'Special offers for target groups that otherwise would not have been reached': Social participation through regional networks in adult literacy and basic education – A multiple-case study

Jakob Bickeböller
University of Cologne, Germany (jakob.bickeboeller@uni-koeln.de)

Abstract

Using the perspective of neo-institutionalism and institutional logics, this article examines regional networks in the field of literacy and basic education. The goal of the analysis is to identify different forms of community-logics within two actor constellations. For this purpose, two regions are focused within a multiple-case study design. The empirical approach is based on interviews with experts from the field of literacy and basic education. The Interviews are evaluated qualitatively. The interview material will be used to identify different logics of communities in the regions and to examine the contexts in which actors orient themselves to the different logics. It becomes clear that communities in adult basic education are constituted on the basis of both geographical and content related aspects. By becoming a member of the communities, the actors benefit from various advantages. This collaboration ultimately enables the social participation and inclusion of the low-literate in the regions.

Keywords: institutional logics, communities, adult basic education, social participation

Introduction: Regional literacy networks as a central factor for social participation

Adult literacy and basic education have increasingly entered the focus of public interest as policy programmes that promote social justice and inclusion have been implemented at the national and international levels. For example, in 2000 at the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal, adult basic education was declared a right for all (UNESCO,

2000). In 2003, the proclamation of the United Nations Literacy Decade highlighted the significance and political interest in the topic. Adult basic education is associated with an 'improved quality of life' (UNESCO, 2002, p. 5), which is to be achieved through agenda setting and 'partnerships at all levels' (p. 5) – namely international, national, subregional, and regional. The policy paper for the National Literacy Decade (2016–2026) in Germany also defined literacy and adult basic education as 'prerequisites for a self-determined life' (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung, 2016, p. 3). The paper called on society as a whole to meet this challenge with a 'broad alliance' (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung, 2016, p. 4). The policy programmes emphasise the importance of adult basic education in the context of promoting the *social participation* and *inclusion of low-literate people*. This aspect was supported by Irving (2020), who related literacy to the democratic right to access information. Effects at the level of adult education practice were achieved in the course of the Alpha Decade through the promotion of numerous projects in the field of adult basic education. An exemplary compilation of the projects can be found in the work of Koller et al. (2020).

Furthermore, interest at the level of educational policy and practice is reflected in the attention paid by adult education research to adult basic education. For example, the 2019 International Yearbook of Adult Education was devoted to 'Adult Basic Education Research' (Schemmann, 2019). Another recent study critically examined the potential of large-scale surveys in literacy (Buddeberg et al., 2020). Other works have investigated the educational policy structures of adult basic education from international and national perspectives. Knauber (2017) examined adult basic education policies and the governance of adult basic education in various European countries. From an *international-comparative* perspective, the author's focus was on 'which actors with which resources have an impact on the content-related, process-related dimension of adult basic education policy' (p. 86). In addition, Knauber and Ioannidou (2016) reconstructed various governance structures in adult basic education and examined their effectiveness at the *international level*. For an analysis of politically motivated interventions in adult basic education at the *national level* in Austria, see Cennamo et al. (2020). Research at the *national level* in Germany focused on the educational policy interests of actors in adult basic education (Euringer, 2016).

Moreover, recent research has also focused on the coordination of action at the *regional level* of adult basic education (Bickeböller, 2022; Koller et al., 2021). Such studies have demonstrated that a variety of actors from all levels of the adult education system are involved in the development of adult basic education programmes. The skills of the actors and the projects with which they attempt to institutionalise adult basic education at the regional level were the focus of a paper by Bickeböller et al. (2022).

A further examination of processes at the *regional level* seems indispensable, as it 'holds a high potential for self-organisation, which in part only needs to be initiated and channelled' (Möltgen-Sicking, 2019, p. 42). Due to its 'proximity to the citizens' (Möltgen-Sicking, 2019, p. 24), the fruitfulness of such an examination due to the inclusion of these very citizens becomes apparent. The prominence of the *regional level* is also evident against the background of new funding instruments in North Rhine-Westphalia, which explicitly support literacy and adult basic education programmes in the context of 'measures for regional educational development' (WbG NRW, 2021, §13a). The goal of the funding instrument is to strengthen networking within 'regional educational landscapes' (WbG NRW, 2021, §13a).

