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NETWORKING ON THE GROUND EXPLORING THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN REGULATORY PROVISIONS AND COLLABORATIVE DYNAMICS IN CHILD WELFARE AND PROTECTION ACROSS THREE JURISDICTIONS

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Sommaire

Ce rapport¹ présente les résultats d'une étude comparative internationale visant à identifier les facteurs facilitant et contraignant la collaboration interorganisationnelle dans le domaine des services d'aide et de protection de l'enfance. L'étude comporte une analyse secondaire des données issues d'études qualitatives distinctes, menées dans trois juridictions : Québec, Norvège et Allemagne. La réanalyse des données a porté sur quatre variables composites, à savoir : gouvernance et rapports de pouvoir; confiance et affinités culturelles; gestion des ressources; et leadership. Les résultats de l'étude font ressortir la façon dont les cadres réglementaires propres à chaque juridiction interagissent avec et affectent les rapports de collaboration entre acteurs, fournissant ainsi des éclairages pertinents pour l'étude et l'établissement des réseaux, tant au niveau national qu'international.

MESSAGES-CLÉS

- Dans la mesure où la plupart des facteurs qui influent sur le fonctionnement d'un réseau ont tendance à interagir entre eux, et sont enchâssés dans un environnement institutionnel donné, l'importance qu'on leur accorde peut varier considérablement d'une juridiction — voire d'une initiative de collaboration — à une autre. En conséquence, l'identification d'un *noyau de propriétés génériques* agissant comme des préalables au fonctionnement réussi et durable des initiatives interorganisationnelles semble s'avérer illusoire.
- Malgré les efforts de plus en plus courants déployés par les gouvernements en vue de promouvoir, et parfois de mandater la collaboration, la plupart des réseaux considérés ont été créés et fonctionnent de *façon hybride*. Cette approche pourrait être vue comme étant un compromis pragmatique afin d'accroître la nature consensuelle des rapports entre les organisations impliquées, ou de concilier des dispositions réglementaires contradictoires de la part du gouvernement.
- Notre analyse rend aussi compte du *caractère multidimensionnel des rapports de réciprocité et de confiance* entre les milieux impliqués. Considérées comme des dimensions essentielles d'un réseau, la réciprocité et la confiance peuvent toutefois ne pas être incompatibles avec la poursuite d'intérêts particuliers de la part des organisations concernées. À ce sujet, la complémentarité perçue – c'est-à-dire le sentiment que les intérêts spécifiques de chacun sont pris en compte – peut parfois servir de levier à l'avancement des activités de collaboration.

1 Exceptionnellement, ce rapport est publié en anglais puisqu'il est destiné à un public international. Un abrégé en français est également disponible.

- Une autre observation concerne les *dilemmes relatifs à la mobilisation des ressources* auxquels les promoteurs et membres du réseau sont souvent confrontés. Ainsi, lorsque le soutien financier du gouvernement est insuffisant, la participation des organisations peut être onéreuse. Et malgré que dans certaines conditions une approche créative pour assurer le financement peut mener à une certaine stabilité dans le fonctionnement des réseaux; à plus grande échelle, cette pratique risque de compromettre la qualité et la performance des services.
- Fait à souligner, les initiatives de collaboration nécessitent souvent une ou plusieurs personnes assumant le rôle de *champions* pour promouvoir ou pour faciliter leur fonctionnement au quotidien. Vu sous cet angle, le *leadership* peut accorder une certaine légitimité, autant interne qu'externe, au réseau; tout en affectant ses objectifs et finalités, ainsi que le degré d'engagement des acteurs concernés.

Abstract

This working paper presents results from an international, comparative project aimed at identifying the enabling and constraining factors that underpin inter-organizational collaboration in Child Welfare and Protection services (CWP). The study comprised three jurisdictions – Québec, Norway and Germany– and involved the secondary analysis of data from separate qualitative studies available in each place. Re-analysis of data centered on four variable constructs, namely: Governance and power relations; Trust and cultural affinity; Resource management issues; and Leadership. Study findings illuminate how regulatory frameworks from each jurisdiction interface with and affect cross-agency collaboration capacity on the ground, thus provide insights that are relevant for the study and organizing of local networks within and across jurisdictions.

KEY MESSAGES

- To the extent most factors that bear on network functioning tend to interact with one another and are embedded in a given institutional environment, their relative importance may vary greatly from one jurisdiction (or even collaborative initiative) to another. As a result, identifying a *core set of generic properties* that would act as prerequisites for cross-agency schemes to operate in a successful, sustainable manner seems an elusive endeavour.
- Despite government’s drive to increasingly promote and sometimes mandate collaboration, in all three jurisdictions most networks reviewed were set up and operate in a *hybrid fashion*. This approach may be viewed as a pragmatic compromise geared at building consensus amongst participating agencies, or sometimes at reconciling conflicting government regulatory aims.
- Our analysis also sheds light on the *multi-faceted nature of cross-agency mutuality and trust*. Seen as crucial network ingredients, mutuality and trust may nevertheless not be incompatible with self-interest. Rather, perceived complementarity –i.e. feeling that one’s interests are considered– can at times provide the basis for collaborative activities to prosper.
- A further observation relates to the *resource mobilization dilemmas* that often confront network promoters and members. In situations where government financial support is inadequate, agencies’ participation costs prove challenging. Whereas under certain conditions a creative approach to secure funding can allow initiatives to evolve into a stable pattern; on a larger scale this practice may undermine service quality and performance.
- Importantly, collaborative schemes often require one or a few individuals acting as *champions* to promote them or facilitate their day-to-day operations. In this regard, *network leadership* may convey a sense of legitimacy –internal as well as external– to the initiative, variously affecting network purpose and direction, including stakeholder engagement.

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Introduction

Over the past decade, the proliferation in most advanced welfare states of local service networks (LSN) has spawned a very substantial literature on the subject at both the policy and practice levels (for recent reviews see O’Leary & Vij, 2012; Provan & Lemaire, 2012; O’Toole, 2015). A wide range of issues and perspectives have been covered; yet, in seeking to understand collaboration dynamics in social services, a research concern of enduring significance –and in many respects a still unanswered question– remains: *Given specific policy and institutional environments, what makes networking activity tick?*

Addressing this concern is the more so relevant given that stimulating, and sometimes mandating cross-agency collaboration amongst a wide array of stakeholders frequently represents a challenging endeavour for policy advocates and practitioners alike (Bryson *et al.*, 2015). On the frontlines, some suggest that a number of such initiatives are faltering and seem unable to generate tangible results. Indeed, while operating and power-related challenges abound (Saz-Carranza *et al.*, 2016), “collaborative inertia” is not an uncommon feature of vertically-defined networks (Huxham & Vangen, 2005). But potentially successful experiences have also been singled out in the literature and may show the way forward (Robson, 2012; Packard *et al.*, 2013; Popp *et al.*, 2014). Further, some have expressed the view that “properly resourced and supported, a mandated network can be an essential, effective policy catalyst to address compelling public policy issues” (Popp & Casabeer, 2015: 5). Be that as it may, in various jurisdictions on both sides of the Atlantic, questions have been raised over whether LSN can be steered (i.e. regulated) in a given direction, led to generate a degree of collaboration among participants, and ultimately perform in a synergistic, effective manner. Finding the right ‘fit’ between regulatory provisions from a given jurisdiction and stakeholder collaborative dynamics is another subject where knowledge is still fragmented and debated.

This paper presents results from a comparative, secondary analysis of data on the enabling and constraining factors that underpin inter-organizational collaboration in Child Welfare and Protection services (CWP). It represents component two from a broader research undertaking on LSN, comparing three jurisdictions –Germany, Norway and Québec– and aimed at assessing how CWP regulatory provisions interface and interact with stakeholder interactional dynamics, thus affecting networks operation on the ground².

Following this introduction, we define the paper’s conceptual and methodological criteria and introduce background information on networks’ operating conditions and CWP collaborative schemes from each of the three jurisdictions under study. Next, empirical data on barriers and facilitators to cross-agency collaboration in CWP from Québec, Norway and Germany are presented. The following section provides a comparative synthesis of findings and makes inferences on how regulatory provisions on cross-agency networks interact with and affect collaborative endeavour on the ground. Our conclusions highlights some emerging issues that bear on cross-agency collaborative endeavour and are relevant for the study and organizing of local networks in a broader perspective.

² A first project component aimed at eliciting the ‘normative rationales’ that underpin and inform LSN in Child Welfare and Protection systems (Breimo *et al.*, 2016). The third component seeks to understand (through a vignette based survey) how front-line workers deal with networking issues in a given situation (rather than how this should be done); thus allowing to explore the subjective side of collaborative action.

