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Inequalities in Neo-mutualistic Professional Organisations: The Boundary Work of Creative Workers in Italy

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1 Introduction

The multiple transformations that have occurred in the labour market in recent decades have radically changed the skills sought by employers (McAfee & Brynjolfsson, 2017). A significant outcome of such changes has been an increase in the number of skilled professionals who are primarily self-employed workers and freelancers (Gallie, 2013), working in a variety of production sectors. The occupational landscape has thus been altered, with many 'emerging' professions being added to it. The growing demand for 'new' skills, inside and outside organisations (Evetts, 2011;

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Noordegraaf, 2011; Liu, 2006), has led to different repertoires of actions emerging that identify and legitimise workers as ‘professionals’.

According to the analytical dichotomy of *professionalism* versus *organisation* (Freidson, 2001), the strategies of *occupational professionalism* (Evetts, 2013), based on workers’ self-directed practices and specific competencies (Gieryn, 1983), are understood as distinct from ‘controlled’ strategies (Noordegraaf, 2015) that are governed by managerial principles, standardised routines and protocols, and are organised ‘from above’ (Evetts, 2011). More recently, scholars have identified a ‘hybrid’ model of professionalism, namely *organising professionalism* (Noordegraaf, 2015), in which organisations and professionals are mutually connected in ways that serve to continuously redefine their work and tasks.

These workers enact strategies that bring about change in organisations. This change gives rise to new actions on the part of professionals (Noordegraaf, 2009) in a dynamic of ‘co-evolution’. Indeed, these actions are driven by two fleshed-out logics: *professionalism* and *managerialism* (Noordegraaf, 2015). As such, they are hybrid by nature and are widespread in new forms of organisations, the very kinds of collective entities that are shaping organising professionalism (Alvehus et al., 2021).

Far from being neutral groupings of workers, these organisations, which are frequently ‘multi-professional’, bring about a ‘division of labour’ amongst professionals while responding to higher standards of competitiveness. The mechanisms they put into place come to segment workers, dividing them into ‘elite’ workers, on the one hand, and ‘rank-and-file’ workers, on the other (Waring & Bishop, 2013; Alacevich et al., 2017).

This is especially true in specific productive sectors, such as the creative industries that are characterised by emerging professional jobs. Many creative workers have joined multi-professional organisations to find legitimacy or effective forms of protection. These organisations pursue multiple aims: they operate as labour-market intermediaries and also act as agents of professionalism by defining the work their members do based on their specific skills and expertise and by consolidating their legitimacy (Franzini & Lucciarini, 2022). This role related to skills and expertise is especially

important for sectors that do not have established training systems (Evetts, 2013).

Some studies have focused on the strategies enacted by the organisations that govern emerging professions, examining the implications of their activities in compensating for market pressures and meeting workers' needs in times of crisis (Maestriperi & Cucca, 2018). Others have pointed out the problematic aspects of these strategies, such as the tendency to stratify workers in a way that might lead to forming professional elites (Waring, 2014). However, few of them have addressed both the positive and the negative aspects. The study presented here aims to fill this gap.

The underlying idea is that analysing the actions of individuals and organisations and how they influence each other is key for understanding their implications in terms of *differentiation* 'within' and 'between' professions (see the introduction to this volume; see also Bellini & Maestriperi, 2018; Parding et al., 2021), in the dual sense of the growing division of labour and rising inequalities amongst workers operating in the same occupational ecosystem—creative labour—but in different professional fields. Drawing on Lamont and Molnar's (2002) concept of 'boundary work', which is already used in the sociology of professions (see Bucher et al., 2016; for an overview, see Heusinkveld et al., 2018), we seek to uncover and explain the relational dynamics characterising the 'professional closure regimes' (Boussard, 2018) assembled in creative industries as a result of the activities of cooperatives of creative workers and of these workers themselves.

Our work is grounded in a case study of a creative workers' cooperative based in Italy (hereafter, also 'CWC'), employing approximately 8000 workers with different professional profiles. Of these, the ones discussed in the analysis are *photographers*, *video makers*, and *lighting and sound technicians*.

The chapter is divided into three parts. In the first part, we lay out the theoretical framework. In the second, we present the research methods and empirical findings. Finally, we discuss the results of the analysis in light of our theoretical framework and suggest lines for future research.

