The micro-politics of co-creation: Augmenting analyses of 'relational agency' in local education partnerships with the 'documentary conversation analysis'

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ABSTRACT

This paper outlines and assesses the value of a methodological framework to analyse both the micro-politics and the situated, relational learning of actors co-creating a common strategy in local education partnerships. Thereby, it draws on Edwards' concept of 'relational agency' and augments its analytical yield and focus with an amended version of the 'documentary conversation analysis' – a reconstructive methodology that is well established in Germany but much less known internationally. To assess its analytical value, the framework is then applied to a piece of micro-discursive data from a strategy-building process in a neighbourhood planning group within a German 'educational landscapes' project. Through shedding light onto (1) the co-created interplay of the actors' orientations, (2) the resulting outcomes and (3) the actors' micro-political strategies in gaining legitimacy, a differentiated picture emerges. The analysis yields fine-grained insights beyond commonly held local partnership assumptions, bringing to light how the actors individually and collectively struggle to cope with the contradictory tasks and contexts at hand. The paper concludes with highlighting the need to further address relational agency as a micro-political process, prefigured by the framing contexts and discourses.

1. Introduction: the micro-discursive co-creation of strategies in local education partnerships

The process of co-creation lies at the heart of governance and local partnership working as a "new form of political steering" (Fürst, 2004, p. 47). Both arose as policy instruments in reaction to the increasingly complex problems that we face in modern societies (Benz, 2004, pp. 13–14). Co-creation as their defining feature describes the active involvement of end-users in the policy-making and production process – in contrast to the umbrella term participation that also can describe a more passive involvement of users (Voorberg et al., 2015).[2] In the context of local partnership working, the concept of co-creation connects with the normative assumption of raising the effectiveness of local policy-making via collective learning: local actors are expected to bring their problem knowledge, expertise and resources in an integrated and synergistic way together to co-create policy strategies that are better adjusted to the local needs and

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[2] The term co-configuration holds a very similar meaning, describing a form of working geared towards the production of intelligent, adaptive services through dynamic, reciprocal relationships between providers and clients, understood as a process of ongoing customisation (cf. Victor & Boynton, 1998). As it is however less frequently used, this paper draws on the term co-creation.

circumstances. To empirically investigate this underlying assumption of collective learning and integrated strategy-building, researchers are challenged to find appropriate ways to analyse data which captures the complex dynamics of co-created strategy-building.

This paper suggests an analytical framework that explores how the co-creation of strategies is micro-discursively and micro-politically accomplished in local partnership talk.[3] Thereby it draws on the analytical lens of 'relational agency' (Edwards, 2005, 2010, 2017) and broadens its focus with an amended version of the 'documentary conversation analysis' (Bohnsack, 2010; Przyborski, 2004; Przyborski & Wohlrab-Sahr, 2008), a reconstructive methodology that was developed and is well established in Germany, however is still little known among international researchers. Both analytical tools are methodologically compatible with one another as they both draw on similar praxeological assumptions. Offering different insights into the (missing) alignment among the actors' perspectives in the process of co-created strategy-building, they overcome each other's shortcomings. Both methodological lenses have each been used extensively to analyse interactive data (for relational agency, see e.g. Edwards, 2017; for documentary conversation analysis see e.g. Bohnsack et al., 2010), but have not yet been systematically brought together yet and made fruitful for a more (micro-)political focus on studying educational governance and local partnership work.[4]

The paper assesses the frameworks' value on data stemming from an ethnographic case study of a German area-based education planning partnership on the neighbourhood level (henceforth: PPN). This case study examined how local leaders from different institutional backgrounds negotiated a neighbourhood strategy for implementing the German 'educational landscapes' policy[5] framework. The study examined to what extent the involved actors have managed to bring their different perspectives synergistically together in co-creating a common partnership strategy for their neighbourhood and what micro-political dynamics unfolded in the negotiation and consensus-making processes. The study's main source of data were audio-recordings of the PPN meetings ($n = 17$) accompanied by interviews with each PPN member at two times (one at the beginning of the process and one two years later), participant observations, a qualitative network analysis, and document analyses.[6]

In the following chapter, the notion of 'relational agency' (Edwards, 2005, 2009, 2010, 2017) will first be introduced and discussed regarding its benefits and shortcomings to examine processes of integrated strategy-building, and the situated, relational learning thereof, according to the underlying assumption of local partnership working and network governance. Subsequently, the 'documentary conversation analysis' (Przyborski, 2004) will be outlined and discussed. Both then will be applied in a combined, enriched way to audio-recorded micro-discursive data of the above-mentioned project. The paper concludes with a critical discussion of the benefits and shortcomings of the suggested analytical framework, highlighting further avenues to study the co-creation of strategies in local partnership working.

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[3] Strategies are, as Jarzabkowski and Seidl (2008) alongside other 'strategy-as-practice'-researchers state, something that people do rather than organisations have; they are constructed in the everyday micro-activities of practitioners. Strategic micro-activities have to be understood in relation to the underlying practices that come into play while actors shape outcomes: strategies unfold as an "interplay between wider social practices and the micro-level of situated actions, interactions and negotiations, as actors draw upon these practices to construct strategic actions" (Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2008, S. 1416).

[4] Both 'relational agency' as well as the documentary method have been suggested in the context of exploring network governance processes before. 'Relational agency' has been used as a key conceptual tool in the UK research project "Learning in and for interagency working" (2004–2007, ERSC-funded; e.g. Edwards, Daniels, Gallagher, Leadbetter & Warmington, 2009) to generate and explore lessons learnt of educational professionals who successfully have worked together in interagency settings. The project operated with an interventionist research setting (drawing on Engeström's methodology of Developmental Work Research, for an overview see Edwards et al., 2009, S. 194–203), thus had a very specific orientation in the generated data that differs considerably to 'natural' strategic talk in local partnerships which is important for studying the co-creation of strategies in the above-suggested way. The 'documentary method' has also been suggested before as a suitable methodology for examining educational governance processes, in particular with the aim to provide explanatory insights into intended and non-indented side-effects of education reforms due to local actors' recontextualisation (Fend, 2008) of reforms (Asbrand, 2014). This suggestion, however, relies on the mutual assumption that through eliciting a typology of the actor's strategic orientations based on their tacit, practice-inherent knowledge or "frame (work) of orientations" (Bohnsack, 2010) which draws on data generated in a researcher-initiated setting (group discussions or interviews), we know how the top-down bottom-up co-created strategies will look like. Yet, without examining the actors' actual interactions between these levels, the validity of this assumption has to be questioned.

[5] The German 'educational landscapes' policy idea is similar to other area-based education initiatives coordinated by municipalities. It is concerned with developing interagency services that integrate formal and non-formal learning settings to improve the local educational provision for children and families, particularly in deprived communities.

[6] The participant observation was conducted in the role of a minute-taker. The consent of the participants for collecting data was obtained once at the start of the field study as well as before each recorded meeting and interview. All participants were guaranteed anonymity and any identifiers of the locality were removed in the collected data.

