Chapter 4
Higher Education and Becoming a Professional

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1 Introduction

This chapter addresses the question of becoming a professional from the perspective of how higher education is seen in relationship with the demands of work life, by students at four European universities. It brings into focus two study programmes different from teacher education, medical education and nursing education, namely Psychology and Political Science. The purpose of doing so is to add a different viewpoint to becoming a professional. These programmes seem very different in curricula structure and professional focus, assumingly producing different educational trajectories from higher education to working life, yet they also have several similarities. The rationale for bringing in Psychology and Political Science into the discussion is that, through the discernment of differences across the educational preparation of professionals, it is also possible to discern common features of what it means to become a professional. Psychology has a clear professional role as the endpoint in the same way as medical, nursing or teacher education has, while Political Science is a typical liberal arts course, without a designated or self-evident professional focus. What is the process of becoming professional like under these auspices?

To address this question in this chapter, I use examples from a comprehensive research programme conducted between 2001 and 2008. The first generation of research that I refer to addressed questions about how students from different European countries and study programmes become professionals (cf. Dahlgren et al. 2007 for a summary article of the project). The project was called *Students as Journeymen between Cultures of Higher Education and Work*. Data from this project will make up the main source used in the chapter.

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The rationale of the Journeymen project was that there is a mutual interplay between institutions of higher education and the students and teachers that populate them. The process of becoming professional in this sense is not only how education impacts people, but also how people impact education. This means that the students are seen as individuals as well as members of different university cultures and degree courses that have clear or less clear connection to a professional work life area. This provides a nuanced way of understanding the relationships between cultural, educational and working life contexts. Becoming professional is here studied as a function of how students understand their university culture as they enter and as they leave their university education, how they see their coming professional work and what they see as the relationship between study and work.

Another assumption in the project was that basically the same educational initiatives might bring different results in different cultures. For this reason, I will examine the different course structures encountered by students. Since the Journeymen project was undertaken, the Bologna process has been implemented in Europe in order to harmonise the system of higher education. The rationale is that this harmonisation will facilitate student and staff mobility and permit free movement of academic graduates. The Bologna process comprises several steps, including the introduction of a so-called Diploma Supplement to facilitate comparisons between degree documents. The European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) has also been implemented to increase comparability between study programmes (EU 2000).

It is reasonable, however, to believe that the programmes are still influenced by the national and local university traditions of the European countries. The research I am referring to in this chapter was undertaken in a comparative context of four European countries: Sweden, represented by Linköpings Universitet (which was also coordinating the project); Norway, represented by the University of Oslo; Poland, where the University of Gdansk is involved and Germany represented by the University of Duisburg-Essen. The project was financially supported by a grant from the Fifth Framework of the European Commission of the European Union (Project identity HPSE CT-2001–0068). The process of becoming is also investigated in a longitudinal part of the study which questioned senior students and professional novices, after about 18 months of professional practice, to investigate how they conceived of themselves as professionals, and how they in hindsight viewed their university education, particularly related to their professional work.

Against the backdrop of the common European labour market, it is of interest to investigate how the higher education systems in different European countries prepare individuals for working life. The Journeymen project induced a second generation of research where the most relevant in this context is the longitudinal study by Nyström, who in her doctoral thesis (2009) followed the Swedish students in Psychology and Political Science and their views of the professional trajectory after 3 years of professional experience (Nyström 2008; Nyström et al. 2008). Hence, data from Nyström's studies will be interspersed and used in addition to the Journeymen data. The transition from higher education to work life is also studied in a comparative context of Sweden and Australia (Reid et al. 2011), and makes up

a third generation of research that will be used to illustrate the process of becoming a professional in the fields of Psychology and Political Science.

2 Theoretical Framework

When I talk about becoming a professional in this chapter, I am particularly focusing on the dimension of identity formation that is situated in the realm of higher education studies and work. It does not mean that the formation of identity occurs only in this realm or that the concept of identity is viewed as something homogenous or as a rational and stable personality trait. Rather, professional identity formation is viewed as a multifaceted, relational and fluid concept. Viewing students as 'journeymen' indicates that the transition from university studies to working life comprises also a trajectory between different practices that have different implications for the formation of professional identities. Students embark on a journey from being expert students to becoming novice professionals (Reid et al. 2011). The formation of identity is open to influence from social interactions and contexts, and hereby also allows for consistency and inconsistency to coexist in a particular person's experience throughout the trajectory from higher education to working life. Conflicting emotions or ambivalences that arise from everyday life can be understood as subjective dynamics, which influence the construction of knowledge as well as the shaping of a professional identity (Axelsson 2008).

