

Franz Koranyi & Nina Kolleck

The role of out-of-school organizations in German regionalization programs: A qualitative content analysis of opportunities for participation

Abstract

This article explores the role of out-of-school organizations (OSOs) in regionalization programs from an educational governance perspective. Although OSOs are included in processes of regionalization and it can be assumed that they take part in the regional organization of school education, there is still a lack of scientific studies in this area. In particular, a systematic analysis of opportunities available to OSOs for participation in the regional coordination of action is needed. Building on a qualitative content analysis of 104 documents of 21 German regionalization programs, we seek to contribute to closing this research gap by analyzing constellations of different actors and their coordination mechanisms based on the rule structure of regionalization programs. We find that OSOs can actively engage in actor constellations within advisory boards, educational conferences, and networks. However, their participation is mainly based on negotiation mechanisms indicating that they have a relatively high degree of interdependence with the actions of other actors.

Keywords

Out-of-school organizations; Regionalization; Educational governance; Qualitative content analysis

Franz Koranyi, M.A. (corresponding author) • Prof. Dr. Nina Kolleck, Department of Education and Psychology, Freie Universität Berlin, Habelschwerdter Allee 45, 14195 Berlin, Germany
e-mail: f.koranyi@fu-berlin.de
n.kolleck@fu-berlin.de

Die Rolle außerschulischer Lernorte in deutschen Regionalisierungsprogrammen: Eine qualitative Inhaltsanalyse der Beteiligungsmöglichkeiten

Zusammenfassung

Dieser Artikel untersucht die Rolle außerschulischer Lernorte (ASL) in Bildungslandschaften aus einer Educational Governance-Perspektive. Obwohl ASL in Regionalisierungsprozesse einbezogen werden und ihre Mitwirkung an regionaler Bildungssteuerung angenommen werden kann, mangelt es bislang an Studien auf diesem Gebiet. Insbesondere bedarf es einer systematischen Analyse der Beteiligungsmöglichkeiten von ASL im Kontext regionaler Handlungs-koordination. Wir wenden uns dem Forschungsdesiderat zu und präsentieren Ergebnisse zu Konstellationen unterschiedlicher Akteure und deren Koordinationsmechanismen im Rahmen programmspezifischer Regelungsstruktur. Dabei stützen wir uns auf eine qualitative Inhaltsanalyse von 104 Dokumenten aus 21 Programmen. Unsere Analysen zeigen, dass es ASL möglich ist, aktiv an Akteurskonstellationen im Rahmen von Bildungsräten, Bildungskonferenzen und Netzwerken teilzunehmen. Allerdings konzentriert sich deren Beteiligung dabei hauptsächlich auf Verhandlungsmechanismen, was auf eine relativ starke Interdependenz mit Handlungen anderer Akteure hinweist.

Schlagworte

Außerschulische Lernorte; Regionalisierung; Educational Governance; Qualitative Inhaltsanalyse

1. Introduction

For the past two decades, the regulation of German school systems has been subject to major reforms aiming to improve educational quality (Altrichter, Heinrich, & Soukup-Altrichter, 2013). As such, regionalization is understood as the emergence of new systems of coordination at a regional level involving a variety of actors (Benz, 1998; Berkemeyer & Pfeiffer, 2006; Emmerich, 2016), and is driven forward by various political and administrative initiatives as well as civil society organizations.¹ Efforts to implement such systems or regionalization programs are referred to in the literature as local or regional educational landscapes (*lokale/regionale Bildungslandschaften/Bildungsregionen*)². Based on the rationale that education benefits from such a coordination of educational resources in terms of available learning opportunities, regionalization programs aim to initiate networks of regional actors (Kolleck, 2015).

1 We understand 'region'/'regional' as specifically defined administrative areas in Germany (e.g., regency [*Landkreis*], city [*kreisfreie Stadt*], municipality [*Gemeinde*]), whereas 'local' describes the situation on-site.

2 In this article, we provide German translations in brackets to clarify the use of terms.

Within this process of regionalization, the role of extracurricular or out-of-school organizations (OSOs)³ in education has changed considerably, with many programs extending the concept of education in a way that brings the individual into focus and includes all learning opportunities in everyday life and throughout the course of life (Association of German Cities, 2007; German Association for Public and Private Welfare, 2007).⁴ According to this understanding, education for children and youth takes place not only in formal settings (e.g., schools), but also in non-formal and informal ones, such as out-of-school organizations and neighborhoods, respectively (Kolleck, 2015). From this broad range of learning opportunities, recent studies suggest that out-of-school activities have a positive effect on “the cognitive, social, and emotional development” of children and youth, thus implying an enhanced educational outcome (Vandell et al., 2006, p. 43).⁵ Accordingly, OSOs’ involvement in regionalization programs is particularly important for implementing an extended concept of education (Kolleck, De Haan, & Fischbach, 2012).

What remains ambiguous, however, is how the rhetorical inclusion of non-formal learning opportunities relates to OSOs’ role in the regional organization of school education. We expect that OSOs are involved both in terms of providing non-formal learning opportunities and in terms of engaging in the coordination of action. In this paper, we investigate the consequences for OSOs by applying a governance perspective and taking a closer look at potential interdependencies.

Previous governance analyses of regionalization programs have primarily focused on local authorities (Otto, Sendzik, Berkemeyer, & Manitius, 2012; Ratermann & Stöbe-Blossey, 2012a; Rürup & Röbbken, 2015; Zymek, Wendt, Hegemann, & Ragutt, 2011). The involvement of other actors, such as schools (Emmerich, 2016) and local organizations (e.g., youth welfare organizations) (Täubig, 2011), is also addressed. However, OSOs are rarely the object of governance analysis (e.g., see Rürup & Röbbken, 2015). This is surprising given that the extended concept of education is becoming commonplace (e.g., BMBF, 2005) and that there are many programs as well as research projects focusing on regional governance arrangements both in Germany and internationally (see Baumheier & Warsewa, 2009; van Ackeren, Brauckmann, & Klein, 2016). In particular, a systematic analysis of OSOs’ opportunities for participation in the regional coordination of action is needed, and it is this gap we hope to address here.

