

Evaluating the effectiveness of the ethical role of scientific societies

Preliminary data on a current empirical research

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Summary

Presentation

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Presentation

- **The project:** *SOCSCI - Scientific Societies in Contemporary Science* (2010-2012) aims to explore a neglected object both by social studies of science and sociology of associations:
 - 1) functions and activities of scientific associations;
 - 2) scientists associative behavior and representations;
- **The communication purpose:** focusing on the ethic role of scientific associations (SA), we intend to contribute to determine its effectiveness;
- **How:** analyzing in particular how the international affiliation of Portuguese SA and the prevalence of law enforcement shape SA ethical concern and practices.



1. Difficulties in defining scientific associations -I

What distinguishes a SA from health, environment... associations?

And from **professional associations**?

The different patterns of the professional regulation system :
Independent self-regulation; State sanctioned self-regulation; Direct state regulation

(Moran and Wood, 1993)



1. Difficulties in defining scientific associations - II

Uwe Schimank (1988) proposes **four SA functions**:

a) communication; b) professional; c) transfer; d) promotion.

Literature also mentions an **ethical function**:

- External - the social application of science;
- Internal – the regulation of a responsible conduct of research.

Evan Schoefer (2003) sustains that there are **two types of SA**:

- a) professional science associations
- b) socially oriented associations.



2. The code as an important indicator of the ethical concern

- A code of ethics expresses a ***society-profession nexus*** (Frankel, 1989);
- **Codes are evolving** constrained by endogenous and exogenous forces (Backof and Martin Jr., 1991) – i.e. reference to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights;
- According to Mark S. Frankel (1989), there are **three types of codes of ethics** :
 - a) The *aspirational* – a statement of principles – i.e. Portuguese Chart of Ethics in Public Administration;
 - b) The *educational* – an effort to demonstrate how it can be helpful in practice – i.e. Portuguese Sociological Association code...;
 - c) The *regulatory* – a set of rules with a system of monitoring and sanctions – i.e. self-regulating professional associations codes, or the American Sociological Association code .



3. The lack of information on ethical effectiveness (a)

Two problems related to codes of ethics effectiveness:

- a) Some codes do not serve as criteria
- b) Codes cannot alone improve professional behavior

The **dominant normative approach** focus on the conditions needed to apply the code: ethical body, code visibility, training of professionals,...

Methods to encourage ethical behavior (Bayles in Beets and Killough, 1990) :

- A) governmental or civic administrative agency ;
 - B) complaint-based enforcement system;
 - C) judicial system.
- } Members-association relation



3. The lack of information on ethical effectiveness (b)

Five strategies that can be adopted by SA (Anderson and Shultz, 2003):

- **Providing forums** for the expression and clarification of ethical norms;
- **Sharing information** about changes and developments in this matter;
- **Providing means** by which members can interpret the implications of new developments;
- **Emphasis in ethical practices** rather than focusing on sanctions;
- Promoting open and confidential **exchange of ideas on ethical dilemmas.**



4. Social and natural sciences differences

Studies on ethical issues are **usually focused on natural sciences**:

- the first code of ethics was developed by the medical profession in the mid 19th century;
- public interest and people lives are often more sensitive issues in this field.

Elvi Whitakker (1999) sustains that social sciences ethics has gone through **four stages**:

- 1) Incubation – 1930s with the publication of the first book on the role of social sciences in society, and also with the American Psychological Association creation of the first code of ethics;
- 2) Consolidation - in the late 1970s a larger number of publications came out;
- 3) Diversification - by the end of the 1980s, urgent ethical demands were promoted;
- 4) Epistemological uncertainty – in the 1990s, different groups seem to promote alternative ethics often radical leading to the last stage.

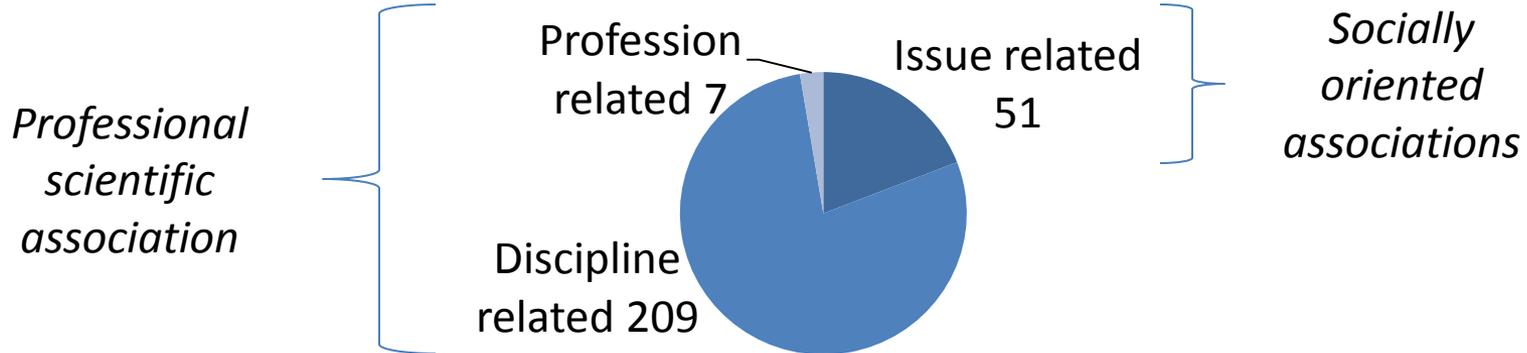
Nevertheless, there is a lack of empirical research comparing these two fields...