Despite its popularity, the term 'region' is often unspecific in terms of the areas it denotes and the scope that it outlines (cf. Bernhard, 2014). In this regard, Fürst (2002) described a 'tension between a functional and a territorial view of region' (p. 23). While

territorial regions are characterised by geographical boundaries, functional regions are constituted by cooperation structures with regard to a common topic. Against this background, questions arise as to how actors in the field of adult education act regionally and how regions can be opened up for action. This article aims to generate insights with regard to the *regional level* of literacy and adult basic education. The focus is on the various frameworks that actors base their actions on. The guiding research questions are as follows:

1. What aspects of territorial or functional regions can be identified in the field of literacy and adult basic education?
2. In which contexts are actors at the regional level oriented towards territorial or functional aspects?

This article employs neo-institutionalism and the concept of institutional logics. Here, particular reference is made to a concept by Almandoz et al. (2017) that encompasses functional and territorial logics of action (see section *Neo-institutionalism and institutional logics*). Methodologically, the article is based on a guided-interview multiple-case study with stakeholders in regional contexts (see section *Methodical approach*). The results point to various frameworks of action by which communities are constituted at the regional level (see section *Geographical and affiliation-based communities in adult basic education*). The findings are also discussed against the background of the theoretical framing (see section *Discussion*). Finally, conclusions are drawn (see section *Conclusion*).

Neo-institutionalism and institutional logics

The following section outlines the perspective of neo-institutionalism and the concept of institutional logics. According to Alvesson and Spicer (2019), neo-institutionalism is 'one of the most prominent schools of thought within organization studies at present' (p. 199). The perspective has already proven fruitful for analyses of processes in the field of adult education and adult basic education in several studies (Bickeböller et al., 2022; Koller et al., 2021; Schemmann, 2020; Schreiber-Barsch, 2009).

The starting point of neo-institutionalist organisational studies is provided by the contributions of Meyer and Rowan (1977), Zucker (1977), and DiMaggio and Powell (1983). Central to the organisational sociology perspective is the assumption that 'institutional rules function as myths which organizations incorporate' (Meyer & Rowan, 1977, p. 340). Furthermore, organisations more commonly orient themselves to institutionalised expectations because of the legitimacy they receive from them than because of their actual effectiveness (cf. Meyer & Rowan, 1977).

Through a high density of interaction, organisations develop a common awareness and orient themselves to each other – causing so-called organisational fields to emerge. This term describes 'a recognized area of institutional life: key suppliers, resource and product consumers, regulatory agencies, and other organizations that produce similar products' (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p. 148).

Another central aspect of the neo-institutional perspective is the assumption that institutions determine the actions of actors. Scott (2001) described them as 'shared assumptions that constitute the nature of social reality' (p. 57). They 'are followed because they are taken for granted as "the way we do these things"' (Scott, 2001). While earlier studies mainly focused on the stabilising effect of institutions and processes of isomorphism, new research also examines change and the influence of actors on

institutions. One concept used to deal with different environmental specifications and institutional expectations is that of *institutional logics*.

The concept of *institutional logics* dates back to Friedland and Alford (1991), who viewed in them a 'set of material practices and symbolic constructions – which constitutes its organizing principles and which is available to organizations and individuals to elaborate' (Friedland & Alford, 1991, p. 248). The concept has since been developed further, particularly by Thornton et al. (2012; see also Thornton & Ocasio, 2008). The authors created a coordinate system for an ideal type of inter-institutional system in which institutional logics exist and operate in parallel: 'Each institutional order represents a governance system that provides a frame of reference that preconditions actors' sensemaking choices' (Thornton et al., 2012, p. 54). Thornton and Ocasio (2008) considered ideal types to provide an analytical lens in terms of 'how individual and organizational behavior is located in a social context and the social mechanisms that influence that behavior' (p. 122). For example, the institutional order of the community legitimises itself through a common will, trust, and reciprocity, drawing its identity from a shared emotional connection. For a more detailed listing of the institutional orders of family, community, religion, state, market, profession, and corporation, see Thornton et al. (2012, p. 107).