Axelsson (2008) emphasises the notion of the construction of knowledge and identities as lifelong projects. Two things are significant in this: first, reflexivity and the possibility of making and revising rational choices making identity formation a self-reflexive project (Giddens 1991) and second, people are influenced by general ideas and actual conditions in everyday life and the possibility to choose is thereby limited. From this perspective, identity or identification does not necessarily rest on a rational basis (Bauman 2001, 2004). Identity is here seen as a shaping process rather than an essential concept. Bauman (1991) claims that in the change to the modern functionally differentiated society, individual persons are no longer firmly rooted in one single location or subsystem of society, but rather must be regarded as socially displaced. There is no 'natural identity' that can be bestowed upon people; the creation of identity is individual and could never be securely and definitely possessed as it is under constant challenge and must be ever anew negotiated. Bauman points at a paradox in the sense that the individual needs to establish a stable and defensible identity to differentiate the self from the outer world, but at the same time needs the affirmation of social approval. 'The subjective world which constitutes the identity of the individual personality can only be sustained by inter-subjective exchange' (p. 201).

Wenger (1998) reasons along similar lines when he describes identity formation in a community of practice. Identity is here viewed as a nexus of multimembership. As such, an identity is not a coherent unity nor is it simply fragmented. A nexus does not decompose our identity into distinct trajectories in each community, nor does it

merge the different identities we construe in different contexts into one. In a nexus, multiple trajectories become part of each other whether they are contradictory or reinforce each other. Wenger claims that identities are at the same time one and multiple. Even if we are talking about identity formation situated in the realm of education and work, it does not mean that development of professional identity is seen as an isolated phenomenon that takes place only at the university or in the work context. Nyström (2008) shows that the process of professional identity development is rather a dynamic relationship between different life spheres. In her study of student and novice professional psychologists' and political scientists' processes of professional identity formation in their transition from higher education to working life, three different forms of professional identity were discerned: a non-differentiated identity, a compartmentalised identity and integrated identity, which exemplify different negotiated relationships between the professional, personal and private life spheres. Nyström's study suggests that these three forms of professional identities are sequential, starting from an individual focus to more relational and integrated ways of reasoning about one's profession. Nyström argues that it is through the negotiations between personal and socially derived imperatives that identity formation progresses throughout working lives.

If we look at the context of universities, with all their diversity in disciplines, scientific and professional perspectives, they have in that sense in the literature been viewed as hosting a number of 'academic cultures' (Snow 1964) or 'tribes and territories' (Becher 1989). Then, it is not surprising that educational design, expectations of knowledge formation and identity building in students vary among the array of university programmes. Previous research shows that students also respond to these expectations in different ways during the course of their education. Their ways of engaging with learning in their respective disciplinary and professional fields have an impact on how they identify with the knowledge for the coming professional work (Abrandt Dahlgren 2003; Abrandt Dahlgren and Dahlgren 2003), and hence on the process of becoming professional.

The implication of the above perspectives for identity formation in the realm of university studies is that students as they begin their education towards becoming a professional, encounter the social practices characteristic of their chosen professional or disciplinary field. They will be exposed to the world views, theories, skills and languages embedded therein, and this will influence their identity building as they eventually appropriate some of these cultural properties. In their research in the context of learning in design, Reid and Solomonides (2007) also identified the importance of affect as a component of professional formation and engagement with the profession. In their study, the 'sense of being' – that is the students' core view of themselves – afforded different orientations towards their 'sense of artistry' (affect), their sense of being a designer (the profession), their sense of transformation (learning) and their 'sense of being within a specific context' (becoming, belonging, involvement).

3 Data Collection and Analysis

In the Journeymen project, data was gathered through semi-structured interviews with junior students in their first year of studies and senior students in the last year of their Psychology and Political Science studies. Both first-year and senior students were interviewed, 20 and 12 students, respectively, in each discipline, just under 100 students in each country. In order to get a sense of how the ideas of becoming professional developed over time, a second round of interviews was conducted with the senior students after their first year of work life experience. To supplement interview data, curriculum documents regarding the different programmes were also used.