3 Because the category of OSOs covers a broad variety of organizations (e.g., associations [*Vereine*], charities, libraries, theatres, etc.) we generally define them as local collective actors which provide non-formal learning opportunities to children and youth outside official school curricula (see Heath & McLaughlin, 1991, p. 624).

4 This change in the concept of education is also present in the context of all-day school expansion in Germany (e.g., Coelen & Otto, 2008; Mack, 2008). Regionalization programs are partly connected to all-day schooling in terms of supporting their development (see program 7 and 33 in Appendix) or framing all-day schools as places where various learning opportunities can be engaged in (see program 4 and 16 in Appendix). For an extensive account on the relation between all-day schooling and the involvement of OSOs in Germany see Arnoldt (2011).

5 For an overview of evidence regarding the US see Eccles and Templeton (2002) and regarding the UK see Pensiero and Green (2016). For a theoretical exploration of out-of-school learning in the German context see Grunert (2012).

We approach our research objective from an empirical-analytical governance perspective (Altrichter & Maag Merki, 2016). Therefore, we operate on the premise that the transformation of regulation in school education is coordinated by means of various modes applied by interdependent social actors in specific constellations (see Figure 1). Explained differently, *the organization of school education by regional actors* can be operationalized as

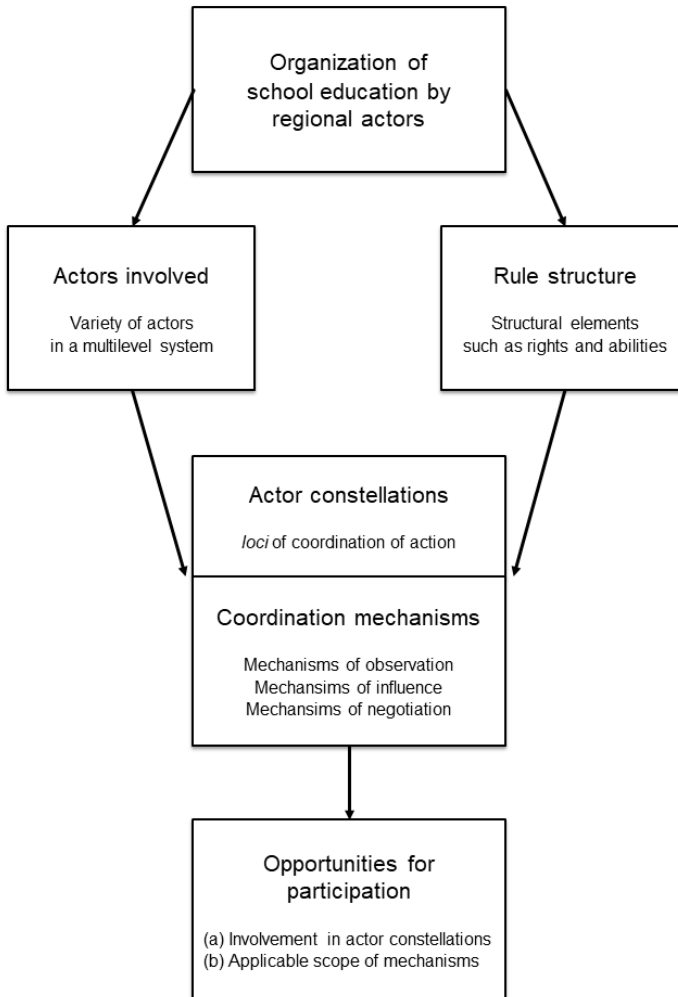
- actor constellations with specific coordination mechanisms based on
- the *rule structure* of regionalization programs
- involving *a variety of actors* in a multilevel system.

Because we conceptualize regionalization programs as ways of implementing new systems of coordination, our focus is on program initiators who introduce forms, routines, and norms to the regional level of school education. During this implementation phase of regionalization programs, actors may not encounter equal *opportunities for participation* in the organization of school education (Kierchhoff & Heinrich, 2013). We define such opportunities for participation as a specific actor's (a) *involvement in actor constellations* and (b) *the corresponding scope of available mechanisms*. In other words, specific mechanisms are institutionalized within actor constellations, which can have major mid- to long-term implications for OSOs' prospective role in regional governance (Nikel & Haker, 2016). Therefore, it is highly relevant to address the following main (MQ) and sub-questions (SQ):

- MQ: Which opportunities for participation are made available to OSOs through the organization of school education by regional actors?
- SQ 1: In which actor constellations can OSOs be engaged?
- SQ 2: What scope of mechanisms is applicable to OSOs within those actor constellations?

In the next sections, we address these questions as follows: First we explain our theoretical approach to opportunities for participation based on an empirical-analytical understanding of educational governance. Then, in section three we discuss methodological considerations concerning the selection and qualitative content analysis of the official documents on which our analysis was based. Lastly, we present research results and summarize the main arguments and conclusions relating to OSOs as well as outline prospects for further research.

Figure 1: Systematics of analysis based on an empirical-analytical governance approach (on the basis of Altrichter & Maag Merki, 2016).



2. Governance in German regionalization programs

2.1 An empirical-analytical understanding of governance in educational science

Offering no generally accepted definition of governance but rather drawing on various perspectives, we want to clarify our understanding of this concept. Whereas Pierre and Peters (2000, p. 7) describe the concept of governance as “notoriously slippery”, over the last decade German educational scientists have carved out an approach to empirical research on the steering of social systems, thereby seeking

to provide general and objective answers to how coordination (potentially) takes place (Altrichter & Maag Merki, 2016).⁶ We draw on this empirical-analytical understanding of governance, primarily analyzing “interaction and modes of collective action” referring to ways in which social actors coordinate their action within complex multilevel systems (Benz & Dose, 2010, p. 26).

