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Competence frameworks and competence-based approaches in youth worker education and training in five European countries

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“Central to the ambition to make all kinds of learning results visible is the validation and accreditation of outcomes of non-formal and informal learning processes including implicit knowledge. A key term of this debate is the notion of competence.” (Bohlinger 2012, 288)

This paper studies competence frameworks of youth work in five European countries. The study originated from the peer learning activity (PLA) on education and training of youth workers launched in 2019. The goal of the peer learning activity is to contribute to the development of competency-based frameworks for education and training of youth workers in Europe.

Due to Covid-19 pandemic the original timeline of the PLA changed, and the activities were delayed. There are six participating countries in the PLA: Finland, Georgia, Germany, Ireland, Portugal and Serbia. In this paper the first five countries are examined. In the initial discussions it was noted that there is not enough information on how competencies are defined in the competency descriptions; what bodies are responsible for these description and what role do the competency frameworks descriptions play in the youth policy, in particular in relation to education and training of youth workers. The aim of this study is to look at the content and the production of youth worker competences frameworks in different countries and to evaluate how much there is horizontal consistency between the participating countries. This also involves analysing how competence frameworks in youth work are structured. In addition to this the role of competence frameworks in youth policy is analysed.

The paper is divided to four chapters. The first chapter analyses *what the concept of competence means*. The concept has been widely used but is hard to come to an agreement about the exact nature of the concept itself. Conceptual analysis should help to better contextualise how it is used in youth work settings. The second chapter analyses how the concept of competence has been used in educational policy, and what are the societal trends which explain the popularity of the concept – or even ‘competence revolution’ in educational policy (Halliday 2004). The third chapter analyses how competences have been dealt with in European youth policy and youth work policy. The results of the study are explained in the fourth chapter. Although the main part of the analysis is descriptive, some interpretations are offered in the conclusions.

Key words: competences, youth work, youth policy, Europe

1. THE CONCEPT OF COMPETENCE

Compared to other widely used theoretical concepts of education, such as education, growth, learning or Bildung, the concept of competence has gained notice in education only after the second World War. While the exact origin of the use of concept is a matter of debate, there are some common reference points, such as psychologist R.W. White’s 1959 paper on competence as a motivational concept (Pikkarainen 2014; Schneider 2019, 1938) and Noah Chomsky’s linguistic

theory (Glaesser 2019). The concept of competence is used in different scientific traditions, such as psychology, educational sciences, sociology, nursing studies and management studies. The term has become popular. It has been estimated that “the term’s very popularity across these differing domains results in its being used in different ways, with different and sometimes conflicting meanings and intentions” (Glaesser 2019, 70). It has also been described as ‘a nebulous concept’, and it has been claimed that despite continuous efforts to define the term it continues to suffer from substantial conceptual confusion (Telling & Serapioni 2019).

The definitions of competences refer to a holistic approach which is based on analysing how a person is able to cope in a job or in civil society settings. In general, the notion of competence focuses on know-how rather than on knowledge (Hébrard 2013). Competences enable one to perform complex and demanding tasks. They involve situational understanding, meaning that workers take into account varying contexts when operating. Competences require approaches that are adequate in the particular context. They are sometimes seen as being relational, combining abilities of people and required tasks. (Hager & Gonczi 1996.) Competences of a youth worker, for example, enable youth workers to work with young people in an ethical and fruitful way in a particular social and historical situation.

Writing from a human resource management perspective, Hsieh and his colleagues state that the most commonly accepted definition of competences emphasises three categories. This definition assumes that competencies are clusters of knowledge, skills and attitudes that correlate with performance on the job. Competences can be measured against accepted standards, and they can be improved via training and education. This is called the KSA model, which sees competences as consisting of these three categories (Hsieh & al. 2012). This definition is widely used in the EU context. For example, the key competences of lifelong learning are “conceptualised as a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes and the definition of each key competence states the knowledge, skills and attitudes relevant for it” (Council of European Union 2018).

In the recommendation on lifelong learning competences the Council of European Union follows the above description and defines competences as “a combination of knowledge, skills and attitude”. Knowledge, according to the recommendation, is composed of facts and figures, concepts, ideas, and theories which already exist. Skills are seen as abilities to carry out processes and use the existing knowledge to achieve results. Attitudes describe dispositions and mindsets to act or react to ideas, persons, and situations (Council of European Union 2018). Youthpass is based on the same understanding of competences as “a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes” (YouthPass 2016).

Although the KSA model is widely shared, even the European institutions do not always use the above-mentioned definition of competencies. Scholars have noted that different and even conflicting views also extend to official documents within the EU. This has led them to state that the concept of

competence is not monolithic but polysemantic (Potolea & Toma 2019). Therefore, it should not come as a surprise that Council of Europe has adopted a different definition of competences.