The project group developed a joint analytical framework for the purposes of the study. There was a need for arriving at descriptive categories of how the process of becoming professional was conceived from the perspective of the informants as well as for linking these conceptions to local policies and contexts; hence, the analysis of the interviews comprised several layers of analyses. As a first layer, an analysis inspired by phenomenography was carried out. Phenomenography is the empirical study of the qualitatively different ways in which various phenomena in, and aspects of, the world around us are experienced, conceptualised, understood, perceived and apprehended (Marton 1994). The words 'experience', 'perceive' and so on are used interchangeably. The point is to suggest that a limited number of ways in which a certain phenomenon appears to people can be found, for instance, regardless of whether they are embedded in immediate experience of the phenomenon or in reflected thought about the same phenomenon. The analyses were initially performed in order to obtain a description of the processes and outcomes of meaningful learning from the perspective of the learner (see Marton et al. 1977). In the Journeymen project, the focus was on the differences and similarities at the group level rather than the differences and similarities between individuals.

A second layer of the analysis was an attempt at linking the students' descriptions to a discursive level, through a discourse analysis, based on the content of the students' experiences as these appear through a phenomenographic analysis. Discourse analysis is a set of research procedures applied to interpret complex issues of language use in specific social situations. As Gee (1999) notes, it is informed by a view of language that transcends the traditionally communicative understanding of its function (i.e. that of exchanging information). For Gee, the main functions of language are '. . . to scaffold the performance of social activities . . . and to scaffold human affiliation within cultures and social groups and institutions' (Gee 1999, p. 1).

The linguistically expressed conceptions of educational issues were interpreted as being related to their subjective activities, their developing social and professional identities and to the cultural and institutional structures they find themselves in. The results of the first two layers of analysis have thereafter been subjected to further comparative analyses; on the one hand, within each participating European university to compare different programmes at the local level, and on the other, between the universities to compare the same programmes in different national contexts.

4 Becoming Professional: Psychology Across Four European Universities

In the following, I undertake a cross-national comparison of the four university programmes in Psychology in Linköping, Oslo, Gdansk and Duisburg-Essen which have different pedagogies and conceptions of learning. These frame conditions may impact the learners' attitudes towards knowledge, competence and their working life expectations. Before focusing on differences and similarities, I look at the various pedagogical approaches employed and try to identify possible consequences for the learners represented within the broad interview data.

Linköping, Sweden. The course uses problem-based learning to bring about an interplay between practical experience and theoretical reflection and to provide students with impressions of their future profession. Students study for 5 years with practical placements incorporated into each theoretical block. After graduation, students undertake a 1-year mentor-guided practice before certification. They also go through a period of ego therapy, in which they reflect on their own personal and professional development, under the guidance of a professional psychologist.

A characteristic feature of Psychology as a field of knowledge is the existence of a set of schools according to which individuals, their motives, functions and aims are conceived of in different ways. The eclectic mode of instruction at Linköping means that fragments of knowledge from different theoretical schools are moulded *ad hoc* and applied to a specific case, that is, the professional selects a specific theoretical perspective for a specific case. The awareness of competing theoretical schools of Psychology and the application of these in clinical practice stand out as the most important features of the learner's answers to the questions about what kind of knowledge is acquired during university studies. The trajectory from university to working life is characterised by continuity and confirmation of the knowledge base acquired during the educational process (Abrandt Dahlgren et al. 2006). Some of the interviews are also very convincing as regards students' feeling of being prepared, of putting into practice the knowledge they have developed during their studies.

> I was surprised by, partly how easily I was entering the professional role and felt confident, and partly by that I could convey my knowledge to the people I met. I was a school psychologist, and there was no doubt about it.

The problem-based learning approach claims to stimulate critical reflection through an emphasis on learning through problem-solving, experiential and self-directed learning. Theories, methods and problems in the field of Psychology are dealt with from a research perspective. It is suggested that since the scientific basis of the profession is rapidly developing and changing, it is important for students to develop the ability of lifelong and independent learning. To do this, students must identify their own learning needs as well as choose, make use of and critically assess different sources of knowledge, and finally, evaluate learning processes and their outcomes. The students are also required to actively seek knowledge with the

aim of developing into independent problem solvers, capable of investigation and intervention.

Due to the small group tutorials that are the basic working form within problem-based learning, the students are interacting with fellow students and teachers from the outset. There is a clear emphasis on the development of communication skills and students are expected to be engaged, talkative and capable and must therefore be well prepared and contribute to discussions. For some of the students, the learning process means hard intellectual and emotional work. The overarching aims of the programme are for students to learn relevant theories and to integrate these into their identity as Psychologists. It seems that the periods of re-occurring clinical placements work as a vehicle for integrating the content learning of Psychology with the learning about their own person.