Methodology and conceptual approach

Why these three jurisdictions for comparison in this area of study? Québec, while sharing with Norway a state-centred approach to welfare service delivery, presents the specificity of having a long history of cross-sector management in human service provision (Gaumer & Fleury, 2009). Concomitantly, its welfare system relies on a well-rooted *économie sociale* as an institutionalized non-statutory partner of the state (Graefe, 2004) –a feature differentiating the province from the rest of Canada as well as Norway, where public involvement is comprehensive, and municipalities are expected to take a strong responsibility for social service provision, often with rather wide mandates. The corporatist legacy in Germany exhibits a deeply entrenched division of work among various public, non-profit and private service providers. Moreover, in contrast to Norway, ‘welfare pluralism’ has long been a reality in Germany –although, as discussed below, cross-agency collaboration proves challenging in many respects (Bode, 2011). Taking account of different *worlds of welfare services* (Stoy, 2014), our project thus covers contrasting jurisdictions, associated with distinct social service architectures and traditions.

All network initiatives considered across the three jurisdictions belong to the same service intervention domain, i.e. Child Welfare and Protection. Additionally, in this paper networks refer to *formalized collaborative arrangements* involving autonomous service providers, public as well as private, and built around the management and provision of services of various kinds under public oversight. In using such generic definition of networks, our study endorses the view that interagency joint-work, embedded in specific national and local contexts, can manifest itself in different forms –in a continuum from less to more comprehensive organizational relations–; to fulfill a range of functions, and involving a varied mix of stakeholders (Popp et al., 2014; Klijn, 2008). Thus, a diversity of formalized CWP schemes, differently named in each jurisdiction

(e.g. teams, networks, collaboratives), were investigated.

Depending on jurisdiction, various data sources were tapped. As regards *Germany*, evidence stems from the research project SKIPPI (*Sozialsystem, Kindeswohlgefährdung und Prozesse professioneller Interventionen*), concerned with the handling of child maltreatment within the German welfare state (Bode & Turba, 2014). The investigation was conducted in five municipalities in urban (n=3) and rural (n=2) areas. Data collection involved a combination of methods, including semi-structured interviews, case file analysis, participant observation (in case discussions and staff meetings) and documentary analysis of relevant materials (i.e. Laws, regulations, contracts). A total of 105 interviews and 12 observation sessions were conducted with representatives from several professional groups and organizations from the CWP field. Interviews focused on retrospective case analysis of intervention processes concerning young children (0-6 years) and where maltreatment had been suspected or reported. In looking at intervention processes, collaborative practices and logics used by professional groups from various agencies and across intervention sectors were investigated and compared, including the operating of formalized networks. Further, network activity was analyzed from two standpoints: collaboration in the event of child-related incidents for which intervention was legally required; and stakeholder collaborative endeavour (voluntary as well as mandated) aimed at improving service delivery.

Concerning *Norway*, data were derived from the project *Collaboration as innovation in Public Welfare Services*, carried out in 2013-2014, and aimed at charting service paths for youth transitioning from CWP to adult services (Breimo et al., 2015). More specifically, the project investigated what happens in the Norwegian welfare bureaucracy when young people turn 18, particularly as regards

service continuity and the interface between various support systems. Data collection was undertaken through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with young adults and sometimes their parents, as well as service workers from municipal CWP and the Norwegian Labor and Welfare Administration (NAV). The latter is a relatively new organization set up in 2005 as a result of the Norwegian Employment Agency and the National Insurance Scheme having merged into a single administration; a reform which, *inter alia*, included the signing of a formal collaboration agreement between various government social services agencies at the local level. It is interviews with service workers and senior management from two Norwegian cities, a big (190,000 inh.) and a small one (20,000 inh.), that constitute the prime data source for this analysis. The former one, where most of the fieldwork took place, is a reform-friendly city actively engaged in trying out new forms of governance, and often a forerunner for what has gradually become national policy. Municipal welfare services offered within the city are split between two agencies: Child and Family, and Health and Welfare. Additionally, service delivery is decentralized according to four districts. A formal agreement has been passed between the municipality and NAV whereby all services are organized in compliance with the same decentralized structure. Agencies also share a common service counter in each district; a *one-stop shop* offering information, guidance and referrals to various agencies.

As regards *Québec*, analysis was conducted by relying on collaborative initiatives investigated by the *Québec observatory of local service networks* (OQRLS) (Archambault & Nadeau, 2012). Out of 62 OQRLS documented networks, four of them dealing with CWP services were selected for their relevancy to the study at hand, and re-examined by centering on facilitating and hindering collaborative factors.³ OQRLS data was gathered by means of semi-structured interviews conducted with a purposive sample of stakeholders, a general network information form completed by a key sponsor, and relevant

network documentation concerning each initiative. A core interview section dealt with networks' operating over time, challenges encountered and optimal conditions for their success. All four initiatives emerged in the 2005-2009 period, in the context of reforms mandating local welfare networks as well as policy geared at enhancing service continuity between the *protection* and *social support* service streams in this domain. In addition, the selected networks are located in rural (n=2), semi-rural (n=1) and urban (n=1) areas which tend to differ in terms of social service availability and scope, collaborative dynamics and local issues at stake. Despite differences, all initiatives aim at improving *preventive interventions*, whether for young children with complex psychosocial problems, youth at risk of suicide, socio-economic disadvantaged children, or troubled youth likely to be referred to the Youth Protection services. Furthermore, all initiatives concern the setting up of *new services* whereby agency collaboration is at its core. As regards network size and composition, all four initiatives are relatively small, directly involving a limited number of partners (4 to 8) from the public and not-profit private sectors. However, referrals are often made to various local or regional organizations interfacing with the network initiative, albeit are not formally enrolled with it.

Despite differences in project objectives and data gathering methods, in all three jurisdictions secondary analysis of data involved qualitative thematic coding and was performed in line with a comparative coding framework agreed upon by members of the team. Given the study's exploratory nature, broad analytical categories or *variable constructs* were considered, namely: (1) Governance and power relations, (2) Trust and cultural affinity, (3) Resource management issues, and (4) Leadership. These constructs cover structural, social capital and agency dimensions prominent in the literature on network functioning. They loosely draw on the *Wilder Collaboration Factors Inventory* developed by Mattessich *et al.* (2001) to assess factors

3 The local initiatives' names have been concealed for confidentiality reasons.

influencing service networks operation; as well as variables singled out in Thomson and Perry's (2006) multidimensional framework. As we shall see, depending on respondents' viewpoints and the network initiative under scrutiny, any of these variable constructs can be seen as having a positive (i.e. facilitating), negative (i.e. hindering), or sometimes neutral (i.e. inconsequential) effect on network functioning. For instance, in a given initiative members' *trust and cultural affinity* can be recognized as a significant 'stepping stone' toward joint-work; in another one its absence or low expression might be indicative of poor collaboration practices; whereas still in others its perceived impact might be marginal.

Applied to available data from the three jurisdictions, the coding frame provided a degree of analytical coherence. However, several caveats should be borne in mind. Given primary studies' characteristics and objectives, the depth and breadth of available information concerning networks' operation varied. As a result, the equivalency and comparability of findings were sometimes difficult to establish. Most important, there are dangers at being conclusive when comparing a small sample of joint-work initiatives from three countries; a feature that qualifies any quick generalization about CWP network hindering and facilitating factors. Be that as it may, the evidence underpinning this study allows for both, a detailed appreciation of CWP cross-agency collaboration *within* a specific regulatory environment, and an accurate approximation of lessons to be drawn when comparing dynamics *across* contexts.

The project is informed by an *institutional logics perspective*, as developed by Thornton *et al.* (2012). Accordingly, organizations, and by extension networks, are conceived of as entities embedded within broader regulatory systems, including systems of meaning and culture; "this embeddedness activates salient institutional logics" within settings of social intervention (such as service networks), enabling or constraining "decisions, practices and actions"(Glynn & Raffaelli, 2013: 175). This implies a multidimensional perspective on networks: On the one hand, networking is subject to *regulation*; on the other hand,

regulation becomes reality only through a *collective enactment of logics on the ground* (McPherson & Sauder, 2013), with this implying contingency. Importantly, jurisdiction-based *institutional environments* (Bryson *et al.*, 2015), including local prior *relational practices* (formal or informal) are deemed relevant.

Networks background and operating conditions

All networks under study emerged in a jurisdiction-specific context (national as well as local), and are an expression of distinctive and evolving collaborative efforts, both of which affect their operating on the ground.

As regards Germany, CWP interagency joint-work has traditionally represented a taken-for-granted –yet *adhocratic*– activity within a pluralistic welfare state. Up until the 1980s, non-profit organisations were entrusted by government with providing services to users deemed to require social support. Adequate public funding for this was secured and service providers' discretionary power appeared high. At local level, municipal authorities and non-profit umbrella organizations handled service infrastructure issues; with social intervention being based on ad hoc provider-Youth Welfare agreements, and professional collaboration defined on a case-by-case basis.