A differentiation of the ideal type of community logic was presented by Almandoz et al. (2017), who distinguished between *geographical and affiliation-based communities*. They drew distinctions between the two forms of communities based on five categories (see Table 1). The first category is the root metaphor, which is the centre of an institutional logic to which the other elements align. While *geographical communities* are based on a common boundary that delimits their members from the outside, *affiliation-based communities* are based on a shared belief in a value, goal, or product (Almandoz et al., 2017, p. 6). The second category distinguishes between the sources communities use to legitimise their actions. Due to local proximity, the actors in *geographical communities* have many points of overlap. Accordingly, a critical aspect with regard to legitimacy is the trust and reciprocity between actors (Almandoz et al., 2017, p. 6). Because members of *affiliation-based communities* have fewer points of overlap, they legitimise themselves through their unity of will. The third category describes sources of authority and norms. In both communities, these lie in the members' commitment to the community. The fourth category identifies the source from which community members draw a shared identity. In *geographical communities*, said source is the emotional connections between members. If this identity is particularly strong, it can result in 'us-vs-them behaviors' (Almandoz et al., 2017, p. 7). The 'identification in *affiliation-based communities* is generally narrower in scope' (Almandoz et al., 2017, p. 7). It depends on the intrinsic value of the community to the actors, and a consensus is quickly reached. The fifth category describes the strategies used by the actors to gain attention within the community. In both communities, actors invest in their recognition and status. An overview of the categories can be found in Table 1.

Table 1. Constitutive elements of geographical and affiliation-based communities (based on Almandoz et al., 2017, p. 8)

Categories	Logics	Geographical community	Affiliation-based community
Root metaphor		A common geographical boundary	Conscious affiliation and belief in a particular cause
Sources of legitimacy		Belief in trust and reciprocity	Unity of will in community goals
Sources of authority and norms		Commitment to membership in a valued community	Commitment to community values and identities
Sources of identity		Community reputation; emotional connection	Intrinsic value of the community's goals
Basis of attention and strategy		Investment in honour and status – relevant in multiple contexts	Investment in honour and status – relevant in limited contexts

Notably, an empirical comparison of empirical material with the ideal types is still pending. Almandoz (2012) analysed the influence of community logic on the establishment of new banks. The extent to which aspects of geographical and affiliation-based communities play a role was not part of the analysis. This serves as the point of departure for the present article. The analysis provides insights into the question of which aspects of the two ideal types of communities can be reconstructed within two actor constellations from the field of adult basic education at the regional level. Based on this, results are generated with regard to the question in which contexts the actors orient themselves towards a geographical or affiliation-based community logic. By addressing these questions, this article aims to contribute to steering and coordination processes at the regional level of adult education. Furthermore, it provides new insights regarding the design of regional educational networks for the inclusion and social participation of low-literate adults. In the following section, the two-step methodological approach is described.

Methodical approach

This paper is based on a *secondary analysis* (Heaton, 2004) of data collected in the context of a *multiple-case study* (Yin, 2018) on action coordination in adult basic education. In this section, before the approach of the secondary analysis is discussed, the design of the main study conducted by Bickeböller is outlined.

In the course of the *multiple-case study*, *guided expert interviews* (Meuser & Nagel, 1991) were conducted with actors from the field of literacy and adult basic education from two regions. A compilation of four different types of case studies was provided by Yin (2018, p. 48). A case is considered integrated if it comprises several objects of analysis (here: adult education centres, nonprofit associations, social work associations, and political actors). In an *integrated multiple-case study design*, conclusions can be drawn about the individual case as well as across multiple cases. In the course of the investigation, six interviews were conducted in region one and five in region two (see Table 2).

The selection of regions was based on statistics from the leo. - Level-One study, which found different aggregations of functional illiteracy and faulty writing depending

on the size of a municipality (Grotlüschen et al., 2012, p. 36). Municipalities with 500,000 or more inhabitants had the highest percentage (18.0%) of functional illiterates, while those with 100,000–499,000 inhabitants had the lowest percentage (11.5%). One region was selected from each of the two categories.

