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ARTICLE



## The consulting of executive practitioners in participative cooperation: how professionals view the inclusive transition process of youths with disabilities in Austria

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### ABSTRACT

The transition of youths with disabilities from mandatory schooling into further education or vocation is still a major challenge for inclusive measures in the Austrian transition system. In the last decade, projects from the Austrian Science Fund (FWF), including 'Participatory experiences in the vocational biography of persons with intellectual disabilities' and 'Cooperation for an inclusive education transition', have undertaken research into how youths with disabilities can achieve a successful transition and which factors limit or prohibit this process. Since continuous cooperation between transition professionals, parents and youths has been shown to be the most promising approach, this article considers and analyses the views of experts on the transition process. The research methodology is located within basic research, as it explores the notion of 'participative cooperation', which has not yet been explicitly addressed. Through three Reflecting Team-modified group discussions, the various professionals and the research team maintained a continuous three-year research cooperation. The main concerns of the professionals are the plethora of jurisdictions, actors with different degrees of power and intentions, coaches with too many assigned youths, the lack of incentives for youths with disabilities to seek work in the general labour market, and the lack of cooperation of parents.

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## Introduction

Transitions are necessary processes in the biography of every human being. The extent to which transitions are successfully managed directly influence the possibilities of the realisation of certain life concepts (Wehmeyer et al. 2018). While transitions and extended educational biographies are becoming more common, youths with disabilities are still largely marginalised by the transition process and unable to participate in general higher education or in the general labour market (Lindsay, Cagliostro, and Carafa 2018).

Arguments and evidence from the field of transition research and career development (Andrews and Hooley 2019; Mazzotti et al. 2016; Test et al. 2009) and educational policy institutions like the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development)

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(2004) have repeatedly highlighted the importance of career guidance, evidence-based transition structures and professional school-based support for over 20 years. Research has shown that transition frameworks, aligned with the individual student is the most prominent factor in transition success (Hetherington et al. 2010), followed by parental involvement (Defur, Todd-Allen, and Getzel 2001) and multi-professional support networks (Kohler and Field 2003). This ‘collaborative approach involving students, parents, teachers, and vocational rehabilitation providers’ (Hetherington et al. 2010) has proven vital for the successful transition of youths with disabilities.

‘Cooperation for an inclusive educational transition’, a five-year project on the transition period of youths with disabilities from mandatory schooling to higher education or employment in Austria, seeks to add insights on how to constitute an inclusive transition from mandatory to post-secondary schooling or employment through ‘participative cooperation’, a notion not yet explicitly addressed. It centres its inquiry on participatory and inclusive basic research as well as close collaboration with youths with disabilities. Additionally, their parents and leading professionals of the transition system have been participating to add further aspects and data. Since there have been a number of publications on the youth’s perception of their transition through the project (Fasching, Felbermayr, and Hubmayer 2017; Fasching, Felbermayr, and Zitter 2020), this article presents the results of three group discussions involving executive professionals within their transition focused institutions.

To embed the insights of the professionals in the contexts of the Austrian transition system and the research project, the article follows a certain structure. First, the system in place to support the youths with disabilities transition into post mandatory schooling will be explained. Then, the scope of the research project and the context of the article will be presented. Following these will be the methods, results, discussion and conclusion, tying together the general insights of the transition system with the findings of the group discussions.

## The austrian transition system

The transition process from mandatory (SEC I) to non-mandatory schooling (SEC II) or to employment has shown itself to be a complicated, emotional and confusing process for many for youths with disabilities (Winn and Hay 2009). To deal with this process, transition services like the ‘Individual Transition Plan’ have been institutionalised, becoming mandatory in some western countries like the US (Wehman 2013) or used as a voluntary counselling measure in other countries, including Austria (Felbermayr, Fasching, and Hubmayer 2019). Although the Austrian system of integrating youths into non-mandatory schooling and employment is internationally recognised for its excellence, youths with disabilities are still a highly marginalised group and often find themselves partaking in an unsuccessful transition process (Fasching 2014).