2 Boundary Work in Multi-professional Mutual Aid Organisations

In creative industries, organisations inspired by the principles of new mutualism (Horowitz, 2021) have set out to create new market players from the bottom up, based on a combination of cooperation and protection mechanisms. These organisations bring together workers who pursue careers in which periods of work under employment contracts alternate or overlap with periods of self-employment. Moreover, it is common for creative workers to be ‘multiple job holders’.

The multifaceted nature of workers’ identities (Pernicka, 2006) translates into two intertwined needs: to increase their market opportunities and to improve their levels of protection. Joining a neo-mutualist professional organisation gives self-employed workers access to the benefits and safeguards usually reserved for employees.

According to Murgia and de Heusch (2020) and Franzini and Lucciarini (2022), these organisations present themselves as ‘cooperatives of self-employed salaried workers’. They make the workers eligible for social protection by ‘hiring’ them, transforming self-employed workers into salaried ones, who are entitled to wider welfare provisions. These organisational actions try to compensate for the lack of protection suffered by self-employed workers, but do not lead to equal treatment for all the different categories of workers within these organisations. Moreover, CWCs foster increased job opportunities both inside and outside the organisation by giving value to workers’ skills and cultivating professional networks. For instance, these organisations provide training courses on health and safety at work, as well as other professionalisation strategies. Workers can earn a safety certification, a mandatory requirement in high-level assignments, and foster their professional positions, both material and immaterial (i.e. public perceptions). However, this system of job opportunities is produced and reproduced along definite demarcation lines, namely, ‘symbolic boundaries’: conceptual tools by which individuals separate people into groups and generate feelings of similarity and belonging and, in so doing, make sense of social reality (Lamont, 2017).

Symbolic boundaries become *social* boundaries in cases where access to both material and immaterial resources and power is determined by the differential positions of actors in the system of inequalities built along these symbolic dividing lines. As such, social boundaries are symbolic boundaries that have been ‘objectified’ based on specific combinations of class, gender, age, race, and other possible differentiating factors. Symbolic discrimination, then, manifests as a social disadvantage because it conditions how resources are redistributed amongst and within social groups. These mechanisms whereby resources are allocated also regulate the perceived legitimacy of professions, in that they define the degree of social recognition granted to a given occupational group and its specific expertise (Gieryn, 1983); they do this through dynamics of ‘boundary-setting’ diversification and ‘boundary-crossing’ integration (Heite, 2012) between workers who inhabit the same occupational ecosystem. These processes of occupational group-building are crucial when discussing the so-called emerging professions, in which workers consider themselves professionals, but lack public regulation and recognition (Maestriperi & Cucca, 2018). In addition, the construction of boundaries is strategic both for defensive actions (against workers of similar occupational ecosystems: ‘boundary-setting’) and expansive actions (between workers in similar occupational contexts: ‘boundary-crossing’).

Cooperatives of emerging professionals play a crucial role in constructing professional groups and their public legitimacy. Moreover, they face a series of organisational dilemmas due to their specific nature. On the one hand, they adopt inclusive practices to strengthen their ranks, maximise job opportunities, and improve their ability to influence the market (Cucca & Maestriperi, 2016). On the other hand, they activate stratification mechanisms that form a professional elite with a relatively advantaged position over others.

If we analyse the stratification processes in these formally horizontal organisations, we find an example of enactment of symbolic and social boundaries. These boundaries draw lines dividing workers based on objective characteristics (e.g. gender and age). The reproduction of these forms of discrimination has been defined as ‘boundary maintenance’ (Giullari & Lucciarini, 2023; Smith & Ward, 2015). In addition, the analysis of stratification processes has also revealed ‘boundary blurring’

practices (Smith & Ward, 2015), through which the boundaries between occupational groups are redefined. These practices aim to maximise job opportunities by mixing professional skills.

In this chapter, we investigate the dialectic between symbolic and social boundaries leading to discrimination against workers in terms of access to the resources provided by the organisation to its members; we also study the organisational boundaries that the cooperative sets up in pursuing advantageous business models, in order to understand what—if any—forms of inequality these models produce. To analyse these instances of boundary work, we focus on the recruitment, training, and career advancement mechanisms that operate in the organisation in question.