The basic condition for the selection of experts within the regions was their activity in the researched field of action (i.e., literacy and adult basic education). The interviewees are considered functionaries within their field of activity since they have a special responsibility within it as well as 'privileged access to information about groups of people or decision-making processes' (Meuser & Nagel, 1991, p. 443). Thus, programme and project managers, the management of two associations, an independent actor, and a political actor were interviewed. They were asked about their networking activities within and outside of their administrative region. An overview of the case composition can be found in Table 2.

Table 2. Multiple-case study design

Case 1 500,000 or more inhabitants	Case 2 100,000–499,000 inhabitants
• Manager of an association • Project manager (association) • Project manager (association) • Project manager (social work) • Programme manager • Political actor	• Manager of an association • Project manager (association) • Project manager (association) • Independent actor • Programme manager

The material was analysed by means of a *content-structuring qualitative content analysis* (Kuckartz, 2018). The focus of the main analysis was on the actor constellations, forms of action coordination, and performance level. The category system was created using a multi-step procedure that combined deductive and inductive category formation (Kuckartz, 2018, p. 100). Based on a mean intercoder reliability of 0.65, the intersubjective comprehensibility of the coding framework was regarded as satisfactory (Krippendorff, 2004).

Based on the main study, a secondary analysis of the material was performed. Heaton (2004) differentiated five types of *qualitative secondary analysis*. The present study was a *supra analysis*, which involved 'the investigation of new theoretical, empirical […] questions' (Heaton, 2004, p. 39) that arose from the primary study. The coded interview passages from the categories *'K01.2 Organisational structure and organisational self-image'*, *'K01.3 Understanding of adult basic education'*, *'K03 Actors'*, and *'K04 Coordination of action'* of the primary study were subjected to further coding with a new category system. Reay and Jones (2016) proposed various procedures for conducting a qualitative analysis of institutional logics. Oriented to the *pattern matching* method, the new categories were deductively developed from the concept of Almandoz et al. (2017) and applied to the material. In the following section, the material is interpreted against the background of the two research questions. As all of the interviews and the coding were conducted in German, the quotations provided in the presentation of the findings were translated into English by the author.

Geographical and affiliation-based communities in adult basic education

In this section, the focus lies on the evaluation and interpretation of the interview material. Before a qualitative analysis of the interview passages is presented, a quantitative analysis based on the code frequencies is provided. A total of 290 interview passages were assigned codes. In both regions, indications of an *affiliation-based* as well as a *geographical community logic* could be found. The distribution of codes indicating an *affiliation-based community logic* was relatively balanced (case 1: 60 codes, case 2: 52 codes). With regard to the codes indicating a *geographical community logic*, however, clear differences between the cases were observed (case 1: 103 codes, case 2: 67 codes). These differences were particularly pronounced for the categories of *'Trust & Reciprocity'* (case 1: 25 codes, case 2: 10 codes); *'Emotional Connection & Reputation'* (case 1: 23 codes, case 2: 8 codes); and *'Recognition & Status'* (case 1: 11 codes, case 2: 4 codes). Therefore, the qualitative analysis of the interview passages on *geographical community logic* focuses on these categories in particular. In the following subsections, the qualitative interpretation of the data is discussed in more detail. First, an interpretation of the data in terms of the two different forms of community logic (*Affiliation-based community logic; Geographical communit logic*) is given. The subsequent section (*Actors between geographical and affiliation-based community logic*) focuses explicitly on the contexts in which actors are more strongly oriented toward one logic or another.

Affiliation-based community logic

The aspects of *affiliation-based community logic* can be described using the example of a cooperative association, which 'has set itself the goal to bundle and further coordinate the active ones in the field of literacy and adult basic education' (I02_Pos. 40). Except for one association from case 2, all interviewees were part of the network. For I06, for example, it was of particular importance that geographical aspects are not decisive here for coming into contact at all with providers outside of their municipality (Pos. 31). Since many network meetings have occurred online due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the circle of participants has expanded again because 'the dependence on location is no longer so high' (I07_Pos. 24). The cooperative alliance is ostensibly constituted by a content-related focus on literacy and adult basic education and not by the geographical proximity of members. Thus, the added value is that there is 'simply networking across the board [...] and also fixed exchange formats [and] conferences' (I07_Pos. 16).