Although this mode of interaction is still widespread; several reforms have led to the establishing of a regulatory framework characterized by increasing competition, enforced cross-agency collaboration and growing bureaucratic control. Additionally, new provisions compel service providers to strengthen collaboration all while improving cost-effectiveness – the latter casting a shadow over the former. Moreover, while provider competition generates economic strains, renewed government efforts aimed at controlling service provision increases transaction costs for all involved parties at the same time it discourages trust-based relations. Thus, tensions do not only stem from traditional cleavages between human service professions or agencies holding distinctive mandates and cultural values, but also from the increasing 'disorganization' of the German welfare state over the last two decades.

As a result, local governance schemes and horizontal provider relations, within and across service sectors, have changed substantially.

Furthermore, the balance of power among stakeholder has shifted, and in so doing, new conflict zones have emerged. Broader and more stringent control mechanisms embraced by government in the social sector create additional obstacles to collaborative work. Overall, professionals operating within the CWP field have to display a degree of inventiveness to manage their day-to-day business, including with regard to binding guidelines to collaborate with one another.

In the case of Norway, the need for increased inter-professional collaboration and service coordination has been a recurring political theme for several decades. Now as before, the main explicit goal is to strengthen cooperation between various actors in the delivery of services, thereby making interventions more holistic and tailor-made to suit the needs of users. However, despite increasing demands for cross-agencies collaboration, Norwegian CWP services remain a fairly closed and self-reliant intervention sector. This is the case even when CWP appears to be the welfare domain in which private provider use is most common.

Significantly, relations between public CWP agencies and private providers, be it for profit or non-profit, are normally contractual and limited in nature. Within the 'maltreatment' service component of CWP, a few collaborative initiatives involving private agencies have emerged; however, these are highly regulated by the core principles of confidentiality that characterize standard practice in the sector. Most inter-agency collaboration encompassing private parties relates to preventive work and the following up of young-adults discharged from child caring institutions. Noteworthy, CWP services have recently been the subject of much negative attention in the media; one complaint being that collaboration with various relevant welfare agencies is often poor. Government, for its part, has emphasized that lack of collaboration is due to the current municipal-state sharing of responsibilities, which supports

and promotes joint-work *amongst* CWP public agencies rather than *across* sectors, including with private providers.

Another concerning organizational issue is the strict separation between child and adult services, which brings about a complete change of care regime when children turn 18. However, in principle at least, children in the custody of CWP authorities are entitled to care services until the age of 23; that which offers a scope of opportunities and some particular conditions for service cooperation. From the perspective of CWP agencies, a wide range of potential allies can be mobilized when it comes to securing the difficult transition to adulthood, including the sharing of responsibility and resources. Adult welfare services, on the other hand, may find it advantageous to collaborate with CWP in order to minimize problems later on.

The situation in Québec is also particular in many respects and stands in contrast to the other two jurisdictions. One initial aspect to consider, having influenced how and in what way collaboration initiatives unfolded over time, is Government's traditional reliance on an interventionist, *dirigiste* perspective to social services steering and delivery. Despite an increase in outsourcing to third-sector providers –on the rise since the mid-1990s–, managed competition between public and private agencies or large-scale contracting out have never gained much traction in the provincial political arena. Instead, the concepts of 'partnering' and 'cross-sector action' have regularly been mobilized, in discourse and practice, to characterize public-private relations and the sharing of responsibilities in service provision. Since the early 2000s, in particular, various public facilities were merged into broad, single Health and Social Services Centers (CSSS in French). These Centers, entrusted with a degree of autonomy and decision-making power, were intended above all as key orchestrators of public-private relations at the local level, including the setting up and steering of service networks.

Inter-agency collaboration in Québec was originally thought of as a bottom-up process, based on voluntary interaction rather than

constrained endeavor, even when promoted and steered by local or regional government agencies. Up until the late 1980s, minimal formal coordination structures were established. In the following decade, however, there's a shift toward 'managed collaboration', as regional coordination plans were promoted by the provincial government. Support for a top-down, 'integrated' system of care was fueled by positive results from several experimental initiatives carried-out in the province during the 2000s. Over time, the combination of various initiatives and reforms would cause two collaboration approaches to coexist, one increasingly hierarchical and constraining –materialized by the CSSS and their mandate to establish local service networks in most social service domains–, and another more consensual and enabling –typified by a set or voluntary, locally-driven arrangements.

A diverse catalog of network initiatives

Concerning collaborative experiences in the three jurisdictions under study, a diverse catalogue of initiatives comes to the fore that could be seen as *indicative* of relevant collaborative issues in the general field of CWP. As regards *Germany*, data relates to network activities at various levels, including the day-to-day work with families entitled to 'curative' social support. More specifically, in the catchment areas where data were collected, different collaborative schemes have developed, aimed at connecting institutions, or providers and 'experts' from various local agencies. Oftentimes, network managers are given a remit to improve coordination, including activities that go beyond actors' day-to-day collaboration around a given case. So-called 'child protection experts' play a significant role in this respect. For instance, in one of the settings investigated, more than 600 agents from various organizations in the CWP field were trained for such managing role. A further networking arena takes place when cross-professional working parties, involving staff from multiple organizations and public bodies, are set up to address complex cases or develop new practices. Many of these working parties have emerged on an ad hoc, voluntary basis –as a product of 'entrepreneurial' social workers, health care professionals, or police officers. Others were prescribed by public regulations to some extent –even when the subject of collaboration may be locally determined. In one of the settings under study, a working party was initiated by a regional authority responsible for youth welfare to tackle substance abuse problems in families. Following the authority's instructions, networking activities began by inviting and encouraging all concerned local players to participate –a necessary step for raising public funds. However, as the working party moved forward, its scope was expanded by the regional authority, thus associating a broader range of local CWP agencies. In this context, networking can be viewed as a decentralized, proactive process geared at meeting relevant parties concerns on the ground; yet, a process

evolving in line with, and largely shaped by, formal regulation.

Various intermediary network configurations can also be found, whose format and objectives vary widely from one region to another. In some places, for instance, 'township conferences' (*Stadtteilkonferenzen*) set up by local youth welfare personnel, will often trigger a dynamic of open exchange amongst a range of stakeholders involved in CWP. Furthermore, non-profit service providers sometimes assemble 'local consortia' (contemplated in the *Social Code*) to agree on a joint-work agenda, including the definition of common policies. In CWP these consortia are not widespread – although in one of the settings investigated a substantial proportion of the local Child Protection budget was collectively managed by one of them. Formal collaboration amongst not-profit agencies is more prevalent at the regional, Länder level, where federations of welfare associations are an institutionalized partner of public bodies when it comes to social welfare provision. A variety of these intermediary collaboration structures are local, pilot projects established in response to new government directives. Of note, in the settings under study, pilots generally comprised local youth welfare offices, specialized non-profit agencies, and peripheral organizations such as health care agencies. More specifically, it is in the area of 'early prevention' (*Frühe Hilfen*) that these initiatives have developed the most, largely as a result of fixed-term funding provided by a national program.

In the case of Norway, CWP services have traditionally been more reluctant to involve non-government agencies, except through formalized agreements and contracting. Yet, in recent years, a marked growth in networking arrangements has taken place, entailing different degrees of collaboration intensity and formalization. Some are local, bottom-up initiatives, while others are models traveling from one municipality to another, including from abroad.

One example is the so-called “Family meetings”, already underway in a number of municipalities. Depending on the issues at stake, besides the concerned family, meetings typically involve a school or kindergarten, CWP agencies, the Public Health Centre, the School Psychology Centre, and the Child and Youth Psychiatry services (BUP). While municipalities host such meetings, it is usually the BUP that plays the most central role. Family meetings are based on a philosophy of *simultaneusness*; thus, as a means to avoid any form of time-consuming referrals and waiting lists.

Another example, also involving private partners, is the “Foyer”. A Foyer is a social enterprise, first established in Aberdeen in response to concerns about youth homelessness and unemployment. In the Norwegian context, a Foyer is a partnership which may include CWP, the Youth Outreach Office, the Municipal Housing Department, NAV, the Refugee Office, private house owners, a security service company and various enterprises and employers. The Foyer provides accommodation with support to former homeless and at-risk youth, while helping them link to a range of services (i.e. health, counselling, employment, etc.).

Other initiatives are the ones encountered in the cities under study. The most formalized example is perhaps the OSK-teams (*Offentlige servicekontorer*) associating NAV with municipal Child protection, and Health and Welfare offices to deal with complex cases requiring multiple provider interventions. These networks are mandated, in the sense that competent local authorities are required to establish them within their respective districts. They are regulated through municipality-NAV agreements, although some discretion is granted concerning their organization and mode of operation. Despite OSK-teams’ collaborative nature, no formal decision-making structure was envisaged for binding all agencies together. Hence, when an intervention plan is established, this is less the expression of a deliberative, collective process than the articulation of a set of decisions made by each agency individually.

A more horizontal collaborative example is provided by the “Action teams”, aimed at preventing school dropout. Action teams are also formalized and exist in all four districts investigated; however, compared to OSK-teams, they operate on an *ad hoc* basis. Their composition is comparatively larger; besides the three agencies mentioned earlier, they include high schools, as well as various follow-up service providers –public as well as voluntary– with which links are more loosely defined.