The Council of Europe's Reference Framework for Democratic Competences is based on four categories: values, skills, attitudes, knowledge, and critical understanding. The concept of competences "is defined as the ability to mobilise and deploy relevant values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and/or understanding in order to respond appropriately and effectively to the demands, challenges and opportunities that are presented by a given type of context" (Council of Europe 2018, 32). This definition presents competence as an ability to cope within a certain situation. Values are seen as integral part of competences, but this definition leaves out dispositions. The authors of the framework remind the readers that in real life situations one seldom copes with only one competence. Instead, a cluster of competences is usually used (Ibid., 33).

The weight given to values is significant, since theoretical models of competences usually implicitly include values, but classify them under the category of attitudes. In this model values, for example human dignity, human rights, cultural democracy and the rule of law, are fundamental. This competence model describes what democratic culture is, and what competences are located within this value-based framework (Bourbier 2020). The Council of Europe Recommendation on youth work also uses this definition of competences, thus differing from the one used in Youthpass. This framework is also used by the OECD when describing the future of education. According to OECD, "the concept of competency¹ implies more than just the acquisition of knowledge and skills; it involves the mobilisation of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values to meet complex demands" (OECD 2018, 4).

It is already clear that there is not a single, shared definition of competences. However, the two examples above show that despite differences, competence is usually seen as a holistic concept which combines different categories. Therefore, for example, competences and skills are two different things. The development of competence requires the accumulation of personal identity, motivation, values and attitudes, the acquisition of skills, knowledge and understanding so that one may become competent in a particular context (Crick 2008, 314).

A competence is not identical with a demonstrable set of skills, a set of skills must be accompanied by a broader understanding and know-how to cope in a certain situation (Telling & Serapioni 2019). In theory, that is so. In practice it is easy to find articles which see these two things as synonymous. Competences of lifelong learning may be seen as "skills/competencies", which "must be taken into account for any realistic consideration of implementing new teaching and learning curricula that fit 21st-century learners and their needs" (Wu & al. 2021, 2). In practice, even "the official European terminology maintains some ambiguity. For example, on the IATE (Interactive Terminology in Europe) website 'competence' is translated into French as '*compétence*', but 'skill' is also translated

¹ According to Scheider, the term 'competency' is used in America, and the term 'competence' in Britain. She also notes that the terms are understood differently (Schneider 2018, 1939).

as '*compétence*', which reflects the real world, since skills and competences in France are often used indiscriminately in the general education sphere." (Halász & Michel 2011, 291-292). Use of the concept of competence and its close synonyms contribute to the diversity among European countries since different conceptual connotations may create different policies. Although theoretically competencies are more complex than skills, in practice these two concepts may be taken to mean the same thing. This can be potentially misleading.

There are numerous studies and policy documents on competencies. Despite this it is commonplace to complain about the ambivalence of the concept itself (Pikkarainen 2014, Schneider 2019). Käthe Schneider has identified an impressive list of incompatible concepts which have been associated with competences. Because of these differences she thinks that gaining a theoretically sound scientific definition will be practically impossible. She identifies the following tensions (Schneider 2019, 1939):

- behavior vs. ability
- inherited vs. learned
- observable vs. non-observable
- motivational vs. cognitive
- quality vs. state
- specific vs. general disposition
- cognitivist vs. behavioristic
- objectivist vs. constructivist view
- construct vs. non-construct.

The concept of competence is very popular. However, the term is used in different ways, and with different and even conflicting intentions (Glaesser 2018). The theoretical reviews on competence note that it is difficult to find a consensus what competences are about. The concept of competence has also been used differently in different fields. According to Hebrand's analysis, the origins of the concept of competence, the meaning of the evaluation of the term has seen variations when it has moved from the legal field, through the linguistic field and to the area of training design. According to him there are two major ways of using the concept. The first one can be termed behavioristic, which reduces competences "to a detailed list of operational know how". The second one takes into account the context and "the complexity of situations and activities, as well as the meaning that professionals give to their work" (Hebrard 2013, 123). According to his analysis, most of the competence descriptions are based on the first model, which is technicist and does not take into account the complex context. Same observation has been made when studying teacher competences. Some countries have adopted broad competence models, with general statements or basic competence areas as in Flanders, France or Lithuania. Others have opted for designing a detailed lists of knowledge, skills and attitudes, with indicators and can-do statements, as in Ireland, the Netherlands or Scotland (Caena 2014).

Dualist conception of competencies is also analysed by Glaesser. According to him, there are two types of competence models, which can be distinguished. He calls these two different types: *models of competences structures* and *models of competences levels*. In the first one, it is assumed that competencies have several aspects, which relate differently to overarching competences. The latter assumes that there are various levels of competences, which differ qualitatively based on the task a person is able to perform. (Glaesser 2018.) Distinct uses of the concept suggest that it is not self-evident what competences are, how they should be described and how they should be evaluated.