Furthermore, the regularly organised meetings are characterised by mutual support. Actors who are in the 'same funding phases' (I04_Pos. 14) exchange experiences or create 'synergies' (I04_Pos. 14). By comparing their experiences, the actors learn from each other and can 'also copy something a bit' in the future (I11_ pos. 24). Since the members feel committed to a common cause, a 'constructive togetherness' exists at professional meetings and events (I07_Pos. 18). This sense of community is to be maintained. The network relationships are maintained by, among other things, the actors exchanging information among themselves about their future offers, so as 'not to compete with each other' (I07_Pos. 24). They attempt to set a different focus and keep the spectrum as broad as possible. For the same reason, the association of I01, for example, also avoids regular funding. Participation in these financing structures could jeopardise relationships with his network partners, which is why he prefers to remain in the area of project financing. He stated the following: 'So these pots aren't very big anyway, and the

more people there are fighting over it, so to speak, the less is left for the individual. So, not our battlefield as an *organisation*' (I01_Pos. 18).

In addition to the identification with network contacts, the *affiliation-based community* is characterised by a strong intrinsic interest and identification with the topic of literacy and adult basic education. I06, for example, already dealt intensively with the topic during her studies, wrote her diploma thesis in this area, and worked as a course instructor. Through her professional career, she developed a strong 'interest in the field of literacy' (I06_Pos. 2), which is why she now workes as a department head at an adult education centre. The same is true for I07, who had also worked as a course instructor and conducted research in the field. Some of the founders of their association 'are still really active and well-known personalities' (I07_Pos. 20). This commitment beyond the professional career speaks of a strong identification with the field: 'They really burned for it' (I07_Pos. 30).

The actors also use this commitment and know-how to advocate for the values and interests of the community. On the one hand, this includes keeping the existing network alive and maintaining it. Thus, I07 attempts to 'get to know different actors, to get to know different projects' (Pos. 24) to have a close connection to all members. On the other hand, the commitment consists of winning new actors for the interests of the field. A crucial aspect here is the acquisition of new cooperation partners for the joint development of services. Through sensitisation and public relations, the actors attempt to convince companies to, for example, 'include the topic of work-oriented adult basic education more strongly in their own thinking' (I02_Pos. 24). Companies are presented with potential benefits of funding measures for their own workforce: 'Here you have another opportunity to promote your employees and, at the end of the day, to position yourself better in the market' (I10_Pos. 27).

Moreover, advocacy for the values and interests of the community consists of raising awareness and advising political actors and funding agencies. I01 stated that he attempts to bring the topic of literacy and adult basic education onto the agenda in relevant committee meetings. Here, he often first answers 'the questions as to why there should be such a thing in Germany at all' (I01_Pos. 40). However, if he can 'prove that I'm not just blathering, but that the offerings actually work' (I01_item 53), political actors are receptive. In this case, opportunities arise for I01 to positively change the framework conditions for the field through consultation. For example, one funding agency has expanded the catalogue of topics for lifeworld-oriented adult basic education as a result of the advice provided by I01's organisation. This makes the association and other active actors from the field 'much more connectable [...] to certain structures' (I01_Pos. 53). In the following subsection, interview passages that are connected to a *geographical community logic* are discussed in more detail.

Geographical community logic

This subsection explains the extent to which aspects of a *geographical community logic* guide the actions of the actors. These aspects were particularly relevant in case 1. This region is highly heterogeneous due to its size (>500,000 inhabitants). To establish adult basic educational offerings in the metropolis, the actors are oriented toward very small-scale geographical boundaries below the city level. To gain access to participants, even the orientation to city districts is too coarse, which is why the actors 'really have to go down to the neighbourhoods or quarters' (I01_Pos. 36). Here, the problem situations or challenges differ depending on the neighbourhood.

Accordingly, the district in which the organisation is anchored is initially significant: 'Yes, we are located in *district* [...], a bustling district, [...] but on the other hand also many of the people there locally with whom we work' (I02_Pos. 8). Because of the proximity to the people, trust can be established and access gained. To establish services in other parts of the city, the association cooperates with other actors who are located there. These are above all 'smaller institutions, in the social areas that meet certain indicators where you can see okay here there is a need for support, here there are a lot of people who are affected by exclusion' (I02_Pos. 10).