2. 'Relational agency' as a cultural-historically informed concept for integrated strategy-building

Integrated strategy-building is understood as a form of purposeful co-creation in which actors create a "collaborative advantage" (Huxham & Vangen, 2005), i.e. a benefit that cannot be achieved alone, through actors bringing their resources together in developing strategies that address common problems. In the following, the idea of integrated strategy-building and its development as a relational capacity is unfolded from a cultural-historical perspective[7] by means of Edwards' (2005, 2009, 2010, 2017) concept of 'relational agency'. This theoretical concept helps to refine our understanding of processes of co-creation that are successful in collaboratively bringing different perspectives together in a synergistic way according to the premises of local partnership working and network governance. Highlighting its learning demands and prerequisites, it is a purposefully normative as well as a dialectically informed analytical concept, deeply rooted in empery: it was developed by Edwards based on several empirical studies and since then has also been empirically drawn upon and refined by others (Edwards, 2017).

Recent approaches within the cultural-historical tradition focus on the agency of actors. They state that the motives which direct an actor's agency in a social situation reflect their sense-making of the purposes, values, norms and expectations of the practice they are acting in (Hedegaard, 2008, see also Edwards, 2010). Edwards (2017; 2010) suggests that the common knowledge of actors about each others' (object-)motives has a central role as a mediating cultural-historical tool to facilitate interaction in a practice. Thereby, it is key to understand these motives – i.e. what matters to everyone regarding the common object in a given situation – in the context of the actors' respective practices. This requires actors to gain a common knowledge and understanding of each other's professional practices and contexts; their practices' purposes, work conditions, professional values and passions, norms, ways of working, and their general professional scope of action (cf. e.g. Edwards, 2017, 2010; Edwards et al., 2019; Hedegaard, 2008).

Edwards argues that in settings where practices intersect and 'boundary work' takes place, e.g. in settings like the PPN, a more conscious knowledge work is required. Conflicts can emerge when actors interpret the shared task or problem space differently: coming from different practices actors employ different sets of knowledge and conceive the problem against the background of their specific institutional purposes. Edwards points out that to allow actors to draw on each other's expertise in order to achieve enriched understandings and responses to the complex problem at hand, an additional capacity is needed. This capacity, which she terms 'relational agency', requires actors to learn how to align each other's interpretation of the common problem, based on an understanding what matters to them against the background of their respective practices. She describes 'relational agency' as a dynamic, intertwined two-stage process which consists of:

(i) "working with others to expand the 'object of activity' or task being working on by recognising the motives and the resources that others bring to bear as they, too, interpret it; and

(ii) aligning one's own responses to the newly enhanced interpretations with the responses being made by the other professionals while acting on the expanded object." (Edwards, 2010, p. 14)

This description of 'relational agency' conceptualises integrated, co-created strategy-building as a process in which professionals gain knowledge of what is important to other professionals regarding the problem they are trying to address. Actors need to learn how others interpret the problem and what their responses to it are; that way they develop a broader interpretation of the problem and envision new ways of responding to it. A collaboratively expanded understanding of the problem can be achieved which is a crucial resource for joint decision-making when developing a shared strategy in multiprofessional collectives such as the PPN. Edwards (2010, p. 53) points out that as a prerequisite for being able to collaborate productively in such a negotiated, expansive way, a minimum of common knowledge is needed which "can open a window" onto the tacit knowledge in each other's practices. This knowledge can be gained through open discussions about problems of practice in which actors might identify similar long-term open goals as they reveal each other's motives, categories and values in their talk, and recognise and engage with them when they discuss potential objects of activity. Edwards argues that the knowledge about what matters to others regarding the common problem facilitates the individual actor's development of relational agency. It is this kind of common knowledge (which deepens throughout the further relational work), that in multiprofessional groups such as local partnerships allows a mutual understanding and facilitates quick common responses to problematic situations (see also Middleton, 1996).

Alongside to providing a helpful normative orientation to practitioners and researchers involved in interagency-processes, the concept of 'relational agency' offers a distinct analytical perspective to study integrated concept-formation over time by providing a dialectically informed, developmental focus on the common object which can be used in a longitudinal way. In the context of the project "Learning in and for interagency working" (e.g. Edwards et al. 2009), 'relational agency' has been applied in such a way,

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[7] The cultural-historical tradition has a praxeological orientation and is based on the work of early 20th century Russian psychologists (namely Vygotsky, his scholar Leontiev and other followers). It foregrounds the role of mediation and the orientation towards the problem object as direction giving principle when humans develop and learn through activity. When we examine innovation processes such as in collaborative strategy-building on a micro-interactional discursive level, Vygotsky's legacy sensitises us to understand actors' rationalities and intentional acting in relation to the cultural-historically shaped mediational means that they employ (e.g. knowledge and language, but also other material artefacts). It also points to the object of the collective activity as a directing force of individuals acting in a social context: the purpose of an activity or practice direct how meditational means such as the (material and conceptual) tools, rules, and division of labour are applied – and vice versa, the mediational artefacts shape how the purpose of an activity is enacted: mediational artefacts, purpose and the individual's acting are dialectically interrelated (Leontiev, 1982). Through their agency, actors – in a dialectic fashion – shape a practice and simultaneously get shaped by it.

focusing on common problem objects that are brought up and were developed further in an interventionist setting by professionals who engaged in interagency working. To methodically elicit this process of collective concept formation in the recorded data over time, Edwards' colleague David Middleton, a discursive psychologist, developed the 'D-Analysis protocol' (Middleton, 2010, see also Edwards et al. 2009, 150–151). Drawing on a sequential and contingent analysis, it focused on the common objects that were micro-discursively accomplished and developed over time (according to 'relational agency') by the involved actors, tracing how the definitions of problems that mattered to the actors with respect to accomplishing the common task were collaboratively expanded and transformed into solutions.

2.1. Assessing the analytical value of 'relational agency' for studying the co-creation of strategies

The concept of relational agency and its operationalization in the D-Analysis protocol[8] provide useful analytical value to examine *to what extent* integrated strategy-building and learning is accomplished on a micro-discursive level through a coordination of different motives, meanings, categories and values informed by the respective purposes of the actor's practices (cf. Hedegaard, 2008). Through its focus on what matters to the actors regarding the collective task at hand, it provides a *unit of analysis* which pays analytical attention *to the interrelated performativity of the actors' perspectives on objects and their motives* (understood in a cultural-historical way) and its *discursive* (*and cognitive*) *outcomes*.[9] Further, it provides a rare theoretically and empirically informed, *dialectical*, *developmental focus* to the study of co-creative strategy-building that can be applied in a longitudinal way by tracing micro-discursive strands of relational and dialectical concept formation over the course of several meetings or events.[10] In sum: With regards to questioning the underlying assumptions of local partnership working, it provides a very important analytically fine-grained, empirically rooted, *evaluative focus* to investigating micro-discursive processes of integrated, consensus-based strategy-building.

Yet, this very same evaluative focus comes with some limitations: the focus and categories provided by the concept of 'relational agency' can only detect processes in which an integrated consensus-building *actually takes place*. Thus, they fall short in revealing and explaining the micro-political dynamics of processes in which an integrated strategy-building *does not* occur and a consensus is *not possible*. For instance, its categories do not address the possibility of non-solvable conflicts and power-play which might lead to a concealed non-integrated consensus-making.