Some scholars emphasise the contradictions and variety in the discourses on competences. Some others emphasise that there are common starting points, such as seeing competences as the outcome of the formation process through a formal learning module, non-formal experiences, or through the sequence of informal experiences and as an individual characteristic which can be revealed in the context of performing effectively (Telling & Serapioni 2019, 391).

2. EDUCATIONAL POLICY AND COMPETENCES

It has been estimated that the use of the term competence has become widespread in educational policy since the early 1990s. Scholars have even talked about 'competence revolution', which is connected to national qualifications frameworks (Haaliday 2004). The concept has also been used in the fields of human resource management and sociology of work. The European development has been foreshadowed by the educational policy in the US. "Competency based education" emerged in United States in the 1960s or the early 1970s, and thus precedes the competence-based models in the business field which proliferated at the end of the 1980s (Hebrard 2013). In Europe the competence strategies have evolved later.

When analysing the policies of the European Union (EU), Telling and Serapioni use the term competence strategy which they see as a major development in the educational policy. In their view "competence strategy functions as a catch-all term for a mixed set of policy initiatives and programmes, broadly sharing the aim to open up Member States' education systems to the use of the concept of competence, with the view of realigning the outcomes of school-based learning processes with the new social, economic and cultural environment" (Telling & Serapioni 2019). Their historical narrative of the emergence of competence strategies within the EU distinguishes two periods. First, the formative period from 1992 to 2000 was preceded by the growing importance of education in Europe and the gradual convergence of education and training. In this period, education was seen as the solution to a variety of both social and economic problems. Also, knowledge and skills could no longer be unproblematically kept apart, and the holistic nature of the concept of competence offered a solution to this problem. The second period, which they call the institutionalisation period, ranges from 2000 to 2013. In 2006 the eight key competences were identified. The key competences unite the economic, social, and personal dimensions, which are no

longer seen as being different. There was a shift in thinking, which moved from measuring inputs (the teaching that is provided for students) to measuring outputs (to learning that can be observed and evaluated). The student became central instead of the teacher-student relationship (Telling & Serapioni 2019). It has been claimed that policies promoting competencies were based on powerful societal ideas, such as “democratic accountability, anti-academic elitism and the recognition that many important societal practices rely on people actually doing things rather than reciting propositional knowledge in one form or another” (Halliday 2004, 579).

In other words, with the emergence of competence policies the focus moved to the outcomes of learning, regardless of where learning took place. This meant that the role of non-formal and informal learning was better recognised.

The narrative described above connects the growing interest in competences with the convergence of formal and non-formal learning and emphasis on lifelong learning. This interpretation is shared by other scholars as well. It has been claimed that the emphasis on competences in educational policy in Europe and globally is based on the discourse on the knowledge society and lifelong and lifewide learning. This in turn emphasises policy interconnectedness and blurring boundaries between formal and informal learning (Caena 2014). This has led to the conclusion that focusing only on formal learning and qualifications could not be enough to satisfy the full scope of learning outcomes (Bohlinger 2012). The emphasis on the learner also means that attention is paid to the actual outcomes and changes in the ability of learners to cope with tasks at hand. To meet this demand, personalized, competency, and mastery-based education are terms used across the globe. They are used to explain changes happening in classrooms and schools. In the US for example, competency-based education is seen as a structure flexible enough to meet the needs of all students and demonstrate career-readiness outcomes (Williams & al. 2021).

The emergence of competence-based frameworks in formal education has been explained by postulating that there is a policy sequence which consists of four phases. Firstly, a debate emerges on the integration of transversal learning outcomes and required competences. Secondly, autonomous, often holistic transversal educational goals are defined. Thirdly, the term ‘competence’ is incorporated in policy documents and guidelines. And fourthly, full-fledged competence frameworks are introduced side by side to disciplinary curricula. (Telling & Serapioni 2019). At national level, mainstreaming competence-informed curriculum policy discourse and practices for school, workplace and university produces a change of perspectives. This is connected to the lifelong learning paradigm which stresses the importance of the eight key competences of European citizens (Caena 2014). Also, the role of OECD has been significant (Schneider 2019), and the psychological competences analysed by PISA studies have influenced the formal education system (Benner 2020).

There has been an on-going debate how general competences can be evaluated, and how they correspond to the learning outcomes evaluated in education. Differences within Europe have

existed for quite some time, based on the national educational policies (see Pepper 2011). Also, the questions about evaluating broad competences such as 21st century competences (Wu & al. 2021) or lifelong learning competences have been debated. Some competence frameworks emphasise performing tasks according to expected standards (Schneider 2019). Others emphasise that although standards and competences sometimes are seen interconnected, they are not necessarily so. Competences may inform standards, but the standards may relate to areas other than competences. (Glaesser 2019.)