Our reasoning for applying an empirical-analytical approach is as follows: It generally allows for an analysis of forms of social order in a specific field (Schimank, 2007a). In other words, we can use the regionalization of school education as a specific context for analysis. Furthermore, it enables us to include a wide spectrum of actors including both private and civil society actors (Emmerich, 2016). Instead of assuming that school systems are regulated by a single dominant actor (e.g., the state), action and interests are considered to be coordinated by many interacting actors. This notion is particularly important, precisely because we aim to extend our analysis to the diversity of involved actors and particularly OSOs. Moreover, we apply theoretical concepts from this approach as heuristic tools within our systematic analysis (e.g., actor constellations or coordination mechanisms). However, it is worth noting that this spectrum of concepts in governance research is more extensive than that which we introduce in the following (Kussau & Brüsemeister, 2007).

2.2 Analyzing the organization of school education by regional actors

2.2.1 Interdependencies between actors based on rule structure

We begin by describing a major premise of the governance perspective. The necessity of coordination originates from interdependencies between actors with the implication that each capacity to act is dependent on resources distributed among actors (Benz, Lütz, Schimank, & Simonis, 2007). In line with neo-institutional theory (March & Olsen, 1984), interdependencies emerge within the complementary relationship between *actors* and *rule structure*. Involved actors – both individuals (e.g., parents, teachers, etc.) and collective entities (e.g., the government, administrations, associations, etc.) – are located within “structural elements” such as rights and abilities to make decisions (Altrichter & Maag Merki, 2016, p. 10). However, actors themselves form and establish certain structural elements, and therefore action is not determined but rather framed by rule structure (Benz, 1998). This interrelationship between agency and structural elements is one of continual influence.

There is evidence concerning both actors and structural elements of regionalization programs. To begin with, regionalization initiatives can be understood as

6 The governance discourse within educational science has given rise to a growing number of publications and, particularly, the book series ‘Educational Governance’. Still, most theoretical concepts originate from political science as well as sociology (see Benz & Dose, 2010; Otto et al., 2012).

trans-sectoral tasks involving various actors (Bormann, 2013) that strengthen interdependencies between various organizations (Emmerich, 2016). Whereas local authorities seem to be particularly important actors in terms of the coordination of action in regionalization programs (e.g., Otto et al., 2012), schools (Emmerich, 2016) and other local organizations (Täubig, 2011) also potentially benefit from the introduction of new steering mechanisms in terms of an enhanced involvement in regional governance. Regarding structural elements, research identifies the establishment of additional formal bodies – such as steering committees (*Steuerungsgruppen*), educational conferences (*Bildungskonferenzen*), and educational bureaus (*Bildungsbüro*) – that frame rights and abilities of involved actors (Berkemeyer & Pfeiffer, 2006; Otto et al., 2012).

2.2.2 Actor constellations as central unit of analysis

Central units of analysis in regards to interdependencies between actors within a specific rule structure are *actor constellations* (see Figure 1). Being both structured by rules and involving actors coping with interdependencies, the concept of actor constellations allows us to interrelate actors and rule structure (Benz et al., 2007). Furthermore, they can be analyzed as multileveled phenomena because actors engage within them on various levels and from various sectors of society (Kussau & Brüsemeister, 2007). Because actor constellations are the *loci* of actual coordination of action, the concept is of high relevance to our analysis.

Despite this relevance, knowledge regarding actor constellations in regionalization programs is limited. Research on the introduction of all-day schools states that local authorities have an elevated position in introduced bodies whereas political actors are restricted in their representation (Rürup & Rübken, 2015). Furthermore, research on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) identifies constellations that bridge the gap between state and civil society actors within regionalization programs, within which civil society organizations “use” state structures to influence the coordination of action (Hamborg, 2016, p. 234).

2.2.3 Coordination mechanisms in actor constellations

Systematizing observations of coordination in actor constellations, we apply the heuristic of mechanisms which are broadly defined as specific and regular processes of coordination between actors (Benz et al., 2007). Because of the high complexity of social coordination, most constellations are adequately described by a combination of mechanisms whereas one of these may be dominant (*ibid.*). To reduce the complexity of identifying specific mechanisms we differentiate three *basal mechanisms* following Schimank (2007a, pp. 35–42, 2010):⁷

7 There is also a fourth mechanisms, “exit”, in which actors loosen or terminate their interdependency with other actors by leaving the constellation (Schimank, 2007a, pp. 35–36).

- Most basic constellations apply *mechanisms of observation* in which actors reactively adjust in unilateral or mutual processes towards the observed action of others. Mechanisms of observation are present in constellations in which actors are not interacting to influence or negotiate but rather where the perception of what someone does or leaves undone coordinates action. Therefore, the capacity of single actors to control the situation is relatively low because perceived action may constantly change.
- Based on observations, action in constellations can be coordinated by *mechanisms of influence* due to unequal availability of competencies and resources. Influence is present in constellations if some actors actively engage in the coordination by means of resources and competences (rules, incentives, and sanctions) aiming to affect other actors' intentions. Depending on the distribution of resources and competencies, the capacity of actors to control the situation may be relatively high.
- Based on observation and influence, a third mechanism in constellations is *negotiation* which results in bilaterally negotiated, accepted, and therefore binding arrangements. Whereas the respective actors may not engage equally in negotiations, all of them must be willing to coordinate their action based on the negotiated agreement. Actors have a higher level of situation control in comparison to observation; however, because agreements are reached through multi-actor interaction, control by any single actor is lower than in influence constellations (Schimank, 2010, p. 308).

Research on coordination in regionalization programs indicates a mix of mechanisms. Generally, findings from ESD research suggest that the introduction of new settings can allow for different mechanisms to alter the way in which coordination takes place (Nikel & Haker, 2016, pp. 174–178). Moreover, research on regional governance found settings to be relatively voluntary and self-steering rather than based on hierarchical coordination (Berkemeyer, 2010; Zymek et al., 2011). Therefore, the dominant mechanism is assumed to be negotiation; only constellations of states and local authorities were found to coordinate their actions by means of influence (Rürup & Röbbken, 2015).

