of adult education nowadays. It outlines to a certain degree the failure of adult education to develop its own terminology and to use quality management in an economic sense.

Turning to the generic meaning of quality, it is interesting to note that the roots of quality management can be found in American and Japanese industry (especially the car-making industry). Starting with external quality control concepts with rather summative functions used by Frederick Taylor for the Ford enterprise at the beginning of the twentieth century, the quality idea extended to all areas of enterprise after the

1960s. This was due to the success of Japanese enterprises and their rather formative quality management with a focus on participative processes after rigorous planning by powerful white-collar expert technicians. Nonetheless, it is important to note that quality management means only that the product has the quality that was intended. For example, even enterprises with an ISO certification can produce cheap mass products with low sustainability. The goals of management are achieved here; nevertheless, consumers might be dissatisfied with the limited performance of a product. Quality management does not have to lead to a good or better product, but to a product as it is meant to be.

Thus, for organisations, quality management is often a process of internal standardisation and external image-building. Both are crucial for the existence of organisations coping with internal and external pressures. These pressures originate partly from political decisions in favour of increased competition between organisations and partly from political decisions in favour of a labour force with often flexible, precarious working conditions (Sennett, 1998). New forms of governance are closely related to the present prominence of the term 'quality management' (Forneck & Wrana, 2005). The introduction of the quality concept into adult education is a relatively recent development, which started in many countries in the 1990s and was connected to an economic shift in adult education (Arnold, 2010). Concepts of market- and customer-orientation from business economics were transferred to adult education. Norms such as ISO-9000 (and later standards) are used in many organisations as a means of standardisation and should apply to almost any business processes, regardless of the products being produced by the organisations. In general, educational organisations started being treated as enterprises and learners started to be seen mainly as customers or consumers in the market of adult education. This perception is very influential, but is also heavily criticised (Forneck & Wrana, 2005). 'The common approach of quality assessment … has been considered by many researchers (e.g. Dill 2007, Harvey & Newton 2007) as having largely failed to address the essence of educational quality' (Law, 2010, p. 65). Education and formation are not seen by critics as products, and learners are not seen as consumers, but as 'prosumers', who contribute actively and jointly in the emergence of education and formation (Arnold, 2010, p. 252). Learners do not pay for a final product, but pay for learning arrangements in which trainers and learners are jointly developing something which can finally result in education and formation. Thus, the concept of quality is enshrined in new forms of governance, which are primarily led by accountability and only secondarily led by improvement (Forneck & Wrana, 2005; Heinrich, Jähner & Rein, 2011).

Overall, 'quality management' is a term which is very much focused on processes, products and controls by standardisation. These processes and products are defined formally according to criteria or norms standards. Thus, quality seems to be a rather neutral term, which can be used in very different ways depending on the context. The central characteristic of quality assurance or quality development is a formalisation of organisational processes. Individual actions should be guided by formal procedures or formal structures, which are often laid down by written guidelines, mission statements or fixed goals. People, interests, professional passion or individual objectives are not apparent, and the individual factor is regulated by this formalism. The negative consequences of quality management that is too rigorous can be self-referentiality, homogeneity, hierarchism and bureaucratism (Heinrich et al., 2011), which stifle innovations. In principle, quality assurance or quality development should help in the organisational execution of tasks regardless of individuals' subjective influence. It is not accidental that discourses about quality are mainly organisation-oriented, rather than

person-oriented. This sometimes makes the quality discourse difficult to understand and often rather socio-technical and very self-referential.

'Quality' is an overall buzzword, although it is also an 'omnibus term' or a 'container term', which means that the term is often used very differently. The term 'quality' is originally a neutral term which has to be defined, but nowadays quality is often a simple synonym for the 'good' without discussing what is good or bad (Hartz & Meisel, 2006). Particularly lacking is a discussion about whom quality is meant for and what are the real objectives in daily practices. Is quality meant for the government? Or for learners? Or for enterprises? Are the needs of these different stakeholders in adult education identical? How should we deal with different interests? Is there a hierarchy of needs, meaning that some needs are more important than others? Nowadays there is a high level of vagueness in the usage of the term 'quality', which makes it easy to hide the interests of some stakeholders. Surprisingly, there is only little discussion taking place about what is really meant by 'educational quality'. In particular, the objectives and the content of adult education are not reflected in their meaning.