Especially in recent years, youths with disabilities or other disadvantages have faced growing problems in the transition from mandatory to further schooling or working life. Today, 80,000 youths in Austria are seen as ‘NEETs’ (Not in Education, Employment or Training) and about 8% are leaving education early (Bacher et al. 2013). This has led to an educational policy called ‘Education Until 18’ (BMAK 2016), through which, since 2017, youths are obliged to attend some form of education until their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. Despite

**Table 1.** Institutionalised measures of transition support (Fasching and Fülöp 2017).

|                                 |  |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Youth Coaching                  | Professional counselling to prevent the premature dropout from vocational education and to foster skills and knowledge crucial for employment. After the initial meeting of youth and professional, both develop a long-term plan and the latter mediates the transition of the youth to a firm. |
| Fit for Vocation                | Teaching of basic competences, relevant cultural techniques and social skills, which can be summarised as soft skills in an institutional setting.   |
| Vocational Education Assistance | This measure, only available for youths with a disability, helps the youth receive a vocational education. The professionals mediate with a firm and support the learning of the youth throughout the period of the contract between the youth and the organisation                              |
| Workplace Assistance            | A measure explicitly for youths with a disability, the aim is to support the individual in their vocational life and with their mandatory tasks of interactions with government agencies. The professional also communicates with the employer.  |
| Job Coaching                    | Job coaching fosters skills in relation to independent workplace competencies and soft skills. The Job Coach also sensitises and coordinates the wishes and concerns of the target firm.   |

structural safety mechanisms like this newly mandatory policy, the transition from SEC I into SEC II is where most youths with disabilities drop out of the standard educational biography. They move into the compensatory sector, a sheltered workshop or occupational therapy (Fasching 2010, 2012). It is especially in this transition where the youths find themselves dependent on multiple professionals and a convoluted network of institutions and jurisdictions. This ever expanding and more complex institutional landscape depends on transition professionals who coordinate and support the youths through the sometimes years-long process within the network (Felbermayr, Fasching, and Hubmayer 2019). Transition professionals are part of the Austrian 'NEBA' (Network of Vocational Assistance), which incorporates regional transition institutions and coordinates them on a national basis. The professional measures of transition support can be classified into five different areas of expertise (see Table 1).

The professionals of the research project operate within the NEBA institutions presented in Table 1 and their institutional task is to facilitate the transition of youths with disabilities into appropriate career paths. They can and must use their resources and their authority, which is deduced from their hierarchical position in the transition system, to either include/exclude the youths in/from their desired vocational fields. How this project is structured and embedded into the inclusive field of research will be phrased in the next chapter.

### The cooperation for inclusive transitions research project

The 'Cooperation for an inclusive educational transition' research project (funded by the Austrian Science Fund [FWF], project number: P-29,291-G29, duration: 1/10/2016-30/9/2021, project leader; Helga Fasching, project website: <https://kooperation-fuer-inklusion.univie.ac.at/en/>) focuses on the cooperation of youths with disabilities, their parents and the aforementioned professionals in the youths' transition period from SEC I to SEC II (Felbermayr, Fasching, and Hubmayer 2019). It connects with and extends the likewise FWF-funded research project 'Participatory experiences in the vocational biography of persons with intellectual disabilities' (Fasching 2014). The 2014 project identified school type (special schools), being assigned to its syllabus, and gender (female) as central macro-systemic mechanisms of disadvantage (Fasching 2016). The main factors for

positive outcomes were found to be parental support, cooperation with professionals, and the early enabling of the participation of the youths. The more recent project aims to further analyse these factors through the notion of 'participative cooperation' (Fasching, Felbermayr, and Hubmayer 2017), which has yet to be explicitly researched within the transition context. The objective is therefore to examine how participative the process is, and more specifically to determine how the transition can be more focused around the wishes, limitations and concerns of the youths. The research interest centres around the question, how the youths can more actively participate in their transition process and make their voices heard.

While the research projects main focus lies on collaborating with the youths with disabilities, their parents and the transition professionals also participate. Their different viewpoints allow the research team to understand the cooperation within the transition process more holistically. Professionals are included to participate in a longitudinal process of self-reflection of their habitus and to help translate implicit practical knowledge into explicit scientific theory. This paper focuses and analyses the arguments of the professionals, and is primarily grounded in empirical inquiry. It is based on the longitudinal discourse developed in the three-year cooperation of the professionals and the research team.