Aside from these initiatives, four interdisciplinary collaborative networks –one in each district– were established in one of the areas under study associating all local stakeholders concerned with children and youth –namely, high schools, child protection services, health visitors, low threshold outreach services, ambulant teams and youth centers, the municipal culture administration, churches and congregations, the police, night watch services and even representatives from the local business community. However, to the extent these networks were established after fieldwork completion; they were not subject to data collection.

In the small city chosen for the project, collaboration practices are less formalized; however, perhaps surprisingly, this seemed to lead to a higher number of private actors being involved. Interviewed service workers interpreted this as the result of non-public actors possessing expertise and resources that otherwise would not be available. However, the collaboration experience was not equally valued by all stakeholders involved. For instance, one caseworker describing collaboration in a positive light stated: “We are people who have collaborated together for years, we are old in this game, and we know each other very well.” But others claimed that often networks were not diversified enough: “sometimes a bigger team, a bigger network is needed in order to find out what actions to take.”

Other collaborative initiatives, prevalent in all municipalities in Norway, are built around persons benefiting from an ‘individual care plan’ (*Individuell plan*) –which is considered a legal right for everyone in need of long-term,

complex assistance. The individual care plan was an organizing tool envisioned by Government in response to negative user feedback, which characterized service provision as fragmented, random, discontinuous and lacking user involvement. It is contemplated by various health and social service laws, including the Child Care Act. The establishing of such plans requires a collaboration structure being formed around users by all concerned professionals and service agencies, sometimes including private agencies and informal caregivers. An appointed case manager oversees client care processes and works collaboratively with all parties involved. In many respects, therefore, these relatively stable initiatives can be viewed as citizens-centered 'mandated networks'.

As far as *Québec* is concerned, a range of collaborative arrangements have emerged in CWP that are tied to and partly shaped by the sector's particular service architecture. In this respect, it is important to bear in mind that *Québec's* Child Protection system was established in line with the Anglo-American tradition which tends to emphasize a legalistic and adversarial approach to concerns about child maltreatment. Accordingly, CWP services are organized into two discrete streams: one that is built around the Child and Youth Protection Centres (CJ), commissioned with tackling potential abuse situations; and another that is an integral part of the CSSS infrastructure –mentioned earlier– to provide services to low-risk families and troubled youth.⁴ A wide range of agencies interface with the CJ at the regional level and partake in the provision of various services, both public –especially the CSSS, educational institutions, and the judiciary/police– and private –such as community organizations, group and family-type homes, other.

Collaboration within this constellation of actors has been promoted through sector-specific 'child protection' policies, but also broader initiatives directed at the CSSS infrastructure –the 'troubled youth' program in particular.

However, depending on service stream, the *aims* of collaboration, the *schemes* envisaged and their *instrumentation* are not fully consistent with one another, thus adversely affecting joint-work effectiveness on the ground. More specifically, from a CJ and 'child protection' perspective, the focus of collaborative endeavour is the establishing of a seamless system of care across the 'protection' and 'support' service streams and, in so doing, seeks to facilitate the caring of *all* at-risk families and children. From a CSSS and 'troubled youth' services perspective, in contrast, networking is viewed as a mechanism for the co-production of services with a range of community partners, and for entrusting local actors with "the exercise of a population-based responsibility." In addition, CSSS-based service networks are less centered on clinical tools and users per se than on the building of effective inter-organizational links, and the re-casting of serendipitous collaboratives involving a complex web of community and cross-sector providers in accordance with a government-defined service nomenclature. That said, collaboration initiatives have varied enormously from one locality to another, sometimes following (mandated) government dispositions, other times at the fringes of such blueprints and as a result of stakeholders' entrepreneurial efforts, and still other times –depending on funding streams– as a combination of both. The exception is perhaps CSSS-CJ collaboration which is largely governed by standard service protocols and guidelines; the goal being to harmonize practices that vary widely across all *Québec* regions. In addition, experimental, university-sponsored initiatives, aimed at better integrating services from both service streams are also underway in a selected number of regions.

As regards schemes' structure, it is worth noting that networks such as the ones examined by the OQRLS have not significantly altered the shape or formation of CWP local *institutional architectures*. In this sense, neither of the networks questioned the divide between *social support* and *protection* services prevalent in the province; nor did they radically redefine the mandate of each service stream.

⁴ Following a new province-wide reform implemented in 2015 (i.e. Bill 10), Integrated Health and Social Service Centers (CISSS in French) have been created by merging several CSSS and hospitals together into the same institutional structure within a given region, sometimes including Youth Centers. However, the reforms' actual effects on the traditional separation between support and protection services streams described here, including CWP cross-agency collaborative practices are still difficult to ascertain (Collin-Vézina et al., 2015; Goyette et al., 2014).

Collaborative barriers and facilitators: Making sense of networking activity on the ground

Drawing upon the data sets from the three jurisdictions, the following sections provide a systematic overview of barriers and facilitations for collaboration according to the four-construct coding frame described above. Reanalysis of data is quite illuminating in that it provides a series of snapshots illustrating the development and actual operating of several CWP collaborative arrangements within and across jurisdictions. However, as noted earlier, networks reviewed should be understood in connection to the specific institutional environments in which they emerged, including the regulatory provisions governing them.

Network governance and power relations

- First, as regards *Québec*, processes leading to the *initiatives' creation* were dissimilar: three of them were steered by a CSSS, and a fourth one emerged in a rather serendipitous manner, through a multi-agency negotiated approach. Whenever the network initiative was a reflection of a CSSS *clinical project* –hence, in line with the mandated networks reform of the mid 2000s– schemes were viewed as a mechanism for the co-production of services with a range of local actors entrusted with “the exercise of a population-based responsibility”. The focus therefore was on articulating service providers’ mandates and resources in a more effective manner and around a particular set of interventions. By contrast, in two of the initiatives –particularly the serendipitous one– networks had a more clinical and professional bent, inspired by a particular Child Welfare intervention approach used elsewhere.

That said, all networks developed *various management mechanisms*. For instance, in all four cases a steering committee,

made up of management from a few or all participating organizations, pilots the network. A government agency, however, plays a pivotal role in three of them. Some initiatives are also affiliated with a local *round table* comprising a larger number of stakeholders, which fulfils a strategic, advisory role. Additionally, in three of the initiatives a cross-agency team was set up as a means of providing and coordinating clinical interventions on the ground.

Governance mechanisms tended to evolve between the time the project was being developed and promoted, to its actual operating. For instance, in certain cases a transitional working group was created at the outset so as to better conceptualise the initiative and bring together relevant stakeholders. A common linkage strategy used by public agencies consisted of reaching out to partners and finding a mechanism to distribute responsibilities –seen by members as a way of “instilling a sense of shared leadership” to the still-emerging collaborative.

In three initiatives formal *service agreements* between all concerned network parties were also established. Agreements delineated goals, mutual responsibilities and service paths to be followed; however, they also served to stimulate members’ meeting of the minds and to standardize expectations.

Power imbalances were not an explicit concern, even when some respondents stated “the need to work towards a more equal distribution of tasks and roles” as the basis for enhancing collaboration. All the same, shared management (i.e. power) arrangements were worked out in all initiatives. Significantly, in at least two cases

interdisciplinary teams were set up within a community organization; a decision partly aimed at defusing potential non-profits concerns about a loss of organizational identity or being manipulated for other objectionable purposes.

- If we now focus on governance mechanisms in *Norway*, agreement on, and not least, compliance with basic parameters and the 'rules of the game' seem vital to networks' smooth operation and outcomes. *Important norms* underpinning collaboration seem to be fairness and a commitment to "genuine cooperation." And when participants get a feeling that initiatives begin to "lose steam and stall," the guiding compass of cooperation may falter.

The OSK-teams investigated, which encompass two municipal agencies and the state-run NAV, have succeeded differently in achieving effective cooperation. There are several reasons for this, not least that stakeholders' degree of trust (see following section) varied across initiatives. But to some extent, trustworthy relations are reflective of differences in how participants' *cooperation behavior was shaped by regulation*. In this respect, participants' assigned mandates may play a significant role. Regarding NAV, central management tends to decide on the cases to be prioritized, which in some offices get precedence over a common local agenda.

But *power-related variables* (i.e. economic resources, prestige, and expertise) also prove to be central to networking. NAV, for instance, command many resources, which, together with prestige from its public status, entrusts the agency with significant decision-making authority. In large measure, however, power is a relational feature tied to the control someone exerts over something others may have an interest in. A network, for instance, is comparatively more important to municipalities (who have a wider remit) than to agencies such as NAV. This unequal balance of power is noticeable in all OSK-teams.

Stakeholders' *resistance to mandated forms* of collaboration is sometimes present as well. In formalized networks, like the OSK-teams, this expresses itself through a dutiful yet disinterested participation, if not verbal opposition –depending, it seems, on the extent to which collaboration is promoted by higher authorities.

