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## Coordination of Action in Adult Education Organizations

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**“...well advised to look at what  
the federal state is doing...” – An  
empirical analysis of constellations  
of actors and coordination of actions  
in Adult Education Centers**

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Der Beitrag will Steuerung in Organisationen der öffentlichen Weiterbildung unter Verwendung der Governance-Perspektive empirisch fassen. Ziel der Analyse ist es die relevanten Akteure und die innerhalb der Akteurskonstellationen herrschenden Handlungskoordinationen sowie ihre Bedeutung für die Leistungsebene in den Blick nehmen. Hierfür wird ein kontrastierender Fallvergleich durchgeführt. Der empirische Ansatz basiert auf episodischen Interviews mit den Leiter:innen und den pädagogischen Mitarbeitenden der Volkshochschulen. Diese Interviews wurden inhaltsanalytisch ausgewertet. Die Erkenntnisse werden auf Ebene der Volkshochschule verdichtet und so die relevanten Akteure, Handlungskoordinationen und Leistungsprofile je Einrichtung ermittelt. Die Arbeit stützt sich auf Daten, die im Projekt „Governance-Strukturen und pädagogische Leistungsprofile in Organisationen der Weiterbildung“ (GLOW) erhoben wurden.

The article aims at empirically understanding governance in adult education organizations using the governance perspective. The goal of the analysis is to examine the relevant actors and the coordination of action within the actor constellations, as well as their impact on the educational performance profiles. For this purpose, a maximum contrasted case comparison is carried out. The empirical approach is based on episodic interviews conducted with the directors and pedagogical staff of the adult education centers. The interviews were analyzed by means of qualitative content analysis. The findings are condensed at the level of the adult education center and thus the relevant actors, action coordination and performance profiles per institution are determined. The work is based on data collected in the project "Governance structures and pedagogical performance profiles in continuing education organizations" (GLOW).

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Steuerung in der Erwachsenenbildung; Akteurskonstellationen;  
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# “..well advised to look at what the federal state is doing...” – An empirical analysis of constellations of actors and coordination of actions in Adult Education Centers

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## 1 Introduction

When looking at the steering debate of adult education in politics and science, it can be noted that the origin of the political discussion dates back to the late 1960s (Schemmann 2014, p. 112, Schrader et al. 2015, p. 5; Hartz & Schrader 2008, p. 11). During this time, there was a strong political will to control the entire education sector, especially in adult education. In addition to the establishment of a uniform education system, efforts to increase economic productivity as well as individual and social emancipation can be stated (Schrader et al. 2015, p. 4; Schemmann 2014, p. 113). This genuine educational control will of politics, which was still predominant in the 1960s, was already replaced in the 1970s, but at the latest in the 1980s, by the labor market, economic and social policy use of adult education (Hartz & Schrader 2008, p. 13). In the 1990s, this was followed by a withdrawal of politics from adult education and, along with this, the idea of an adult education market was promoted. This retreat is accompanied by measures to reduce public funding on the one hand, while there is an expansion of public project funding happening simultaneously, as well as the introduction of personal participation certificates for certain measures, such as those funded by the Employment Agency. In addition to these developments, non-governmental control bodies such as the accreditation and quality certification agencies are being established. Structures that enable efficiency and effectiveness in an economically reasonable way are being implemented in the continuing education sector (Dollhausen 2008, p. 272). The 2007 federalism reform put the federal states in charge of educational curriculum planning. However, it only resulted in minor changes for adult education. More relevant is the Maastricht Treaty coming into effect, through which the European Union (EU) acquires competencies in the field of vocational and general education. The EU then becomes one of the most important stakeholders in the field of project funding (Schrader 2014, p. 186).

The above-mentioned political will to control stands vis-à-vis with a scientific discussion that is only slowly developing. Therefore, organizations, and even less the issue of control, were not addressed as topics of research work for a long time. This has changed and the research interest of the control of social systems has increased significantly in the last 10–15 years (Ioannidou 2013, p. 376). This also applies for the field of adult education where questions of the withdrawal of the government and debates about the implementation of economically oriented forms of governance are of particular interest. Furthermore, a change in the stakeholders, constellations of stakeholders and coordination of action as well as forms of control in the service structures can be noted (Schemmann 2014, p. 123). Based on this, a “new” governance regime in adult education research has been emerging (Schrader 2008).