To further build on the analysis of the transition structures, this article will recapitulate findings of the project until now. The knowledge of the transition system and previous findings will be incorporated into the discussion.

### *First results of the research project*

Since its inception, the project has already produced results and published articles (Fasching, Felbermayr, and Hubmayer 2017; Fasching, Felbermayr, and Zitter 2020) and contributions to anthologies (Fasching and Fülöp 2017; Felbermayr, Fasching, and Hubmayer 2019), primarily focusing on the experiences of the youths. To add to the inquiry, we will build on the insights of the transition professionals in this article.

Looking at the first results from the professionals' discussion, highlighted that they operate within habitual frames of realism which oscillate between compulsion and voluntariness (Husny 2020). It is their daily task and struggle to balance bureaucratic guidelines and the inputs of the youths, which range from self-harming and unrealistic to deliberate and sophisticated wishes and ambitions. Following these example insights into the research project, the following section will explain the methods deployed in the project, which have been partially analysed for this article.

### **Methods**

The projects focus on participative cooperation is embedded within explorative basic research. Therefore, this article focuses on the qualitative and participative paradigms and analyses the results of 3 adapted Group discussions, using the Reflecting Teams (RT) concept (Andersen 2011). The RTs were conducted with the intention of discovering, what the participants of the transition process view as participative cooperation and how it could be implemented in practice. The article focuses on the results of the three RTs,

which were conducted with the professionals. The Group discussions were analysed using the documentary method (Bohnsack 2010).

Concerning ethical issues, the close collaboration between the researchers and the participants were performed through cooperation agreements. As the research project is conceived as a longitudinal study and sometimes new topics arise only in the course of the research process, informed consent is renewed before each research phase. Moreover, research subjects have the possibility to withdraw their consent at any time and drop out of the study without penalty or consequences. The principles of confidentiality and anonymity are highly significant in the research project; data gathered throughout the research process was fully anonymised (von Unger 2014).

## **Participants**

In the time frame of 2018–2020, yearly group discussions were held, each focused on one sample group. Each RT was accompanied by the researchers as well as two master students who analysed each RT through the documentary method (Bohnsack 2010).

This article focused on five executive professionals of different fields of expertise from school and non-school contexts, including academic vocational guidance (Alice), post-school qualification (Christopher, Emma), VET assistance (Denise) and family counselling for parents with a child with a disability in a transition context (Betty), who all participated in two or more RTs.<sup>1</sup>

The RT is a concept stemming from systemic family therapy. It incorporates a leading therapist and clients who conduct a discussion. Additionally, a team of therapists is present to listen, observe and interpret the communication. After the end of the discussion, the team joins the discussion group and presents their reflection of the topics. The clients can then 'reflect the reflection' (Andersen 2011). This procedure can prevent misunderstandings and foster communicative understanding. In the adapted RT for the discussion, the project team adopted the roles of the therapists. The project leader adopted the reflective position, while another member of the staff took on the role of moderator. After two hours of discussion, the project leader re-joined the discussion to initiate the reflection process with the professionals, talking openly about their views and research project results to accommodate the RT and participatory paradigms.

## **Analysis**

The transcripts of the three RTs were edited and categorised on the basis of the documentary method. This method stems from the field of ethnomethodology and applies a praxeological approach (Bohnsack 2010). It lays its focus on asking what the social reality is as well as how it is produced in its actors' everyday practice. It is a reconstructive method to understand the social field and relation between actors in a certain system (transition system), combining common sense and scientific social structure knowledge (Bohnsack 2010).

This methodology has enabled a way to analyse multiple group discussion settings, like the RTs, with respect to the underlying social mechanisms and discourses of the transition system through propositions of the professionals (Husny 2020). The RT, as a type of group discussion with participatory elements, is an ideal approach for the topic of interest. The

main point of interest is the professionals' opinions, notions and approaches regarding cooperating with youths, their parents or families as well as their inputs on transition practices and policies. For this purpose, the sociogenetic reconstruction of typologies in the documentary method takes individual cases of the analyses and compares them through the reconstructed *modus operandi* and the additional contextual knowledge of the researcher (Bohnsack 2010).