3 Case Study and Methods

The cooperative under analysis was created at the beginning of the 1990s by musicians and live performers looking for a way to reduce the precariousness and intermittent nature of certain creative occupations. Over the years, this first unit of professionals has been supplemented by further sub-divisions aimed at organising other types of creative workers, such as educators, journalists, and photographers. Today, the cooperative is made up of eight organisational units representing different professional areas. The organisation has grown stronger by creating a complex network of services that it supplies to its members (from legal and tax assistance and training courses to a travel agency). This array of services aims to reduce transaction costs and maximise the incomes of worker-members and the organisation, as the cooperative collects a share of the worker's payment for a given 'gig' (short-term contract), namely, 9–12 per cent of the established fee (for an overview of how these organisations work, see Franzini & Lucciarini, 2022). The cooperative has over 8000 members and in 2019 had a turnover of approximately 60 million euros.

We carried out the fieldwork between September 2018 and October 2019, conducting in-depth interviews with the CEO, the management, and the managers of the three professional areas being researched: *photographers*, *video makers*, and *lighting and sound technicians*. We selected

these three groups of professionals based on how many members they have and their relative importance within the cooperative. Lighting and sound technicians make up approximately 70 per cent of the total number of members. In contrast, photographers and video makers account for 5 and 10 per cent, respectively.

Preliminary interviews with the management allowed us to identify the most significant groups of professionals within the cooperative and organise a series of focus groups, each with a high number of participants and heterogeneous composition.

We decided to use the focus group method because this tool allows researchers to understand the dynamics of interaction within the group (Kitzinger, 1995) while uncovering the opinions and conditions of minority groups (Smithson, 2000), albeit in the context of a 'peer group conversation' (Gamson, 1992). We conducted the focus groups according to a discursive scheme based on five main narrative parameters: profession, employment and working conditions (i.e. type of employment, hours worked and work organisation, income), interest representation, associational identity, and unmet needs (i.e. in terms of social protection and job quality).

Four focus groups were held: the first two were addressed to lighting and sound technicians (with 20 participants in each group, making a total of 40), the third was addressed to photographers (15 participants), and the fourth involved video makers (15 participants). We selected the participants based on their profession, age (20–55 years old), gender (except for lighting and sound technicians, because of the lack of women amongst them), and seniority (see Tables 10.1 and 10.2).

We analysed the data we had collected using the standard multi-stage approach (Conover et al., 1991) commonly used for focus groups. This

Table 10.1 Interviewees and participants in focus groups

Age class	Video makers		Photographers		Lighting and sound technicians	
	M	F	M	F	M	F
20–34	7	5	4	2	30	–
35–60	3	–	6	3	10	–

Table 10.2 Key informants

Cooperative CEO (1)
Cooperative managers by professional field (3)
Communications office manager (1)
Research office manager (1)

