Chapter VIII
Fostering Communities in Urban Multi-Cultural Neighbourhoods: Some Methodological Reflections

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ABSTRACT

Societies face serious challenges when trying to integrate migrant communities. One-sided solutions do not pay tribute to the complexity of this subject and a single academic discipline provides no proper methodological approaches to the field. An inter-cultural computer club in an urban multi-cultural neighbourhood illustrates these phenomena: appropriate argumentations and models can only be found in a theoretical net of scientific disciplines. Categories in a complex socio-cultural field have to be uncovered. These categories can be explained with the help of the theoretical net. We develop a three-dimensional model combining empirical tools with the research strategy of participatory action research and grounded theory as a guide to theorizing the field. This model is introduced here as a means of socio-technical design and development.
IN\TR\DU\CTION

Migration is not a novel phenomenon in history. It has happened all the time and may have numerous reasons and causes. Each society as well as each generation is confronted with social and cultural changes which accompany migration. Those societies which lose people face different challenges than those which allow migrant groups to enter. Though migration movements out of a society are another interesting and important phenomenon to investigate from a socio-technical point of view, we are focusing here on the consequences following the integration of migrant groups into a society. With regard to the existing literature we can differentiate between four possible realisations of the analytic category of integration, i.e. assimilation, inclusion, exclusion, and segregation (cf. Berry 1992). Due to its various social circumstances, integration turns out to be (a) a very complex social phenomenon, (b) more an on-going process than a stable condition, and (c) subjected by continuous changes. Furthermore, it is bound to individuals and groups and is thus closely related to questions of socio-cultural identity.

Commonly recognized as necessities for ongoing and successful integration is contact and communication among migrant communities and member communities of the reference society\textsuperscript{1}. Especially schools appear to be a common place for these two prepositions, at least contact between all ethnic communities is an inescapable institutional factor (due to compulsory school attendance). Following this underlying condition—besides other motivational factors—we founded the intercultural computer club come\_IN in cooperation with the elementary school Marienschule in Bonn, Germany. Here, parents are invited to accompany their children to the club and to work with them on hands-on projects which are relevant to all participants, i.e. these projects are negotiated in advance. All necessary work and all content is worked out and collected with the help of information and communication technology (ICT), mobile devices provide good support in documenting activities which take place outside the club room. By doing so, a commonly shared practice is motivated which leads to a heterogeneous community, spanning from multiple ethnicities, generations, and roles. A mixed cultural spirit is negotiated which mutually influences the socio-cultural nuance of participants’ identity—integration is fostered.

In Stevens et al. (2004 and 2005) we tried to find evidence for a couple of these assumptions in a rather broad manner. These papers, however, make the attempt to set our undertaking on a methodological fundament. By doing so, we developed a three dimensional model of combining empirical tools with the research strategy of participatory action research and grounded theory as a guide to theorizing the field. This chapter is a mostly theoretical discussion about dealing with communities and technologies in practice. Its main contribution is to position the project come\_IN in a theoretical as well as methodological framework. A rigorous participatory action research (PAR) approach established a firm basis for further research strategies within come\_IN (for an overview on PAR, cf. Greenwood et al. 1993, or Kemmis and McTaggart 2004). As this further strategy we chose grounded theory (cf. Strauss and Corbin 1998). We will show how first steps of a more wide-spanned grounded theory (GT) within come\_IN has been realized, how theory plays an important role within this undertaking, and how consequences are derived from the emerging complex net of concepts and categories. First results and empirical findings about come\_IN can be found in Veith et al. (2007), where we focus on identity and role affiliation mediated by the club.

A cyclic action research program requires moments of theoretical reflection: is it still possible to return to the scientific discipline we started from (namely the fields of computer-supported cooperative work, computer-supported collabora-
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