Despite the increased research interest, there are hardly any empirical findings on governance structures in adult education. This also applies for the “new” governance regime and the composition of stakeholders and coordination of actions. On the one hand, this is because governance in adult education is a topic that is difficult to access as the area of adult education, in contrast to the primary, secondary and tertiary areas of

the education system, has a pluralistic and subsidiary structure. Compared to other educational sectors, adult education is subject to less regulation by the government (Hartz & Schrader 2008, p. 15). This makes it difficult to precisely and comprehensively determine governance in adult education. To address this challenge, this paper focuses on the field of public adult education which has a relatively homogeneous structure and thus allows a comprehensive view of governance. Based on the lack of empirical evidence, the article examines the questions of which stakeholders, stakeholder constellations and coordination of action are significant for organizations in public adult education? How do these protagonists and coordinated actions affect the services offered by the organizations?

This article aims at an empirical understanding of governance in organizations of public adult education in Germany. For this purpose, the current discourse in governance research will first be examined in order to subsequently elaborate the analytical potential of the governance perspective. Conceptual ambiguities are first clarified and basic assumptions of the governance perspective are presented. Thereby, the classical governance forms and coordination of actions are briefly outlined. This is followed by a maximum contrasted case comparison based on the data of the DFG project “Governance structures and educational performance profiles in adult education organizations” (GLOW)<sup>1</sup>. To evaluate the data, the structuring and summarizing content analysis according to Mayring (2015) was combined. The cases are analyzed with regard to relevant stakeholders, constellations of stakeholders and coordination of actions as well as their significance for the performance level. Finally, the paper discusses the findings of the case-comparative analysis and opens up further research perspectives and subsequent questions.

## 2 Theoretical Framework

In the following chapter, the governance debate in adult education is outlined (2.1). After the reconstruction of the debate, the governance perspective will be examined (2.2) in order to provide the basis for the methodological and analytical approach of this paper.

### 2.1 Governance in Adult Education

If one looks at the scientific debate on the topic of (political) control in adult education, it is to be noted that the perspective of global control by the government occupies a large part within the discourse. This can be seen in the so-called “Länderstudien” of the 1990s (Nuissl & Schultz 2001), in which the question of governmental responsibility was investigated, and in some cases led to the assumption of a control deficit by the government (Schrader 2008). In the first ten years of the new millennium, this trend has continued, as exemplified by the examination of the effectiveness of adult educa-

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1 DFG-Kennzeichen: SCHE 585/2-1; DO 746/3-1

tion laws in the federal states of Hesse and North Rhine-Westphalia (sfs 2005; DIE 2011). But also, the conceptual development in adult education research should be emphasized. Schrader (2008) succeeded in presenting a model that understands adult education as a multi-level system. His concept is based on the system-theoretical understanding of the variables of interaction, organization and system, which divides adult education into five levels. In the center is the level of teaching-learning processes of adult education, which is characterized by the offer, its use and the returns. This is followed, in ascending order, by the level of organization, institutional environment, and educational policy at the national and supranational levels. Thus, recent impulses of the control debate are dedicated to the different levels of the adult education system. As an example, we refer to works dealing with governance by inter- and supranational stakeholders (e. g. Ioannidou 2010; Schemmann 2007). Furthermore, it addresses the question of how organizations of adult education can develop into learning organizations and whether they can thereby react more flexibly to changing framework conditions (Dollhausen, Feld & Seitter 2010; Jenner 2018). Another strand of research incorporates neo-institutionalism and, by focusing on institutions and institutional expectations, opens up a more differentiated view of the actions of the actors. One example of this is Hartz (2011). Her research focuses on the quality debate and shows how the implementation of quality management systems increases the self-direction capabilities of adult education organizations. In this context, reference should be made to the work of Herbrechter. She examines the interconnectedness of the management's understanding of leadership and the institutional framework conditions, and makes the connection between the meso and micro levels (Herbrechter 2016). In addition to the outlined findings, the contributions using an educational governance perspective have increased (e. g. Knauber & Ioannidou 2016; Knauber 2017; Koller & Arbeiter 2023). Koller et al. also use the educational governance perspective to examine governance in the field of work-oriented basic education and to analyze which organizational structures can be identified (Koller et al. 2021). Bickeböller's contribution should also be mentioned here as he identifies the relevant players in the field of literacy and basic education and draws conclusions about their coordination and the regional governance-regime (Bickeböller 2022).