Accordingly, the association first obtains an overview of the needs in individual neighbourhoods and then attempts to establish offerings there through cooperation. The presence in the districts is also critical for the adult education centre in the metropolis. I06 considered the ability to provide access in different areas of the metropolis a great advantage: 'And there is also the possibility for interested people to simply come to our house and get in touch' (I06_Pos. 16). In addition, the actors in case 1 are in a 'close exchange' (I05_Pos. 16) with regional education policy. Due to the diverse provider structure and close ties, the actor from education policy spoke of a good 'basic structure' (I05_Pos. 14) within the metropolitan boundaries.

In case 2, a district-specific literacy and adult basic education programme is still being developed. Thanks to the new funding from the amended Continuing Education Act, the Adult Education Centre has been able to establish a continuing education advisory service in the city districts; however, 'this will be seen in perspective, to what extent it bears fruit and perhaps can be expanded' (I11_Pos. 10). In addition, there are referral structures to the adult education centre 'because they also have a large area of reading and writing courses' (I09_Pos. 6). For the joint organisation of public relations activities within the region, the actors appreciate their geographical proximity, because 'you can just meet somewhere for coffee and discuss the whole thing' (I10_Pos. 21).

Trust and reciprocity are crucial components for cooperation in the *geographical community*. This was particularly evident in the joint development of adult basic education programmes in case 1. As described above, the association of I01 depends on cooperation partners in the city districts for the acquisition of participants. I01 described the joint development of offers as barter transactions, in which he offers the educational management as a resource to the cooperation partners in return for learning locations and participants. He described this as follows:

> We sort of go and match that demand, that need at the learning site with our resources and that's usually the opportunities to fund the lecturer honoraria, to do the educational management, to print the flyer, etcetera, to do curricular proposals and preliminary work and we bring that together. (I01_Pos. 28)

By bringing resources together, actors benefit from each other and can initiate district-specific 'special offers for target groups that otherwise would not have been reached' (I03_Pos 18). Each is dependent on the other to make the courses happen. Not having to worry about education management, for example, was a 'great benefit that we have used as a network partner' for an actor from social work (I03_Pos. 16). However, because of this interdependence, these structures of supply development are very fragile. Accordingly, the actors must be able to trust each other. These trust relationships also enable the actors to perpetuate project offerings beyond their duration. For example, courses financed by project funding were transferred to the local adult education centre after the project period. There is now 'a course at the adult education centre that is only running now because it originally came about through the project' (I06_Pos. 25). This would not have been possible without trust within the *geographical community*. In the

meantime, a 'permanent contact person' (I06_Pos. 14) has been appointed at the association to maintain the connection between the association and the adult education centre.

In addition to the trust that the actors have in each other, they must also gain the trust of potential participants in the district. To make adult basic education offers and their own association 'known in the district, we made a health offer, namely a pumpkin competition' (I02_Pos. 30). At a neighbourhood festival in the spring, seedlings were distributed, which were processed into soup at an event in the fall. Through this offer, the association came into contact with the people in the district and was ultimately able to initiate a literacy course on site. The long-term planning illustrates how much energy the association invests into building trust in the district before the education programmes can finally start.

In case 2, reciprocity was expressed as part of a research and development project between an association and the local university, which involves working on an app for the low-literate. While the association has the pedagogical knowledge about the target group, the university contributes the technical knowledge: 'So basically, I'll put it bluntly, that's someone who comes from the technical side, who does this whole chatbot, the technical implementation of language, of AI, etcetera' (I09_Pos. 16).

Another key aspect for the success of a *geographical community* is its reputation. The actors establish emotional connections within the community and may set boundaries with the outside world. This was particularly evident in a statement made by I05, who emphasised – with regard to the cooperation in case 1 – being 'absolutely thrilled by our *location* model, [...] not only from the cooperation, from decades of it, but also in terms of the content of what has been achieved there' (I05_Pos. 14). In this statement, I05 assigned a label to the cooperation in her region, which not only included all actors involved from her community but also differentiated it from other regions. She was proud of the structures in her local area and was convinced that 'this is something [that] should be rolled out' (I05_Pos. 14). This conviction was shared by I01, who emphasised that they were 'pretty much alone with the approach in their region for quite a while, also took a lot of criticism from the literacy landscape' (I01_Pos. 65). In I01's conviction, an us-vs-them mentality is also characterised. The actors from case 1 have broken new ground with their strategy, which was not always evaluated positively in the field. However, this has not deterred them from continuing along this path within the region. Emotional connections in the form of 'cooperations that have existed for years, i.e. beyond this project' (I03_Pos. 14), were helpful for this. According to I05, this form of togetherness is 'also a long tradition here with us' (I05_Pos. 30).