Gdansk, Poland. The Psychology programme in Gdansk is also conducted over 5 years, but here it is highly structured around traditional lectures, lessons and seminars. For the two first years, all students study a common curriculum, specialising after the third year in their chosen area of Psychology. The main purpose is to give students knowledge and practical skills connected with work as psychologists in the medical service, education and private psychology practices.

Graduates of Psychology are prepared to care for and conduct professional rehabilitation with persons with sensory and ambulatory disabilities as well as intellectually disabled children, youths and adults. Students also acquire information, which will be of use in personnel and training departments, advisory companies, employment agencies and educational centres. In contrast to the emphasis on clinical practice in Psychology at Linköping, Gdansk is mainly based on working with the literature, and psychological problems are dealt with by means of theoretical reflection rather than by practical experiences or interplay between the two. The first-year students from Gdansk claimed to be enormously interested in clinical and social Psychology, but changed their minds during their studies. Since the courses only deal with clinical issues to a limited extent, students do not feel sufficiently well prepared for this kind of work later on. Consequently, many early career Psychologists are engaged in various working life areas, especially in management activities.

Duisburg-Essen, Germany. First-year students here also shared this initial interest in Psychology. Here, a degree in Psychology means that the graduates can work as teachers at the secondary-school level although they mostly major in general Psychology methods or industrial Psychology, and do not focus on clinical or social Psychology. However, the German students often decide to become Psychology teachers and acknowledged the social significance of their profession during the practical training period (after graduation). During the advanced study period, the main area (besides teaching) is industrial Psychology. This applied research area, however, is highly method oriented. Consequently, most of the graduates either envisage a teaching career or involvement in research institutes. The Polish and German students distance themselves from the idea of their professional role as

'social helpers'. Because of the wide range of jobs, students, especially in Gdansk, seem not to favour only one field of work, although the Psychology of management and personnel training are both popular.

Oslo, Norway. The programme is initially heavily theoretical and the integration of theoretical studies and practical/clinical-oriented work does not come until later in the course. It is largely research based with an emphasis on scientific knowledge. Students are expexted to acquire general knowledge of the most important theories, research methods and application of research results to professional work. The Norwegian students welcome seminars given by external teachers who are seen as professional role models. This is the reason for a strong demand for better practical training often expressed at the end of the students' studies. Social and practical problem-solving competencies are mentioned as most important because relational and communicative skills are regarded as essential for good clinical psychologists. The most oppositional learning conceptions were to be found in a comparison of the university programmes at Linköping and Gdansk.

4.1 Emphasising Clinical Psychology

Early career psychologists from Linköping developed a 'professional persona' through reflection on working life experiences. Without self-reflection, conflicting interests such as client and colleague, client and relatives and client and children cannot be handled and private and professional lives cannot be balanced. With respect to the differences between higher education and working life, beginners clearly welcome the demarcation between work and leisure in their daily routines. They feel well prepared by their studies to meet the requirements of their jobs. The learners' emphasis on the importance of active learning is a possible reflection of the structure of the problem-based nature of the Swedish programme. Psychology is a field of study that has a clear orientation towards a professional field, and students' professional identity building trajectories take a different course of development compared to students of Political Science, examined later. For example, Hult et al. (2003) showed that the junior students envisaged identity as a psychologist in terms of a helper or as a social engineer. These students had a personal interest in other people and had personal experiences of helping people as their incentive for undertaking their studies. Students who talked about becoming a psychologist/social engineer referred to their fascination with the subject and people's behaviour and how Psychology could be used to modify behaviour.

Senior students identified with the role of a psychologist as a helper and social engineer capable of moderating people's behaviour. Periods of clinical internship influenced the senior students' trajectory of professional identity formation. They describe how it has become necessary to separate the private and the professional spheres of life, and how the strategy of constructing a kind of professional persona, comprising elements both from their private personality as well as their professional

role, is a way of accomplishing this. The strategy encourages them to differentiate between personal involvement and empathy.

> It is important to be involved and empathic, without losing your critical attitude, to be able to keep a certain distance, even if you are very close . . . . It's in a way a basic condition for being able to do the job, to feel and to analyse, but also to be able to come home and not be a psychologist after work.