Differences between professionalisation and quality management

The integration of adult educators into organisations shows the necessity of distinguishing between organisational development and professionalism, as Gieseke (2002), Harney (1998) and Nittel (2000) stress. The logics of organisational development and professionalism are different. Which logic leads and improves the day-to-day actions of practitioners? Is it, on the one hand, the logic of professionalism or is it, on the other hand, the logic of organisational development? In this respect we are lacking updated empirical research apart from interviewing directors or quality managers, who often tell legitimising narratives about the success of quality management (Behrmann, 2010; Heinrich et al., 2011). For example, it would be interesting to research real educational processes and the consequences for different stakeholders before and after the introduction of a quality management system.

Professionalisation versus quality management
Based on the explanation above, the logic of professionalisation and the logic of quality management can be distinguished, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Differences between professionalisation and quality management

	Professionalisation as a process towards professionalism	**Quality management as a process towards standards**
Roots	humanities/universities	economy
Focus	People	organisations
Basis of action	patterns of personal interpretation, based on unique cases	defined organisational processes, based on defined standards
Field of acting	social fields	technical fields
Perspective	holistically oriented	oriented towards individual parts
Action orientation	a good way of acting in unique situations	one way/right way

Source: Authors' own design

Table 1 makes clear that both approaches have very different focuses in many respects. Professionalisation originates in the academic area and is person-oriented, while quality management is process-oriented and comes from an economics background. Professionalism as the goal of professionalisation can be developed through a scientific qualification, by professional associations and through a code of ethics. Professionalisation is understood as an ongoing process of a person in social interaction. The personal bases of action are patterns of individual interpretation, which are focused on unique cases. Quality based on quality management concepts is developed through documentation, assessment, objective standards, evaluation and quality assessors. It is characterised by defined and standardised organisational processes. The context of quality management is less complex and is oriented towards individual parts, and processes can be defined by one right way. In contrast, professionalisation is needed for complex situations in which individuals have to interpret the context in a holistic way in order to be able to act adequately. Depending on the situation, different actions can all be adequate solutions.

The approaches of professionalisation and quality management are far from identical and cannot easily be integrated. But instead of discussing which approach is superior, the most valuable approach should be to appreciate both perspectives and to benefit from the different potential of both. A conflation of both approaches implies the danger of a strengthening of organisations (managers) and a weakening of professionals, as standardisation is often a very powerful tool. An introduction of quality management often results in the organisational demand that professionals have to justify their individual actions (Harney, 1998). This is even true when it is claimed that a strengthening of organisations would enhance professional culture (Heinrich et al., 2011). Normally, the opposite is true (Nittel, 2000) – a rather hegemonic quality culture is established, by merging the professional and the organisational perspective (e.g. Ehlers, 2009).

A critical approach towards conflating the organisational and the professional perspectives
Hartz (2008) and Veltjens (2009) describe a development since the 1990s, at least for Germany, in which the discussion of quality has stimulated a turning of the focus away from the professionals and towards the organisations. Quality is connected with the

organisation and not the profession as a starting point. Because of this, it is valuable to analyse precisely the expertise in *Key competences for adult learning professionals* (Research voor Beleid, 2010, for the European Commission), which seems to be becoming a basis for the European Commission in defining adult learning professionalism. In analysing the *Key competences for adult learning professionals* expertise, a conflation of organisational and professional perspectives can be found. This is shown by the fact that the study describes competencies of a person as well as competencies which should be shown by an organisation. The sum of the personal and the organisational competencies are defined as 'Key competences for adult learning professionals'.

Furthermore, the term 'professional' is used for improving organisational aspects in adult education, while the term 'quality management' is used for improving professionalism in adult education:

> The 2006 joint report on progress with the Education and Training 2010 work programme expressed regret at the fact that the professional development of vocational teachers and trainers continues to pose a real challenge in most countries. This coincides with other quality measures such as organisational development. The report could justifiably have extended the expression of disappointment to the professional development of teachers active in the field of non-vocational adult learning. (Research voor Beleid, 2010, p. 18)

> Quality assurance and management within adult learning institutes is indispensable for the professionalisation of the sector. Several national country studies illustrate a demand for more measurements in this field. The study shows that continuous professional development (CPD) and external evaluation only play a relatively small role in quality enhancement policies for adult learning providers. This indicates a need for change. It is necessary to increase external evaluation and pay more attention to the career prospects of practitioners. These strategies support processes of professional development in the sector. They stress the need for practitioners to have professional autonomy in determining their career paths and, at the same time, to be accountable through external evaluation. (Research voor Beleid, 2010, p. 20)

The assumption is that quality assurance and quality management would improve the professionalisation of adult educators. In this way, the organisational and the professional perspectives are conflated. This assumption is rather questionable. So far, there is no solid empirical proof that the introduction of quality assurance and quality management has led to a professionalisation of educators – or even to an improvement in educational quality. Empirical studies focusing solely on the perspectives of management and quality assessors (Behrmann, 2010; Heinrich et al., 2011) are interesting, but deliver mainly self-referential assumptions about the value of quality management.

