

**Nadège VÉZINAT, « An Incomplete Professionalisation. A socio-history of the tensions experienced by the professional group of financial advisors of La Poste (1953-2010)».** (« Une professionnalisation inachevée. Socio-histoire des tensions vécues par le groupe professionnel des conseillers financiers de la Poste (1953-2010) ») **Sociology thesis, directed by André Grelon, EHESS, Paris, 2010, 646 p. + annexes.**

This thesis retraces the origin of the financial advisor position at La Poste. It analyses the emergence of a commercial position within a rapidly changing State administration. La Poste became a public limited company in 2010; symbolically, La Banque Postale was authorised at the same time to provide credit to consumers. However, it was also required to guarantee a certain number of public service missions and to settle previous, unresolved administrative tensions that were affecting its staff on a daily basis.

The aim of the professionalisation process analysed in this research was not, however, to transform the professional group into a profession. In that sense it may partly be considered atypical. Even though it brought together the functionalist characteristics of the Anglo-Saxon “profession” (Wilensky 1964), it did, in fact, aim to impact on staff, thereby constituting more of a strategy for avoiding resistance through regulating the professional group than an empowerment of that group (Boussard, Demazière, Milburn, 2010). Yet this professionalism from above was intended to ease the tension experienced by staff that were given orders, which we shall label “prescribed” and contradictory. The issue was settled by means of organisational changes and the postal staff’s “submission”, which took place because of the process of professionalism from above (Evetts, 2003). To support this theory, I have based my research approach on qualitative, quantitative, ethnographic and archival methods that are interconnected. These different types of material have been drawn together in the context of a sociology of professional groups, with the aim of analysing the occurrences that take place at group level without losing sight of what is involved in work activity, while bearing in mind the particularities involved in carrying out that work (Demazière, Gadéa, 2009).

The first part of my research consisted of retracing the history of La Banque Postale, starting with its financial services in 1953. Its socio-history is brought into consideration, as is, to a lesser degree, the sociology of organisations and economic sociology, in order to assess La Poste’s competitive (banking) environment and determine the European models that inspired it. I then go on to describe, at macro-organisational level, the processes of financialisation and integration into La Poste’s market and to understand the overall constraints and opportunities that, within a particular economic context, have led to the development of the postal financial services.

It is within this context that the professionalisation of financial advisors is then analysed. The concepts of the sociology of professions are called upon in order to show the different stages of the construction process undergone by this professional group, which emerged in 1991. This professionalisation, still incomplete, was intended to enable the banking sector to be regulated in a certain way and to allow the organisation to control its employees, and even to achieve its organisational changes through its own staff. Professionalisation thus appears as a redefinition of its “jurisdictions” (Abbott, 1998) in a strategy to structure the different tensions.

Finally, the last part of my research focuses on the transformation of financial advisors' work. It highlights the process of rationalisation and standardisation of an activity that was, for a long time, spread out within post offices. The sociology of work is put to use with the aim of deconstructing categories in order to discover the men who lie behind the position of financial advisor at La Poste. The tension that exists between sales and advice, and between business and public service, is evaluated through the individual careers, values, representations and rationale that give financial advisors their particular identity.