Pierre Hébrard (2013) has used the following framework in analysing different competence-based programs. This framework is potentially useful in analysing youth work settings as well. The first three points are especially relevant.

- the degree of breakdown of the professional activity into tasks and operations,
- the presence or absence of a distinction between competence and performance or activities,
- the phrasing of competence in terms of observable behaviors as in the kind recommended by *pédagogie par objectifs* (to be able to + action verb in the infinitive) or in terms referring to ‘un système de connaissances conceptuelles et procédurales organisées (...) susceptibles d’être mobilisées en actions efficaces face à une famille de situations’ (a system of organized conceptual and procedural knowledge (...) that is likely to be used effectively to confront a group of situations),
- the lack of consideration of the relational dimensions of competence or its reduction to communication techniques.

3. YOUTH POLICY AND COMPETENCES

Given the emphasis on competences in the educational policy in general, it is no wonder that the concept of competences has influenced youth policy and youth work policy as well. In the EU white paper *New Impetus for the European youth*, competences were already briefly mentioned. The paper called for improving the systems for transferring and recognising occupational skills and competencies between Member States (European Commission 2001, 44). The Council of the European Union recommendation on the mobility of young volunteers across the European Union also noted that “voluntary activities constitute a rich experience in a non-formal educational and informal learning context which enhances young people's professional skills and competences, contributes to their employability and sense of solidarity, develops their social skills, smoothes their integration into society and fosters active citizenship” (2008/C 319/03). This recommendation was updated in 2022. The new recommendation still states that competences which are relevant for work are learnt when volunteering: “A volunteering experience enhances the personal, educational, social, civic and professional development of young people and helps them develop competences needed and valued by the labour market” (Council of the European Union 2022, 24b). The creation of Youthpass

as an instrument for recognising learning in non-formal environments (Lejeune 2015) meant that competences were integrated into the youth policy evaluation.

The current EU youth strategy states that youth work provides learning opportunities for young people and helps them to develop competences and skills on many levels. “In this context, youth work in all its forms can serve as a catalyst for empowerment: Youth work brings unique benefits to young people in their transition to adulthood, providing a safe environment for them to gain self-confidence, and learn in a non-formal way. Youth work is known for equipping youth with key personal, professional, and entrepreneurial competences and skills such as teamwork, leadership, intercultural competences, project management, problem solving and critical thinking. In some cases, youth work is the bridge into education, training, or work, thus preventing exclusion.” (European Commission 2018, 11-12).

In youth policy discourse competences and skills are often mentioned together. It is recognised that young people learn in non-formal environments. There are tools for recognising learning taking place in youth work settings both on a European and on national level.

The questions about competences of youth workers, however, is a different matter. Shared European understanding is yet to be achieved. The Declaration of the Second European Youth Work Convention in 2015 stated that to improve youth work quality, “[t]here needs to be a core framework of quality standards for youth work responsive to national contexts, including competence models for youth workers, and accreditation systems for prior experience and learning”. The Council of Europe Recommendation from 2017 called for “establishing a coherent and flexible competency-based framework for the education and training of paid and volunteer youth workers that takes into account existing practice, new trends and arenas, as well as the diversity of youth work” (Council of Europe 2017). The recommendation also invited member states to:

- i. work with youth work providers and other stakeholders to develop a set of core competences (for example values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and critical understanding) that should be expected from youth workers;
- ii. establish frameworks, strategies, programmes and pathways for the education, training, capacity building and professional development of youth workers based on the agreed set of competences;
- iii. establish new, or further develop existing mechanisms for the documentation, validation, certification and recognition of competences, which paid, and volunteer youth workers gain through their practice;
- iv. give increased support to implementing the existing and future European frameworks and agendas on the recognition of non-formal and informal learning.”

In the ‘Conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on education and training of youth workers’ by the Council of

European Union from 2019, member states were invited to “Create a competence-based framework for formal and non-formal youth work education and training which is sensitive to the differences in training needs of employed/paid youth workers, those wishing to pursue a career in youth work and volunteer youth workers and youth leaders, which relies on peer-learning and uses digital learning and other innovative methods.” Members states were also encouraged to carry out country-specific mapping of competences needed in youth work (Council of the European Union 13937/19, §19, §20.9).

What all these documents share is *the recognised need to produce a shared competence framework*. They also implicitly note that such a framework does not yet exist. It has also been noted that the youth work community lacks knowledge on the topic and more research is needed. For example, The Declaration of 3rd European Youth Work Convention called for a Youth Work Research Agenda, which would secure among other topics “research on existing common agreed professional standards for youth workers education and training (e.g., competence models and frameworks, code of ethics, curriculum)” (Declaration of the 3rd European Youth Work Convention, 13).