2.2.4 Implications of actor constellations with specific mechanisms for OSOs' participation opportunities

Referring to our main research question, OSOs' involvement in actor constellations with specific coordination mechanisms has considerable implications. Due to the institutionalization of rule structure during the implementation of regionalization programs, actors are involved in different actor constellations and have varying scopes of mechanisms for the coordination of action. Consequently, although actors (e.g., OSOs) are involved in regionalization programs, they may not have equal *opportunities for participation* (Kierchhoff & Heinrich, 2013). We therefore suggest that opportunities for participation can be explained by referring to divergenc-

es in (a) OSOs' involvement in actor constellations and (b) OSOs' scope of coordination mechanisms. From a governance perspective, the concept of opportunities for participation has not previously been used. However, we introduced it inductively during our empirical analysis, thereby allowing us to precisely describe the role of OSOs in regionalization programs.

Regarding opportunities for participation, program initiators present regionalization programs as directing more autonomy and self-organization to schools as well as introducing networks involving schools and OSOs, thereby allowing them to develop their own solutions and collaborations in regional education (Jungermann, Manitiuss, & Berkemeyer, 2015). Additionally, empirical investigation of actor constellations in ESD indicates that civil society organizations benefit from new constellations because they provide actors with alternative coordination mechanisms (Hamborg, 2016) and, accordingly, OSOs' participation opportunities seem to be expanded in comparison to pre-regionalization. However, Zymek and colleagues (2011) find in the context of school autonomy that influence mechanisms are primarily present in the domain of federal state governments and regional school boards (*Schulträger*). Consequently, the current state of the art does not provide a sufficient account of OSOs' opportunities and thus, we seek to contribute to filling this research gap in the following.

3. Methods

Our main research interest was to explore OSOs' opportunities for participation in regionalization programs based on an in-depth description of their positions in actor constellations and the corresponding scope of coordination mechanisms available to them. We therefore adopted a qualitative and explorative research design based on official documents published by program initiators to reach a relatively high level of generalization based on the inclusion of all relevant programs in Germany, and conducted a qualitative content analysis to approach the data deductively based on the introduced theoretical concepts while engaging inductively with the documents' contents (Mayring, 2015).

3.1 Documents

We based the selection of programs on the systematization by Jungermann et al. (2015) from early 2013 which included all 16 German federal states. In line with our focus on school education, their case selection included programs explicitly involving schools (*ibid.*, p. 17).⁸ We identified all programs, did further online research for additional programs, and updated the list to 35 regionalization pro-

8 Regarding this criterion, it is important to note that – similar to early or adult education – 'school education' was understood as an education level, which in this case includes both primary and secondary school levels. However, this criterion did not restrict our selection to 'school-centered' programs.

grams. Because our main objects of research were OSOs, we scanned all program descriptions to identify those deliberately involving OSOs in their aims or main concept (21 out of 35 programs; see Appendix).

We mostly collected documents via official program websites at the end of May 2016, however, in two cases we requested these directly from programs (programs 9 and 19). We categorized the collected material as program descriptions ($n = 29$), information material ($n = 19$), articles and collected editions in the context of programs ($n = 5$), official announcements as well as calls for applications ($n = 12$), press announcements ($n = 2$), documentations and reports ($n = 30$), evaluations ($n = 4$), and PowerPoint-presentations ($n = 3$). In total, we included $N = 104$ documents with a volume of 4,643 pages.

In addition to quantity we methodologically emphasize the specific nature of our material because we exclusively included program initiators' documents as non-reactive artifacts to analyze their intentions regarding German regionalization programs (Bowen, 2009). Consequently, our analysis highlights program initiators' description of actors, rule structure, and actor constellations as well as coordination mechanisms. Moreover, those documents themselves can be regarded as means of coordination by program initiators. We argue however that whereas programs develop in ways that offer more or fewer opportunities for OSOs, those documents contain the intended institutional design because program initiators conceptualize forms, routines, and norms for the coordination of action. Thus, our analysis can exclusively account for the potential availability of participation opportunities for OSOs in regionalization programs.

3.2 Qualitative content analysis

To relate governance theory and data in a sensible manner, we deduced a category system based on concepts of educational governance, and paid specific attention to the categories *actors*, *rule structure*, *actor constellations*, and *coordination mechanisms*. However, we were open to inductively introducing new categories during analysis as proposed by Mayring (2015). First, the operationalization of key categories and sub-categories was based on definitions in the literature on an abstract level. Secondly, during the coding process we specified definitions and added sub-categories to the coding system. For example, being aware of structural elements such as formal bodies (Berkemeyer & Pfeiffer, 2006), we introduced this category and respective sub-categories during the analysis (e.g., educational bureau).

Following a methodologically controlled and systematic procedure according to Mayring (2000, 2015) and Kuckartz (2016), we then structured the documents' content based on our category system. To guarantee objectivity and reliability we first constructed a coding manual including an introduction for coders and listed the categories in combination with definitions, typical examples, and specific coding rules (Mayring, 2000). Secondly, we examined all documents regarding their relevance to the theme of governance. In a third step, we coded the material

choosing single sentences as basic coding units. Fourthly, we paraphrased the coded passages to reduce the extensive material (Mayring, 2015). We structured and summarized each sub-category and repeated the procedure for our main categories. Finally, the paraphrases of each category were analyzed according to both program-related and category-related considerations, thereby allowing us to interpret our data in terms of specific regionalization programs and the overall phenomenon of regionalization (Kuckartz, 2016).

Regarding quality criteria, we discussed our procedure, the coding manual, and category definitions with pretest coders to ensure internal validity. In terms of coding reliability, we furthermore conducted a test prior to coding of both intra- and intercoder reliability in June and July 2016 based on the developed manual (Mayring, 2015). In a first step, a single coder coded the sample twice leaving a week between the first and the second coding. The test of intracoder reliability produced a coefficient of $r_H = .85$ which correlates with a good reliability (Bos, 1989). Secondly, to test intercoder reliability, two coders coded the sample independently and produced an acceptable coefficient of $r_H = .75$. For both tests, Holsti's method was applied using the software PRAM (Holsti, 1969; Neuendorf, 2002).