For illuminating such micro-political dynamics in more detail, a more flexible analytical toolkit is needed which is able to address and illuminate dynamics of conflict. One method that uses categories for gaining more differentiated insights into the relational dynamic of the process of knowledge building is the 'documentary conversation analysis'.

3. Documentary conversation analysis: the explication of shared, opposing or divergent orientations

Documentary Conversation Analysis (DCA) (in the following: Bohnsack, 1989, 1998; Bohnsack, 2003; Bohnsack et al., 2001, 2010; Kleemann et al., 2009; Przyborski, 2004; Przyborski & Wohlrab-Sahr, 2008) is a German method of qualitative data analysis. It follows a sequence analytical approach and is concerned with the negotiation of meaning in talk. Yet, its pursued aim differs to that of 'relational agency': it is not directed towards the objects that are micro-discursively accomplished in discussions; rather its main interest lies in exploring the actors' 'orientations' and 'orientation frames' which they implicitly draw upon when they interact in conversations as well as the 'modus' in which the conversation is carried out. That way, DCA can reveal the extent to which a group draws on mutually shared action-guiding ground (cf. Edwards', 2010 idea of "common knowledge") when talking about a certain

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[8] Here a short overview of its structure and key categories: The 'D-analysis protocol' consists of five analytical stages (starting with a 'D') in which actors progressively negotiate and build consensus upon a problematic issue, and subsequently find a strategy to deal with it (Middleton, 2010, p.96; Edwards et al., 2009, p.150):

(1) Diexis – an actor points to an issue that draws the attention of other actors towards a particular problem so that they subsequently react to it
(2) Definition and delineation – this stage indicates how this issue is taken up, explored and elaborated by comments of others:
    (a) which acknowledge and qualify the stated issue further;
    (b) which mark orderabilities on the past, present and future practice, i.e. qualifications in which actors draw on their local context; and
    (c) which state a different perspective on the issue that possibly serves as a basis for expanding the perspective on the issue.
(3) Deliberation – after delineating the issue, the thinking process is narrowed down again towards coming to an agreement by either giving or asking for consent. This is done through:
    (a) building a consensus by referring to the particular local context or local knowledge; or
    (b) building a consensus referring to general knowledge of the practice. Whereas these first three steps look at how a problem arises and gets explored and negotiated, the following two steps concern how it matters to the actors' practices and what consequences are identified:
(4) Departure – a departure indicates a quality-shift in actors' remarks towards an enriched re-conceptualisation of the problem;
(5) Development – this stage describes comments in which actors concretise new ways of working that indicate to be the basis for or describe an already occurred significant reformulation of their everyday practices. This implies generating a tool based on the previously found consensus, which allows people to discuss a solution to the identified problem and moving on to the level of concrete measures.

[9] This does not only concern the (possibly enriched) common understandings of problems and the resulting strategic measures that are co-created in local narratives, but could relate to a broad range of aspects, such as consents, legitimacy, institutional structures, hegemony, identities, recognition, emotional (dis)connectedness.

[10] The 'D-Analysis protocol' also contains, along the lines of 'relational agency', an additional evaluative question: that is, how much a problem is worked on and elaborated before a consensus is made (or not).

topic. From that, conclusions can be drawn on the form of sociality that structures the discussion (Przyborski, 2004).

DCA draws on the notion of 'orientations' or 'orientation frameworks' which are concerned with what matters to people and semantically directs their actions. More explicitly than in the concept of relational agency (but nonetheless alike), the documentary method rests, informed by Mannheim's (1980) sociology of knowledge, on the assumption that what people hold as important depends on their experience of everyday practices in which they gain implicit action-guiding knowledge: attitudes that reflect certain relevancies, values, normality assumptions, and world outlooks that also inform people's motives. This knowledge orients a person's acting in an implicit, habitualised way and allows for a mutual understanding among people who acquired similar knowledge through shared experiences over time – it reflects the practice's 'modus operandi'.

Taking this assumption, which is very compatible with the precepts behind 'relational agency', DCA provides tools which allow identifying the prevailing modus of conversation. It permits examining the dynamics of how particular orientations in the discursive interaction get enacted: to what extent do people mutually share an orientation framework, and if so what is it about? If not, how do they deal with the differences? Do they carry them out in open conflict or do they play hidden power-games trying to impose their orientations onto the others? Or, do the differences in the end turn out to be just two sides of the same coin?

That way, DCA allows a detailed illumination with regards to how consensual the collective strategy-building process is carried out. By considering the individual positions, it helps examining in a more refined way whether the negotiations around a strategy really are based on a process of meaning-making in which the actors' different perspectives interlink – or whether the 'consensus' is dominated by single actors who manage to enforce their meaning onto others. Besides making the ongoing micro-discursive power-games visible, DCA allows tackling the question of ownership of consents on a micro-level: it reveals whether the made 'consensus' corresponds with the individual actors' orientations. Concerning the sustainability of decision-making in local partnerships, this aspect of the individual's identification with collectively made agreements is crucial.

3.1. Analytical tools

To reveal the actors' orientations, DCA distinguishes two analytical levels: (1) the level of the communicated knowledge (and its literal, immanent meaning) and (2) the level of the preflexive, conjunctive knowledge (and its 'documentary meaning'). The former corresponds with (1) the '*formulating interpretation*' as a first analytical step that decodes the topical structure of the conversation and paraphrases the literal content of '*what*' has been said. The latter is reconstructed in a second step, (2) the '*reflecting interpretation*', which then concentrates on '*how*' the communication is carried out. It reveals the actors' orientations and the conversation's underlying organising modus. The reflecting interpretation focuses (a) on the organisation of the conversation by means of a detailed set of analytical categories (see Table 1), and (b), on culminated points in the dramaturgy of the conversation, so-called 'focusing metaphors', with a high density in interaction, speech overlap and use of metaphors. Focusing metaphors refer to centres of common experience and indicate that the actors, mutually understanding one another, draw on shared orientations. To identify consistent orientation patterns and conversation modi across different discussion topics, DCA applies a comparative approach.

In step 2, the 'reflecting interpretation', a topical sequence or 'passage' – that was identified as relevant in step 1 ('formulating intepretation')[11] – is taken and divided in three general stages: (1) the opening, in which a particular orientation is proposed (2) the continuation in which others take the proposition of the orientation up and relate to it, and (3) the closure of the passage. As Table 1 shows, there are several subcategories to detect the different ways of how the discussants implicitly refer to another's orientations in their interactions. However, it is only in the closure that it becomes clear whether the actors communicate based on a shared orientation frame or not and thus define whether the discourse is organised in an inclusive or exclusive modus: (a) a 'real conclusion' indicates an inclusive conversation organisation; the orientation appears another time in a conclusive manner (this indicates a 'parallel' or 'univoke' discourse organisation[12]), potentially also in the form of a synthesis which captures former seemingly contradictory aspects of an orientation ('antithetical' discourse organisation). In contrast, (b) a 'ritual conclusion' marks the ending of a passage that is organised in an exclusive modus, in which people communicate with each other without drawing on shared orientations; the topic changes without an ending in a shared orientation. Actors either openly oppose each other in form of a dispute (oppositional discourse organisation), or, in a more hidden divergent way, seemingly agreeing to the literal content of the previous speaker's comment but framing it with an incongruent orientation (divergent discourse organisation). 'Ritual conclusions' require rhetorical moves that lead away from a topic, such as bringing in a third orientation with a rather general irrelevant remark like 'everyone is entitled to their own opinion' ('meta framing'), or pointing out the irrelevance of the object of discussion, requesting to bring in a new topic, or finishing the old topic ('meta communication') (for a more detailed illustration: Przyborski, 2004, pp. 55–76).