In this article, we analyse the RTs through a detailed thematic abstraction of cases inside each discussion. Our approach follows the four steps of the documentary method.

Step 1: Phrasing Interpretation by asking *what*: Subtracting the essence of the individual propositions of the professionals to gain the immanent or literal meaning.

Step 2: Reflective Interpretation by asking *how*: Analysing the group discussion with instruments of reconstructing the modes of talking (narrative, descriptive).

Step 3: Discourse analysis: Combining the sequential Steps 1 and 2 to reassemble cases which are representative of certain topics in the discourse of the discussion.

Step 4: Types and Typologies: Grouping the cases around common attributes to gain a grounded understanding of the social practices and implicit knowledge of the professionals. While the first two steps of interpretation deduct the essential contents of the group discussion, the types and typologies are inductively reconstructed. The singular case is grouped within the types and the latter within the comprehensive case typologies. The last units are then comparable with theoretical knowledge of the field.

Following this, each statement goes through four stages of interpretation:

Example original statement of Alice:

*In the case of parents, it is sometimes, I think, it is maybe sometimes somewhat smart in this case, as you say, compulsion, to use it a bit, to show them for once that it can be also be that way, and then they can see how else it could work, and then they might understand that it is smart that way.*

Step 1

In asking *what*, this original statement from the transcript gets reduced to its core notion.

Initial code: Compulsory Cooperation

*Alice speaks about the relevance of compulsion, as it useful for the orientation of parents. It can be used to show parents how it (cooperation) can function properly.*

Step 2

In asking *how*, the deducted essence of Step 1 gets questioned through a canon of interpretative measures (Is the statement of a descriptive or narrative nature? Is the motive an evaluation or reasoning? Does the statement initiate or close a certain discussion?).

*Alice seems to think that she has some form of superior knowledge, which the parents do not have. She therefore has to initiate a practice which the parents will not just simply accept, and which therefore needs some kind of force.*

Step 3

Reconstructing the discourse of the discussion combines Step 1 and 2. Step 3 stops being sequential and works with the knowledge of the whole discussion. It reconstructs the positions of each professional in relation to the other three.

*Alice uses this frame of thinking to describe the parents but also the youths as persons who lack knowledge of societal mechanisms. Her institution, the school, provides this knowledge*

**Table 2.** Typologies of the documentary method of the three RTs.

| Typology 1<br>Modes of practised cooperation                              | Typology 2<br>Knowledge and notions about cooperation                          | Typology 3<br>Structures of cooperation                            |
|---|--|--|
| Type 1 (RT 3)<br>Participative cooperation                                | Type 4 (RT 3)<br>Working habitus of the professionals                          | Type 3 (RT 3) Voluntariness  |
| Type 1 (RT 1)<br>Cooperation through communication                        | Type 2 (RT 1)<br>Power   | Type 3 (RT 1)<br>Competition                                       |
| Type 3 (RT 2)<br>Shared language  | Type 4 (RT 2)<br>Soft skills   | Type 2 (RT 3)<br>Compulsion  |
| Type 4 (RT 1)<br>Participative cooperation of youths<br>and their parents | Type 5 (RT 1)<br>Expectations of youths and parents about<br>the professionals | Type 2 (RT 2)<br>Institutional framework                           |
| Type 5 (RT 3)<br>Triangulation of youth-parent-<br>professional           | Type 1 (RT 2)<br>Educational and vocational opportunities                      | Type 5 (RT 2)<br>Function of the professional in<br>the transition |

*and it is up to Alice to teach it to both, even if it needs an element of force, since it is necessary to heighten the chances of real inclusion.*

#### Step 4

Different cases of the discussions are compared if there are similarities in the orientations and habitus of the professionals. The comparisons construct types, which are clustered arguments within each of the three RTs. The types are combined into typologies through comprehensive case analysis between all three RTs. The discourse of the professionals within all three RTs primarily addressed everyday practice (Modes of practiced cooperation), followed by their analysis of the intricacies and interests of their field (Knowledge and notions about cooperation) and which possibilities and limits the institutional structure of the NEBA and general transition assistance complex facilitates (Structures of cooperation) (see Table 2).