Quality assurance and quality management are targeted at the organisational level. To assume that improvements on this level might spill over to the individual professional level is far from obvious. In fact, standardisation on the organisational level might even inhibit individual professional development, since standardisation must logically lead to a loss of individual, professional freedom in action, which might be needed in specific situations in complex societies. Even from the perspective of economics this is questionable, as W Edwards Deming outlines in the introduction of his book *The new Economics. For Industry, Government, Education*:

> This book is for people who are living under the tyranny of the prevailing style of management. The huge, long-range losses caused by this style of management have led us into decline. Most people imagine that the present style of management has always

existed, and is a fixture. Actually, it is a modern invention – a prison created by the way in which people interact. This interaction afflicts all aspects of our lives – government, industry, education, healthcare. We have grown up in a climate of competition between people, teams, departments, divisions, pupils, schools, universities. We have been taught by economists that competition will solve our problems. Actually, competition, we see now, is destructive. What we need is cooperation and transformation to a new style of management. (Deming, 1994, p. XV)

This fundamental critique does not derive from a pedagogue or a critic of capitalism, but from the prominent American management consultant W Edwards Deming at the end of his life (1900–93). Deming worked for decades with enterprises in Japan and the USA. It is also a comment on our present situation of economic and ecological crisis, but it was rather prophetic, considering that he wrote it in the 1990s. Although Deming was the 'father' of the Japanese quality revolution and of total quality management (TQM), he was very critical about standardised ways in organising quality and leaving out the individual perspective. He found that knowledge about the variation of people was missing, and he saw a general lack of theory in leading organisations and individuals in organisations. He opposed strongly numerical goals without a theoretical foundation (such as the theoretically weak Lisbon goals (Behringer, 2010)) and considered popular management tools, such as merit pay, as the best way of inhibiting motivation and collaboration of individuals in organisations (Deming, 1994). When reading his almost 20-year-old books nowadays, it is challenging that almost all his descriptions of aberration in organisational life seem to have become frequent daily practice in many organisations. It is even more ironic that public organisations often start to use methods of management that were once popular in commercial organisations, when the methods have already become unpopular in business life (e.g. merit pay), or that scientific knowledge is ignored (e.g. the Hawthorne studies in sociology of the 1920s (Roethlisberger & Dickson, 1966)).
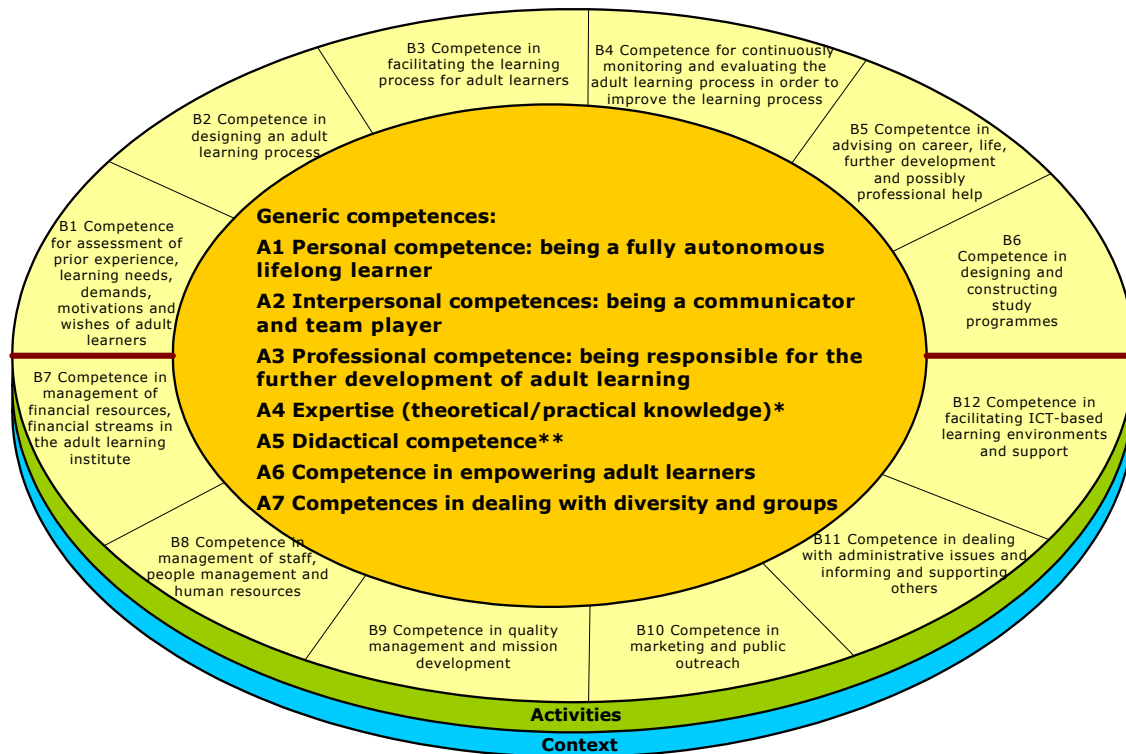
The developed set of key competencies also shows further indices that the organisational perspective is understood as the leading one:

This set of key competences is applicable for all professionals working in the adult learning sector, by abstracting from the specific context in which professionals work. Moreover, it attempts to include all competences needed to support the activities carried out on an institutional level. This means that not only the teaching activities, but also other activities (for example management activities and programme development activities) are supported by the set of key competences. It also means that each professional is expected to acquire all the given competences, but that ideally all competences are available among the entire staff of an adult learning institute. (Research voor Beleid, 2010, p. 10)

The study assumes that the organisation is the reference point for professionalisation of adult education, not the individual professional. Furthermore, anybody who works in the adult learning sector is called 'professional'. Another example of the mixing of the logic of quality management and the logic of professionalisation within the expertise is the assumption that adult education professionalism can be broken up into single pieces of competencies:

...to abstract the core competences that have been indentified in other studies and in different contexts that could be applicable for everyone working in the adult learning sector. (Research voor Beleid, p. 23)

Figure 1. Set of key competencies of adult learning professionals

Generic competences:

A1 Personal competence: being a fully autonomous lifelong learner

A2 Interpersonal competences: being a communicator and team player

A3 Professional competence: being responsible for the further development of adult learning

A4 Expertise (theoretical/practical knowledge)*

A5 Didactical competence**

A6 Competence in empowering adult learners

A7 Competences in dealing with diversity and groups

B1 Competence for assessment of prior experience, learning needs, demands, motivations and wishes of adult learners

B2 Competence in designing an adult learning process

B3 Competence in facilitating the learning process for adult learners

B4 Competence for continuously monitoring and evaluating the adult learning process in order to improve the learning process

B5 Competentce in advising on career, life, further development and possibly professional help

B6 Competence in designing and constructing study programmes

B7 Competence in management of financial resources, financial streams in the adult learning institute

B8 Competence in management of staff, people management and human resources

B9 Competence in quality management and mission development

B10 Competence in marketing and public outreach

B11 Competence in dealing with administrative issues and informing and supporting others

B12 Competence in facilitating ICT-based learning environments and support

Activities

Context

Source: Research voor Beleid (2010, p. 11)

The Research voor Beleid study uses the following as its initial sources in its expertise upon which Figure 1 is based: 'academic and policy-related documents on competences for working in the adult learning sector'; 'Job descriptions, vacancy texts and competency profiles on providers level'; and 'learning outcomes of education programmes designed at delivering competent professionals in the adult learning sector' (Research voor Beleid, 2010, p. 28). In this way, the study uses single tasks of adult learning professionals as a starting point from which the set of competencies are described. However, this rather technical approach creates several problems: it assumes that a profession can be defined by listing single tasks; and it assumes that a summative fulfilling of the competencies that are needed to fulfil these tasks would lead to professionalism. This approach can also be found in the Australian competencies approach: Flowers (2009) shows that in Australia this approach leads to a homogenisation of professional development and to ways of learning that focus primarily on the defined standards and competencies.

Looking back at what has been worked out in this paper as being the differences between professionalisation and quality management, the separation into different parts is a typical way of developing and improving organisational structures but not professionalism. The leitmotifs for all these competencies are missing in the area of expertise. Such leitmotifs can be the formulation of a common societal responsibility or the fostering of the learning individual according to his/her own needs. This common societal responsibility can, as a consequence, act as a reference point towards the formulation of adult learning competencies. Because of this, the sum of single

competencies does not lead to professionalism. Furthermore, single competencies can be understood as synergetic contributions to professionalism in adult education.