In the transition to working life, this strategy is even further developed (Abrandt Dahlgren et al. 2006) when the neophyte psychologists typically work as clinical consultants in hospitals, particularly the psychiatric area involving children, teenagers and adults, and also in schools. Here, the ability to contribute valuable reflections to a discussion between the team or between colleagues gives a feeling of becoming professional. At the individual level, reflection constitutes both a way of synthesising and understanding the client's problems and a way of scrutinising their own thoughts and feelings.

> It is important that I dare to be a human being in the encounter with other people, it is not only about techniques, technical knowledge, facts and methods, but also that I as a human being allow myself to be moved by the meeting with the clients, and that I use my humanity to feel, reflect and draw conclusions from the meeting. To develop in my professional role, it is clear to me that I also need to develop my personal identity.

Nyström (2008) shows, in her follow-up study of the Linköping results of the Journeymen project, how students in Political Science and Psychology construe their professional trajectories in terms of their envisaged future work as senior students, and later as early career professionals. Interviews were conducted after 18 and then after 34 months of work life experience. The clear clinical and professional focus of their university studies seems to have produced a high degree of continuity between being a senior student to becoming a working psychologist. The newly graduated psychologists establish themselves quickly in the labour market and become fully legitimate participants. Six thematic categories were found which illustrate the graduates' visions of their professional trajectory in the 3 years since the first interviews:

- *Learning continuously* – the graduates see the necessity of maintaining learning in their professional work, either in a particular professional field to strengthen their career, or for mere personal reasons and pedagogical interests.
- *Establishing oneself* – the graduates identify with the workplace and the work tasks and this implies a stable professional role as well as a stable notion of the content of the work tasks.
- *Mastering a tool box* – the focus of the future professional trajectory is on the learned technical skills or the tool box of accessible methods, which are perceived as generic and applicable to any specified professional field.
- *Fulfilling a commitment* – the emphasis is on an articulated visionary purpose, which derives from a strong commitment to humanitarian motives to 'make the world a better place' or to 'help people in need'. The professional role or the relation to a certain professional field is only a means to an end since the focus is on the commitment itself.

- *Searching for a professional field* – views of the professional trajectory as uncertain are expressed here. The professional knowledge and competence are described in a broad and generic sense almost like looking to 'find a field' of application.
- *Changing directions* – portrays the view of the professional trajectory as a need to do something different, either in the same professional field or in a totally different area.

Nyström et al. (2008) show that after 3 years of working life experience, a majority of the graduates have changed direction, and are leaving their professional community with the aim of further developing their professional identity. They found that this happens as the early career psychologists seek higher status and income and also because of the difficulty of coping with the emotional stress and fatigue of clinical work.

The Norwegian psychologists highly regard the theoretical knowledge they have acquired during their studies, which they regard as essential for mastering the professional challenges facing a clinical psychologist. Similar to the experiences of students from Linköping, they describe the dilemma of drawing a line between their helping role as professionals and as private persons. Though working life offers an apparent separation of private and professional lives in terms of working hours and leisure time, early career psychologists have problems differentiating emotionally between these domains. This may partly be connected with the high level of responsibility they feel in their powerful positions in relationships with the clients. The main challenge seems to be the development of a professional distance, a challenge in all professional fields. Additionally, the Oslo students underline the significance of active participation in the learning processes rather than mere listening, taking notes and learning by heart. Critical questioning and application of the knowledge acquired are seen as fundamental conditions for learning. Retrospectively, the Norwegians value practical education more than the basic theoretical education of the first 2 years.

4.2 Emphasising Theoretical Psychology

While a professional orientation is obvious amongst early professionals in Scandinavia, it is more difficult to identity this same professional orientation amongst Polish graduates in their first year of work. From the perspective of most students, a fundamental critical attitude towards, and a theoretical distance from, reality are often seen as a main effect of university education. The domains of Psychology are observed from a theoretical perspective; interestingly enough, clinical Psychology as a field of application is not included in this view. This does not meet the expectations of the first-year students who cultivate an image of the psychologist as a social expert. Quite frequently, young academics avoid clinical Psychology as a field of professional application and choose to work in the management area and in adult education. They feel that they do not necessarily have to work in clinical or

social environments in order to act psychologically and to help other people. In their eyes, their expert knowledge can be transferred to any field of work. Some students continue to work regularly in the work places where they worked part time during their studies, even if this work is not Psychology related.