4. EUROPEAN YOUTH WORK COMPETENCE FRAMEWORKS

There are some examples of competence models on the European level (cf. Potocnik & Taru 2020). The Council of Europe Youth Work Portfolio is a tool designed to help youth workers and youth leaders to self assess and further develop their youth work competences. This model has also adopted a definition of competences as a cluster of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values. It describes eight youth work *functions*. *Functions* refer to what youth workers commonly do. The eight functions are as follows:

- Address the needs and aspirations of young people;
- Provide learning opportunities for young people;
- Support and empower young people in making sense of the society they live in and in engaging with it;
- Support young people in actively and constructively addressing intercultural relations;
- Actively practise evaluation to improve the quality of the youth work conducted;
- Support collective learning in teams;
- Contribute to the development of their organisation and to making policies / programmes work better for young people;
- Develop, conduct and evaluate projects.

These functions are in turn further divided to 31 competences. 31 competences are described on a rather general level. For example, function number seven (Contribute to the development of their organisation and to making policies/programmes work better for young people) is divided into two

competences: Actively involve young people in shaping their organisation's policies and programmes; Co-operate with others to shape youth policies. While the list of competences is broken down into 31 competences, these competences are described on a general level. (Council of Europe, Youth Work Portfolio.) This competence framework intentionally describes how to perform certain tasks instead of describing individual or psychological processes.

Based on the theoretical insights of the first chapters, following observations can be offered:

- The definition of competences takes into account values and is wider than the definition usually used by EU.
- The model is based on competences structure, which describes several aspects of each competence (Glaesser 2019).
- The model favours general disposition instead of detailed analysis of a certain situation. The degree of breakdown into operations in the model is detailed compared to other frameworks.
- There is an emphasis on assessment and further developing competences. There are tools for self-assessment.

SALTO has produced a European Training Strategy Competence Model for Youth Workers to Work Internationally. It defines competences as a cluster of knowledge, values, attitudes, skills and action/behaviour. The model describes eight competences of youth workers. These are:

- Facilitating individual and group learning in an enriching environment;
- Designing programmes; Organising and managing resources;
- Collaborating successfully in teams;
- Communicating meaningfully with others;
- Displaying intercultural competence;
- Networking and advocating;
- Developing evaluative practices to assess and implement appropriate change.

The model describes in detail attitudes, skills, knowledge and behaviours of each competence (Evrard & Bergstein 2016).

Based on the theoretical perspectives in the first chapter of this paper, the following observations can be made regarding the SALTO model:

- The definition of competences takes into account values and is wider than the definition usually used by EU. It also includes behavior in the competence model list.
- The model is based on competences structure, which describes several aspects connected to competences (Glaesser 2019).
- The model favours general disposition instead of detailed analysis of a certain situation.
- The degree of breakdown into operations (Hebrard 2013) in the model is modest on purpose, since the emphasis is on describing general competences.

As it can be seen, these two European models share significant similarities, since they use the same definition of competences and are both competence structure models, describing similar tasks. Both also take into account values. SALTO model has a behavioral dimension.

The supposed value-neutrality of competence frameworks has been criticised from the formal youth work education perspective since it does not take into account the value-based nature of youth work (Corney 2004). There are also differences since the competences are verbalised differently. The Youth Work Portfolio talks about functions, which are further divided in to 31 competences. Also, eight functions in the Youth Work Portfolio and eight competences described in the SALTO model are not similar. Finally, Youth Work Portfolio is more detailed. Even between the two European models there are differences, which perhaps shows that describing youth worker competences is not based on an existing consensus.

5. NATIONAL COMPETENCE FRAMEWORKS

Based on the preceding chapters, four questions were identified as starting points for investigation. These questions were used to analyse data from the country respondents, collected via a web platform and direct e-mails.

- 1. What are the contents of different competence descriptions? How are competences understood?*
- 2. Are youth work competence frameworks competence structures of competence levels models? Are they detailed (specific) or do they describe general statements (universal)?*
- 3. How can competences be evaluated and what are the criteria for doing so? Are there policy processes to evaluate competences of youth workers, and if there are, how has the policy process evolved?*
- 4. What is known about the competence frameworks of formal youth work education? Is there a connection between these competences and other competence descriptions of youth work, such as ones used in designing training?*

In addition, the analysis phase indicated that in the context of youth policy, the fifth question provides important information.