## Results

### *Modes of practised cooperation*

For lasting cooperation, the professionals seek to understand how and why parents and youths think and act like they do. The experts need to understand the environmental factors that lead to their clients' behaviour. To successfully cooperate with them, professionals rely on communicative techniques to cooperate with the youths, the parents or the family as a whole. These techniques incorporate the professional actively presenting the youth with realistic and favourable vocational branches. They then cooperate and compile traits of the youth and traits needed for the job and conduct comparisons together. Within this process, the aim is to assimilate the youth's wishes to realistic chances.

Alice often tries to present the youth with unrealistic wishes, areas where she would also not succeed as she would not meet the requirements. She walks the youth through multiple vocational sectors through her negative examples:

*I couldn't be a maths teacher as I am no good at maths. Through this the youths go 'aha' ... there are so many more fields I can go into. -Alice in RT 2*

Betty applies a support circle in her work. In this concept, the youth decides who is inside his/her circle, ranging from parents to friends. Following this, she and the youth



prepare a poster of what the youth is capable of. Finally, the supporters gather and are presented with the poster and they themselves present positive examples about the strengths of their mutual acquaintance. Betty experiences these as emancipating experiences and recalls surprising realisations about the youth's capabilities from the supporters.

*And there are so many 'aha' moments from the parents very often, where they say 'wow I would have never thought that my daughter or son was capable of this, that he/she produced this to this extent' and yeah this measure is received very positively -Betty in RT 3*

Finally, the professionals also sometimes assume the role of the parents and attend vocational fairs or job interviews with the youths.

*Sometimes the youth is ashamed of their parents and asks if their coach or teacher can accompany them. This possibility is sadly only available on rare occasions as it is not a standard measure -Alice in RT 2*

The primary factor to build a cooperative structure is trust, which is correlated with time. Both variables are discussed in all the RTs as the most essential factors to constitute **cooperation through communication**.<sup>2</sup> Professionals also proclaim that it is indispensable to reflect about the socioeconomic environment before trying to approach and communicate with parents. They conclude that a **shared language** needs to address and disclose different understandings of all involved parties. Christopher remarks that there needs to be a meta-communication over definitions, so that a lasting and transparent cooperative environment can be built.

Professionals see the mode of **participative cooperation** as a normative goal but with a plethora of barriers within everyday work for its realisation. The most marginalised groups, socially or economically, are especially hard to reach and are difficult to actively integrate into participation. Parents who are seeking active communication and cooperation with professionals are usually very active to begin with.

*You can't be surprised if parents blocking off and delegating their child to us has a tremendous effect on the child ..., it's really frustrating. Why are the parents not there? Why don't they help? And you try to get them to cooperate and it's really productive when the parents come to communicate and interchange with us. But this is not the common process. - Emma in RT 1*

### **Knowledge and notions of cooperation**

Public institutions have an aura of **power**. They can decide over vocational capability or incapability. They can channel funding and support an internship. For the professionals, many of these institutions draw conclusions and conduct assessments based on temporary evaluations, sometimes even after only a single meeting. Additionally, many of the institutions differ in their evaluation of the youth. Multiple evaluations of work capacity also often hinder a continuous job-seeking process. This is often in the interest of such institutions as they need to reach certain quotas and therefore want the most productive youths within their jurisdiction.

*After my whole life working within this institutional context, I still don't have a universally applicable understanding of who is responsible and which diagnosis is valid. -Denise in RT 1*

Contrasting the cooperative network of youth-parent-professional with actors of the economy, the former does not have the power to be an equivalent partner. There are only

sporadic attempts by the economy to foster projects or institutionalise measures. Professionals miss a systematic set of policies with executable recommendations. Within the cooperative framework, professionals summarise the hierarchical power structure throughout the RTs as follows:

To start with, executing the notions and requirements of the free market in a society are the large public institutions like job centres, schools or medicinal facilities with their diagnostical power. Some of these institutions where many **educational or vocational opportunities** could be provided see some disabilities like autism as being an *a priori* inability to work. Schools often relay youths with disabilities into vocational education or day care centres, especially higher schools who do not consider themselves accountable. Given these notions and institutional idiosyncrasies, the professionals try to build favourable competencies and performative skills in the youths. They lack **soft skills** like independently maintaining a household, understanding the social consequences of their actions, forming realistic goals and plans, being on time or presenting themselves as active and communicative. After this, the parents often represent their children through their own values and ambitions. Finally, the youths are often trying to arrange their personal goals, leisure time and fight for independence, all whilst being influenced by puberty.

