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**KEEPING THE MYTH ALIVE: NETWORK COORDINATORS  
FACING THE CHALLENGES OF PUBLIC ACTION IN THE  
BELGIAN MENTAL HEALTH SECTOR**

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# **KEEPING THE MYTH ALIVE:**

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## GENERAL ABSTRACT

This thesis addresses the issue of coordination within the field of mental health in Belgium. More specifically, it focuses on the arrival of coordination professionals in a context of mandated networking of local actors following the formulation of several policy plans, aimed at addressing the negative effects of the increasing fragmentation that the sector has experienced for several decades. The author proposes to analyse the emergence of these new workers, called “network coordinators”, from four perspectives – *instruments, practices, knowledge* and *experience* – in an attempt to understand what coordination work consists of and how it takes shape within the field.

Deploying a qualitative methodology based mainly on a series of observations of coordination work and interviews with coordinators and other field actors, this thesis highlights the central role of these new coordination professionals in the implementation of these policies at local level. The author proposes an analysis of the daily work of network coordinators and, in so doing, of the complex context in which it takes place and the difficulties they encounter. By describing the contours of a promising but unachievable mandate, this thesis provides an understanding of the *disillusionment* that some network coordinators experience with their new role. Finally, this work takes a critical look at these coordination initiatives by showing both the rareness of the profile of the “successful coordinator” – who is no more than a pragmatic coordinator with multiple skills and knowledge – and more broadly, by highlighting the limits of the *network model* as it is currently conceived and implemented.

**Keywords:** coordination, coordination work, translation work, knowledge work, governance, meetings, mental health, public policy, network model, myth, public action

## RÉSUMÉ GÉNÉRAL

Cette thèse porte sur la question de la coordination au sein du champ de la santé mentale en Belgique. Plus particulièrement, elle traite de l'arrivée de *professionnels de la coordination* dans un contexte de mise en réseau mandatée d'acteurs locaux suite à la formulation de plusieurs plans politiques visant à répondre aux effets négatifs découlant la fragmentation croissante que connaît le secteur depuis plusieurs décennies. L'auteure propose d'analyser l'apparition de ces nouveaux travailleurs, appelés « coordinateurs de réseaux » à travers quatre angles d'approche – *instrument, pratiques, savoirs* et *vécu* – pour tenter de comprendre de quoi est fait le travail de coordination et comment il prend place au sein du champ.

Déployant une méthodologie qualitative reposant principalement sur une série d'observations du travail de coordination ainsi que sur des entretiens avec des coordinateurs et autres acteurs du champ, cette thèse souligne le rôle central de ces nouveaux *professionnels de la coordination* dans la mise en œuvre de ces politiques au niveau local. L'auteure propose une analyse du travail quotidien des coordinateurs de réseau et, ce faisant, du contexte complexe dans lequel il prend place et des difficultés qu'ils rencontrent. Tout en décrivant les contours d'une mission prometteuse mais impossible à réaliser, ce travail de thèse permet de comprendre la *désillusion* que vivent certains coordinateurs de réseau face à leur nouvelle fonction. Pour terminer, ce travail propose un regard critique de ces initiatives politiques en montrant la rareté du profil de « coordinateur performant » – qui n'est autre qu'un coordinateur pragmatique aux multiples compétences et savoirs – et, plus largement, en identifiant les limites du *modèle du réseau* tel qu'il est pensé et est mis en œuvre actuellement.

**Mots-clés:** coordination, travail de coordination, travail de traduction, travail de connaissance, gouvernance, réunions, santé mentale, politique publique, modèle de réseau, mythe, action publique

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