Overall, like other educational fields, adult education has to deal with new forms of governance. Quality management is considered as a governmental mode in order to steer quasi-markets by standardisation. Thus, the dominant perspective is actually accountability-led and not improvement-led. The resulting trend is that: learners turn into consumers; competition is the new mantra; competency tests flourish like weeds; organisations have to be certified in order to get access to public co-funding; and adult educators have to meet new standards, while simultaneously being branded as being deficient and struggling with rather scarce public resources. The precarious working conditions in adult education and the public responsibility in this precariousness are not missing here by chance, but are hidden in this new governance mode. All in all, this shows that the logic of professionalism is sacrificed for the logic of standardisation.

Acknowledging boundaries and building bridges

In conclusion, professionalisation and quality management contain different logics and have different focuses. It is a fundamental, categorical and logical mistake to assume explicitly or implicitly that the perspectives of organisations and professions are identical. The same is true of the assumption that quality management is an objective expression for 'good education'. Keeping differences and acknowledging boundaries is important in order to be able to see differing interests (e.g. quality of education might be viewed differently by a politician, a citizen, a manager or an auditor) and to mediate between emerging conflicts because of different interests.

The new modes of accountability-led governance in adult education and other educational fields are often characterised by a rather militaristic language, like 'calibre' or 'mobilisation' (e.g. 'it is essential to ensure that teachers and school leaders are of the highest calibre', Research voor Beleid, 2010, p. 18), which asks for general mobilisation towards one joint goal. On the contrary, we should remain open-minded about the multiple differences – especially in our postmodern societies – and the value and richness of these differences. The consumer model has serious limitations, and the free space of professionalism beyond organisational chains is precious.

Nonetheless, it would not be advisable to build new frontiers between professionalisation and standardisation through quality management. It is important to keep the differences in mind, but also to see the two different tasks of professionalisation and quality management in their contribution to an improvement of adult education. Both approaches have disadvantages and advantages as well as limitations and possibilities. Thus, we have to look for bridges and benefits, by combining both approaches at some points without losing the indispensable value of the perspective of each individual approach. Professionalisation as a process towards professionalism in adult education focuses on the development of people working as professionals in adult education. By contrast, quality management in adult education focuses on adult education providers and their organisational development. Both approaches have different objectives in improving adult education.

Adult learning professionals are normally working in organisations. For this reason, it is necessary to decide in which situation the logic of the organisation should be the guiding logic and in which situation the logic of the professional should be the guiding logic. To identify this, the following questions could be used:

- Which actions follow a right/wrong logic and can be standardised by quality management? Which actions follow an adequate/inadequate logic and therefore need professionalisation without standardisation?
- For which actions is it sufficient to follow routines, and can they be standardised by quality management? Which actions need a holistic interpretation of a complex situation beyond routines and have to be professionalised?
- For which actions is it necessary to have academic expertise and therefore qualified staff (professionalisation)? For which actions is this unnecessary?

Based on this differentiation, it may be valuable to evaluate which part of the *Key competences for adult learning professionals* (Research voor Beleid, 2010) expertise contributes to professionalism of people working in adult education, and which part contributes to the organisational development of adult education providers.

To reach quality in the adult learning sector, both perspectives should be acknowledged in their own respect. Therefore, it is necessary to think in which situations professional autonomy is needed and in which situations standardised processes lead to an improvement. In this way, a distinction between the two approaches can be made, thereby avoiding a dominant definition of professionalisation solely on the logic of quality management.

Notes

[1] The inaugural meeting of the 'ESREA Research Network on Adult Educators, Trainers and their Professional Development in Thessaloniki in 2009' also focused on the question of quality provision and assessment in the context of the education of adult educators. The starting point of this paper was a discussion in Workshop 10 on 'In-service training of adult trainers: The role of the enterprise and the role of the individual'.

[2] Translated by the authors. Original in German: 'Professionalität heißt, auf die Kurzformel gebracht, die Fähigkeit nutzen zu können, breit gelagerte, wissenschaftlich vertiefte und damit vielfältig abstrahierte Kenntnisse in konkreten Situationen angemessen anwenden zu können' (Tietgens, 1988, p. 38).

[3] Translated by the authors. Original in German: '…sondern den differenzierten Umgang mit Forschungsbefunden aus der Disziplin und mit interdisziplinarem Wissen zur Deutung von Handlungssituationen mit Handlungsanspruch in einem bestimmten Praxisfeld' (Gieseke, 2010, p. 386).

[4] Interestingly, the term 'management' has also taken on a universal meaning. Field characteristics here are often hidden. It is assumed that a manager could manage different organisations – an assumption which is challenged even in economics (Mintzberg, 1989), but is still mainstream thinking of MBA business schools.

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