In addition to the community's external reputation, the reputation within the community also guides the actions of the players in a *geographical community*. To create relationships of trust, the actors must first make a name for themselves and prove themselves to be trustworthy. Here, the decisive factor is an initial success: 'Once you have done something [...] then you also find other topics' (I02_Pos. 20). This acts as a flagship and increases recognition within the community: 'So word has gotten around in the *location's* structures' (I01_Pos. 34). This was confirmed by an actor from case 2, namely I09, who emphasised that 'once you have done something [...] then you also find other topics' (pos. 20).

Actors between geographical and affiliation-based community logic

The aforementioned results have described which aspects of an *affiliation-based* and *geographical community logic* could be reconstructed in the two cases. In both cases,

aspects of both forms of community logic could be reconstructed, with aspects of *geographical community logic* prevailing in case 1 and aspects of *affiliation-based community logic* prevailing in region 2. In this subsection, the focus is sharpened on the contexts in which actors orient their actions more strongly to one or the other logic.

Focusing on the components of the *affiliation-based community logic*, it became clear that they often occur in connection with contexts aimed at a general further development of the field. This could be conferences, fairs, or other exchange formats between actors in literacy and adult basic education. Accordingly, by participating in the *affiliation-based community*, stakeholders gain knowledge of 'new developments in the field and studies, research results, publications, then getting to know, maybe new colleagues' (I11_Pos. 24). The individual and – above all – collective added value ultimately lies in the progressive professionalisation of the field as well as in public relations work and a broader social awareness.

In addition to the exchange of experiences, these formats lead to a unification of the field. The players join forces and commit to a common goal. Accordingly, I09 saw great added value from these meetings in terms of the 'preservation of value' (I09_Pos. 22). This value lies in the 'integration of all persons and the enabling of learning for all persons' (I06_Pos. 6). The actors see their work as valuable because it is a 'social mission to catch up on what has been missed' (I07_Pos. 16). Thus, another added value of the *affiliation-based community* lies in the self-assurance of actors.

With regard to the *geographical community logic*, as described above, the components of trust and reciprocity in particular as well as emotional connections and the reputation of the community among actors in the metropolis could be reconstructed. If one examines these components more closely, they can be observed to often be connected with the development and establishment of concrete adult basic education offers in the regions. Geographical boundaries in the sense of districts, neighbourhoods, and quarters in which the target group is located are particularly critical in the development of services in lifeworld-oriented adult basic education.

As a result, geographical aspects are a guiding factor in the acquisition of participants and the development of services. I02 stated the following: 'My colleague regularly walks through the neighbourhood and talks to people' (I02_Pos. 28). He and his colleagues 'don't want to just make blanco offers and hope that someone will come, but we want to go somewhere and say "What do you need?"' (I02_Pos. 24). To be able to realise this, integration into a *geographical community* is indispensable for the association, since through this they gain access to places 'where, so to speak, the potential learners are anyway' (I01_Pos. 30).

The fact that maintaining relationships within the *geographical community* is a high priority was underlined by I02 describing the partners in social spaces as the 'most important actors' (I02_Pos. 22). Furthermore, I01 took a critical position against the networking formats of the *affiliation-based community*:

> We then came to the conclusion that it was very nice networking, because it was always the same eight actors who confirmed among themselves how bad the world is and how important the topic of literacy is. You can do that, sometimes it's good for your soul, but it doesn't really bring you forward. (I01_Pos. 38)

The top priority of the *geographical community* is to change the structure and establish adult basic education offerings within its own borders. Accordingly, the actors are guided in their actions by relationship building, reciprocity-based bartering, and their own reputation within these borders. The next section provides a discussion of the results in the light of the theoretical background.