- 5. What stakeholders have been responsible for creating competence frameworks?*

O'Donovan and his colleagues have analysed competence descriptions and frameworks in different European countries and regions. They note that competences are regulated mainly on the national level. Youth work competences are defined by occupational standards; by youth work quality standards; by setting legal requirements for the desired outcomes of youth work; or through other methods. They also note that there was a great variety of responses in the survey they analysed (O'Donovan & al. 2020, 37-39). This probably indicates that there are differences in the European

practice architectures of youth work (Kiilakoski 2020), and that the elusive nature of the concept of competence itself means that there are different conceptions of youth work competences in Europe.

Information on the five countries chosen was gathered from country informants. If available, original documents indicated in the answers were also used to gain further information.

5.1. Finland

There are no official competence descriptions of youth workers in Finland, nor are there competence descriptions created by the youth work community itself. Therefore, in the Mapping educational and career paths of youth workers in Europe study Finland is categorised into countries which do not have competence frameworks (O'Donovan & al. 2020).

There are, however, competence-based curricula in secondary vocational education of youth workers and on the higher education at the university of applied sciences. Therefore, in Finland the *main driver for creating competence descriptions has been educational policy*. Although work and learning based approaches had been implemented since 1990s, the reform of vocational education in 2015 was a watershed. This meant that the former subject-based model was replaced with work and learning based model. According to the instructions to vocational institutions, the aims of the competence based model were “to move increasingly to a learning outcomes based approach and a unit-based (modular) qualification structure in all vocational education and training leading to a qualification” and “to further strengthen the learning outcomes based definition of vocational qualifications and the unit based (modular) qualifications, which will, in turn, support the construction of flexible and individual study pathways and promote the validation and recognition of prior learning as part of a qualification” (National Board for Education 2015). Later the number of programs was cut down with the aim of creating more holistic approaches (Räsänen & Goman 2018).

The curriculum of vocational education of youth workers is given by the National Agency of Education. It represents national level policy. Youth work falls under Education and Instruction field, and more precisely competence area in Youth and Community Instruction.

There are four compulsory vocational units.

‘Professional encounters, education and instruction’ (15 competence points) expects students to follow the laws, regulations and principles of the field; to act professionally in interaction with clients and in the work community; to know how to manage individual and group well-being and safety; to respect diversity when working with various individuals; to support the growth and well-being of the individuals; to execute daily actions of education and instruction; to exercise basic skills of working life; and to develop and evaluate various actions (National Agency for Education 2017, 5–12).

'Instruction of the individual, groups and community' consists of 35 competence points. The curriculum states that students should have the competency to follow the laws, regulations and principles of the field; to plan and deliver actions to an individual, group or community; instruct for group activities, taking into consideration group development phases; to work while using various methods of instruction; to instruct in sustainable ways of life and execute a trip, camp or event; to manage the holistic safety of the people being instructed and features of work safety; and to develop and evaluate various actions (National Agency for Education 2017, 276–283).

'Promoting the growth and wellbeing of young people' (30 competence points) is the third compulsory subject. It deals with using knowledge to tackle various issues in working with young people and to take into account the different social networks and situations of the young. The curriculum states that students should have the competency to follow the laws, regulations and principles of the field; to work in a way that uses knowledge of youth and youth phenomena; to help the young and support their growth and well-being; to take into account families and other social networks of the young; to plan and execute projects; to promote participation and to encourage influencing society; to instruct the young in ethical thinking and reflection on values; to work in digital environments and to execute technology and media education; to work in multiprofessional networks; and to develop and evaluate various actions (National Agency of Education 2017, 126-136).

The fourth vocational unit is *'support and social empowerment for inclusion'* (30 competence points). According to the curriculum, students should have the competency to follow the laws, regulations and principles of the field; to work in a preventative manner; to use methods of social empowerment and to recognise the need for them; to support participation and community involvement in clients; to work according to the principles of service counselling; to support clients in difficult life situations; to take care of one's own well-being and safety; to develop and evaluate various actions (National Agency for Education 2017, 136–143).

The competence framework of vocational education is a combination of two models, competence structures and competence levels, since there is heavy emphasis on how to evaluate different levels the learners have achieved. The degree of breakdown into operations is quite detailed. The phrasing of competence is done in terms of observable behaviors. The curriculum of vocational education is being renewed at the time of writing (Autumn 2022).

Recommendation by The Rectors' Conference of Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences (Arene) distinguishes between programme-specific competences and common competences for all the programs in the universities of applied sciences. According to the recommendation, "competences refer to extensive competence modules, which are combinations of individual knowledge, skills and attitudes" (Arene 2021, 4). Common competences include learning to learn, operating in the workplace, ethics, sustainable development, internationality and multiculturalism, practice development. The curriculum in higher education is prepared by each institution.