4. Results

4.1 Overview of involved actors in regionalization programs

Reflecting the premise that action is coordinated by a variety of actors in a multi-level system (see 2.2.1), we present an overview for German regionalization programs in Figure 2. Firstly, most actors are located at the regional level (*Landkreis, kreisfreie Stadt, Gemeinde*). For example, not only various bodies of the local authority (e.g., the office for education, youth welfare, etc.) and political positions such as the mayor and district administrators are involved, but also schools, OSOs, and organized civil society (e.g., trade unions, associations [*Verbände*], welfare organizations, etc.). Secondly, state actors such as education authorities (*Schulämter*)⁹ as well as public-private partnerships such as coordination bureaus relate to the regional coordination at an intermediary level. Actors at this level may span several regions or even several federal states. Thirdly, at state level, state ministries and government-proximate institutions participate alongside state-wide coordination bureaus. Fourthly, on federal level, various ministries (e.g., for research, for family, for environment, etc.) are part of regionalization programs. Interestingly, civil society organizations such as trusts and foundations are also involved in the regulation of education operating nationwide. Finally, some regionalization programs are financed by the European Social Fund, representing an

9 Whereas state education ministries regulate school education in Germany, the operational supervision is directed to a lower (but not regional) level (*Bezirksregierung*). Therefore, we consider educational authorities to be located at an intermediary level (see also Brüsemeister, 2007, pp. 82–83).

Figure 2: Actors of regionalization programs in the multilevel system.

Regional / Local	Local authority <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Political leadership Bodies of the local authority (education, youth welfare, etc.) School boards 	State <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Police Higher education institutions Employment agencies 	Out-of-school org. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clubs and associations (culture, sports, etc.) (Civic) trusts and foundations Libraries Museums, theaters, opera Music and art schools Adult education center Churches, religious groups Cultural centers Mult-generation projects Job centers
	Non-state <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trade unions Associations Welfare organizations 	Schools	Local Economy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Companies Chamber of Industry and Commerce Chamber of Crafts
Intermediary	State <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regional board Education authorities School supervisory boards 		Non-state <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transferagenturen
States	State <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ministries Institutes, agencies, and offices 		Non-state <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coordination bureaus
Federal	State <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Federal ministries 		Civil society <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trusts and foundations
EU	State <ul style="list-style-type: none"> European Social Fund 		

involvement at the level of the European Union as a supranational actor. This overview of involved actors already outlines the high complexity of regionalization programs in which OSOs are situated at regional level.

4.2 Identification of rule structure in regionalization programs

Having clarified which actors are involved in regionalization programs, we furthermore explore structural elements of rights and abilities framing action in regionalization programs (see 2.2.1). Our analysis indicates seven formal bodies with different key tasks of which we provide a generalized account in the following (see Table 1).

Firstly, we identify elements in the context of initiating regionalization programs which we label *program leadership (Programmleitung)*. Members of program leaderships are able to conceptualize programs and select participating regions. Furthermore, they can continually decide on resource distributions which may be tied to the monitoring of activities in the region. Program leaderships also communicate with participating regions to which they provide support and advice. Accordingly, to coordinate programs, leaders can publish documents (as analyzed in the research project) as well as organize announcements and application processes based on program conceptualizations, and consequently select applications and locate resources.

Secondly, there are two types of regional decision-making bodies: the *leadership group* (*Lenkungskreis, -gruppe*) and the *steering committee* (*Steuerungsgruppe*). Whereas the former are relatively rare in regionalization programs and are responsible for strategic decision-making and vision development only, the latter are prominent formal bodies in regionalization programs. Steering committees provide a structure for regular, consensus-based planning and (high-level) decision-making in which committee members are responsible for translation and operationalization of visions including the planning and structural design of the regional coordination as well as corresponding implementation. Furthermore, like program leaderships but at a regional level, steering committees can distribute available resources as well as coordinate monitoring. Based on these rights, steering committees (and leadership groups) can communicate regional visions and goals upon which other actors are expected to base their actions. Furthermore, they can find and formulate binding decisions, and are commonly the head of educational offices and conferences.

Thirdly, our coding indicates two consultative bodies which are labeled *advisory board* (*Bildungsbeirat*) and *educational conference* (*Bildungskonferenz*). In the documents, both bodies are conceptualized as platforms for regional actors interested in and willing to participate in the coordination. Their main task consists of building a relatively open-access forum for debate and discourse allowing for the sharing of information and communication between stakeholders. However, members of both bodies can also provide advice and opinions to steering committees (among others), thus, this formulation of joint recommendations can be considered as a lobbying activity.

Fourthly, every program documented the initiation and support of ‘*networks*’ between actors within regions, however, their formal structure remains vague. Generally, other bodies can initiate action to establish ties between regional actors resulting in networks that allow for the exchange of experiences and information. These networks aim for advantages through collaborative action such as the emergence of certain profiles and regional foci of education.

Finally, a newly introduced organization is the *educational bureau* (*Bildungsbüro*) profiling as facilitator and operative body. Educational bureaus carry out tasks decided on by steering committees, and can implement strategies, pool regional actors, distribute information, and organize activities. They commonly draft reports which summarize results from the monitoring. In some programs, educational bureaus are located at an intermediary or state level and are a point of contact for local authorities or other actors providing information and professional advice.