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[11] The formulating analysis typically consists of (a) a 'topical structuring' and (b) a 'detailed formulating interpretation'. The 'topical structuring' structures the text in paramount topics (PT), subordinated topics (ST), sub-subordinated topics (SST) and if necessary sub-sub-subordinated topics (SSST). The 'detailed formulating interpretation' paraphrases the literal content of the discussants' remarks. (For an exemplary presentation see Bohnsack, 2010, p. 116).

[12] A 'univoke' discourse organisation describes a synchronous speaking based on mutual understanding; a 'parallel' discourse modus depicts sequential descriptions based on mutual understanding.

Table 1
Categories to analyse the organisation of discussions (based on Przyborski, 2004; after Schröck, 2009, p. 51).

DISCOURSE MODUS	DISCOURSE ORGANISATION	CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION OF THE CATEGORY
A OPENING			
		Proposition	First proposition of an orientation, introduction of a topic
B CONTINUATION			
		Elaboration	Any kind of further development of an orientation, substantiated by: (a) an argument *(argumentative)* (b) an example *(in the modus of an exemplification)* (c) a description *(in the modus of a description)* (d) a narrative *(in the modus of a narrative)*
	Parallel or univoke discourse organisation	*Differentiation*	Highlighting the boundaries of an orientation; limiting the scope and relevance of an orientation → Modification of the organisation's yield
Inclusive discourse modi → *require a 'real' conclusion*		*Validation*	Confirmation: orientation is validated, either: (a) as the whole *(propositional)*, or (b) only a part *(performatory)*
		Ratification	Comment indicates an understanding of the orientation, but doesn't reveal whether the orientation is shared or not → *could also lead to an antithetical, oppositional or divergent discourse organisation*
	Antithetical discourse organisation	*Antithesis & Synthesis*	A negative horizon that later, most likely in the conclusion, is sublated (as opposed to an 'opposition') in a more general orientation → discussants approximate the orientation's core in an antithetical way
Exclusive discourse modi → *require a 'ritual' conclusion*	*Oppositional discourse organisation*	*Opposition*	Orientation which opposes or is incompatible with the proposed orientation: → a common orientation is not existent
	Divergent discourse organisation	*Divergence*	Ostensible reference to proposed orientation while employing a different orientation; a disguised reframing of the proposed orientation → veiled incongruences between incompatible orientation → a common orientation is not existent
C CLOSURE			
		Conclusion	Closure of the unfolding of an orientation: ends a topic of discussion as: **(a) *'Real' conclusion*** → closes a discussion threat that displays a shared orientation → closes in the modus of proposing, validating, generalising or synthesising an orientation **(b) *'Ritual' (false) conclusion*** → closes a discussion that displays a non-shared orientation by: ○ switching or shifting topic ○ meta-framing ○ meta-communication ○ as ritual (false) synthesis ○ a performative ritual conclusion
		Trans(pos)ition	Conclusion, in which a new topic is proposed and the old orientation is transported in its basic yield

3.2. Assessing the analytical value of the DCA

DCA illuminates – in line with the thinking and theoretical background of 'relational agency' – the orientation frameworks that actors apply in their positionings when micro-discursively co-creating a strategy. Through the analytical division between the 'immanent' and 'documentary meaning', DCA allows for a more open analysis of 'how' actors interact than the notion of relational agency, i.e. how actors implicitly deal with mutually shared or opposing action-guiding interpretations when they interact in the discussion. Its categories not just help illuminating whether an 'integrated' inclusive modus of conversation is at hand in which the orientation frameworks are shared from the start or aligned with each other in the further process in a dialectical way. But it also sheds light on the micro-political dynamics, hidden and open conflicts and power-play in the legitimate definition of meanings related to the strategy that might occur when orientations are not shared, detecting false, 'ritual' consents that might arise from that.

Yet, DCA's analytical focus has traditionally been laid on bringing light into the single actors' orientation frames and the modus of conversation that arises out of their interrelated performativity. Therefore, it has limitations that however can be met by enriching and amending it through the perspective of 'relational agency'. It lacks and therefore benefits from (a) the theory-based developmental (longitudinal) focus on the common object(-motive) and its accompanied evaluative focus on its collective reconceptualization through actors' aligning their different perspectives, and correspondingly (b) a unit of analysis that not only focuses on the orientations and their interrelated performativity, but also on its discursive (and cognitive) outcomes.

However, through already providing an 'antithetical/synthetical' discourse modus (see Table 1), DCA's categories are – in terms of its technical procedures of the 'formulating' and 'reflecting interpretation' – very amendable towards this enriched, developmental object-(motive) focus provided by 'relational agency' and can be fairly easily integrated. A bigger difference through this amendment and expansion of the original purposes of DCA is generated in terms of the product of the analysis: it is not only geared towards reconstructing the orientation frames that come into effect in the conversations and the discourse modi that arise out of that (DCA's traditional focus), but to also revealing and reflecting the collectively accomplished knowledge objects and their object-motives, and more general outputs and outcomes of such co-created processes. This adds an additional layer to DCA which traditionally aims towards a typology of orientation frames. Its comparative approach to test 'orientation frames' for consistency then becomes a somewhat necessary, but on its own insufficient, intermediate step.

Further, both 'relational agency' as well as DCA lack a consideration of the linguistic and rhetorical resources that the actors employ to pursue their intentions in the negotiations.[13] DCA has been applied comparably little to 'natural' micro-discursive data which captures the negotiations of work-processes in the making. It was originally designed for the analysis of group discussions and interviews in which the researcher – with as little intervention as possible – aims to generate data on the actors' narratives and descriptions about their everyday practices. Therefore, despite providing some illumination of the micro-political dynamics, the categories provided by DCA are still to some extent too underexplored to capture them entirely.

Here, a well elaborated toolbox can be adopted from discursive psychology (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter & Wetherell, 1987) to add it to the 'reflecting interpretation'. Discursive psychology puts a big emphasis on examining how people use their rhetorical repertoire to account for and achieve certain ends with their remarks. The analysis of the rhetorical strategies in comments to achieve legitimacy brings therefore further light into the micro-political dynamic of the co-creation of strategies in local partnership working.

4. Application of the suggested analytical framework to data

In the following, a version of DCA enriched by the developmental focus on the common object(-motives) provided by 'relational agency' and the instruments of discursive psychology will be applied to an extract from the first meeting of the examined PPN (planning partnership on the neighbourhood level) and assessed in its analytical yield.