### *Structures of cooperation*

For many youths, a vocational education in the dual system with practical experience in a firm is a realistic goal that they are trying to achieve. The main problem that seems to crystallise within this process is not the actual productive capacity of the youth, but the continuous dismissal or redirection on the part of the gate-keeping actors of the general labour market or the job centres, resulting in a lengthy search with a plethora of problems and a struggle to stay motivated. To counteract this, the framework for transitions provides help in finding a job (work assistance), fostering maturity and communicative skills to execute official conversations (job coach), evaluating and upholding continuous workplace efficiency (vocational educational assistance) or presenting promising fields of work (fit for vocation). Based on the experience of the professionals, they are overburdened with respect to many of these measures due to the high number of youths in the jurisdiction of one coach or assistant. The reference group for these measures is also often vague, as it consists of youths with a plethora of disadvantages, not exclusively related to disability. Finally, many institutions that are conceived for youths with disabilities involve less risk, more leisure time and sometimes better payment for the youths, making it very unreasonable for the youths to explore the jobs and structures of the free market.

*I have this fantasy of a labyrinth. With SO MANY POSSIBILITIES where I can go but there is actually maybe only one or two which lead to an exit and when I enter I will get lost eventually. -Denise in RT 1*

Youths often see the institutional experience as something to be avoided and try to circumvent it with their parents. After their child can leave the compulsory setting of school, they try to pursue a career or lifestyle outside institutional measures. For the professionals, this can be counterproductive and lead to 'wasting years trying to circumvent the institutional system made to support them and experiencing countless failures in the process.' (Denise in RT 3). **Compulsion** often acts to regulate or initialise starting points of

cooperation. Compulsion is interpreted as a societal frame like laws or institutions. For the professionals, the parents and their children are often involuntarily bound to this system which enforces a certain amount of cooperation on the part of the family. With these compulsory measures, like school, registration, mandatory education, internships, job centre attendance or contracts, the families are often scared or overstrained. Their main fear is whether and how their children can theoretically exit the system and whether working within the system has long-term stigmatising implications. The more compulsory the context of the cooperation, the more the professional must instigate a normative re-adjustment of the family within their work environment.

**Voluntary** factors receive a higher quantity of discussion within the RT. Sometimes voluntariness is discussed as symbiotic and interdependent with compulsion, but mostly as oppositional. While compulsion constructs the societal context, voluntariness and working on equal terms constitute the micro-systemic contexts, like daily interaction between the three parties. In this context, youths have a choice as to which courses or appointments to attend and which goals to pursue. Working on equal terms works most efficiently if the professional views the parents or the youth as experts of their own biography. The more voluntary the measure, the more likely each actor's alternative can be explored on their own terms. While all the professionals experience this context to be the most productive for cooperation, voluntary measures are too often visited by already highly active parents and rarely by those who need it the most.

## Discussion

The project aims to dissect how the youths can participate within their transition process and how the most important parties, the parents and professionals, can be incorporated. For the Discussion, we will look at how these parties participate in and through the three typologies; *ergo* the lens of the professionals.

### Youths

Youths are seen as oscillating from unrealistic goals and partaking in harmful peer networks to sophisticated and active seekers of vocation. Many need or seek guidance as their parents are often passive or absent, and the institutions (job centre, firms or bureaucracy) are experienced as scary, stigmatising or boring. To constitute a successful transition for youths willing to involve themselves, professionals see challenging interactions as a great tool. They present them with different concepts, notions or requirements and work through them together. Participative cooperation also works when the youths are given the opportunity to present themselves to their social environment. Professionals cannot avoid instigating processes of normative readjustment as some youths insist on following futile options (Husny 2020; Andrews and Hooley 2019). To add a participatory element to this, some professionals try to level the playing field by normalising inabilities within certain vocational spaces. The biggest concern to the professionals is to teach soft skills concerning social presentation, how to behave in vocational settings and how to live independently. The professionals conclude that if the youth has someone who actively supports them, guides them to job interviews, vocational fairs or the job centre, then this adds a level of security to the uncertain transition process that the youths seek.