Table 1: Formal bodies within regionalization programs

Bodies	<i>n</i> <i>Percentage</i>	Key tasks	Dominant mechanism
Program leadership	21 (100%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conceptualization of the program (long-term goals and priorities, content, structures, rules, etc.) • Selection of regions • General distribution of resources • Monitoring of activities 	Influence
Leadership group	2 (9.52%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formulation of regional visions • Strategic decision-making 	Influence
Steering committee	15 (71.43%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Formulation of regional visions) • (Strategic decision-making) • Operationalization of regional vision • Regular planning and structural design • Operative decision-making • Regional distribution of resources • Implementation of monitoring • Head of educational office / educational management in general • Head of educational conferences • Association to “traditional” institutions (local authorities, civil society, etc.) 	Influence
Advisory board	3 (14.29%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formulation of regional visions • Platform for discussion • Consultation of steering committees • Formulation of recommendations and development of initiatives 	Negotiation (Influence)
Educational conferences	7 (33.33%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of information • Formulation of regional visions • Platform for discussion • Consultation of steering committees • Formulation of recommendations and development of initiatives 	Negotiation (Influence)
“Networks”	21 (100%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exchange of experiences and information • Development of regional profiles 	Observation
Educational bureau	15 (71.43%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Execution of decision and support of steering committees • Coordination and pooling of regional actors • Distribution of information and public relations • Monitoring and reporting • Professional advisory 	–

Note. Percentages are calculated on basis of the number of regionalization programs deliberately involving OSOs (*n* = 21). See Appendix for further details.

4.3 Empirical actor constellations with specific coordination mechanisms

Because actor constellations consist of a variety of actors based on structural elements (see 2.2.2), we analyze actors’ composition in identified formal bodies in Table 2.¹⁰ Furthermore, action within actor constellations is coordinated by means

10 The educational bureau is not identified as a rule structure for constellations but rather as an actor itself.

of specific mechanisms of observation, influence, and negotiation (see 2.2.3), which we describe based on rights and abilities outlined for the identified formal bodies. It is worth noting that the legitimacy for actors' involvement in all actor constellations is based on their organizational status (i.e., as members of local authorities, education authorities, schools, etc.) (see Emmerich, 2016).

Most programs are led by both state actors at federal and state level, and civil society organizations at federal level. In seven cases, local authorities also take part in constellations within program leaderships. Because constellation members control available resources and frame structural elements of regionalization programs, they are in a considerably decisive position. Considering tasks and resources such as conceptualizing programs and controlling the selection of program participants, constellations within program leaderships have a high potential to affect other actors' intentions, and we therefore suggest that the dominant mechanism of those constellations is *influence*. Consequently, members in constellations within program leaderships have a relatively high degree of situation control allowing them to dominate the coordination of action in their programs.

Constellations within leadership groups and steering committees can include state actors at local, intermediary (*Schulamt, Schulaufsicht*) and state level which is an indicator for the collaboration between traditionally separated responsibilities within the steering of education.¹¹ Furthermore, in ten out of fifteen actor constellations within steering committees schools can also take part. Whereas members are only bound to negotiate with each other to find binding arrangements, their decisions also have major consequences for others in the regionalization program. Members of both constellations can actively engage in the coordination by means of the capacity to decide on programs' regional design and to determine resource use. Similar to constellations within program leaderships they can also affect other actors' intentions indicating that mechanisms of *influence* are dominant. However, the situation control of constellations within leadership groups and steering committees is primarily directed to the regional level.

Constellations within advisory boards and educational conferences include a relatively broad mix of actors: State actors, local authorities, schools, OSOs, non-state actors, and the local economy. However, actor constellations within both formal bodies are exclusively located at the regional level. Members of both actor constellations can apply a mix of mechanisms: On the one hand, they can debate with other regional organizations with the aim of reaching a mutual understanding and binding agreements based on mechanisms of *negotiation*. On the other hand, advisory boards and educational conferences create opportunities to lobby for specific intentions through purposeful formulation of recommendations applying mechanisms of *influence*. However, we suggest that negotiation mechanisms outweigh influence mechanisms due to constellations' platform profiles, and that those con-

11 For a detailed account of the regulation in German school education see Ratermann and Stöbe-Blossey (2012b).

Table 2: Actor constellations of involved actors within formal bodies

Groups of actors in multilevel system		Program leadership (n = 21)	Leading group (n = 2)	Steering committee (n = 15)	Advisory board (n = 3)	Educational conference (n = 7)	“Networks” (n = 21)
Regional level	State actors	17	17	17; 25; 31	2	4; 7; 14; 16; 29	2; 17; 19; 21; 25; 29; 30
	Local authority	8; 9; 11; 14; 16; 17; 24	3; 17	1; 2; 3; 4; 5; 7; 9; 11; 14; 16; 17; 24; 25; 29; 31	2; 25	1; 4; 7; 14; 16; 29	2; 3; 4; 5; 7; 8; 9; 11; 16; 17; 19; 20; 21; 23; 25; 29; 30
	Schools			1; 3; 5; 9; 11; 14; 16; 24; 25; 31	1; 2; 25	1; 4; 7; 11; 14; 16; 29	1; 2; 3; 4; 5; 7; 8; 9; 11; 14; 16; 17; 19; 20; 21; 23; 24; 25; 29; 30; 33
	Out-of-school organizations			3	1; 2; 25	4; 7; 14; 16; 29	1; 2; 3; 4; 5; 7; 8; 11; 14; 16; 17; 19; 20; 21; 23; 24; 25; 29; 33
	Organized civil society	8; 9	3	3; 11	1; 2; 25	4; 7; 14; 16; 29	2; 3; 4; 5; 7; 8; 11; 14; 16; 17; 19; 20; 21; 23; 24; 25; 29; 30
	Regional economy			25; 29	1; 2	4; 7; 14; 16; 29	2; 3; 4; 5; 14; 19; 21; 25; 29; 30
Intermediary level	State actors	2; 9		1; 2; 3; 5; 7; 9; 14; 16; 24; 29; 31		4	
	Public-private partnerships		3; 17	17			
State level	State actors	1; 2; 3; 4; 7; 9; 11; 14; 16; 17; 19; 20; 21; 23; 33	17	11; 17; 30			
	Public-private partnerships	4; 5; 23; 30					
Federal level	State actors	29; 30; 33		30			
	Organized civil society	8; 17; 19; 20; 21; 23; 24; 25; 29	17	17; 24; 25			
EU	ESF	19; 29; 30					

Note. For numeration see list of programs in the Appendix.

stellations therefore cope with a relatively high degree of interdependence between actors.