- Evidence from *Germany*, in turn, indicates that governance and power relations are of particular importance as well. An initial observation is that, depending on the initiative, member *participation motives* seem quite diverse, above and beyond service improvement considerations. Thus, in one of the local settings under study, stakeholder organizations sometimes expressed an interest in forming service alliances primarily for political reasons, i.e. to build a common front and speak with one voice within a given policy arena. The corporatist legacy of the German welfare state creates institutional incentives for providers to organize in advocacy-oriented groups. However, some interviewees reported an interest in keeping newcomers out of such collectives as a means to protect a mandate for delivering services. In other cases, politically-motivated behavior tied to funding proved relevant in network dynamics as well. For instance, participants to a working party involving the local Youth Welfare office mentioned that criticizing the latter was often avoided due to financial concerns.

Stakeholder *resistance* to mandated forms of collaboration is also present at times. Thus, as reported by a network manager, the creation elsewhere of positions similar to hers had triggered fears of parallel roles being established, including within public administration settings. Moreover, "being accountable to yet another public body" or feelings of "being bossed around" by various sets of directives were considered problematic. Colleagues within her organization were unsettled by fears of additional external interference and role confusion. Besides that, some interviewees also observed an "authoritarian culture

of conversation” in network meetings. Apparently, collaboration resonates with top-down control in this context.

Occasionally, steps were also taken to try and *reorient a mandated arrangement* toward a more consensual one in which collaboration goals and activities are jointly decided by members. For instance, a leader in such network explained that while strict “conformity with official guidelines [was initially necessary] to raise the money” earmarked for the project –concerned with drug addiction–; as time went by she thought about actually doing “things that would be helpful”, hence, engaged in activities closer in line with what she and other stakeholders considered most relevant and useful for the targeted population. This draws attention to the opportunities for *pragmatic adjustments* that might be present and are sometimes pursued by members within top-down arrangements. More specifically, to the extent network policies ‘from above’ may create a set of participation dilemmas among relevant stakeholders; playing along with the rules or getting around them are not uncommon strategies.

In some instances, *creative coping strategies* were devised by stakeholders to deal with hierarchical network policies concerning them. One such strategy consisted in selectively abiding or neglecting to engage in government-sponsored activities (e.g. regularly missing meetings; not complying with decisions; showing passivity in discussions; other). An alternative one entailed deflecting from the network’s original purpose, thus incorporating objectives other than the ones set by national or regional regulation. In such situations, initial goals were gradually transformed, sometimes substantially, through open stakeholder discussions and the initiative of a network manager.

Participant observation in group meetings allowed for the identification of particular network *management mechanisms*

and practices used in CWP. Some such meetings resembled a transmission belt for hierarchically defined government guidelines. For instance, a training session was organized whereby local welfare department representatives introduced ‘best practice’ models and tried to impart distinctive professional attitudes to participants –some of which felt as though they were in a ‘classroom’. Lectures given by visiting experts served a similar purpose. In other meetings, communication was more interactive –e.g. when discussing a case for which child protection interventions were needed. A third variety of networking activity consisted of open-ended, brainstorming sessions in which participants would address in tandem an assortment of issues –in some respects akin to situations of ‘organized anarchy’ described by Cohen *et al.* (1972). Altogether, these network gatherings suggest various managing mechanisms were employed to steer collaboration on the ground; their application being contingent on participant power relations –e.g. having the capacity to structure meetings’ content and format vs. possessing enough clout for manipulating or sidestepping a given agenda.

Trust and cultural affinity

- For most *Québec* network members, the establishing of service links was not new or contrived even when initiatives responded to a *public mandate*. There’s little to indicate that members felt pressured (e.g. not-profits) or participated for opportunistic reasons (e.g. large public agencies) other than addressing a service need. Practitioners were usually quite familiar with one another owing to service referrals or their association with specific local activities. And this *familiarity* seems to have played a crucial trust-building role. As reported by one respondent: “Before arriving with a project like this, cooperative relations should be already underway. You do not establish a trusting relationship in the context of a new project; you establish a new project in a relationship

that already exists.” Likewise, a manager stated: “Our complicity, our previous collaboration, our credibility were already established and mutually recognized. Our shared findings and experience... All of this no doubt contributed to the project’s implementation.”

The importance of building *trustworthy relations as a prerequisite* for the establishing of effective collaboration is somewhat at odds with the hierarchical nature of recent policy directives on networks. For public providers entrusted with a mandate to set up networks, translating these directives into workable action entails performing a delicate balancing act; one that requires “making pragmatic adjustments to some extent.” As put by one CSSS manager: “The term *collaboration* is a much vaunted part of our mission as a service provider. But working well with partners requires we don’t push our views on others. It means making the best out of it for everyone. Sometimes a network sponsor [such as a CSSS] must be ready and willing to make difficult compromises.”

Different venues were used to *foster closer relations* and reinforce trust. For instance, transitional working groups set up to define the initiative’s main parameters, stakeholders consultations or affiliation with a local round table, provided a unique opportunity for partners to exchange information and bring each other’s expectations into line. In any event, *infusing a sense of mutuality* was regularly viewed as an indispensable network ingredient. Furthermore, one of the challenges regarding mutuality was members’ willingness to *forego their own interests* at the expense of goals established in the collaborative: “Transparent interaction between members is paramount. [Participants should] avoid ‘pulling the cover’ in their direction... Collective goals should be placed before their organizational or personal ones.”

Closely linked to the establishing of *trustworthy and collaborative relationships, bridging organizational cultural differences,*

particularly between public agencies and non-profits, was vital for getting the collaborative under way. In several initiatives, drawing practitioners out of their “comfort zones” concerning intervention approaches, routines and attitudes appeared challenging. As stated by a CSSS practitioner: “In the beginning it was a culture shock. Not only were we no longer working within our respective organizations and traditional mandates, but we were sitting across from each other, holding our own ideas, yet faced with situations as complex as they were before” Non-profits in particular feared an *organizational identity loss*: “Identity differences and confrontation of intervention perspectives were particularly challenging for stakeholders during the first year of implementation (Community organization director).”

However, to the extent networks took time to become operational, deeply-rotted differences in intervention perspectives, norms and expectations could generally get ironed out. In this respect, network intervention protocols, regular clinical supervision and steering committee meetings played a key role in helping to forge shared views. Interestingly, in some initiatives endorsing beforehand a particular intervention philosophy seems to have served as a rallying point, providing members with a stronger base from which to build a collaborative.

- As far as *Norway* is concerned, interviewees tell about *personal relations being developed through participation* in networks. An important factor seems to be the knowledge obtained about other parties, which may serve to supersede biased perceptions and prejudice. One interviewee talks about how such mutual understanding and the personal relations established through formal networks also contribute to enhance the informal cooperation between the parties

Nevertheless, interviews also contain stories about suspicion and distrust. It even seems as though *trust and distrust*

sometimes coexist in a given network; both mutual understanding and suspicion may be present, and shift depending on the situation or the constellation of actors involved. It would also appear that some partners are considered either more trustworthy than others or, on the contrary, always viewed with some suspicion. Municipal actors are generally more suspicious of state agencies than other municipal counterparts, and NAV (state) is generally regarded with a degree of suspicion by municipal partners.

Struggles over resources seem more prevalent amongst municipal partners than between municipalities and the state. But NAV is a powerful agency whose own agenda is defined in a hierarchical manner. Even when local NAV-offices participate in local networks, they are primarily accountable to their own 'primas'. There is a general feeling among municipal interviewees that NAV primarily seeks to protect their own interests. At the same time, responsibilities often overlap, and NAV command many resources that municipal agencies can only access through cooperation. These dynamics illustrate the potential for local collaboration; however, they also point at power imbalances, which sometimes turn *mutuality unto an ambivalent endeavor*.

This leads to another aspect of mutuality that emerges from the analysis of networking initiatives in Norway, namely, the fact that partners are bound together not always (or only) through a sense of shared values and preferences but, interestingly enough, also *through complementary differences*. As put by one interviewee working for an OSK-team: What happens, she says, is that "we learn about the possibilities that exist within other sectors that we didn't know about. It means that the space of opportunities becomes extremely enlarged." And such "possibility room" means everyone could benefit from a larger set of working instruments. Hence, mutuality rests on the potential for collective goal achievement and the fact that individual partner's success benefits everyone.

It therefore appears that, at least within the Norwegian public service context, self-interest is not incompatible with mutuality. Rather, what we observe is a development whereby self-interest is often tacitly accepted, that which turns collaboration into a *generic activity*, as opposed to one requiring a degree of organization. One interviewee, for instance, characterizes the OSK-team as a "great opportunity for case-managers working alone with difficult cases to be able to address them with professional managers from different fields, with different competences and loads of experience." The problem, however, is that "it is very difficult to get people to use it." Although mutuality and self-interest are not necessarily inimical principles; lack of mutuality and trust may prevent collaboration processes from getting established.