In summary, the perspective in adult education research has broadened from a context-specific control with the government as the main actor to a perspective that takes into account various stakeholders and diverse control instruments at different levels. In line with this, the governance perspective has become established in adult education looking at governance from a multi-level perspective and opening up the view for diverse stakeholders. This is also shown in the publication titled “Educational Governance & Leadership in Continuing Education Organizations” published in April 2023. It presents various research approaches, designs and results that illustrate the broad spectrum of possible approaches (Dollhausen et al. 2023). It becomes clear that there is little empirical research on the influence of actors and action coordination on educational performance profiles.

## 2.2 Governance Perspective

In the debate outlined above, it has become clear that governance in continuing education is not determined by one comprehensively acting government, but that a variety of stakeholders play a role in the governance of adult education. The resulting gain in knowledge while moving away from the government-centered perspective opens up the discussion of the governance perspective in educational research. The following chapter briefly summarizes the basic assumptions of the governance perspective, the basic coordination of action and forms of governance, in order to be able to analyze the results of the case comparison. It should be noted that the perspective outlined here serves only as a framework and has been adapted to the specifications in continuing education research.

The governance perspective is a concept that has been pursued as a separate field of research in the Anglo-American world for a long time. It is evident that governance research has also been established in the German-speaking world (Schrader et al. 2015; Schemmann 2014), not later than the publication of the anthology of the same name (Altrichter, Brüsemeister & Wissinger 2007) and the publication of their own handbooks (e. g. Altrichter & Maag Merki 2010).

In educational research, the governance perspective is fundamentally concerned with the control and regulation of educational institutions (Herbrechter & Schemmann 2019, p. 187) and is applied across its entire spectrum, from school and higher education research to adult education (Schrader et al. 2015; Schemmann 2014). In the governance perspective, steering is understood as the coordination of action in complex structures (Herbrechter & Schemmann 2019, p. 187). Especially when interested in processes of coordination of action between stakeholders or constellations of stakeholders having interdependent relationships, the governance perspective offers analytical tools. It examines the regulation and control relationship between stakeholders (Herbrechter 2016, p. 282; Altrichter 2015, p. 33; Kussau & Brüsemeister 2007, p. 27) and opens up a more comprehensive picture of the educational landscape through the new perspective, in which not only governmental stakeholders come into focus, but a multitude of stakeholders and constellations of stakeholders. It looks at social systems from a multi-level perspective (Schemmann 2014, p. 126).

However, there are differences and ambiguities in the use of terms from the governance perspective. Institutionalized forms of coordination are sometimes referred to as governance forms (Kussau & Brüsemeister 2007, p. 40), modes (Blumenthal 2005, p. 1168) or governance types (Lütz 2010, p. 142). Despite the existing inconsistency, the following assumptions can be considered consensus: social stakeholders are not independent in the implementation of their goals of action, but depend on the coordination of action with other stakeholders. Different forms of coordination of action can be distinguished: *hierarchy*, *market*, *community* and *network*, which are based on observation, influence and negotiation (Kussau & Brüsemeister 2007, p. 37; Benz & Dose 2010, p. 252). It should be noted that hybrid and mixed forms of coordination of action also exist. The forms do not only coexist separately, but can in fact interact with each other (Schemmann 2020, p. 396).

In the case of *hierarchical coordination of action*, the decision-making authority lies with a higher-level management authority. It has the authority to issue directives and thus determines the actions of the members (Brüsemeister & Kussau 2007, p. 40). In contrast, the *market form of coordination* is based on the observation of other stakeholders and anonymous action (Benz & Dose 2010, p. 258 f). Reactions occur through the mutual anticipatory action of the other participants (ibid.).

The *coordination of action in communities* takes place along affectively shared norms and values. The relationships between them are characterized by a great autonomy (ibid., p. 257 f).

In *network coordination of actions*, peer relationships tend to prevail. The protagonists are not subject to fixed rules or rankings. The actions are based on trustful cooperation, mutual influence and exchange of resources or information (ibid., p. 262).

The forms of coordination identified here served as a framework for the category development described below and will be explained subsequently, as will the survey and evaluation strategy.