## Parents

There is a trend within the professional habitus that parents are the primary point of discussion and entity of interaction, which overlaps with the scientific consensus that parents hold a lot of power over their children's transition phase (Defur, Todd-Allen, and Getzel 2001). The professionals have profound assumptions about the parents and construct them as a heterogeneous group. Some parents have to be approached continuously with a stringent schedule. A small portion is very active and constantly seeks cooperation with the professionals. Many seem to avoid institutional support, fear stigmatisation or do not care about their children and wish for an institution to take over. Regardless of their notions, professionals try to offer them personal meetings where they instigate a shared language to understand the parents amidst their background. Professionals remark that many difficulties stem from a problematic background (Turnbull et al. 2010). The experts assume a mediator position to convince the parents to participate, to adapt their wishes for their children to realistic norms, and to listen to their children's wishes and needs. When parental participation fails, professionals try to step in. Youths often seek to attend important occasions without their parents and with the professionals, as the adolescents seem to experience this as an emancipating process.

## Institutions

The goal of the professionals is to get the youths with disabilities into SEC II or a vocation. For this, they have to concern themselves with the notions, powers, implicit knowledge, requirements and structures of the institutional networks and the general labour market (Husny 2020; Wehmeyer et al. 2018). The professionals try to be mediators between firms and the families, because the latter are often confused about how and who to approach. However, even the experts themselves sometimes do not have a sufficient overview of the field. Many different institutions with unique jurisdictions constitute a labyrinth that the families can get lost in, especially if they do not seek counselling from the professionals. The multi-professional network is a curse and a blessing as it helps but also constitutes a complex network of actors and notions (Kohler and Field 2003).

## Conclusion

Incorporating professionals into longitudinal research cooperation has given the research team as well as the experts a basis of productive exchange and a catalogue of suggestions and open problems. Professionals are able to introduce a differentiated canon of insider knowledge, stakeholder notions and implicit requirements for a successful transition. Through the participatory approach, the professionals express gratitude for being able to cooperate closely with the research team. They summarise the three-year process as a novel and productive experience. The RTs reveal how complicated and how many environmental factors surround participative cooperation in the transition field (Felbermayr, Fasching, and Hubmayer 2019; Husny 2020). To incorporate the adolescents and their parents' wishes, the resources of firms, job centres and the general labour market professionals are often too thinly stretched. They suggest having smaller groups of youths per professional, because otherwise participatory elements like trust, openness,

respect or validation cannot be upheld. To constitute structure, in which participatory cooperation can be implemented, inclusive notions have to be the norm not only within the cooperative triangulation, but also within the macro contexts of all actors. Policies need to be transparent, set realistic and convertible goals like a specific amount of youths per coach. There also needs to be more incentives for youths with disabilities to seek jobs in the free labour market, as they do not connect them to clear benefits but only to more bureaucracy. If labour market policies seek to build more inclusive structures, job incentives for youths with disabilities should not guide them towards segregation. There needs to be transparent advantages for these groups of youths to not look into day care structures, but the more challenging positions in the general labour market. Lastly, the transition network needs the means to address the societal developments of the labour market, where an ongoing trend of segregating youths with disability (Fasching 2016) is in contrast to the goals of the professionals, the youths and their families. The results from this article could be used as insights on policy reforms, help practitioners understand the idiosyncrasies of the field of transition in Austria and instigate further research of the limits and possibilities of participative cooperation. Many barriers for the participation of youths with disabilities in their transition process still exist in Austria and other countries and more research could extend the literature on how to form a transition system, with more space for the youths and their wishes.

## Notes

1. Alice, Betty, Christopher, Denise, Emma are the anonymised stand in names of the professionals.
2. The deducted types of the documentary method analysis will be presented in bold in the results section. This visual indicator is added to support the presentation of the results.

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