5. Methodology (a)

What we have done so far:

1. Identification of Portuguese SA and their typification: 267 SA



2. **Analysis of codes of ethics:** 12 codes (not exhaustive)

natural sciences and related disciplines: 6

social sciences and related disciplines: 6

indicators: origin, ethical committee, sanctions



5. Methodology (b)

What we intend to do next:

- I. To **complete the collection and analysis of codes of ethics** and of related rule books (considering also, among other factors: the year of creation, revisions made, eventual references to the judicial system);
- II. To analyze **other documental references on ethical mechanisms, position and behavior** of scientific associations (in their respective website and other documents);
- III. To select **case studies** from both disciplinary fields in order to adopt an in-depth approach and carry out:
 - interviews with officials and
 - a members' survey.



6. Preliminary data from the analysis of Portuguese SA codes of ethics - data

FEATURES AND TYPE OF CODE OF ETHICS	ORIGIN	ETHIC COMMITTEE	SANCTIONS	TYPE*
SCIENTIFIC ASSOCIATIONS BY DISCIPLINE GROUP				
NATURAL SCIENCES AND RELATED DISCIPLINES				
Associação Nacional dos Odontologistas Portugueses	Government	Yes	No	Educational
Associação Portuguesa de Cardiopneumologistas	Association	No	No	Educational
Associação Portuguesa de Licenciados em Optometria	Association	No	No	Educational
Sociedade Portuguesa de Bioanalistas Clínicos	Association	No	No	Educational
Sociedade Portuguesa de Espeleologia	Association	No	No	Educational
Sociedade Portuguesa de Protecção contra Radiações	International	No	No	Aspirational
SOCIAL SCIENCES AND RELATED DISCIPLINES				
Associação Profissional de Arqueólogos	Association	NA	NA	Educational
Associação Portuguesa de Psicoterapia Centrada na Pessoa e de Counselling	International	Yes	NA	Educational
Associação Portuguesa de Sociologia	Association	Yes	No	Educational
Associação dos Profissionais de Serviço Social	International	NA	NA	Aspirational
Sociedade Portuguesa de Psicologia Clínica	Association	NA	Yes	Regulatory
Sociedade Portuguesa de Psicoterapia Centrada no Cliente e Abordagem Centrada na Pessoa	International	Yes	NA	Educational

*(Frankel, 1989) NA – not available.



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6. Preliminary data from the analysis of Portuguese SA codes of ethics - findings

- There are still **few SA with a code of ethics**;
- **We are not able yet to compare** the ethical position between the two groups of disciplines through codes of ethics;
- Some of the SA with a code of ethics are **current professional groups who are lobbying** to have self-regulation monopoly;
- We have some codes of ethics are the translation or adaptation of international ones which may be **a sign of the importance of the international influence** and also of the stage of development of our sciences;
- There are very **few special bodies** and sanctions;
- Therefore, it is no surprise that ***educational codes prevail***.



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Concluding remarks

- Since there is no specific legal status, a public registration data base, nor a institutionalized definition, **the construction of the Portuguese SA data base is a complex task**; nevertheless it has already more than 350 SA;
- **Codes of ethics are an important but insufficient indicator of the ethical concern**: some cannot be used as a guide in decision-making, and others need a visible enforcement system;
- **Professional associations with a regulatory function are expected to be more effective** in ethical issues than scientific associations;
- **Scientific associations have other ways to influence the ethical conduct**:
internal dimension: promoting the debate, training and publishing on the subject;
external dimension: developing political influence and preparing materials for the general public;
- Based on preliminary data, we have identified professional groups who are searching for the self-regulation status: **the code of ethics may be seen as a sign of an empowering strategy**;
- Even if our search of codes of ethics is not exhaustive, **the international influence may be important** considering the adoption/ translation of other institutions codes of ethics.