The Duisburg-Essen graduates make use of their education in primarily two areas; teaching and applied industrial Psychology such as research and counselling. Like the Gdansk graduates, they do not envisage clinical professions or jobs in social counselling. The focus of their studies is predominantly on empirical–methodological matters such as industrial Psychology. The great interest in social tasks, which is apparent in the freshmen group, seems to have vanished in their final year. It seems that during the course of their studies, the majority of students have had to revise their former image of the psychologist as the good psychiatrist who is everybody's helper. As a consequence, they have ceased to consider themselves as psychologists even though they know that psychologists work in almost every domain. As a hypothetical explanation, one could draw the conclusion that the public discourse is more effective than the psychological expert discourse. Students who are aiming for a teaching career have nevertheless stressed the importance of social competences as essential to their professional activities. Furthermore, they refer to the ethical responsibility they have as role models. Thus, the self-image of most Duisburg-Essen psychologists is that of a teacher, even though they differ from their colleagues by virtue of their psychological expertise. This self-definition could hint at an essential identity conflict: since they are not able to mediate between the public discourse and the expert opinion concerning the characteristics of psychologists, these novices constantly feel a need for legitimacy. Because they do not see themselves as psychologists in the traditional way, it does not seem at all difficult for them to move to other professional fields.

Basically, this is also true of the Polish psychologists. In comparison with the two Nordic countries, the labour market for psychologists is less delimited and defined in Germany and Poland. Senior students often stated that they felt insecure about their future career choice. This might explain why so many decided to enter the advanced teacher training programme and with the promise of financial security as a public servant. Jobs in industrial Psychology are rarely chosen despite students' excellent prior knowledge.

The next section of this chapter focuses on Political Science graduates, who, unlike Psychology graduates, do not have a clear professional trajectory to work life from university.

5 Becoming Professional: Political Science Across Four European Universities

This book is about becoming professional in fields where there are more or less clear professional roles for the graduates after completing their university studies. What is then the rationale for the inclusion of Political Science, which does not have

a defined professional role, although students after graduation take on professional roles in various sectors of working life? Becoming professional as the result of a liberal arts study is a different process compared to Psychology, medicine, teaching or nursing, and provides yet another perspective on the relationship between higher education and working life. Social, economic and political conditions are important for the evaluation of the professional development of beginning professionals particularly as there is a lack of emphasis on professional qualifications. In the following, I briefly describe the structure of the educational programme in Political Science across the four universities participating in the Journeymen project.

Linköping. Political Science and Economics in Linköping provide students with a broad knowledge of the social sciences and include international politics, institutional theory and scientific conflicts. A critical approach to various political and economic theories is emphasised in the 4-year course, which is organised around conventional lectures, seminars and supervision of the main thesis. Students choose to study Political Science as a separate subject for 2 years or as a Master's degree for 2 years. First-year students described their aims of studying Political Science, as a personal education project and to receive a broad education. Johansson et al. (2008) examined the ways in which junior and senior students in Political Science experience their studies and envisage their future working life. In this study, they pointed to the dual nature of knowledge in the discipline. On the one hand, they focused on factual knowledge about different political systems, and on the other hand, on comparisons and critical analyses of political ideologies. However, the critical element for students' engagement with learning from this example is the affinity they felt for the personal education project. In this instance, students experienced an element of autonomy created through choice. The project enabled them to reflect on their own key interests and learning goals and explore them in a way that was personally meaningful.

These two faces of Political Science (factual knowledge and critical analyses of political ideologies) as a discipline shape a heterogeneous and sequential learning trajectory for the students. In the early stages of study, conveying basic descriptive knowledge about political systems and theories takes precedence through a cycle of lectures, independent studies and seminars. Later, developing the students' abilities to investigate, analyse and compare different political systems becomes more significant. This latter stage involves independent thesis work under supervision. Contact with teachers is less prominent in the initial phase of the programme and the students feel more anonymous as first-year students than they do as senior students. Furthermore, there seems to be a lack of contextualisation and meta-reflection because the emphasis is *on* politics rather than immersion *in* politics. Johansson et al.'s (2008) study shows that the change from the descriptive to the analytic aspect of knowledge in Political Science also seems to bring with it a changed student–teacher relationship. Over the course of the programme, the teacher changes from being a lecturer or seminar leader to that of a supervisor, engaged in close dialogue with the individual students about their thesis projects. Writing the thesis provides opportunities for students to focus on a particular issue and the students apply both theories and research methods developed in Political Science. The thesis can be

seen as a turning point for the students, demanding they engage actively in the construction of the learning task constituted by the thesis work.