The curriculum of community educator program of the Humak University of Applied Sciences is

based on four different competences: community, pedagogical, social and developmental. Accordingly, “The curriculum consists of broad-based modules designed to develop and advance students’ competencies in community education” (Humak 2018, 6) and “[t]he programme has a special focus on competence development based on the needs of workplaces” (Humak 2018, 4). The programme’s intended outcomes are based on the core competencies, which are explained in the curriculum as follows:

1. Community. “Students learn to work in various diverse communities from the outset of the programme. Students will recognise the role of communities in individual growth and development, identity development social engagement and agency. Students develop an understanding of the role of continuous assessment in community development work. Community-related phenomena are examined especially within the sociological, socio-pedagogical and socio-psychological frameworks of reference. Students learn to recognise and assess human factors that influence communities and thus develop an advanced socio-cultural understanding of the work in practice.”
2. Pedagogical. “Students are introduced to phenomena related to the guidance, education and development of individuals, groups and communities. Key pedagogical competencies include skills in appreciative interaction as well as responsible and sensitive community-based agency.”
3. Social. “Students develop an understanding of social diversity and strengthen their competencies in encountering different cultures. Social phenomena are examined especially within the sociological, socio-political, administrative and business management frameworks of reference. Students develop their action and advocacy skills throughout their studies. In addition, students learn to use and develop various channels of social advocacy. Students learn to recognise the impacts of social change on welfare service provision in different sectors.”
4. Development competence. “Students will be able to recognise development needs in work practices and operational structures and find and justify solutions. Students will learn the ethical principles of research and development and develop an understanding of the importance of critical and diverse knowledge in development processes. Students will be able to apply community-based approaches in the organisation and management of development processes. In addition, the module prepares students to manage the thesis process and introduces them to methods used in thesis writing.”

In addition to these the programme also has a strong focus on promoting international competence. “The aim of the international and multicultural studies is to learn to work in international and multicultural settings and understand the fundamentals of diversity, global challenges and sustainable society.”

The curriculum of Humak is centred more on aims and less on content. In contrast to the evaluation-centred curriculum of vocational education and training, curriculum of higher education does not describe evaluation in depth. Even the length of the curriculum reflects this: the curriculum of Humak University describes two programmes in forty pages, while the National Agency of

Education's vocational education curriculum describes three programmes in 291 pages. (Kiilakoski 2019.)

Finland. Summary.

What stakeholders have been responsible for creating competence frameworks?

In vocational education, National Agency for Education has had a strong role in promoting competence-based approaches. Educational policy has contributed to the introduction of competence-based education. Higher education institutions offering youth work education have autonomy and have produced a slightly different model.

What are the contents of different competence descriptions?

There are two models, one in vocational and one in higher education. In the first one, competences are about professional encounters; instruction of individuals, groups and communities; promoting growth and well-being of young people; support and social empowerment and inclusion. In higher education the competences are community, pedagogical, social and development competence. Both competence descriptions share the pedagogical component, emphasise groups and communities, and emphasise supporting growth. They also share a social policy perspective, although with different emphasis. Vocational education is more explicit about the organisational issues and basic work skills.

Are youth work competence frameworks competence structures or competence levels models? Are they detailed (specific) or do they describe general statements (universal)?

The curriculum of higher education follows a competence structures model. The degree of breakdown into operations is general. The competences are described in broad and general terms. There are two distinct models of competence-based education in Finland. Model of vocational education is a competence levels model, since evaluation of competences is divided into different levels.

How can competences be evaluated and what are the criteria for doing so? Are there policy processes to evaluate competences of youth workers, and if there are, how has the policy process evolved?

There are no national evaluations of youth work competence, nor is there a mechanism for recognising competences of youth workers. Students in formal education are evaluated according to the curricula. There are national criteria for evaluation in vocational education. The higher education institutions do their own evaluations.

What is known about the competence frameworks of formal youth work education? Is there a connection between these competences and other competence descriptions of youth work, such as ones used in designing training?

There are no policy processes outside formal education for evaluating youth work competences. Outside formal education, there has been little policy interest in explaining youth work

competences in Finland. The concept of competence does not play a strong role in youth policy. Therefore, in Finland the main emphasis is on formal education.

5.2. Germany

There is no national level competence framework in Germany, as it was pointed out in the previous study on Mapping the Educational Pathways of youth workers (O'Donovan & al. 2020). However, since the Bologna process was introduced, especially higher education has seen a transformation from knowledge-oriented approach to competence-oriented approach. Also, there has been a debate on the practical aspects in higher education. Youth work is usually taught at universities of applied sciences, which have emphasised practical aspects more than traditional academic institutions.

