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### **Cooperative decision making – front stages and back stages of negotiations within district teams**

The presentation deals with empirical results of my dissertation project– a *grounded theory study* regarding cooperative decision making processes of professionals belonging to different youth welfare organizations.

In so called ‘district teams’ or ‘social space teams’ social workers of the youth welfare office (public organisation) and social workers of non-profit, non-governmental organizations for statutory socio-educational provisions cooperate on different levels and with different aims; essentially these teams have committed to *inter-organizational cooperation*. To all intents and purposes the teams are *negotiation systems* and meanwhile resemble a different model of organizing youth welfare on a communal level compared to other forms of coordination like market and bureaucracy – at least in theory.

Within different approaches of coordination theory and organization theory negotiations and ‘cooperative management’ (Willke 2001) are conceptualized as intermediary forms of coordination which accommodate modern social demands and exceeds the mere achievement of coordination by competition or bureaucracy. But what does it mean to professionals to work within such intermediary forms of coordination?

Against this backdrop my main research interest is to find out *how* and *to which ‘extend’* the actions of the team members contribute to coordinate and organize youth welfare services on a communal level. So the question is: What do they do in these teams – or with the words of Clifford Geertz: What the hell is going on here?

For data acquisition I chose guide-lined expert interviews. During the research process I enlarged my research outline by doing participant observations in two meetings of these teams.

First interim results show that within these teams *cooperative and collective decision making* processes take place. All in all the members of these teams don’t make ultimate decisions within their meetings but their work is part of overall decision making processes on youth welfare services; decision making on different objects: cases and (new) provisions. Despite the different ‘functions’ of the teams they have something meaningful in common: they *have to come to mutual agreements* on certain points by negotiating.

My analysis shows that these negotiations on the interaction level are shaped and influenced by 'underlying structures'. For "linking interactions to organizations and overarching societal structures" (Maeder, Nadai 2007, 2) I use *the negotiated order approach* of Anselm Strauss. In addition E. Goffman's work regarding *the interaction order* seem to be a well-suited theoretical tool to get a deeper understanding of what is going on within these teams, too.

In my presentation I would like to explain some of my concepts and categories which I build out from the data. I want to focus on the question of the (unequal) distribution of power between the team members (youth welfare office and NGOs) and its' consequences; especially according to aspects of coordination and organization of youth welfare services.

### References

Nadai, Eva; Maeder, Christoph (2007) *Negotiations at all Points? Interaction and Organization* [53 paragraphs], Forum: Qualitative Social Research, 9(1). <http://www.qualitative-research.net/fqs-texte/1-08/08-1-32-e.htm>.

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