The analysis focuses thereby on the second step of DCA, the 'reflective interpretation'. The first step of the DCA, the 'formulating analysis', which provides a sequential overview of the discussed topics and of the dramaturgy of the meeting, will not be depicted as a separated step here for reasons of limited space. After introducing the data, a nitty-gritty analysis will be provided to demonstrate the application of the above-discussed categories. Then the analysis will be further condensed by means of three foci that arose as consequence of the outlined analytical framework and unit of analysis: (1) the interplay of the orientations and the resulting mode of conversation; (2) the development of the common object(-motive) and relational agency; (3) actors' micro-political strategies of achieving legitimacy for their claims.

The chosen extract to assess this amended version of DCA is taken from the middle of the first PPN meeting (starting at minute 56

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[13] The literature on the documentary method is contradictory concerning the issue of actors' intentions in a communicative situation. On the one hand, Kleemann et al. (2009) argue that interpreters cannot be certain about intentions and motives that speakers pursue in their remarks, as the necessary extra information from the speaker lacks in most cases. Thus this level of intentional meaning ('intendierter Ausdruckssinn') cannot be systematically identified by the documentary method and doesn't get analysed by it (Kleemann et al., 2009, p.160). Nohl (2010, S. 206) quoting Schütze (1987) points out that argumentations and evaluations as text types take account of the communicative situation rather than referring to the documentary meaning and thus are linked to the level of the literal communicative knowledge. However, he suggests that with regards to how arguments and evaluations get constructed and are used to account for their own or others' actions, they can very well be part of the reflecting interpretation and give insights into the orientation framework on which basis the speakers deal with their topics and problems. In a recent publication (2016, p. 125), he mentions, with reference to Mannheim's (1980) "way of thinking"-concept (deutsch: "Denkweise"), the related thought that not just conjunctive but also communicative knowledge can have a (partially implicit) 'modus operandi'.

from a total of 98 min). The extract was chosen because it captures one of the rare sections of the PPN's early discussions in which the group members come to some sort of agreement when debating the further strategy for the process in their neighbourhood. It is the beginning of an overall theme strand 'strategy for the local implementation process' which stretches over five meetings. This strand proved to be central to the overall analysis of the co-created strategy-building process.

4.1. Introduction to the situational context of the data

In order to understand the chosen data, some context knowledge is required about a first plenary workshop that was held prior to the first PPN meeting.[14] The participants of the first plenary workshop were representatives of almost all formal and non-formal educational organisations in the neighbourhood – school principals and kindergarten leaders as well as leaders/representatives of a diverse range of youth welfare and third sector organisations, such as a children and youth centre, a parent school, an immigrant organisation, a girls' centre, an adventure playground supervised by social workers, and others. The coordinator of the 'educational landscapes' project (henceforth: Co) moderated this plenary workshop. Co was not only responsible for planning and leading the partnerships' participation process on the neighbourhood level (as the only full-time payed person for this project), but also for moderating all its meetings.[15] Thereby, he had to align the partnership's participation process with the overall timeline of the neighbourhood renewal programme in which context this 'educational landscapes' project took part.[16]

This plenary workshop had failed in its aim to come to a consensual decision upon common 'profile themes' as a basis to develop project proposals for further funding. Two conflict parties became visible: On the one side, there were the organisational leaders (mainly of schools) involved in two already existing concept papers that had been written prior to the project: (1) one nine-months-old concept paper of the school principals in the neighbourhood for themed project measures that extend the all-day schools into the neighbourhood (e.g. theatre), and (2) one concept paper for a children- youth and family centre, developed by two neighbourhood organisations and the youth welfare officer over the last two years. The other side of the conflict consisted of representatives from other smaller third sector/youth welfare organisations in the community. They had also developed some ideas for common neighbourhood measures in the context of an inquiry that Co had sent out prior to this plenary workshop, in which they had been asked about their perceived needs, ideas and wishes for common education projects from their respective professional perspectives. The conflict escalated when Co championed the existing concept papers of the first group as "a resource that needs to be built upon" and urged the participants to consider their already defined themed projects as common 'profile themes'. It reinvigorated historically grown, structurally reinforced conflicts between the youth welfare sector and the schools as well as it reactivated issues of competition among the youth welfare organisations themselves. In consequence of the conflict, the plenary workshop was cancelled, after a core group, the PPN, was named – representing the main conflict parties – to prepare the next plenary workshop in a better way.

The selected strand of the discussion on the local partnership's strategy in the neighbourhood occurred after the PPN members had reflected upon the plenary workshop, talked about the purpose of the PPN as a group and discussed the broader frame of the project. MO, a female head of an immigrant organisation in the community, had asked about the already existing principals' concept paper which she felt insufficiently knowledgeable about. Subsequently, she was informed by those who knew about it. She indirectly pointed out the problem of Co's suggestion to mainly draw on the school principals' concept paper for the local partnership projects, as they only entailed the schools' perspective, ideas and concerns. Then she came up with an alternative suggestion for a strategy of how to deal with the school principals' concept paper in the next plenary workshop.

4.2. Data analysis

Table 2. Data excerpt from the first PPN meeting.

The following analysis is divided into three topic-structured subunits (according to the 'formulating analysis', see above) that highlight specific objects of negotiation within the broader objective of finding a common partnership strategy for the neighbourhood.

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[14] This marks a difference to traditional CDA in which no context knowledge is considered prior to analysis in order to keep the researchers' presuppositions as low as possible. However, as 'relational agency' requires understanding the actors' motives against the background of their practices, context knowledge is important here. Further, the provided context knowledge illuminates the sequential background of the chosen abstract.

[15] This double responsibility was the case within the first two years of the partnership process. In general, Co was working in a multilevel-local partnership structure that was interorganisational at all levels, and was led by a steering board consisting of the leaders of a different ministries (education, social matters, culture, urban planning, economy), the municipal leader, and the CEO of the urban renewal programme this 'educational landscapes' project was part of. The diverse range of interagency planning boards on the neighbourhood level were still to emerge at this point.

[16] Co was working in a multilevel-local partnership structure that was interorganisational at all levels. It was led by a steering board consisting of different ministerial leaders (education, social matters, culture, urban planning, economy), the district leader, and the CEO of the urban renewal programme. The project board was much smaller, consisting of low-level representative of some of the ministries, district office, the youth welfare officer, a delegate of the urban renewal programme and Co. The planning board structure on the neighbourhood level was still to emerge at this point.

Table 2
Data excerpt from the first PPN meeting.