### 3 Methodological Procedure

In the following chapter, the multi-stage methodological procedure is explained. In the first step, the survey strategy is considered (3.1), in which the case selection is made on the basis of a cluster analysis, organizational data and the adult education act. The selected cases serve as the data basis for the subsequent evaluation strategy (3.2). Afterwards, data is evaluated and analyzed in a maximum contrasted case comparison (Yin 2009).

#### 3.1 Survey Strategy

In line with the research interest in stakeholders and coordination of action in adult education organizations, Adult Education Centers in Germany serve as the data basis. In order to be able to make a selection that is as well-founded as possible, the case selection is carried out in a multi-stage procedure that includes a cluster analysis, the analysis of organizational data as well as the adult education act.

The cluster analysis serves to structure the population and to support a systematic case selection. The cluster analysis subsumes the Adult Education Centers and groups them into homogeneous groups that differ as little as possible within the cluster and have as high a difference as possible outside of the cluster. It was conducted using data from the Statistic on German “Volkshochschulen” (Adult Education Centers) from 2005 and 2015. In a first step, Schrader’s (2011) multi-level model was used to structure the approximately 900 Adult Education Centers in Germany. The variables of the Statistics on German “Volkshochschulen” were assigned to the individual levels of the multi-level model and then, the variables determined in this way were examined for changes between the years 2005 and 2015. Variables whose values did not show at least a 20 % difference between the year 2005 and 2015 were not included in the subsequent



cluster analysis. It is expected that if there is a change of at least 20 %, that change is large enough to draw conclusions about the institutional framework. The variable legal entity is excluded from this procedure. It is included in the cluster analysis despite the lack of analysis of the change between the years 2005 and 2015. This is because it reflects the legal form of the Adult Education Center and is therefore considered to have a decisive influence on the organizational structure. After the above-mentioned pre-selection, the following variables are included in the cluster analysis: Funding by federal and SGB<sup>2</sup> funds, legal entity, number of cooperation courses, and full-time pedagogical staff<sup>3</sup> (Engels 2018).

The goal of the cluster analysis is to support the most reasoned case selection possible. The cluster analysis resulted in six clusters which served as the basis for case selection and from which one to three Adult Education Centers were selected. In addition to the cluster analysis, other factors were decisive for the case selection. For example, the results of an online research on the history, organizational structure and mission statements of the Adult Education Centers in question were included in the final selection. Finally, 10 Adult Education Centers were selected (see Table 1), in which 43 interviews were conducted.

**Table 1:** Sample

	Volkshochschule <sup>4</sup>
<b>Cluster 1</b>	Heiden
	Falkenstein
<b>Cluster 2</b>	Arlingen
	Fahnbach
	Engelsheim
<b>Cluster 3</b>	Kornstedt
<b>Cluster 4</b>	Feldberg
<b>Cluster 5</b>	Höhenwalde
<b>Cluster 6</b>	Neustadt
	Haffstedt

The data basis for the subsequent evaluation were episodic interviews conducted with the directors and pedagogical staff on the premises of the adult education centers. Three to seven interviews were held per institution, lasting between 60 and 120 minutes. The data was anonymized before evaluation.

2 Financial support for professional training

3 For the cluster analysis, the variables permanent and temporary HPM were combined to form the variable HPM.

4 The names mentioned here are pseudonyms.

### 3.2 Evaluation Strategy

The evaluation takes place in three sub-steps. It is divided into the development of the category system, the coding and the case analysis. Thus, the relevant stakeholder constellations and action coordination in Adult Education Centers as well as their influence on the pedagogical performance profiles are captured.

In the development of the category system, the content analysis of Mayring (2015) was used as a guideline. This method allows to structure large amounts of data and to elaborate essential contents. Mayring’s structuring and summarizing content analysis were combined in order to identify relevant stakeholders and coordination of action concisely and in the most comprehensible way. The category system was first developed with the help of the summarizing content analysis; the governance forms *hierarchy*, *market*, *community*, *competition* and *network* as well as the coordination forms *observation*, *influence* and *negotiation* served as the theoretical framework of the developed categories. These deductively formed categories were further specified and differentiated based on the material. A ‘preliminary saturation’ of the developed category system occurred after two cases (8 interviews). For a better understanding of the findings, the categories *hierarchy* and *community* are presented below as examples. The category *hierarchy* comprises actions that are subject to a “command-obedience” mode. In this case, a superior authority shall be responsible for the decision-making with the right to issue instructions to the Adult Education Center. In contrast, in the *community* category, the action mainly takes place within the profession. Here, it is characterized by autonomous actions based on commonly shared convictions.