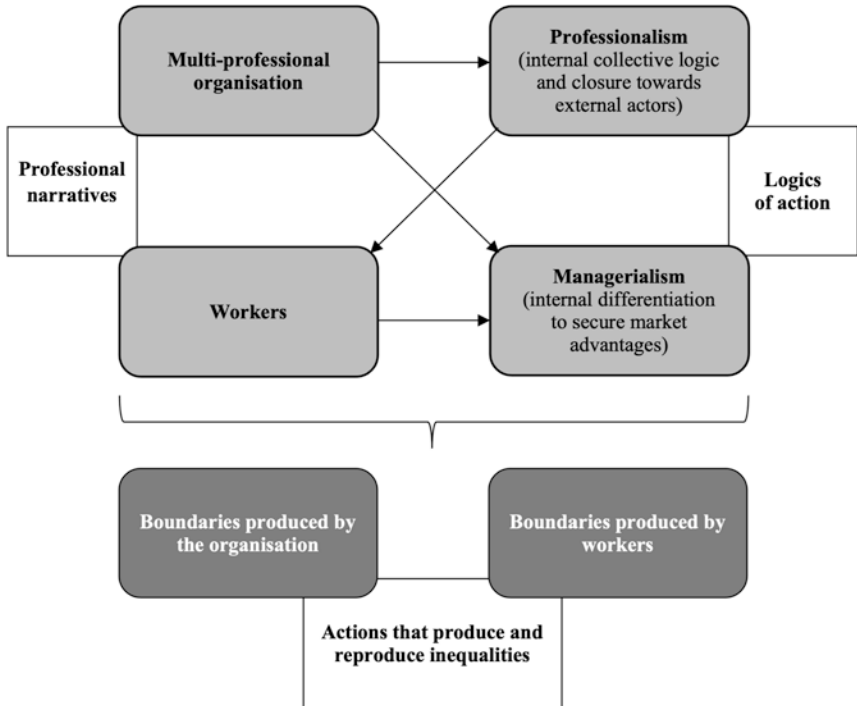


Fig. 10.1 Principles and actions that produce inequalities in the multi-professional organisation

approach involves classifying the interviewees' statements by using a coding process to identify themes and concepts. We based our analysis on two narratives, *professionalism* and *managerialism*, and observed how they were segmented (for the processing of the qualitative model, see Fig. 10.1) to identify the boundary line(s).

4 Main Research Results

To understand the relationship between the strategies of the organisation and those of the workers, we focussed on three dimensions: the mission and vision of the organisation, job quality as perceived by the workers, and the market opportunities to which they have access. The CWC was created by artists for artists in the form of a social enterprise cooperative. In its over 30 years in existence, the organisation has built a collaborative network that offers two main lines of services. The first aims to professionalise workers through a method of soft coordination in which the cooperative 'recommends' a minimum fee for each job. The workers are also helped to update their skill sets through a system of training courses run each year on occupational safety regulations and the use of technical equipment. The membership system also encourages members to share job opportunities, increasing the cooperative's volume of jobs available. Interviews with the management clarified the spirit of the cooperative.

You can live off the arts. The goal of (the CWC) is to connect workers and employers, professionals, and practitioners and to help everyone understand that the arts should be considered a job like any other. Stop thinking of it as a passion: passion does not buy you dinner, and talent must be nurtured through hard work, dedication, and money. That's why art must be paid for. (Int_management1)

The second line of service aims to lower transaction costs (Williamson, 1979), maximise income, and guide the workers through the tortuous maze of tax deduction regulations by providing them with tax and social security assistance.

We focus on building and having our members follow a system that leads them to increase their income and 'deduct' as much as possible on each job order through contracts that also provide protection. We take care of them, so they make thoughtful decisions and don't rush into choices for a few dirty bucks. We invite them to collaborate and not just compete with each other, passing on jobs and projects. If the cooperative grows, they grow too. (Int_management1)

The CWC offers similar activities to the various professions. The common starting point is the awareness of the transformation of the overall sector and the new skills required by clients. In this regard, the cooperative supports professional specialisation through training. However, access to specialisation courses is selective and not open to all workers, with different access criteria for the three professions under analysis.

4.1 Photographers

Conversations in the focus groups revealed new market needs, specifically a heightened demand for images, both to be used online and in print. This has contributed to a fall in the quality of such work.

Do you see this picture? [showing a magazine] It's all wrong; it's a bad picture. But now, many newspapers and web pages are asking only for quantity, not quality... In some reports, you can see that they used a smartphone [camera], not professional equipment. (FGs_photographers_1A)

At the same time, participants identified the employment niches that are more 'professionalising'.

I took a [photography] post-production course because that's the industry where they pay the most because you have to know how to use the camera and software. I had to invest money and take the course, but it was worth it. I send [the photos] to Bangladesh for contouring [isolating the photographed object from the background] as we all do, even Australian colleagues send them there, because it's lengthy work but not particularly skilled. For one euro per photo, they contour it, and then I can work on post-production, and it's worth it in terms of both time and money. (FGs_photographers_1)

That said, workers can access these market niches if they have completed specific training courses and obtained certifications. The worker pays for the professional courses; based on this training, the participants can secure their first assignments and thereby begin to develop a portfolio. Courses such as these involve a significant commitment for workers

in terms of time and money, and as such are more accessible to young people who receive financial help from their families:

Post-production courses are mostly taken by young people who can afford to pay for them and the equipment. You can't fit in the course time if you already have a job. I have a salaried job and set work hours that are incompatible. I only keep doing work related to small public and private events. (FGs_photographers_1C)

4.2 Video Makers

Of the three sectors examined, video making has experienced the steepest increase in demand. This growth has specific implications in terms of job quality and fair pay.