<u>Participants:</u>
MO- f, leader of an immigrant organisation (adult education)
Co- m, project coordinator
S1- f, principal of a primary school
S3- m, principal of a primary and secondary school
Y2- f, leader of a girl's club

No	Excerpt (own transl. of the German data)
1	**MO:** *Well for me um if this <u>really</u> is supposed to become a process, a <u>common</u> one, it would imply that we now get to know, the big round [referring to the next plenary workshop], what is actually already there from the schools, (**S1:** Uh-huh.) um I @cannot@ subscribe to something that I don't know, (.) and um and then um it would be nice if the process in the [previously existing community board] um would <u>also</u> get admitted, as <u>another</u> point, um which we then can present, <u>too</u>.*
2	**Co:** *Uh-huh.*
3	**S3:** *Well, above all, that-[[I see it the same way,*
4	**MO:** [And [first (.) not yet deciding but first discussing. I find one first needs a discussion. One <u>still</u> needs um visions to start with and well if one gets immediately criticised for a vision one doesn't feel like it. Um um to <u>initiate</u> an interesting process one has to develop visions, it was also offered like this, and then move it <u>back and forth</u>. No? Um and um and <u>then</u> the question is whether things will be decided collectively or not, <u>I</u> don't know that.
5	**Co:** ((speaking quickly)) [First name MO], I only think that we are at another point. I want to [make] this at this point also quite clear, because we are at the point where it is clear it <u>is about</u> visions. (**MO:** Yes.) And um we are only in the situation in which we need to clarify how can we [make] the <u>visions</u>, which already exist, in the different realms, how can we <u>turn</u> them into concrete <u>projects</u> (**MO:** Yes.) with which we want to go into the application. That is- that is the point. That means we are quite clear there is the vision [principal's paper] which is also [partially-
6	**S3:** [Please [don't] forget the intermediate step, I have written this down: a concept is supposed to be developed (**S1:** Mhm.) which is <u>reasonable</u> (**S1:** Mhm.) because <u>otherwise</u> we cannot [develop] common projects.
7	**Co:** *That's right.*
8	**MO:** Well ev- up to now everyone has um for- mainly <u>solely</u>, sometimes also <u>together</u> [developed] ideas, and now the interesting thing is to talk <u>collectively</u> about the ideas, isn't it, and to look where it interlinks <u>in a meaningful way</u>. (**Co:** Uh-huh.) And what we can make <u>out of it</u>. (**Co:** Uh-huh.)
9	**S1:** Yes, I think that this is actually good what you have said with the presentation of the [school principal's paper]. To the big group. Because this is for a lot of them seemingly not really- well there then lies 'dance theatre' (**MO:** Yes.) or 'theatre centre' [refers to profile themes provided as catchwords in the failed plenary workshop] and most people don't know how to <u>connect</u> with it. (**Co:** Uh-huh, uh-huh; **MO:** Yes.) I mean, [I find that actually quite good.[
10	**MO:** [Is nice, [always sounds nice.
11	**S1:** @Yes.@
12	**S3:** Yes, and for us is- this was a crazy <u>thing</u>. (**S1:** Yes.) Everybody can imagine this. (**MO:** Yes.) Well, this <u>hasn't been existing</u> before at all to <u>face</u> such a situation and [develop] collectively a **common** paper, (**S1:** Yes.; **MO:** Yes.) one has to imagine that. Well, and I haven't experienced this in the whole [name of city] at all. ((**S1:** Uh-huh.; **MO:** Yes, -positive, this is good.)
13	**Co:** Exactly, and [now the next-
14	**S3:** [And regarding to this I would like to support you [Co] in knowing clearly, what are the key themes here [in sub-region], also within a <u>short</u> time (**MO:** Yes; **S1:** Uh-huh) as far as we are able to do so, and out of that has to, if I am not <u>stupid</u>, <u>emerge</u> something like a <u>concept of education and support</u> °maybe one still can get this clearer° (incomprehensible). (**S1:** Uh-huh.; **MO:** Yes). From <u>that</u> <u>the</u> projects sort of develop (**MO:** Yes.) which possibly will get financed by the [urban development programme]. (**S1:** Uh-huh.; **MO:** Yes) To be able to enter this competition.
15	**MO:** *One really has to talk with each other first,*
16	**S1:** *Yes.*
17	**S3:** *And this is of course a hard <u>task</u> ahead of us.*
18	**Co:** *I would like to [present] the catch words that I sort of [developed] for- [refers to the overall local partnership framework that is developed on the strategic level parallel to the local participation process]* *((Y2 asks about the background of another program related to the project))*

Following transcription rules were applied (adapted from Bohnsack, 2003, p.235):

Emphasised	<u>loud</u> °quiet°	
,	rising intonation	
.	sinking intonation	
word-	incomplete word or sentence	
((sighs))	nonverbal remarks	
@word@	spoken in laughter	
(3) or (.)	number of seconds of a pause; or pause of one second	
[word]	either synonym for a name in order to create anonymity, added information by the author for improving the comprehensibility of the translation, or context information	
[	overlapping conversation	
[...]	left out text	

1-8: Definitions of a "common" process (meanings on 'collaboration')

[1] Proposition and elaboration by MO; [2] ratification by Co; [3] ratification by S3; [4] argumentative elaboration by MO substantiated by an exemplification

[1] MO opens up the debate with a strategic suggestion that simultaneously puts the mode of collaboration and participation (both horizontally and vertically across administrative levels) up to debate by implicitly expressing her doubt whether this process actually is intended to be a "common" process, subsequently suggesting how a "common" process should look like. She outlines an orientation towards collaboration that is based on an equal participation of school and youth welfare representatives, which in the first instance would mean to create a shared information basis through knowledge exchange (*proposition*). She does so by on the one hand suggesting presenting the principals' ideas to an existing neighbourhood board mainly consisting of youth welfare-organisations and on the other hand kindly asking for equally recognising the existing youth welfare actors' ideas and neighbourhood board as a legitimate part of the partnership as well. Her suggestion is accompanied with an ironic, opposing remark (accompanied with a reserved laughter) towards the currently dominant orientation (conveyed by Co) towards an understanding of "collaboration" and "participation" that based on the expectation of merely 'subscribing' as a non-school actor to the already existing principals' ideas without knowing them in detail.

Both [2] Co and [3] S3 agree (*both*: *ratification*). Before S3 can elaborate his thoughts, [4] MO interrupts him and elaborates her proposition on the issue of equal participation (*argumentative elaboration*). She enriches her proposition of equal participation and common knowledge by a notion towards collaboration and participation that is based on discussion and a generation of shared visions that then need to be tested of being realistic ("move back and forth"). By critiquing Co's expectations towards the local actors of immediately coming to decisions she points out that time is needed to create common knowledge and visions. Also, she strengthens her strategic proposal and orientations by creating legitimation for them through the official talk and promise made by Co and other strategic actors in the beginning of the process ("it was also offered like this") and brings in the open question of who has the power to make the final decisions.

[5] Divergence by Co

Co's reaction to MO is a first indicator that the strategy-talk in this extract is carried out in a divergent modus: Co responds to MO's rather direct opposing strategy and orientation proposal in a rather double-bind way, reframing and thus opposing her ideas of the a "collaborative" "participation" process into one geared towards an efficient and effective way of generating strategic products. First, he starts his sentence by calling MO by her first name when addressing her (they knew each other from former collaborations), implicitly communicating that the PPN is an informal setting in which everyone is on the same eye-level – which corresponds to the rationality behind local partnership working and MO's proposition of equal participation. Then, quite on the contrary, he marginalises MO's orientations towards equal participation and idea recognition as well as building common knowledge and visions through reframing them against a management logic by arguing of "being at another point" in the process, which implies that MO's proposed strategy is obsolete. At the same time, he undermines her critique by highlighting that his concern is "only" a concern of the right management.

His counter proposal of describing the situation as one in which the already existing visions (especially from the principals' concept paper) now have to be transformed into concrete common projects to apply for funds, favours a version of a "common" process that takes the external project pressures of efficiency, effectiveness and product-orientation into account through building on the most progressed ideas (i.e. the school principals' ones). At the same time, he (mis)uses his position as a moderator, acting in a hierarchical way towards MO by stating "I want to [make] this at this point also quite clear", acting opposite towards MO's demand of participation.