The resulting categories were the basis of the coding which was conducted using MAXQDA. Prior to coding, the transcripts were divided into sentence segments and structured using the developed categories. Moreover, the category system was further developed during coding when required by the data material. The coding was carried out independently by two trained coders in the sense of a structuring content analysis according to Mayring (2015). All material was coded with great openness and any uncertainties or ambiguities that arose were clarified in interpretation groups<sup>5</sup>. To ensure scientific quality, the intercoder reliability was determined in addition to the reflexive attitude towards one’s own research and cognitive process that is characteristic of qualitative social research. This is at a satisfactory Cohens Kappa value of 0.64.

## 4 Results

In the following, the results of the maximum contrasting case comparison between the Adult Education Center Neustadt (4.1) and Engelsheim (4.2) are presented and explained. For this purpose, the similarities and differences between the two cases are elaborated and the findings of the individual interviews are condensed on the level of the Adult Education Center (VHS) in order to identify the relevant stakeholders, coordi-

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5 As all the interviews and the coding were carried out in German, the quotations in the presentations of the findings were translated into English by the author.

nation of action and performance profiles per institution, and ultimately to contrast the two cases (4.3).

#### 4.1 Adult Education Center Neustadt

The Adult Education Center Neustadt is a publicly funded Adult Education Center that is a municipal agency of the city government. It is managed by a director who is a civil servant and part of the city administration. The Adult Education Center Neustadt is divided into 8 program areas that are managed by 12 full-time employees, and it employs about 386 freelance lecturers. As a part of the city administration, the Adult Education Center Neustadt is bound to the city administration by a fixed hierarchically organized structure. In matters of financial and human resources, the management of the Adult Education Center depends on the approval of the relevant authorities. As described in the Continuing Education Act (WBG), the Adult Education Center is bound to provide educational programs in the areas of general, political, professional and cultural education as well as school graduation and parent/family education. The offer should promote the personal development, strengthen the ability to participate in shaping the democratic community and help coping with the demands of the working world. According to the WBG, the Adult Education Center has the right to plan its curriculum autonomously. The federal state is committed to promote further education and supports 75 % of the occupied positions in the adult education institutions and subsidizes 60 % of the average fees.

Due to its official structure and the law on continuing education, the Adult Education Center is closely linked to the municipality and the federal state. Thus, the federal state is given fundamental importance in terms of content as well, and the district government also plays a significant role for the Adult Education Center, as it has executive functions with regard to the Continuing Education Act. Due to being so closely connected to the city, stakeholders of the city administration, especially the treasury, become significant for the Adult Education Center. This relationship also results in important connections to the city's economy.

„And we even have a big project going, the ‘Neustädter Job Promise’, which we realize together with the IHK [Chamber of Industry and Commerce] the district craftsmen’s association in the ‘Neustädter’ economy and the ‘Neustädter’ city administration under the patronage of the mayor [...]“ (Herr Kronberg, ll. 136–139).

The Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) also plays a significant role in the institutional environment of the Adult Education Center, especially with regard to the funding structure of the Adult Education Center, and consequently the measures taken by the Adult Education Center. Likewise, other continuing education organizations in the city, such as family education institutions by the church or Protestant adult education, are being involved with a round table organized by the Adult Education Center. In addition to the aforementioned municipal stakeholders, the EU also enters the picture. By co-financing, the EU does not only exert influence on the structures of the Adult Education Center, but also ties up municipal funds as well as federal state funds.

Last but not least, the German Adult Education Association (DVV) as well as the federal state association are pointed out as supporting institutions in the interviews.

A closer look at the coordination of action reveals that it is basically hierarchically structured in relation to the federal state and the municipality. The federal state activates the control media of power and money through the Continuing Education Act, and the district government acts as the executive in this constellation. At the same time, the Adult Education Center aligns its program planning to the federal state and its funding priorities.

“Because budget responsibility, which is not only reflected or reflected in contacts with the treasury, is very important and shapes their actions as a framework condition” (Mr. Kronberg, ll. 375–377).

“[...] if, for example, the federal state particularly promotes certain things, let’s take basic education, then they are of course well advised to also look at what the federal state is doing [...]” (Mr. Kronberg, ll. 384–386)

Furthermore, in terms of hierarchical coordination with the municipality, the integration of the management into the structure of the municipal civil service opens up the possibility of exerting influence on the program, for example through management meetings with the city’s mayor. Additionally, as part of this close link, the organization has adopted elements of New Public Management, such as contract management, decentralized resource authority, and, in part, quality management.