Gdansk. Here, political studies can also be described as liberal with a humanistic profile. The main purpose of political studies is to offer the students practical skills connected with professional work in national administration, self-government council organisations, political parties, economic and social organisations, education and international institutions. The emphasis is on providing general political knowledge as well as theoretical and practical specialisation knowledge. However, the graduates from Gdansk tell a different story with a majority of them working in the private sector. There is a strong contradiction between the idealised view of the profession mentioned by many senior students and the real labour market situation. Indeed, it seems as if knowledge and competence acquisition at university were irrelevant to the subsequent professional working life.

In *Duisburg-Essen*, the study of Political Science is embedded in the broader disciplinary theme of Social Science. The aim of Political Science is to provide fundamental knowledge in research perspectives and methods generally, and more specifically in the research methods of Social Science. Another aim is to qualify students for employment. This latter aim is reflected in the organisation of the curriculum through practice-seminars in different enterprises or in the public sector.

Oslo. This is a liberal programme with a heavy emphasis on developing academically oriented independence and analytical skills. The fundamental course in Political Science aims to provide a general introduction to the four major areas of political theory: international politics, comparative politics, public politics and administration and research methods and statistics. The expected profile of competence is related to the emphasis placed on independent academic understanding, scientific analysis and the capacity for systematic argumentation. In the latter part of the programme, the students can specialise in a chosen area. A glance at the Oslo graduates reveals that they have found work in sectors related to the content of their studies. About halfthe graduates work in public administration, are employed in journalism and the media and only one graduate works in the private sector. Thus, their professional work corresponds to the content of studies and the skills acquired at university.

6 Working Professionals

Early career professionals particularly value social and communicative competence and positive self-portrayal and assimilation in social contexts. Furthermore, organisational skills, flexibility and loyalty are regarded as essential for work in companies. Specialised knowledge, on the contrary, seems to be subordinate to the above mentioned skills. This appreciation of practical key qualifications is particularly surprising since the Gdansk curriculum generally marginalises practical application. It is tempting to regard this distinctive feature as a paradox: the Gdansk students try to understand and discuss current politics without any real participation in politics.

Like the Swedish and Norwegian first-year students, the students from Duisburg-Essen mention the significance of Political Science in democratic beliefs and values. Most students describe their function as that of mediators between politics and citizens. In Duisburg-Essen, an important aim is to give fundamental knowledge in the technique of scientific work with emphasis on the methods of Social Science. Having gained an insight into complex interrelations between Political Science and current affairs, the graduates feel that they have been selected to hand their expert knowledge on to others. This mirrors their intensive professional identification. Moreover, the frequently emphasised appreciation of critical analytical and communicative competencies, are also intended to fulfil such a mediating function. Even though the German students are convinced that they have primarily acquired theoretical knowledge, it is very difficult for them to find a job where they can apply their knowledge and study-related competencies. Many graduates from Duisburg-Essen are either overqualified for their current jobs or are employed in sectors with little topical relevance to their studies. Most are looking for a more appropriate job.

In Linköping, the first-year students paradoxically display a more concrete idea of their scientific discipline than their older fellow students (although they still feel insecure about future fields of work), whereas the graduates in Duisburg-Essen claim to have acknowledged the significance of Political Science only at the end of their studies. While writing their Masters' thesis, the Swedish seniors start to identify with political scientists from the media. This turning away from academic role models marks the end of a development from an idealistic to a realistic understanding of Political Science if one bears in mind that for the first-year students, cooperation, democratic values and idealistic attitudes were most important. Johansson et al. (2008) showed that the first-year students in Linköping envisaged a somewhat idealistic professional role as political scientists, being watchdogs for democracy and global justice as the most important features. Students in the latter part of their studies reported a more realistic view, identifying an emerging identity as investigators and civil servants and an appreciation of the parts of the studies that enhance their generic skills.

> Political Science is about critical thinking, analytical skills and thinking abstractly, having a sceptical attitude and being analytical. I think they're the two most important views of it (Political Science): thinking abstractly and objectively as far as possible.