Constellations within networks include every actor group at the regional level. Because their rights and abilities are not explicitly described within the documents it is difficult to identify mechanisms in network constellations. However, we suggest that actors interact in a loose way by perceiving each other's actions, and therefore coordinating their action through mechanisms of *observation* and having a relatively low degree of situation control.

4.4 Opportunities for participation of OSOs

Although the concept of opportunities for participation has not previously been applied from a governance perspective, we introduced it inductively to our empirical analysis, thereby allowing us to precisely describe OSOs' role in regionalization programs regarding (a) their involvement in actor constellations and (b) the scope of mechanisms available to them (see 2.2.4).

Whereas OSOs are not included in constellations within program leadership and leadership groups, and extremely rarely in constellations within steering committees, they can take part in constellations within advisory groups, educational conferences, and networks (see Table 2). Our analysis suggests that they have the potential to take part in all three constellations within advisory boards as well as in five out of seven constellations within educational conferences. In both, OSOs can interact with other regional actors such as state actors, local authorities, schools, non-state actors, and the local economy. We find an even broader mix of actors in network constellations in which OSOs can participate in nineteen out of twenty-one cases. From a regional level perspective, they are represented to a similar degree as organized civil society organization and the local economy are in regionalization programs, however, their representation is less than that of schools and local authorities.

Regarding OSOs' scope of mechanisms applicable to the coordination of action, we find a broad variety of modes. As described above, constellations within advisory boards and educational conferences have a mainly informative and discursive function with the aim of reaching accepted agreements and recommendations. This indicates coordination mechanisms of *negotiation*. Still, constellation members' scope of mechanisms may also include mechanisms of *influence* because recommendations can be directed to other actors and actor constellations (e.g., steering committees) in the region. Furthermore, network constellations coordinate action via mechanisms of *observation*, adding another mode to OSOs' scope of mechanisms. Since negotiation mechanisms require observation mechanisms (see 2.2.3), we suggest that within OSOs' scope in regionalization programs, negotiation is dominant whereas the applicability of influence mechanisms is relatively limited in constellations including OSOs.

Summing up, OSOs have opportunities for participation in advisory boards, educational conferences, and networks by applying mechanisms of observation, influence, and negotiation, and thus can be considered as an active actor group in regionalization programs. However, coordination is mainly based on negotiation mechanisms in which agreements are reached through multi-actor interaction, implying that control by any single actor is lower than in influence constellations. We therefore suggest that in constellations within advisory boards and educational conferences, there is a relatively high degree of interdependence between the actions of OSOs and those of other regional actors.

5. Discussion

Regionalization is altering the organization of German school systems and, amongst others, involves OSOs based on an extended concept of education. It has remained ambiguous, however, how this rhetorical inclusion of OSOs relates to their role in the organization of school education by regional actors. Therefore, this article addressed OSOs' involvement in actor constellations and their corresponding scope of available coordination mechanisms applicable within regionalization programs. We showed that OSOs can be involved in three actor constellations within advisory boards, educational conferences, and networks, participating mainly by means of mechanisms of negotiation.

On the basis of our results, the applicability of the empirical-analytical governance approach to investigating opportunities for participation is confirmed. Inductively introduced to our analysis, the concept of opportunities for participation allowed for a precise description of OSOs' role in regionalization programs. Based on the relationship between involved actors (see 4.1) and rule structure (see 4.2), opportunities for participation are regarded as representation of actors in constellations with corresponding coordination mechanisms (see 4.3). For example, our results suggest major differences between actors involved in actor constellations within either steering committees or educational conferences. Whereas in the former constellations, actors can use mechanisms of influence with correspondingly greater potential to control situations, in the latter constellations, mechanisms of negotiation are dominant indicating a higher degree of interdependence between involved actors. Thus, although a relatively high number of actors are involved in regionalization programs, their presence in actor constellations varies, thereby affecting their scope of applicable mechanisms.

By exploring OSOs' opportunities for participation we were able to address research gaps in regards to OSOs in actor constellations (see 2.2.2) as well as their scope of coordination mechanisms (see 2.2.3). The organization of school education by regional actors allows for an active engagement of OSOs involved in actor constellations within advisory boards, educational conferences, and networks. Still, they are not (program leadership, leading group) or extremely rarely (steer-

ing committee) represented in influence constellations. Because actor constellations within advisory boards and educational conferences are platforms for information, negotiation, and recommendation, OSOs are capable of taking part in the exchange of views and discourse but also of co-formulating recommendations influencing other constellations. In line with previous research on mechanisms in regionalization programs, OSOs mainly participate by means of mechanisms of negotiation indicating that their action is strongly interdependent with that of others.

More generally, we show that regionalization programs are mostly initiated by constellations including actors at state and local authority levels as well as by state actors and civil society organizations at federal level. Furthermore, constellations within leadership groups and steering committees potentially consist of state actors at state, intermediary, and local authority levels, whereas schools are partly included. Members of both constellations use mechanisms of influence, thereby implicating a relatively high capacity to control situations. Our results therefore support research suggesting that opportunities to become involved in mechanisms of influence remain mostly within traditionally state dominated constellations (see Rürup & Röbbken, 2015; Zymek et al., 2011). Although our research provides an analysis of opportunities for participation in regionalization programs, some questions are left open for further research. First, our empirical analysis applies a limited number of theoretical concepts. This approach allowed us to extensively describe actor constellations and scopes of applicable mechanisms, however, more concepts could be taken up in further research (e.g., governance regimes). Secondly, our investigation of OSOs' opportunities is based on the analysis of official documents which themselves can be regarded as means of coordination by program leaderships. Understanding those documents as frameworks of the institutionalization of regional governance (Schimank, 2007b), we describe *potential* opportunities. Future research could therefore include actors' perceptions of their role within actor constellations and of their strategies to cope with the intended institutional design. Finally, we are unable to draw conclusions on further mechanisms applicable outside of regionalization programs because we focused on the coordination of action within structured regionalization programs only.