“[...] we have a, each department just has a certain budget with which it budgets and designs its program [...]” (Ms. Warnecke, ll. 376–377).

The coordination of action with the EU is strictly hierarchical and the Adult Education Center is committed to the political guidelines and goals of the European Social Fund (ESF). With regard to stakeholders of the local economy, the Chamber of Industry and Commerce and the District Chamber of Crafts, it can on the other hand be characterized as a community. This also applies to other local education providers.

The findings presented here reveal key influencing factors for the performance level of the organization. Due to its legal form as a municipality VHS and its grant funding, the Adult Education Center Neustadt is not dependent on additional projects to secure its funding. The program offer is strongly oriented towards the Continuing Education Act. The law obliges the adult education center to provide an educational program in the areas of general, political, vocational, and cultural continuing education, as well as school-graduation qualification and family education. The three main areas are political education, German as a foreign language/integration courses and languages. It also reveals that the Adult Education Center complies with the federal state’s funding priorities and adapts its program planning accordingly.

“However, here you have naturally also quite substantial interrelationships, also on the program, if for example the country promotes certain things, let us take times basic education, particularly, then you are naturally well advised to look also, what does the country,

and/or conversely to take influence on the country, by saying to the country, ah yes, here would have to be thought times perhaps at this or that keyword” (Mr. Kronberg, ll. 384–387).

A particular focus of the program is the area of school-graduation qualifications. This area has been greatly expanded, also by dedicating a building exclusively to those courses. Furthermore, there is a close link with politics and the local economy through the Chamber of Industry and Commerce and the district craftsmen’s association. The successful completion of the courses is encouraged and supported by granting apprenticeship training positions. In the area of school-graduation qualifications, project financing is sometimes used in order to respond to changes in funding, and thus to still be able to meet the demand.

#### 4.2 Adult Education Center Engelsheim

The Adult Education Center Engelsheim is a non-profit limited liability company (gGmbH) loosely linked to the city, which means that it receives a small amount of subsidies. The city acts as a shareholder, which means that regular consultations take place with the mayor and the treasurer. Furthermore, due to the structure as an “Optionskommune”<sup>6</sup>, there is a close connection to the district and through this, economic stakeholders also become significant.

“the tenders in SGB II all go through the district of Heersland, i. e. through the job center, and of course we have very, very close contact with the district” (Ms. Gimsen, ll. 241–242).

The Adult Education Center Engelsheim is divided into six program areas that are supervised by three full-time employees, and employs about 204 freelance facilitators. The Continuing Education Act is primarily designed as a subsidy law and equally covers general, political, cultural and vocational continuing education. It grants the right to continuing education, the topics are determined by the needs of the adults and it supports 30 % of the basic funding and 70 % of the performance funding.

The branches of the Adult Education Center can be seen as a unique selling point; in addition to these, the other Adult Education Centers in the region are also linked to each other through close relationships. As an important economic player, the *Müller Werke* should be emphasized, which are represented by their economic power in various committees as well as networks, and without them as partners, many projects would not be feasible. Therefore, it is an important partner for the Adult Education Center in various fields, such as tourism or with the Chamber of Industry and Commerce.

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6 An “Optionskommune” is a type of municipality in Germany that has the sole responsibility for providing certain social benefits, such as unemployment benefits and social assistance. This is in contrast to other municipalities where these benefits are provided by the Federal Employment Agency. The “Optionskommune” model gives municipalities more flexibility and autonomy in how they provide these benefits, but it also means that they have to bear the full financial responsibility for them.

“So that is, as said, in all committees, which are active here somewhere, whether that is now chamber or the training network or else, there are the *Müller Werke* simply always also active then” (Mrs. Gimsen, ll. 64–66).

Moreover, the State Association of Adult Education Centers (LVV) plays an important role for the Adult Education Center Engelsheim, where the Adult Education Center is involved in regional groups and the regional conference.

When considering the coordination of action with the various stakeholders and constellations of stakeholders, the form of coordination with the city can basically be characterized as hierarchical.