[6] Validation by S3; [7] ratification (most likely divergence) by Co; [8] argumentative elaboration by MO, substantiated by a description

[6] Both the content of S3's remark ('reminding' Co to not forget to develop an overall concept as an intermediate step prior to the developments of projects) and what S3 does with it (interrupting Co before he can finish specifying further what the already existing visions are) validate MO's orientation towards building common knowledge (*validation*). [7] Co agrees – but it's unclear on what basis. However, the *conclusion* [18] proposes that he draws on another orientation framework when doing so (*ratification, most likely divergence*). [8] MO again elaborates her orientation of the importance of building common knowledge by arguing for the benefit of an integration of (school- and youth welfare) ideas "in a meaningful way".

9-13: Using prinsipals' paper as a central content base for the common strategy

[9] Differentiation by S1; [10] validation of S1's differentiation by MO; [11] ratification (most likely validation) by S1; [12] narrative elaboration of S1's differentiation by S3; [13] ratification (most likely divergence) by Co

[9] S1 confirms MO's general emphasis on the importance of developing common knowledge for the process. However, in raising the problem of the information deficit in the plenary only with regard to the schools' ideas, she limits its scope: she neglects MO's orientation towards an equal recognition of the ideas stemming from school and youth welfare actors in favour of a revision of the principals' concepts (*differentiation*). [10] MO's quiet joke that the used catchwords 'always sound nice' marks reservation towards the school principals' ideas but validates S1's differentiation (youth welfare actors need to be informed to be able to better judge on the school principal's ideas) (*validation of S1's differentiation*). [11] S1 responds to MO in a laughing way, showing understanding towards

her mistrust (*ratification, most likely validation*). [12] S3 reacts towards MO's implicit antagonism and elaborates S1's differentiation through a narrative on the development of the principles' paper: he stresses how novel and "crazy" the process of creating the principal's paper was, and thus how valuable it is and that it still needs further development. At the same time, he, like S1, validates MO's orientation towards the need of building common knowledge, indicating that he has been in such a process before (*narrative elaboration of S1's differentiation*). [13] Co agrees on the importance of the principals' paper for the process – taking his later comment [18] into account, he most likely agrees with S3 on different grounds (*ratification, most likely divergence*).

14-16: Developing a local 'concept of education and support' as central strategic instrument for the neighbourhood prior to the generation of concrete projects

[14] Attempt of a 'real' conclusion by S3; [15] validation of the 'real' conclusion by MO; [16] validation by S1; [17] validation by S3

[14] S3's remark is the beginning of a 'real' conclusion between S3, MO, and S1. Interrupting Co, S3 formulates a conditioned demonstration of support to Co. In doing this, he integrates the orientation towards the importance of building common knowledge for achieving a common process as well as Co's dominant orientation scheme to develop projects (*attempt of a 'real' conclusion*). However, by not further commenting on whose ideas would be the basis for the negotiation, the differentiated orientation brought in by S1 which focuses on the principals' ideas stays as an implicit consensus in the room. [15] MO validates S3's suggestion, however approving it with her more general orientation towards building common knowledge (*validation of the 'real' conclusion*) which [16] S1 validates with a simple 'yes' (*validation of the 'real' conclusion*). [17] As a concluding remark on the general shared orientation, S3 highlights the difficulty of achieving a consensus but nevertheless reiterates the importance of building common knowledge between all actors involved.

[18] 'Ritual' or 'false' conclusion by Co

Instead of actively giving his consent or, being the moderator of the meeting, summarizing the achieved consensus, the project coordinator Co changes the topic. The former 'real' consensus turns into a '*ritual*' or a '*false*' *consensus*; it approves the divergent organisation in this section of data. Co's hierarchical and managerial orientation comes up in this comment one last time: by wanting to bring in the local partnerships' overall strategic concept paper (whose 'catchwords' he mentions in this comment) as an alternative to the suggested 'concept of education and support' for the sub-region, Co refers to the concept not as a means to produce an agreed basis of common knowledge among the local practitioners but rather as a set steering instrument developed by the strategic actors.

4.3. Summary of findings by means of three interpretation foci

In the following, the findings from the enriched 'reflecting interpretation' will be summarized by means of three interpretation foci that reflect the strengths of each of the brought together analytical tools: (1) the actors' orientation and mode of conversation (DCA) (2) the common object and the display of 'relational agency' (relational agency), and (3) the actors' strategies to gain legitimacy for their strategic proposals 'discursive psychology'.

Interpretation focus 1: interplay of orientations and resulting mode of conversation

The analysis shows that the conversation was conducted in a divergent modus – a modus in which the opposition to another is veiled, in particular between Co and the local PPN actors. The preliminary 'real' consensus regarding the further implementation strategy (developing a concept of education and support for the neighbourhood prior to the generation common of projects) was made between MO, S1, and S3 based on a shared orientation on the importance of building common knowledge for achieving a common process. However, this orientation is not shared by Co. With his focus on producing projects to be able to apply for funds soon, Co brings forward an orientation informed by the project's demands of efficiency, effectiveness and product-orientation which, considering the dimension of time, opposes the local practitioner's orientation on building common knowledge which requires time and an open outcome. Yet, Co doesn't oppose them openly, but rather communicates in a veiled, double-bind manner: he ostensibly validates the content of MO's and S3's remarks, but frames it with a 'false' orientation: he applies his own – divergent – orientation framework to the communicative content of their comments, trying to undermine the prevalent orientation framework and take over the interpretative authority. This way, he is able to (a) promote the message to the local practitioners that he is following a model of participatory governance in which their voice is equal to his voice, and (b) more subtly still exercise power and control to meet the official demands he is obliged to, following a traditional hierarchical model of steering and implementation. Thus he can still officially reconcile and serve the two tasks entailed in the notion and discourse of local education partnership working – albeit they appear somewhat contradictory in the above positions: (1) leading in a participative, communicative way on an equal footing (bottom-up logic of dialogue and participation), and (2) being efficient, effecting and outcome-oriented in the process of collaborative planning (top-down logic of planning and steering).

Interpretation focus 2: co-creation of the common object(-motive) and display of 'relational agency'

The common object in the above-extract was the strategy for the project's local implementation that was negotiated. In consequence of the divergent modus of conversation we can see a frazzled picture of different strategy-proposals, informed by what mattered to the different actors. The proposals however were only in parts taken forward by actors displaying signs of 'relational agency'. One example of applying 'relational agency' is the achieved consensus of the goal of building common knowledge by MO, S1 and S3 in a next plenary workshop (see above), but this strategy stayed abstract. The PPN's actors did not come to a 'real' conclusion concerning whose ideas should be recognized and considered as a basis for the negotiation of the sub-regional concept of education and support. An implicit agreement could be achieved through MO's [10] and S3's [12] validation of S1's remark [9], pointing out the centrality of the principals' ideas for the further process. However, also this proposal stayed rather abstract and was neither taken up in the conclusion [14] nor in its validations [15–17]; the local practitioners seemed to have come to a mutual agreement to avoid a further elaboration of this critical issue in favour of achieving a consensus on a more general level, that allowed a mutual recognition between the school and youth welfare actors on the relational level (which also could be interpreted as a form of displaying 'relational agency'). On the contrary, Co's competing strategic proposal to decide for (the school principals') topics as common projects within the PPN was both concrete and pragmatic and fitted the project's demands and context, and thus had better chances to succeed as a strategy. The analysis of later pieces of data showed that he did succeed with his strategy and his sense-making of the object oriented towards efficiency, effectiveness and outcome-orientedness.