Despite these limitations, our research provides valuable insights. To begin with, regional actors can learn more about their involvement in constellations and applicable mechanisms as well as strategic positions worth pursuing in the future development of regionalization. For example, from an OSO's point of view it could be valuable to become represented within steering committees because this could further improve their opportunities within regional governance.

Moreover, our research has implications for the conceptualization of regionalization programs. It is worth noting that the emphasis of regionalization programs on consensual and equal participation of all learning opportunities must be questioned based on our results (see Berkemeyer, 2010; Zymek et al., 2011). If regionalization programs are aiming for a broad involvement, platforms such as educational conferences seem to be crucial elements for their implementation.

Finally, our research on regional governance also has international relevance. Regional developments of collaboration in education have been emphasized in countries such as the UK (Cummings, Dyson, & Todd, 2011; Cummings, Todd, & Dyson, 2007; Jopling & Hadfield, 2015; Lubienski, 2014), the US (Dobbie & Fryer Jr, 2011), Canada (Fullan, 2010), and the Netherlands (Bakker, 2010). Although developments in those countries are not exactly parallel (Emmerich, 2016), our approach is transferable, suggesting that research on the concept of opportunities for participation should especially focus on actors' involvement in actor constellations and corresponding coordination mechanisms. To better understand the role of OSOs in school education internationally, further empirical studies comparing developments and best practices in different countries are urgently needed.

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Appendix

Overview of regionalization programs sorted by federal states

Number	Name	OSOs	Region
[1]	<i>Pilot “Regional Educational Landscapes”</i> Pilotprojekt “Regionale Bildungslandschaften”	X	BW
[2]	<i>Educational Regions</i> Bildungsregionen	X	BW
[3]	* <i>Local Networks in Education</i> Lokale Bildungsnetze	X	BW
[4]	<i>Educational Regions in Bavaria</i> Bildungsregionen in Bayern	X	BY
[5]	<i>Project network Kobra.net</i> Projektnetzwerk Kobra.net	X	BB
[6]	<i>Home match. For education</i> Heimspiel. Für Bildung	–	HH
[7]	<i>Regional educational conference</i> Regionale Bildungskonferenzen	X	HH
[8]	<i>Learning stories. Darmstadt on track to an educational landscape</i> Lerngeschichten. Darmstadt auf dem Weg zur Bildungslandschaft	X	HE
[9]	<i>Joint responsibility for education in the educational region of Groß-Gerau</i> Gemeinsame Verantwortung für Bildung und Erziehung in der Bildungsregion Groß-Gerau	X	HE
[10]	* <i>Educational regions in Hesse</i> Bildungsregionen in Hessen	–	HE
[11]	* <i>Educational regions in Lower Saxony</i> Bildungsregionen in Niedersachsen	X	NI
[12]	<i>Learning Regions</i> Region des Lernens	–	NI
[13]	<i>Autonomous School</i> Selbständige Schule	–	NRW
[14]	<i>Regional educational networks</i> Regionale Bildungsnetzwerke	X	NRW
[15]	* <i>No child left behind</i> “Kein Kind zurücklassen”	–	NRW
[16]	* <i>Communal educational landscapes</i> Kommunale Bildungslandschaften	X	NRW
[17]	* <i>Ruhrfutur</i>	X	NRW
[18]	* <i>Pilot project to control the impact of child poverty</i> Modellprojekt zur Bekämpfung der Auswirkungen von Kinderarmut	–	SL
[19]	<i>Securing school success</i> Schulerfolg sichern	X	ST
[20]	<i>Educational landscapes between the seas</i> Bildungslandschaften zwischen den Meeren	X	SH

[21]	<i>nelecom – Thuringia education model – a new learning culture in local authorities</i> nelecom – Thüringer Bildungsmodell – Neue Lernkultur in Kommunen	X	TH
[22]	* <i>School-related youth social work in Thuringia</i> Schulbezogene Jugendsozialarbeit in Thüringen	–	TH
[23]	* <i>Cultural agent</i> Kulturagenten	X	BW, BE, HH, NRW, TH
[24]	<i>A square kilometer education</i> Ein Quadratkilometer Bildung	X	BE, SN, NRW, BW
[25]	<i>Living environment school</i> Lebenswelt Schule	X	HE, BW, SH, ST
[26]	<i>TransKigs – Fostering the quality of education in day-care centers and primary schools</i> TransKigs – Stärkung der Bildungs- und Erziehungsqualität in Kindertageseinrichtungen und Grundschule	–	BE, BB, HB, NRW, TH
[27]	<i>LISA – Local initiative for integration of young immigrants in education and work</i> LISA – Lokale Initiativen zur Integration junger Migranten in Ausbildung und Beruf	–	BY, BB, BW, NI, TH
[28]	* <i>Educational chain</i> Bildungskette	–	HH, HE, RP, NRW
[29]	* <i>Learning locally</i> Lernen vor Ort	X	Nationwide (without BE)
[30]	<i>Learning regions – Support of networks</i> Lernende Regionen – Förderung von Netzwerken	X	Nationwide
[31]	<i>Supporting youth: ACTIVE within the region and districts</i> Jugend Stärken: AKTIV in der Region und im Quartier	–	Nationwide
[32]	<i>Competence center</i> Kompetenzagenturen	–	Nationwide
[33]	* <i>Full-day learning</i> Ganztägig Lernen	X	Nationwide
[34]	* <i>Transfer agencies</i> Transferagenturen	–	Nationwide
[35]	* <i>Education integrates</i> Bildung integriert	–	Nationwide

Note. Selection was based on Jungermann et al. (2015). * Programs were added based on our research. BB = Brandenburg, BE = Berlin, BW = Baden-Württemberg, BY = Bavaria, HB = Bremen, HE = Hesse, HH = Hamburg, NI = Lower Saxony, NRW = North Rhine-Westphalia, RP = Rhineland- Palatinate, SH = Schleswig-Holstein, SL = Saarland, SN = Saxony, ST = Saxony-Anhalt, TH = Thuringia