That said, overcoming myths and prejudices that agencies might hold about one another is a precondition for developing a collaborative relationship. Differences with regard to legislation and governance structure can also be difficult to handle within a network setting. Some interviewees even point at differences in professional opinion as an occasional obstacle. Still, differences in experience and competence, and even in cultural patterns of thought, *are most often regarded as assets* for collaboration by Norwegian interviewees. This is probably because the networks under study differ from those in the Québec sample both regarding setup and objectives, as they meet occasionally, though regularly, to deal with common, cross-sector and complex problems.

- Turning now to *Germany*, we can infer from our material that trust-based relations are just as crucial when it comes to the setting up and running of network schemes. As previously indicated, major stakeholders engage in collaborative initiatives for a number of reasons; primarily, though, as a means to improve CWP service organization and

delivery. However, interacting with actors from other professions or organizations outside their own sector is sometimes fraught with challenges, one of them resulting from what a respondent calls *language differences* (i.e. professional and organizational cultural barriers). To bridge this gap members have to become adept at translating 'foreign' concepts into their own organizational and professional world –some even speak of the need to develop an intervention Esperanto of sorts.

That said, *regular network interaction* can provide valuable opportunities for getting acquainted with others and embarking on a fruitful exchange of ideas; a prerequisite to build up trusting relationships with relevant stakeholders. Indeed, difficulties in collaboration are often interpreted as problems with 'particular individuals' within the network. Conversely, successful partnerships are sometimes associated to members' personal characteristics, including their level of commitment vis-à-vis working with others. As put by one interviewee: when dealing with the police or a Youth Welfare office "[working well] is a matter of who you come across." A Youth Welfare manager, for his part, argued that getting a personal impression on relevant actors is often necessary before deciding on whether and how to collaborate in a given context. In addition, *informal contacts* amongst partners are seen as an advantage. For instance, doctors facing a potential case of child maltreatment may at times sidestep protocols and confidentiality norms by contacting relevant professionals directly. On the whole, it seems as though the existence of regular, one-on-one contacts is a stepping stone for consolidating a network and making it work smoothly.

Moreover, in situations where such communication channels do not operate well, a high dose of *inter-professional diplomacy* is required. For instance, a child psychiatrist explained that Youth Welfare workers, quite protective of their decision-making autonomy, often behave

defensively when intervention suggestions are made concerning a cared-for child. In such situations, overcoming resistance and working collaboratively is only possible through intensive personal interaction and compromising beyond formal protocols. Network managers, in particular, fulfill a key role in this respect given their center stage positioning and remit to facilitate members' expected level of interaction.

In a similar vein, Youth Welfare officers would take a favourable view toward network interaction, particularly as regards private stakeholders –who are often suspicious of oversight and funding roles–, and in doing so seek to improve their reputation. This is obviously related to power relations and resource management issues. We also found instances in which various stakeholders would compete on *leading* a collaboration initiative. A representative of a public health office reported that it proved important to 'fly one's flag' within the complex network infrastructure in a given local setting, with the result of various stakeholders talking at cross-purposes in many instances.

To be sure, most interviewees held that networks were a helpful vehicle for improving professional standards, therefore highlighted the importance of getting to know other stakeholders within the CWP 'jungle'. That said, we found instances in which *mandated networking was perceived as a threat* to existing patterns of inter-agency collaboration. For instance, a local Welfare Department initiative geared at creating community-based support facilities by integrating new partners and modifying collaboration objectives was antagonized by a group of service providers who, having worked together for a lengthy period of time, had already built close collaboration ties. The inherited routine had contributed in forging common strategies vis-à-vis the local Welfare Department all while avoiding detrimental stakeholder competition. Hence, faced with the mandated initiative, 'Old networkers' perceived the

‘formalization’ of collaborative action as conducive to retrenchment dynamics and top-down governance. This indicates that building ‘trust’ and establishing ‘mutuality’ is considered essential by non- statutory stakeholders but also potentially fraught with conflicts, to be closely scrutinized.

Resource management issues

- Concerning resources, a constraint on network development often highlighted in *Québec* is the fact that, despite a policy drive geared at stimulating and sometimes mandating local collaborations, new moneys needed to implement and sustain such government-inspired initiatives were never provided. Not surprisingly, in all networks under review various financial streams had to be tapped to support their establishing and long-term operation. Sometimes partial financial support was secured through an accessory Ministry assistance program (not necessarily geared at networks); in others, ad-hoc financing was obtained from a regional government body; whereas still in others a fund-raising program was used. Financing from multiple sources was nevertheless the norm.

Also, despite a *new* service being created, interdisciplinary teams were normally formed by reassigning professionals already working in a member organization. Last, professional training sessions, offices and equipment needed were provided free of cost by the participating member organizations. “We began with a zero budget, but secured donations from the Municipal Housing Bureau, furniture was provided by the Youth Protection Office, and two practitioners and a doctor were re-assigned [to the network]. We agreed to call on a special funding pool; everyone has contributed.”

In any event, *creative problem solving* was generally needed to pull together all necessary monetary and personnel resources. Financial shortcomings often led to delays in the networks’ start or inability to adequately respond to service demand.

However, whereas some saw funding shortages as “the projects Achilles heel” and a source of concern; others seemed no longer concerned. As stated by a Child-protection manager: “Usually collaborations with community organizations do not last very long. But in the case of this project the partnership has already lasted since 2002. Common budgets have gone up steadily, and partner interactions have improved over time. We’ve already received several partnership awards.” Still others are of the opinion that “management commitment is paramount and comes before financial security.”

- As in *Québec*, in *Norway* networking endeavor has *seldom been endorsed by extra moneys*; something that several interviewees found quite unfortunate. Although increased collaboration required no more than participants’ time, financing may represent an issue, especially so concerning young care leavers being transferred from Child Protection to community-based social services. One OSK-team member stated that “young adults are sent over to us when they are 18 years and ten minutes old. This further leads to some tough processes of bargaining. If we only had joined budgets, this could all have been avoided”. Further, some interviewees questioned whether the time invested was worthwhile: “Sometimes I look at the meeting agenda and decide there is not much for me to contribute in here; and there is no point in just sitting and listening, and there’s no point either in making these meetings bigger than they have to be.” As mentioned above, NAV is a large organization controlling a sizeable proportion of public welfare expenditure. Its introduction was a valued government initiative giving the agency a high degree of decision latitude, even concerning its own objectives –something other agencies are not capable of. Municipal interviewees stressed that NAV often focused on self-evaluated goals. In this respect, one OSK-member said that “NAV is only occupied with processing applications for grants

and services; they do not use any resources on guidance and counseling.” She further regretted that these tasks, considered less ‘countable’ and outside the official statistics, were often left to the other team members.

‘Action teams’ members, on the other hand, reported few resources or management collaboration obstacles. A reason for this is probably their more ad-hoc and ‘low threshold’ way of networking. Fewer economic resources are at stake and the decisions made are of a more practical nature. As highlighted by a member: “we don’t count numbers on these meetings; there is not much number counting.” When asked about the prevailing positive attitude towards these teams, a respondent pointed out that “members are very engaged and really interested in making it work.” Another reason is a prevailing “good chemistry” between members. Also, the Action-teams have a common target population; seen as an important factor holding collaborations together.

- As far as *Germany* is concerned, analysis shows that networking initiatives often present relevant actors with a predicament, particularly so regarding access to financial resources. As illustrated by a regional community-based network (known as *Sozialraumorientierung*) which required added funding from the local administration and the establishing of new service facilities (e.g. community cafés for young mothers); the initiative was initially well received by many stakeholders, in that it was viewed as a step forward toward creating synergy throughout the Child protection system. However, to the extent public authorities were concurrently planning budgetary cuts for ordinary services to families in need, the same network was also equated with a government-led strategy for economizing on child protection services. Interestingly, some service providers embarking on the program appeared little concerned by this context in that they anticipated opportunities to

consolidate or even enhance their own position in the ‘social market’ through their participation in community-based projects. Others felt compelled to go along with the collaborative given their perception that on the whole it would represent an innovation with little negative effect on service quality. Oftentimes, subsidies were accepted by independent providers while adopting a ‘wait and see’ attitude. That said, many service providers were quite skeptical, seeing in networking a ‘Trojan horse’ of sorts, essentially aimed at service retrenchment. For them, the credibility of the network policy in question was low.

Ambiguity between intrinsic motivation to embark on networking on the one hand, and the impression of this strategy being promoted for economic, instrumental reasons on the other, seemed to be a general pattern throughout the settings we investigated. Interviewees explaining their perspective on inter-agency collaboration often placed an emphasis on the added value for their own organization. Participating in networks, it was stated, helped to promote one’s own image in a competitive environment. As put by an independent service provider: “There are networks where you simply have to be onboard in order to show your face as a provider.”