Discussion

The results of this study provide new insights into institutionalised practices and expectations that guide actors in the field of literacy and adult basic education in Germany. In addition, findings were generated with regard to the importance of geographical aspects in the networking of actors in the field of adult basic education. Thus, this contribution provides new findings regarding the coordination of action at the regional level of adult education.

By orienting the analysis to the concept of *institutional logics*, particularly to the ideal types of *geographical* and *affiliation-based community-logics*, two different forms of networking among the actors were reconstructed. While relationships within the *affiliation-based community* were established because of a common theme (adult basic education), actors within the *geographical community* established contacts because of their local proximity. An interesting finding was that both forms are relevant for the actors in both cases, which indicates that networking at both thee geographical and content levels is essential for the survival of adult education organisations.

Next, the article examined practices and rules that guide action within the two forms of community. The *affiliation-based community* legitimises its existence through a shared belief in a unifying value. The actors affirm each other and create an atmosphere of belonging. The degree of their investment in the community depends on their intrinsic motivation to contribute. By contrast, within the *geographical community*, relationships are based more on the building of trust and reciprocity. In barter transactions, the actors pool their resources and prove themselves mutually trustworthy, which leads to close and emotional ties in the long run. In order not to lose this status, members invest heavily in their reputation within the community.

Finally, the article focused on the added value that membership of the two forms of community means for the actors. By participating in the *affiliation-based community*, actors gain insights into new developments in the field and can learn from others. The belief in the common value strengthens the actors' self-confidence in their own work. By participating in the *geographical community*, the actors gain access to target groups and can establish adult basic education programmes within their region. Here, they have the opportunity to apply the aspects learned from the exchange within the *affiliation-based community*. Thus, both forms of community are, in different ways, a prerequisite for the further development and professionalisation of the field and a central factor for the social participation and inclusion of people with low literacy. The following section frames the findings in terms of their added value for adult education practice, policy, and research.

Conclusion

Overall, it can be stated that the concepts of *geographical* and *affiliation-based community logics* proved fruitful for this study's analysis of the collaboration of literacy and adult basic education stakeholders at a regional level. Within the framework of the *multiple-case study*, it was possible to reconstruct components of the two forms of community within two actor constellations. The reconstruction enabled a focus on the added value that both forms have for the actors as well as for the field.

This was followed by a classification of the findings in terms of their relevance for educational practice, policy, and scholarship, as well as for the inclusion and social participation of low-literate people.

Practical benefits arise with regard to the networking of adult education organisations. The findings indicate which practices are expected from adult education

organisations in different networking contexts. In this regard, the results of research question one are particularly significant. They point to practices of action that are specifically relevant in the two forms of community. In addition, this study provides insights regarding the benefits that adult education organisations can derive from participating in different networking contexts. In this regard, the results of research question two provide insight, pointing to the advantages of membership in the different forms of community. Depending on the interest (e.g., field knowledge or access to the target group), one or the other form of community is more profitable.

These insights will continue to open up connections for educational policy. In addition to the promotion of networking per se, possibilities are opened for the precise promotion of different forms of networking. If, for example, there is an educational policy interest in progressive professionalisation and awareness-raising in society as a whole, the promotion of cooperative alliances in the sense of an *affiliation-based community logic* would be a good idea. If, on the other hand, there is an interest in promoting innovative strategies of supply development, the support of regional barter transactions in the sense of a *geographical community logic* would be recommended.

With regard to research on continuing education, this article opens up a new perspective on the analysis of networking structures at the regional level through its orientation on the concept of Almandoz et al. (2017). On the one hand, it will assist analyses of processes at the regional level, shedding light on this hitherto little researched level. On the other hand, it brings a theoretical perspective to the debate, which will prove fruitful when applied to other levels and actors. Furthermore, research opportunities exist in the empirical analysis of further ideal types of *institutional logics* (e.g., market and state) in the field of literacy and adult basic education.

Finally, this article demonstrates how different forms of networking can contribute to the inclusion and social participation of low-literate people. By promoting *affiliation-based communities* in adult basic education, innovative and successful strategies will receive broad attention in the field. In *geographical communities*, low-literate people are directly involved in the development of services. This involvement of the target group and their lifeworld is not only critical for the design of suitable educational programmes but also for their social participation and the promotion of social justice.

Declaration of conflicting interests

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