Inter-organisational collaboration among social service agencies

A mixed methods approach in network research

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Overview

> Introduction
> Research interest
> Theoretical background
> Methodological considerations
> Project description
> Preliminary results
> Outlook
Introduction

Problem outline

> Social welfare beneficiaries with multiple problems are increasing

> Beneficiaries simultaneously make use of several social services

> On behalf of the beneficiaries the social service providers should coordinate their activities
Introduction

Social welfare in Switzerland

> Principle of subsidiarity: assistance is only provided if a person in need is unable to help himself or herself, or if third-party assistance cannot be obtained

> The social welfare agencies are the operational units which deliver social welfare to the beneficiaries

> Social welfare includes counselling and financial support

> Primarily a municipal task, in some cantons in cooperation with the canton
Introduction

Social welfare in the Canton of Bern

> Canton is responsible for regulating social welfare provision

> 60 social welfare agencies in the German-speaking part

> Agencies are responsible for different amount of municipalities:
  14 agencies  1 municipality
  17 agencies  2 – 4 municipalities
  18 agencies  5 – 9 municipalities
  11 agencies  10 + municipalities
Research interest

**Basic question**

With what other social service providers are social welfare agencies collaborating and how is the respective collaboration organised?

The focus lies on the collaboration concerning social welfare beneficiaries.

> Collaboration structure
> Collaboration processes
Research on inter-organisational collaboration

> Definition by Friedman et al. (2007): „By collaboration we mean a relationship between two organizations that involves exchanging information and sharing resources in order to coordinate services for mutual benefit and to achieve common goals, such as facilitating the care or treatment of clients.“

> Umbrella term: „The term [collaboration] describes a range of working together arrangements.“ (Horwath & Morrison 2007)

> Collaboration continuum covering different levels of collaboration
Method

Methodological considerations

> Social network analysis focuses on social relations between actors (individuals, groups, organisation)

> Analysis at the actor level (egocentric networks) or at the network level (whole networks)

> Interest in both the structure of social relations and the interactional processes which generate these structures
Method

Mixed methods approach in network research

„A mixed-method approach enables researchers to both map and measure network properties and to explore issues relating to the construction, reproduction, variability and dynamics of network ties, and crucially in most cases, the meaning that ties have for those involved.“ (Edwards 2010)
Project description

**Sequential exploratory mixed methods design**

- Analysis of collaboration structure and processes among social welfare agencies and other social service providers
- Sequential arrangement of a quantitative and a qualitative part
- German-speaking part of the Canton of Bern
Survey among social service agencies

> Focus on collaboration structure

> Survey among all 60 social welfare agencies

> Online questionnaire completed by the agency leaders

> Similar survey among the most significant collaborating agencies of the social welfare agencies
Project description

**Interviews within specific agencies**

> Focus on collaboration processes

> Two case studies on the basis of two social welfare agencies

> Qualitative interviews with leaders and professionals within several agencies
Project description

Research process

Survey among social welfare agencies

Survey among collaborating agencies

Interviews within specific agencies

Measurement of collaboration level

1. No contact: No contact at all concerning social welfare beneficiaries

2. Intermediation: Beneficiaries get sent to the other institution in order to make use of a specific service that cannot be provided by the social welfare agency

3. Information exchange: The social welfare agency and the other institution exchange beneficiaries’ information without coordinating their activities

4. Coordination: The social welfare agency and the other institution exchange information and coordinate their activities in order to facilitate the beneficiaries’ integration
Questionnaire

List of institutions in different fields

> Employment: regional employment centres (RAV), providers of work integration schemes, inter-institutional collaboration agencies (IIZ) …

> Health: invalidity insurance agencies, health centres, mental health services, substance abuse services …

> Finances: unemployment insurance funds, tax offices, dept counselling …

> Law: migration office, conciliation authorities …

> Other: educational counselling, vocational counselling, schemes concerning the transition from compulsory to vocational education …
Questionnaire

Other aspects of collaboration

> Intensity
> Perceived importance for the beneficiaries‘ integration
> Degree of institutionalisation
> Quality of information exchange
> Extend of common goal orientation
> Duplicity
> Involvement of clients
> …
Preliminary results

Network example

Characteristics of the social welfare agencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>Number of municipalities</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SoSe A</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5‘000 - 10‘000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SoSe B</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5‘000 - 10‘000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SoSe C</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10‘000 - 20‘000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SoSe D</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10‘000 - 20‘000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SoSe E</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10‘000 - 20‘000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SoSe F</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20‘000 - 50‘000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Preliminary results

Network example
### Preliminary results

#### Occurrence of coordination

Number of coordination ties depending on field

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>Employment</th>
<th>Health</th>
<th>Finances</th>
<th>Law</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SoSe A</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SoSe B</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SoSe C</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SoSe D</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SoSe E</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SoSe F</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Preliminary results

Coordination ties within the network
Preliminary results

**Institutionalisation of the collaboration**

Extend of institutionalisation depending on field

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Employment</th>
<th>Health</th>
<th>Finances</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N = 30</td>
<td>N = 38</td>
<td>N = 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arrangements between both institutions</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-house directives</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual proceedings from case to case</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Outlook

Processes within a network

„Network structure is not the whole story (…) and for that reason we need to supplement methods of formal network analysis with qualitative observations about what is ‘going on’ within a network.“ (Crossley 2010)

> Investigating different aspects of a phenomenon

> Investigating questions that the previous part has raised
Thank you for your attention!