Abrandt Dahlgren et al. (2006) showed in a longitudinal study of the same group of informants that a new role and professional identity of the political scientist as a negotiator and a mediator crystallises after the first year of working life experience. The graduates were found in a variety of different work contexts within the public sector. These include municipal administration, social welfare administration and the national migration authority, but there were also a few working in private companies. The graduates employed within the public sector reported an increasing awareness of the responsibility involved in being the advocates of the individual citizen. When describing this new role and identity, they generally pointed to generic skills, both when asked what kind of knowledge they acquired through their education and what was required in their present work. This also constitutes

the answer to the more general question about the knowledge required to be recognised as a good political scientist. The labour market beginners at the end of this development would rather define themselves as empirical investigators and evaluators. Those who are employed in the public sector identify most strongly with the role of the political scientist. Often, however, they feel intellectually unchallenged at work. Employees in the private sector claim not to identify with the professional conception of political scientists. The study by Nyström et al. (2008) confirms the picture of the graduates from Political Science leaving their studies searching for a professional field and an unclear picture of their professional trajectory. After 3 years, most are employed and have transformed their general knowledge to accommodate specific areas of work. Many of them envisage at this point an insider trajectory in their professional field; the majority emphasise the need for continuous learning in their field or profession, which Nyström et al. interpret as a form of renegotiation of their identities as members of a community of practice through lifelong learning.

7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have illustrated the process of becoming a professional through the transition from higher education to working life, based on students' experiences of participating in educational progammes with either a strong professional focus or a classical liberal arts focus. The dominating pattern of becoming a professional when we compare the results between the four European universities participating in the Journeymen project is that professional preparation in higher education, as well as classical liberal arts studies, seems to produce a process where the identification with a professional role seems to be accomplished during the later, sometimes applied, parts of the studies. Common across three universities is the sequential rather than integrated structure of disciplinary and professional knowledge. The Swedish Psychology programme is different in that it integrates theory and practice and thereby the early start of professional identification and becoming.

Psychology varies between countries from classical liberal arts in Poland to a professional programme in Sweden, where the students also develop a clear professional identity during the course of their studies. In Norway, Psychology appears to have been modelled on the idea that theory should precede application. Problem-based learning is the feature of Linköping Psychology and stands out as giving students a fairly clear identity as clinical psychologists. In addition to comprising periods of practical experience of the profession, there is explicit reference to significant features of the professional role as a psychologist. The Oslo students resemble the Linköping students although their identity as clinical psychologists is somewhat weaker. Gdansk Psychology is more similar to a classical liberal arts programme and this is perhaps why students consider working in many different sectors of the labour market. Their role models, thus, vary and consist of, for example, organisational consultants as well as teachers.

The students in Political Science in all four countries display a weak professional identity at the end of their studies. They may have come across role models apart from their own teachers, as in Oslo where prominent representatives of Political Science are invited to talk to the students. The Linköping students also find role models among political scientists who appear frequently in the media. When it comes to learning in more applied contexts, the Oslo students emphasise their assignments, whereas the Linköping students state that the work on their Master's thesis during the last year of their studies is what really brings about a change in their understanding of what Political Science is all about. Furthermore, for the political scientists, a highlighted issue concerns the distinction between public and private sectors of employment of graduates. Not surprisingly, this field of study seems to be marked by greater diversity and often paradoxical relations between expectations, education and work.

A major aim of the Bologna process is that students who leave each of the three cycles of education – Bachelor, Master and Doctor – should be employable. Employability calls for a number of qualifications where a set of generic skills such as communication, cooperation, as well as problem management, is essential. Moreover, it could be claimed that the kind of practical experience that prepares students for contextualising their general knowledge in different environments might be a way of preparing them for their entry into working life. The Linköping students are obviously employable in their relatively narrow and well-defined labour market. The Gdansk psychologists are likewise obviously employable, but in a less restricted labour market. This may be indicative of the value for employability of classical academic generic skills such as analytical and critical thinking.

What I have suggested here, based on an extensive research programme, is that the perspectives of knowledge and learning embedded in professional education programmes have an impact on how students perceive their professional futures. Professional identity formation is affected by whether students view the content of their educational programmes as directly relevant to their future working life or merely content required for graduation (Abrandt Dahlgren et al. 2006). I also suggest that professional becoming transcends the boundaries of the educational context as well as the boundaries of the working life context. The process can be seen as part of the learner's life trajectory and involves the personal and private life spheres in a non-linear development of professional identity. Thus, professional identity construction can be understood as partly located in academia, and partly between academic institutions, working life experience, individual life strategies and socio-political contexts.

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