“Well, as I said, the city is quite clear, our shareholders are municipal, the mayor is basically my superior and of course we are in constant contact with the city, so there’s no question about that” (Ms. Gimsen, ll. 214–215).

However, it is possible for the city to ensure its support to the Adult Education Center through its sponsorship as a non-profit organization. On the other hand, the Adult Education Center is completely autonomous in its decision-making and human resources management.

“Well, it is actually so, if that becomes explosive then and becomes difficult, then it is quite clear that the city then says, no, you are a gGmbH, we have nothing to do with you. (Laughter) If it however, if the times look good and everything runs positively, then one also gladly falls back on it naturally” (Ms. Gimsen, ll. 97–98).

Likewise, the coordination of action with the district is to be characterized as hierarchical. In contrast, the coordination with the business associations takes place in the form of cooperation. Furthermore, the coordination with the other Adult Education Centers in the region is characterized by community and close cooperation.

“But we have some courses where we work very well together and always alternate, once she has the hat on, once I have the hat on, so with administration and so on, and that goes very well, also accounting-wise, that is excellent, because otherwise we could not offer these courses, they would not run otherwise” (Ms. Stolz, ll. 232–235).

The coordination of action with the state association (LVV) can be characterized as collaborative.

“On the one hand, the state association is a service provider for the Adult Education Centers, but on the other hand, it is also the executor of clients who have approached it.” (Mr. Sawusch, ll.382–384).

As seen in the case of the Adult Education Center Neustadt, the structures and influential possibilities are reflected on the achievement level in the Adult Education Center Engelsheim, as well. Due to the low level of grant funding from the city, the general program area plays a subordinate role in the financing of the VHS and this is accompa-

nied by a strong expansion of the project area to compensate for the low level of grant funding.

“So that means grants, then a third project area, a third program business, but the program business, I don’t know how much that makes up at the moment, is minimal.” (Ms. Gimsen, ll.137–139).

In addition, it is clear that in the general program area, the focus is on continuing vocational education. The range of the vocational qualification steps into the foreground, for example the training to the specialized ‘Fachwirt’<sup>7</sup> in long-term courses. The Adult Education Center Engelsheim offers 8 ‘Fachwirte’, partly in cooperation with nearby Adult Education Centers.

“[...] this is where our long-term courses start, business administrator, accountant, commercial administrator, so we have one, two, three, four, yes, seven, eight specialist courses in here [...]” (Mr. Ehrenfreid, ll.338–339).

Beyond that, corporate training courses are part of the regular range of services offered by the Adult Education Center, which are actively promoted and increase the funding of the Adult Education Centers. Another special feature is the link with the state association in the area of course offers. Thus, the commercial continuing education as well as the pedagogical long-term courses were launched by the LVV.

### 4.3 Case Comparison

After describing the cases examined in terms of the present stakeholders, coordination of actions and their influence on the level of performance, here is a brief summary and comparison of the cases.

Despite the contrasting case selection, some commonalities in the stakeholders and stakeholder constellations can be identified. For example, stakeholders such as the municipality, the federal state, the job center, business organizations, BAMF, ESF, and LVV play a role in both cases. In addition to the common stakeholders, other protagonists of the two Adult Education Centers differ, such as the district government at VHS Neustadt and the district at Engelsheim. This difference of significant stakeholders also includes ‘Müller Werke’, an important partner for the Adult Education Center Engelsheim due to its economic power and strong networking; there is no similar stakeholder for the Adult Education Center Neustadt.

Regarding the coordination of actions, there are different manifestations depending on the case. In both cases, the hierarchy and community appear as forms of coordination, but in different ways. This becomes clear when looking at the Adult Education Center as a whole.

At Adult Education Center Neustadt, the coordination of action can be characterized as predominantly hierarchical. On the one hand, this is due to its structure as an

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7 business management specialist

office of the city, which means that coordination with the city's stakeholders, such as the mayor or treasurer, is also subject to hierarchical coordination. On the other hand, it is strongly oriented towards the Continuing Education Act, which only allows hierarchical coordination. Despite this structural constitution, it is precisely through these that the director manages to exert influence on policy-making. Thus, it is possible for the director to set own priorities in management meetings with the city. Further scope for action is provided by the adoption of elements of New Public Management, such as decentralized resource allocation and contract management. At the Adult Education Center Engelsheim, hierarchical coordination of action also occurs, for example, through the city as a shareholder and through stakeholders such as the ESF or the BAMF. Furthermore, elements of New Public Management such as reporting and controlling are also evident here. However, the focus is not on hierarchical coordination due to the Adult Education Center's status as a limited liability company.