In addition, as a matter of principle some service providers in *need of referrals* were keen to interact with the local Youth Welfare office as well as with other providers. In this respect, a representative of a non-profit service provider indicated that her organization was obliged to regularly interface with the Youth Welfare office simply because this was the place where local policies were operationalized “otherwise, we could close, I mean, if we do not support the conversation with the office.” Likewise, a midwife explained that being part of a network made sense to her for many reasons, but that this was also an occasion for advertising services; for her, it was important that “families know; well,

this is an offer I may want to use one day.” In the same way, an agent from a for-profit service provider stated that it was essential to keep contact with Youth Welfare workers by “saying hello whenever possible”.

Various CWP actors felt that mandated collaboration was driven by New Public Management (NPM) policies that strongly impacted on resource allocation. In this regard, a respondent from a non-profit provider involved in child protection schemes argued that networking was imposed by external bodies without any thoughts on the *participation costs*. In his eyes, to engage in extended and multiple partnerships without increasing available resources was rather “absurd”. He expressed a general concern that networking was more than just “knowing each other” and should include conceptual work across fields and organizations. For collaboration to ‘become alive’, he posited, an enormous investment is generally needed; failing which cross-agency synergy would be unrealistic. Major CWP stakeholders considered that current network policies promoted by public bodies often generated excessive demands negatively affecting their day-to-day activities. For some, these demands had the potential to ‘paralyze’ providers already facing growing service demand. Under these conditions, participation in networks was perceived as a cumbersome duty to which one complied for symbolic reasons or because of pressure from purchasing bodies.

Importantly, oftentimes networks were *perceived as opportunities* or even indispensable arenas to ensure a profession’s or an organization’s particular interests. It seems that in a ‘disorganized welfare mix’ networks provide incentives to ‘tap’ information without disclosing relevant knowledge. While extended collaboration or participation in network meetings were often considered demanding, cross-agency interaction appeared as a solution to the CWP ‘business’ dilemma, i.e. being ‘on one’s own’ but also dependent on others. By

seeking ‘close interaction’ with a selected range of partners or just being visible, CWP stakeholders pursued idiosyncratic rather than ‘public good’ goals. In this context, German CWP networks can be seen as a hybrid form of collective action, with mutuality overlapping an egocentric perspective centered on economic and resource management issues (i.e. funding, accountability, reputation in the contract business, etc.).

Leadership

- As regards *Québec*, multiple actors were normally tasked with developing and managing network initiatives. Noteworthy, several projects were *led by clinician-managers* –i.e. practitioners holding managerial responsibilities– able to draw on their expertise for setting the network up. This leadership conferred greater legitimacy to the initiative than if it had been brought about by managers less cognizant of realities on the ground. The centrality of clinician-managers was even more apparent for initiatives focusing on a particular intervention philosophy, whereby their credibility ensured stakeholders’ *buy-in* at every stage of the process.

That said, however, several respondents emphasized the importance of a *shared leadership* approach. As stated by a CSSS community organizer: “Different leadership styles can combine and intertwine... On the one hand, there is leadership in connection with *the model*, which has its own objectives, its philosophy and approach. Compliance with it is a requirement [and NN’s] leadership in this regard has been important. On the other hand, each of us has our own idea of what this model means and entails. Through several meetings partners ironed out a common vision. On the whole, this *shared leadership* provided by members of the Board of Directors [...], contributed to a collective, locally relevant response.” Along similar lines, a Child-protection manager stated; “We mapped

out a common vision [for the network]. Thus, the initiative is a good example of *shared leadership* between all partners; from the strategic to the intervention levels, all decisions are taken by mutual agreement.”

- Issues related to leadership seem to be less important in *Norway*, at least as regard the OSK-teams. Again, this could be attributed to properties of the networks under study. By and large, the legitimacy and mandate of the OSK-team is rooted in political decisions, as they are composed by managers from different public agencies meeting on an equal footing. Formal leadership is problematic, as no one would have formal authority over the other. Nonetheless, there are differences between the teams, which presumably relate to the establishment of informal leadership roles. Action-teams also lack formal leaders, but here we can clearly see the importance of someone ‘taking the lead’ and showing the enthusiasm to maintain and further develop the network.
- Concerning *Germany*, *leadership arrangements* can have a mitigating impact in the face of collaboration dilemmas and stakeholder dynamics, although our evidence does not provide very precise insights in this respect. More specifically, in many of the network meetings mentioned earlier, formal authority did not translate into effective leadership, as Youth help office actions were often perceived as top-down dominance. Further, concerning joint-work within mandated networks, coordinators seemed to encounter limited partner compliance; that which hints at their formal leadership being questioned by members. However, in the case of voluntary, cross-professional working parties (depicted above), informal leaders were usually essential for collaboration to evolve beyond what formal authorities seemed to mandate.

Regulatory provisions and cross-agency collaboration dynamics: A synthesis

The distinct ‘network stories’ which emerge from our three jurisdiction analysis provide various insights on how regulatory frameworks interface with and affect cross-agency collaboration capacity on the ground. The ‘stories’ have important implications for CWP network policy and practice that should be considered before drawing a more general, comparative conclusion of emerging trends and issues.

In looking at *governance arrangements* first, it is noteworthy that despite differences all networks under study were set up and operate in a hybrid governance fashion. In Québec for instance, such governance model appears to have been the means by which local actors, eager to engage in a collaborative, were able to reconcile a hierarchical mandate, particularly vis-à-vis public providers such as the CSSS, with the expectations, interests and reservations of various stakeholders favoring a more relational, and horizontal approach. Network management mechanisms show that usually local government agencies still sit in a pivotal position; however, steering committees set up to run the initiatives tend to associate most, if not all network organizations, thus encouraging a greater distribution of roles and decision-making capacity. In addition, formal service agreements were often established to delineate service responsibilities, and in doing so, served to frame members’ expectations –including the risk of manipulations. Power asymmetries and related tensions may remain, but were rarely mentioned or identified as a concern. The same could be stated about oversight provisions, which do not seem overly constraining; nor were they singled out as influencing member dynamics.

Importantly, schemes’ organizational shape as well as the gradualism used to implement them, have to be considered when exploring

the governance of networks. Québec is again a case in point. None of the networks analyzed modified in any significant manner existing service architectures. In many ways, finding a niche between the support and protection service streams –yet not questioning the divide– could be seen as a pragmatic organizational strategy likely to have contributed in gathering support from relevant stakeholders, particularly government agencies. Likewise, a step-by-step implementation approach, based on previous smaller-scale projects from other regions provided a firmer foundation for the networks to emerge.

Regarding Norway, the mandates established for the OSK- and Action-teams were very precise with respect to composition and setup, whereas aims were more vaguely stated or even implicit in some respects, thus allowing for a degree of governance hybridity. Further, unlike in Québec or Germany, collaborative schemes were largely conceptualized and processed in a prescriptive manner by others than those actually participating in them. Despite this, both OSK and Action-teams were given considerable leeway in how to accomplish their respective set of objectives; including scheme’s design and operating mode.

Germany’s ‘story’ on the other hand sheds light on a configuration whereby inter-organizational collaboration has developed concurrently with a growing control culture and greater competitive relations. Given that demands for enhanced collaboration intersect with other policy agendas such as budget cuts or enhanced government control processes, stakeholder grievances about imposed network agendas and joint-work overload are not uncommon. As a result, major stakeholders often face contradictory imperatives or appear trapped in a paradox between collaboration and rivalry –including

the fact that some stakeholders may exploit collaborative initiatives for their own ends. Moreover, experiences from Germany suggest that unbalanced power relations persist despite network interaction. Stakeholders who concede keeping a low profile when meeting public administration officials bear witness to this. Against this backdrop, stakeholders may be reluctant to 'buy-in' to the argument that networking may represent a panacea for improving CWP service delivery.

Whether in Québec or Norway, reconciling apparently contradictory tendencies – such as in Germany between collaboration and competition – was not an issue for the initiatives studied. In the former in particular, CWP service privatization or provider rivalry for public funds or contracts have never been on the public agenda. That said, as in Germany, in Québec multiple collaboration mandates and requests may sometimes create a sense of “task overload” amongst relevant stakeholders.

Concerning *cross-agency trust and cultural affinity*, bridging differences was a clear challenge to most initiatives reviewed in either jurisdiction. In Québec, this challenge concerned how to prompt members to think critically and outside of their 'organizational boxes', all while finding a common service denominator for them to collaborate effectively and in meaningful ways. Bridging this gap took time and effort; more so given fears of an organizational identity loss voiced by some. However, various network development activities appear to have provided the opportunity for members to forge common views. Interestingly, where the collaboration was centered on a particular, proven intervention approach, sense making and cultural difficulties appear to have been less of an issue. In addition, mutuality and trust, a dimension much cited in the literature on networks, were also frequently singled out by respondents as a necessary condition – and a prerequisite – for the initiatives' emergence and sound operation. As outlined earlier, although all of the initiatives developed in the context of policy-mandated networks, in Québec members were generally quite familiar with one another; many of whom had

already established trustworthy relations. And such familiarity no doubts facilitated the development of reciprocal relationships based on trust. It also contributed in forging a degree of collegiality within the network, including a sense of common purpose beyond individual agendas.