The demand for content has increased, particularly on the web. So, many people lured by this opportunity have suddenly set themselves up as video makers. But you must know how things work to make even low-quality videos. If you don't have any training, not only do you offer poor quality work but you also get paid very little, [thus] putting your colleagues in a difficult position. The market demands low-quality products, but you can't charge too little for making them because it's not good for you or others and, most importantly, you must learn how to do it. It's a job not a hobby. (Int_management_videomaker_2)

Although the volume of work has increased, the quality of job opportunities remains relatively low unless workers manage to make their way into the higher standard networks of independent productions made for both public and private broadcasters.

Doing a lot of small jobs for websites or feeding your own site and earning through advertisement is very tiring and tends to flatten you onto a single mode of communication, in addition to not ensuring a stable income. I have chosen to work for a private client who provides me with a reliable economic base, and then I invest in independent projects that I sell to other private clients. This way, I keep my reputation for quality work and have an easier time selling subsequent projects. (Int_management_videomaker_1)

Access to high-quality collaboration networks is a strategy that leads to high-quality jobs and professional advancement, but it is not for everyone.

You have to invest a lot in networks, participate in festivals, and convince well-known personalities to participate in your projects to make them more appealing and get a bigger audience. This costs money and time, even for international collaborations. If you have a family, it's very difficult: you're away from home a lot, and in order to cut the costs of filming, you have to concentrate all your work, which has a very tight schedule.

4.3 Lighting and Sound Technicians

Again, the first theme that emerged in the focus groups with lighting and sound technicians was their awareness of changes in the job market and technical equipment and the need to develop a high degree of professionalism and specialisation.

Before, you used to do everything; you loaded the trucks, drove them, unloaded the trunks and assembled the sound and lighting system. Now, I only work as a technician; whoever hires me has to hire a driver and porter as well because working times have shortened. You don't go on tours that last months anymore; with the materials you have, you set up a stage in a day, work the event in the evening and take it down the next day. You can't do anything else. Before, they would even ask you to sleep in the truck. Now, to work, they ask for safety certificates, and if you work for the CWC, they call you because everyone in the sector knows that the cooperative offers basic courses to its members. (FGs_technicians_1)

This market sector has proven to be highly polarised in terms of the content and quality of the work.

[...] the creative market is like a curve that plunges downwards. There is a lot of demand for low-quality work and very little demand for really good work. It's not just your skills that get you to the end of the curve; it depends a lot on your networks, both clients and colleagues. You get some jobs only if you've got into certain circuits, and the people in them don't want to let you in. (FGs_technicians_2)

Workers secure better quality jobs not only because of their technical skills but also because they have access to elite networks.

In Italy, there are two services [the companies that deal with organising and managing artistic events]. The big ones that work for large public and private events. They've always been the same, and they belong to two families that have always worked in this industry. If you get to work with them, you've made it. (FGs_technicians_2)

However, working conditions remain physically challenging in both higher quality and lower quality networks.

I'm 24 years old, and I'm on pain medication constantly because you're hanging from a rope for hours. That's why you only see young people doing this part of the job; older people can't do it anymore. (FGs_technicians_5)

All three professions are largely affected by a polarisation process and have a *core* populated by work for larger companies with ties to important public and private contractors and a *periphery* of fragmented and occasional jobs. In creative industries, the clients vary significantly in terms of scale, and 'good' clients are mostly large public or private companies; the rest of the field is taken up by a plethora of smaller private clients, which are more likely to have trouble paying on time or to offer less favourable conditions.

5 'Dual' Boundary Work: The Fit Between the Organisation's Strategies and the Workers' Strategies

Thanks to our multi-stage approach, we developed two lines of interpretation for analysing the strategies pursued by the cooperative and the professionals and the inequalities these strategies produce. The people interviewed described the cooperative's approach to *professional* work as reinforcing collaborative mechanisms amongst worker-members and setting up closure against external workers. At the same time, a set of

managerial practices stimulated competition inside and outside the cooperative. Both logics, professionalism and managerialism, were enacted through a system of practices and a repertoire of actions that work to include or exclude workers based on certain boundaries. These inclusion and exclusion mechanisms generate inequalities amongst workers (see Fig. 10.1).