Thus, when looking at the overall coordination of actions, it becomes clear that the hierarchical forms of coordination are not to be characterized as decisive, but that the joint coordination of actions is predominant. This becomes clear in the coordination with other Adult Education Centers, the state association and the 'Müller Werke'.

Looking at the performance level of the two adult education centers, the greatest differences become apparent here. Here, it is the continuing education law versus the project area.

For example, the Neustadt Adult Education Center is clearly governed by the Continuing Education Act in terms of the courses it offers, and within this framework it focuses on the areas of political education, integration courses (German as a foreign language) and school-graduation certificates. The Adult Education Center Neustadt focuses strongly on integration into the labor market (e.g. project 'Neustädter Job Promise') and less on additional qualification (such as 'Fachwirte', long-term courses). Moreover, it has a large language area as well as a decent environmental and technical area and thus meets the classic adult education topics. For them, the purpose of project funding is merely to cover additional supply needs in case grant funding is insufficient. In addition, corporate training does not play a role for the Neustadt Adult Education Center in its regular curriculum and is only considered when additional resources are available.

This is different for the Adult Education Center Engelsheim, for which the project area is the most developed part of their educational offer and ensures the main part of its funding. In contrast, the general program area plays a subordinate role for the financing and overall planning of the Adult Education Center, and in general, the focus here is in the area of vocational qualification. Another strong difference between the two Adult Education Centers is their handling of company training courses. In Neustadt, these are considered only when capacities are available, whereas in Engelsheim, they are part of the regular offer and are actively promoted. It should also be noted that many courses are created in cooperation with another stakeholder involved such as other Adult Education Centers or educational institutions.



Considering that two cases are not sufficient to draw conclusions about governance regimes, an attempt is being made to make a few general statements.

Looking at the prevailing stakeholder constellations and coordination of actions in the two cases as a whole provides some insights into interrelations and mechanisms. There is a dependency of the structural conditions, the stakeholders in the region and the prevailing coordination of action. Consequently, those have an influence on the performance profiles of the institution.

A strong connection to the city and a differentiated continuing education law promote hierarchical action coordination and offer financial predictability. As a result, the city's projects and the law on continuing education have an increasing impact on the educational offer. Networks and other stakeholders are also selected according to the projects offered by the city. In this structure, educational programs that go beyond this coverage are unlikely to be offered.

Less stronger connections to the city and a less differentiated continuing education law give the Adult Education Center more autonomy. However, they also ensure greater financial autonomy. To absorb the low level of financial support and assistance from the federal state/city, networks are established to strengthen the position in the region. This ensures a predominantly collaborative coordination of the institution's actions. The service profile primarily offers courses that contribute to the financial stability of the Adult Education Center. Projects of the city and offers required by the WBG have an inferior standing.

## 5 Conclusion

The main focus of this paper is on governance in organizations of public continuing education. Of particular interest are which stakeholders, constellation of stakeholders and coordination of actions play a role for organizations of public continuing education and what influence they have on the performance level of the organization.

It can be stated that despite strong structural differences between the two Adult Education Centers, there are similar constellations of stakeholders and coordination of actions. Only when looking at the Adult Education Center as a whole, the predominant constellation of stakeholders and coordination of action can be characterized, and it is precisely through the reconnection back to the performance level that the influence of certain framework conditions on the curriculum becomes clear. To what extent governance regimes can already be characterized by this is difficult to determine based only on this case comparison. Further analyses are necessary for this. Eventually, the findings will be placed in the context of the current academic discussion.

With regard to the debate on governance, this article provides an initial empirical and analytical view of governance in organizations of public continuing education. In doing so, the contribution not only enables the identification of relevant stakeholders and forms of coordination, but also points out their significance for the performance level. It becomes apparent that, in addition to the expected stakeholders and coordina-

tion of actions, surprising findings also emerge. This shows how important the study of steering in continuing education is, and that it is precisely the inclusion of the performance level that increases the added value of the results. As a next step, a systematization into governance regimes should be attempted after further analyses. It could also be considered to examine the governance of continuing education providers under other sponsorships, such as denominational or private educational institutions, in order to obtain a more comprehensive picture of governance in the continuing education landscape.

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