Interpretation focus 3: actors' micro-political discursive strategies to gain legitimacy for their interests

With regards to generation of legitimacy in the data and the power-play that is required (through applying a focus enriched by the tools of discursive psychology), we could see how MO positions herself as a contributing stakeholder, but needing to use the word "one" to gain legitimation for her strategic suggestions [4]. With that, she declares them as objective knowledge, recognising that she is not powerful enough to position her stakes directly. In [5], it becomes visible how Co doesn't take MO seriously in her claims and suggestions, but rather treats her as a troublemaker, trying to secure the functioning of the (immediate) process by pressurising her into complying. In [6] we see how S3, who through the principals' paper already has a stake in the process, initiates a 'rescue job' in order to bring MO back into the conversation, recognising that youth welfare organisations such as MO are integral partners in putting the principals' ideas into practice. So although S3 and S1, who join Co in rescuing the situation, seemingly ally with MO, they also implicitly ally with Co concerning the pursuit of the school principals' ideas in the project.

Summarizing the results of these three analytical foci, we see a situation in which the strategic conflict is carried out in a veiled opposing (divergent) way, in which the principals and youth welfare actors were in a very delicate situation: the needed to oppose Co, yet for doing so, they needed to come up with a consensus in a situation that didn't allow for an consensus as the actors were engaged in a micro-political struggle themselves. On the contrary, Co had a clear advantage, as his proposal was more concrete and pragmatic and adhered to the affordances of the overall project frame. At the same time, it becomes clear, that he also struggled in reconciling the bottom-up and top-down demands, which he resolved by keeping up the symbolic level of partnership talk while hierarchically installing the projects demands of being efficient, effective and output-oriented.[17] When considering Edwards' suggestion of needing to create common knowledge as a basis for a development of a shared common object taken forward by displaying 'relational agency', the strategic orientation that MO brought in and that got opposed by Co, was necessary first step to realize the assumption of an integrated, synergetic strategy-building behind local partnership working work. However, as it became more visible later, her proposal didn't get agreed on by Co for reasons that were much more severe than a mere interpersonal conflict between them both – they were rooted in the structural contradictions of the context that they were acting in.

5. Concluding discussion

This paper outlined and applied an analytical framework to examine the micro-politics of co-creating strategies in local partnership meetings and the learning thereof. In doing so, it drew on the cultural-historically informed concept of 'relational agency' (Edwards, 2005, 2009, 2010, 2017). With the aim to gain a more complex analysis of situations when 'relational agency' processes do *not* occur, this focus was integrated in and extended by an amended version of the 'documentary conversation analysis' (DCA) (e.g. Przyborski, 2004) and further enriched by the toolkit of discursive psychology (e.g. Edwards & Potter, 1992). This framework was then applied to micro-discursive data from a longitudinal ethnographic study of a local 'educational landscapes' partnership on the neighbourhood level (PPN) to demonstrate the analytical gain of the framework. Through directing the analytical focus towards (1) the interplay of orientations and the resulting mode of conversation; (2) the co-creation of the common object and display of 'relational agency'; and (3) the actors' micro-political strategies to gain legitimacy for their interests, a fine-grained picture emerged in which the actors' individual and collective struggles and ways of coping with the context and task at hand were captured.

The analysis of the diverging orientation frames that the actors drew upon in the interactions have brought implicit contradictions to the fore: on the one hand between the actors different structural positions, and on the other hand between the assumptions in the

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[17] Co is dealing here with a general contradiction inherent in the concept of local partnership working or network governance in general: that of participation and deliberation vs. efficiency and effectiveness. Elsewhere, I have elaborated on this contradiction further (e.g. Schmachtel & Olk, 2017; Schmachtel, 2017; Schmachtel, 2016)

local partnership discourse and the PPN practice. They manifested themselves in a hidden conflict and struggle among the PPN members and Co over the interpretative authority. Thereby Co showed a somewhat pragmatic strategic orientation which was shaped by the partnerships' (New Public Management) conditions and time-space demands which were opposed by the PPN members. The PPN members were however among themselves entangled in complex micro-political power-play which was strongly informed by the organisational leaders' institutional contexts. In consequence, they had to delicately negotiate between acting relationally on the one hand and bringing forwards their partially conflicting individual organisational interests on the other. These negotiating processes were strongly shaped by the partnership's context and orientation which put some actors (in particular the schools) in a more powerful position than others.

The observed complex struggles suggest that 'relational agency' needs to be conceptualized as a micro-political process which is prefigured by the discursive and structural context in which it takes place. This context may support or hinder processes of 'relational agency', depending how actors are structurally put into relation to another and how these contexts superimpose the ongoing interactions. 'Relational agency' as an analytical perspective shows here limitations in its focus on conflicts in the co-creation process. Conflicts are only ever considered (in a dialectical way) as a catalyst for the development of enriched reconceptualisations of the problem. Building on the "presumption that differences can be resolved in a pluralist fashion" (Avis, 2009, p.644), this does not account for antagonism, which cannot be resolved or sublated in the given context (for a more detailed critique regarding the cultural-historical tradition see e.g. Avis, 2007, 2009 and Warmington, 2008). Considering the complex demands and impossibilities of working relationally in area-based educational partnerships revealed by the analysis, the taken-for-granted assumption of integrated strategy-building in such education partnerships has to be questioned and reconsidered in their prerequisites.[18]

To better understand the nature of such structurally prefigured conflicts, contradictions and power-play, further theories on meso- and macro-level are fruitful to consult for reflecting the micro-discursive orientations in play against the backdrop of wider structural conditions and their legitimating discourses (e.g. with a focus on the transformation of education and the welfare state).[19] Additionally, more research is needed on other cases of area-based educational partnership working to offer further insights into the scope of action when dealing relationally with adverse macro-structural contexts when co-creating strategies. Last but not least, it remains an open empirical question to what extent this scope changes if 'relational agency' and common knowledge are actively drawn upon as interventionist capacity-building perspectives by coordinators and participants in area-based education partnerships.

Declaration of competing interest

None.

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[18] This adds to the voices that raise critique towards the dominant, confrontation-averse consensus rhetoric in governance-informed policy, as e.g. in Cardini (2006); Mouffe (2002); Seitanidi (2010); Sullivan (2010); van der Arend and Behagel (2011).

[19] Based on the data analysis with this framework in the context of the considered research project, I drew on the neoinstitutionalist concept of "rationalized myth" (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; see the analysis in Schmachtel, 2016) combined with Nissen's (2012) theory of the 'subjectivity of participation' as an ideology critique of the managerial steering philosophy and structures of New Public Management (Schmachtel, 2017; Schmachtel & Olk, 2017) which have enforced this dynamic. Other possibilities are thinkable and desirable.

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