5.1 Boundary Work as Part of the Cooperative's Strategies

We identified a repertoire of actions performed in the CWC to organise work and manage worker-members internally. This repertoire includes boundary maintenance strategies that unfold through three segmentation mechanisms implemented by the cooperative: recruitment, training, and career development (see Table 10.3).

Recruitment follows the historical boundaries reproduced in these professions. In particular, the profession of lighting and sound technician continues to be male-dominated and involves primarily young people. The exclusion of women and older workers is justified on the basis of two elements. On the one hand, equipment and working methods have used technological innovations to improve quality, thereby decreasing the time required. These improvements have not eliminated the need for physical strength and agility, so these traits continue to be essential for performing such tasks. On the other hand, the work of lighting and sound technicians is organised in such a way as to prioritise the client's need to minimise working time as their primary strategy for cutting costs. The result is a system that is irreconcilable with family commitments and caring responsibilities, which in Italy still falls primarily to women. This profession is thus characterised by a stark gender and age asymmetry.

Training likewise addresses two sets of needs. On the one hand, it creates and sustains the organisation's reputation for promoting workplace safety and for spearheading the provision of safety certifications. This grants the cooperative an important place in a market characterised by high competition and makes it attractive to the public and private actors that produce both local and national cultural events. The organisation

Table 10.3 The cooperative's boundary strategies

CWC's strategies	Photographers	Video makers	Lighting and sound technicians
Recruitment	Open, inclusive boundary	Open, inclusive boundary	Age-based and gender-based boundary: an area in which the concept of physical strength reproduces inequalities
Training	Selective boundary, based on the individual professional's economic capital		
Career development	Selective boundary, based on training and networking		

offers this type of training free of charge to all its members. This service is instrumental for maintaining high-quality standards or, at least, fair pay. On the other hand, the cooperative also offers second-level training focused on learning how to use technical equipment. These are optional courses paid for by the workers themselves. This business model reproduces inequalities based on the socio-economic resources availability, favouring workers who can self-finance specialised training, which in turn opens the door to higher level jobs and better pay. This two-track training system is a factor that contributes towards creating divisions amongst professionals, which leads to groups forming that have a competitive disadvantage inside the same organisation.

Career development follows the boundaries constructed through the managerial strategies pursued in the previous steps, reinforcing segmentation inside and outside the organisation. For example, the cooperative has an organisational practice that involves buying expensive, technologically advanced equipment to be shared amongst workers, especially in the case of video makers and photographers. This practice meets individual workers' needs to keep production costs down by taking advantage of possible economies of scale; nevertheless, it exacerbates the differentiation *between* professional groups based on the equipment needed. It also reproduces the segmentation created in training. Since access to this training depends on workers' economic resources, this practice prevents some of them from developing the skills needed to use complex technologies.

Generally, the tendency to adapt to market demands—such as hiring young men in technical roles—reproduces inequalities inside the cooperative while reinforcing discrimination outside it.

5.2 Boundary Work in Workers' Strategies

As for workers, the empirical evidence pointed to the logics of high and low professionalisation (see Table 10.4). Creative work is often teamwork. The mechanisms triggering collaboration amongst workers involve a selection process that is based on boundaries. Since this sector lacks formal boundaries drawn by legal regulations or rules that establish specific training requirements for certain roles, boundary work is primarily based on each worker's characteristics. In some professional areas, workers tend to give more value to characteristics that are traditionally considered appropriate for the sector. Boundary making is thus based on age and professional experience in addition to gender, with the profession of lighting and sound technician being especially male-dominated. Indeed, age and experience affect the types of jobs to which workers have access. Moreover, the workers who do secure jobs tend to share them with those they see as 'similar', that is, workers with 'standard' characteristics (i.e. young, male, and experienced).

Like other studies (Liu, 2006, 2015, 2018), we found that the size of networks is crucial in counteracting boundary mechanisms. Professionals fight to maintain their jurisdictions while building networks to create distinctive teams and to expand their skill sets in order to provide specialised services. Our focus groups showed that the ability to meet a wide range of professionals makes it easier to have access to more and better jobs. In these processes, technological innovation offers an important space for renegotiation, especially for younger professionals with less social capital who have up-to-date technical skills.