Interestingly, as Norway's experiences suggests, although trust remains a needed collaborative ingredient, its distribution might be unequally spread through the network, in the sense that trust can coexist with a degree of suspicion and relational ambiguity. Accordingly, trust and distrust are often simultaneously present; with some actors being regarded as more trustworthy than others depending on issues tackled and situations. The reason for this may be that, at least in the case of Norway, networks are established not only on the basis of shared values, but also perceived complementary differences. In this respect we see that members' singular, and potentially conflicting interests can nevertheless aggregate into a higher, collective purpose; a major stepping stone for cross-agency collaborative work. One additional lesson arising from the OSK-team example in Norway concerns the difficulty low-ranking, participating professionals often encounter when making network decisions on behalf of their own organizations – a difficulty that *inter alia* led to their replacement by agency directors.

Moreover, as shown by our evidence, collaborative schemes' setting up and running often require one or a few individuals to perform *leadership roles* within and across organizations. Whether formal or informal, leadership therefore variously affects network purpose and direction, including stakeholder engagement. This comes clearly to the fore when looking at Québec initiatives; several of which were championed or led by clinician-managers who could build on their field experience, but also and most important, convey a greater sense of legitimacy – internal as well as external – to the network being promoted. In addition, flexibility in the way government regulation envisioned collaboration in Québec also allowed for adaptation and compromise on

how schemes, once set up, would be managed and operate. Accordingly, respondents from three initiatives underscored the importance of a shared management approach as a means to strengthen members' connection and better align cross-organization efforts. By contrast, in Norway all networks under study consisted of collegiate units formally associating a set of 'equal' partners. To the extent leadership played a role, it should be understood in relation to the informal positions adopted by members showing a degree of enthusiasm or greater abilities in facilitating dialogue. Moreover, the experience in Germany suggests that besides leadership roles, developing informal ties between professionals or individual agents from different agencies may be a pre-condition for collaboration to become sustainable on the ground.

Concerning *financial and material resources*, their availability, or lack thereof, can be a serious stumbling block, more so given that government's promotion of networks is seldom supported by a formal commitment to adequate funding. In Québec, securing funding was especially challenging at the projects' inception phase; in the four cases under study sponsors had to go the extra mile and proactively invest in fund-raising from various sources, mostly public, but sometimes also private. Furthermore, long-term funding and availability of personnel remain one of the main sources of concern for the networks' continuity. Data from Norway corroborates that resource shortages and stakeholder unequal access to them may cause difficult conditions for collaborative endeavor to emerge and fructify –albeit less so than is the case in Québec. Importantly, in Norway, struggles amongst municipal partners over resources, or underpinning norms of fairness and equal distribution of burdens were at times a source of tensions and operative difficulties. More generally, the evidence from Germany is indicative of the fact that, tied to power imbalances and resources, the institutional context –i.e. legal frameworks and approach to public management– may have an enormous impact on the incentive structures underlying collaborative efforts.

Conclusion

Having synthesized findings on how regulatory provisions appear to interface and impinge on collaborative capacity in the three jurisdictions considered, we conclude by highlighting some emerging issues that bear on cross-agency collaborative endeavour more generally. Insofar as each of our country-based 'stories' fits into and expresses particular institutional environments (Bryson *et al.*, 2015) –hence, extrapolating from them would be speculative at best– conclusions drawn center on key themes relevant for the study and organizing of local networks.

A first observation concerns whether a bundle of *common properties* would act as prerequisites for cross-agency schemes to operate in a successful, sustainable manner. Indeed, implicit in much of the literature on the subject is the search for such *generic, enabling qualities* –work that we partially drew on for the purpose set out in this study (Thomson and Perry, 2006; O'Toole, 2015). As shown in our analysis, however, most facilitating or constraining features that bear on collaboratives' functioning not only tend to interact with one another, but their relative importance may vary greatly. Further, schemes scope and scale of objectives appear to be key mediating factors in understanding how features impact on collaborative endeavour. The point to emphasize in here is that although a set core of properties –such as the ones identified in our empirical data on CWP networks in Quebec, Norway and Germany– is a necessary step toward enhancing our understanding of collaborative dynamics and functioning; properties in and by themselves may be insufficient means for improving cross-organization collaboratives. 'Common denominators' for effective collaboration are dependent on the *adequate interplay* between relevant factors in a given context.

A second, related consideration refers to the *governance mechanisms and processes* whereby collaborative schemes are predicated across contexts. In this regard, all the while acknowledging that in many jurisdictions collaboration in CWP has increasingly been promoted through top-down, hierarchical processes; such governance mechanisms appear *highly encultured and mixed* in many respects. Hence, 'mandated collaboration' may have different meanings depending on jurisdiction; including the scope for adjustment, adaptation and negotiation that is provided for to relevant actors.

Accordingly, our three-jurisdiction 'stories' hint to a *variety of hybrid collaboration arrangements* rather than a uniform pattern concerning the way government enforces the 'network agenda' and various stakeholders interact with one another. Furthermore, sometimes governance mechanisms can significantly inhibit or embroil the capacity of major stakeholders to embark on inter-agency collaboration. For instance, under conditions of competition or institutional rivalry as found in Germany, 'taking the role of the other' (in the sense of Mead, 1934) would be often confined to the spotting of opportunity structures relevant to one's own mandate and economic survival. Further, forging relations to various institutional partners may be used mainly as a means to 'tap' information without disclosing much in return. Having said that, even under adverse regulatory circumstances stakeholders on the ground can find ways to overcome inter-organizational rivalry or distrust, and to discover complementarities, including a broader collective purpose –as suggested by the Norwegian evidence and one German initiative. Moreover, the development of joint-work activities at arm's length from government or through the 'translating' (Callon, 1986) of open-ended and vaguely defined mandates –as seen in Québec– may provide good opportunities for non-instrumental collaboration. At the same time, evidence from Norway shows that enforcing government mandates can be a major, effective driving force for local cross-agency schemes to emerge.

Thirdly, our analysis sheds light on the *multi-faceted nature* of cross-agency *mutuality and trust*; seen in the literature as crucial for service collaboration to emerge. Overall, networks can be prime

vehicles for building reciprocal service linkages, opening up to other ‘languages’ and perspectives, and ultimately overcoming barriers for cross-agency collaboration. Yet, as stated above, self-interest is not always incompatible with mutuality, nor is it an obstacle for collaboration to prosper; rather, perceived complementarity –i.e. the feeling of one’s interests being promoted by collaboration– can provide the basis for collaborative activities. In any event, for this to occur informal collaboration at street level, the building of personal relationships, or diplomacy may be needed given that various stakeholders and professionals (holding different responsibilities and mandates) tend to exhibit idiosyncratic attitudes and behaviours –an observation found in the literature for a long time now (Head, 2014; Carey & Crammond, 2015).

Whereas experience with a given organizational or professional culture can be ambivalent, other factors may be helpful when it comes to creating and maintaining a sense of mutuality. In this regard, although bridging cultural differences is often a significant challenge overall, our evidence shows that trust-based mutuality can be fostered through various means, namely transitional working groups set up to define the initiative’s main parameters; the conducting of stakeholder consultations; the power-brokering of network entrepreneurs; the framing of a common collaborative vision, other. Moreover, the growth in shared leadership appears to enhance sustainable trust-building relations; whereas the leading role of clinician-managers contributes in ensuring a collaborative’s required internal or external legitimacy.

A further observation relates to the *resource mobilization dilemmas* that often confront network promoters and members in a given regulatory environment. To the extent that the establishment and long-term operation of networks requires considerable investment, both in financial and personnel time; in many situations ‘participation costs’ often prove a challenging, difficult to resolve issue. In addition, relevant stakeholders normally have to invest in collaboration while not knowing its actual pay off in advance. Whereas a creative, piecemeal approach to secure funding and other needed resources can make network initiatives evolve into a stable pattern under certain conditions; the fact remains that on a larger scale such piecemeal approach would likely produce shortcomings in service delivery and the quality of collaborative social intervention as a whole.

What is more, in many quarters policies geared toward ‘enforcing collaboration’ can be perceived as a Trojan horse for achieving other objectives than strictly improving joint-work. Where mandated networking overlaps with NPM-driven policies (see the situation in Germany), stakeholders’ primary concern in participating in a collaborative may be to ensure their economic survival at the expense of service improvement considerations –networking policies main rationale. Accordingly, what stakeholders experience under these conditions is in stark contrast with the ‘textbook’ message concerning cross-agency collaboration; that is, creating opportunities for overcoming idiosyncrasies and rivalry in the face of social service fragmentation. Overall, the adequate *alignment* of regulatory provisions, network configuration (i.e. objectives and architectures), and stakeholder dynamics on the ground appear crucial for cross-agency collaboration to thrive.

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