The cooperative is committed to consolidating its reputation—internally and externally—as a response to the boundary-making and boundary-blurring processes enacted by workers. Internally, by maintaining boundaries, it retains its ability to attract new members, confirming the competitive advantage of a managerial choice that is open to different

Table 10.4 Workers' boundary strategies

Workers' strategies	Photographers	Video makers	Lighting and sound technicians
High trajectory	Involving professionals who are recognised as the best fit for the reference market: young men with specialised skills and technical expertise but a limited portfolio, which decreases their chances to compete for legitimacy and reputation in the market	Involving flexible professionals that accept difficult working conditions: young men, excluding older workers and women with caregiving responsibilities	Involving professionals who are recognised as the best fit for the reference market: young men, excluding older workers and women
Low trajectory	Offering low-quality jobs Favouring the selection of workers outside the networks, with limited training, whose careers are stuck at the bottom of the ladder		

types of professionals. The mechanisms for bringing professionals together and fostering collaboration ensure a high engagement amongst worker-members, especially the highly qualified professionals that had been excluded from high-quality networks before joining the organisation. Externally, both mechanisms reinforce the cooperative's leadership position in the market, securing a range of professional services that are highly diversified in terms of quantity and quality.

As the fieldwork revealed, many workers conveyed a positive narrative about being members of the CWC. They acknowledged that membership brought them instrumental benefits, particularly in consolidating their professional legitimacy. This legitimacy is fostered, for instance, by the practice of setting 'recommended' minimum fees or giving worker-members the chance to attend training courses and earn the certification stipulated by occupational safety regulations. As a matter of fact, by establishing formal parameters for accessing the market, this kind of certification distinguishes professionals from non-professionals. In so doing, the CWC protects its members against 'similar' workers leading 'invasions' of the market (Noordegraaf, 2015). To this end, it acts through professional closure regimes (Boussard, 2018).

6 Conclusions

The analysis carried out in the previous pages has brought to light the strategies that the cooperative and its worker-members, namely creative workers, use to produce and reproduce boundaries. Moreover, it has shown that one of the purposes of maintaining these boundaries is to ensure the organisation's survival. The segmentation of the internal labour supply prevents the accumulation of a 'reserve army of labour' that is stuck in less-skilled jobs and forced to accept precarious employment terms based on number of clients rather than job quality. At the same time, it produces professional elites.

A counterintuitive result is that, although the organisation claims to be 'inclusive' and to be guided by 'horizontal' principles in structuring the relationship between the management and the membership, its activities produce and reproduce mechanisms of internal differentiation. These mechanisms act as boundaries that draw lines of discrimination that divide workers based on objective characteristics such as gender and age.

Although symbolic and social boundaries are factors that exacerbate inequalities in all three of the professional areas analysed, we found that the intensity of boundary work varies by profession. For video makers and photographers, the falling cost of equipment has reduced the push to engage in boundary work, encouraging a progressive increase in the number of low-capital workers in these professions. Conversely, the importance of physical strength means that the lighting and sound technician profession remains a persistently male-dominated group.

This case study has outlined how multi-professional organisations, such as mutual aid cooperatives of creative workers, operate as agents of differentiation within and between professions. Furthermore, it has emphasised the intersecting character of these two dimensions of differentiation processes. The *between* dimension is inherent to the multi-professional nature of such organisations. Indeed, the professional groups have differential weights in the organisation, which in turn exacerbates differentiation, for example, when expensive technical equipment is bought and shared to support specific categories of workers. This mechanism also produces differentiation *between* those operating inside and

outside the organisation, but *within* the same professional group. Other mechanisms based on managerial and professional strategies operate to differentiate workers *within* their professional group. Further reflection would nevertheless be needed on how organisations with a ‘mutual’ character, which have the purpose of counterbalancing the deficiencies of welfare states, contribute to building collective narratives in competitive occupational ecosystems, such as creative labour (see Bellini & Lucciarini, 2019), and reconstructing solidarity in an individualised society: the vision that in this book is referred to as the *beyond* dimension.

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