The German Qualifications Framework (DQR) is an instrument for classifying qualifications in the German education system. It is intended to facilitate orientation in the German education system and to contribute to the comparability of German qualifications in Europe. It is closely linked to the European Qualification Framework (EQF). The DQR divides competences into four areas or two categories, each with two sub-categories: Professional competence, consisting of knowledge and skills, and personal competence, consisting of social competence and autonomy.

The following three examples of different models used in Germany can be offered.

In the field of higher education, the *Qualifikationsprofil Jugendarbeit* is the only explicit competence framework for youth work. It has been developed in the frame of the research project Jump – “Youth Work with Perspective” by the University of Applied Sciences in Kempten. Its development is strongly connected to evaluation and further development of the part-time degree programme "Social Work with a focus on Youth Work". Youth work studies in Germany are a part of social work in higher education. The qualification profile focuses on pointing out the requirements for the knowledge and skills of the professionals and their training as concretely as possible. The contents of the model have been developed based on eight group interviews which were conducted with representatives of various fields of activity of youth work in Bavaria, and an online survey on the requirements for youth workers in 2017 (with 396 people participating). Afterwards, results were evaluated qualitatively, and a content analysis was carried out. These results were then intensively discussed with other actors in youth work - from the fields of science, theory, teaching, practice and political. The model has been criticised for being too much based on understanding of youth workers and not enough on theoretical perspectives.

The model has four main categories of competences, which are divided into 32 sub-categories. This model is therefore among the most detailed in this study. The sub-categories are described more generally, and they do not talk about observable behaviour. The model is not divided into knowledge, skills and attitudes. Instead, it focuses on describing what youth workers should be able to do. (Qualifikationsprofil Jugendarbeit.)

1. Operational competences

1.1 pedagogical-professional action, sub-divided into “facilitating participation”, “shaping educational areas and processes”, “being a reliable confidante”, and “creating professional co-operation”.

1.2 political action, sub-divided into “advocating interests and participation of adolescents”, “enabling the young to participate politically”, “creating and defining open spaces”, “representing the field of youth work”, and “representing interests concerning labour policy”.

1.3 administrative action and organisational management, sub-divided into “carrying out the administration work for the institution and organisation”, “organising financial resources”, “leading and managing the staff”, and “carrying out public relations work”.

2. Personal competences

subdivided into “mastering challenges competently”, “organising day-to-day work independently”, “demonstrating social competence”, “being able to position oneself”, “being ready to constantly learn something new”, and “acting responsibly”.

3. Professional self-identity

3.1 professional identity, subdivided into “identification with youth work” and “developing a professional understanding of roles”.

3.2 pedagogical approach, subdivided into “embodying basic pedagogical principles”, “having critical sympathy for children and adolescents”, “getting involved as a person”, “positive attitude towards the resistant and the unexpected”, and “reflecting on their own professional action”.

4. Scientific and theoretical basis

subdivided into “specific knowledge about youth work and social work”, “key perspectives and findings of the related disciplines”, “structural knowledge”, “scientific and theoretical reference in their own work”, “legal prerequisites”, and “socio-political framework conditions and developments”.²

The Youth Leader Card (Juleica) is a nationwide standardised ID card for volunteers in youth work. It serves as a proof of qualification for the holder. Only people who can prove that they attended training according to prescribed standards can apply for the Juleica. This gives them a qualification that is not available in other areas of voluntary work. Every Juleica card holder has completed training according to fixed standards. The Juleica card also gives the holder legitimacy vis-à-vis public authorities, such as information and advice centres, youth facilities, police, and consulates. In addition, the Juleica is also intended to give social recognition for voluntary work and quality in youth work. Nationwide, there are more than 100,000 volunteers in youth work who have a valid Juleica. Many more youth leaders have completed the training but have not applied for the Juleica. Most youth leaders (over 60%) are between 16 and 25 years old. These youth leaders make over

² qualification profile: https://www.agjb.de/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/WEB_hsk_broschuere_qualifikationsprofil_181114.pdf

95% of all youth work in Germany possible.

Juleica card has a rather long history. On the initiative of the German Federal Youth Council (Deutscher Bundesjugendring), the federal states agreed to introduce the youth leader card in November 1998. The "Agreement of the Supreme Youth Authorities of the Länder on the introduction of an ID card for youth leaders" is the basis for today's youth leader card. The youth leader card has been introduced in all federal states through state law regulations. The prescribed contents of the Juleica training were adopted by the Conference of Youth Ministers 2009. In addition to this nationwide minimum requirement, each federal state has supplementary quality standards that regulate, for example, the duration of the training (nationwide at least 30 hours, in some federal states up to 50 hours). *The Juleica is a framework for training and content, with no specific focus on competences.*

The prescribed contents of the Juleica training include (decided by Conference of Youth Ministers 2009):

- tasks and functions of the youth leader and ability to lead groups
- aims, methods and tasks of youth work
- legal and organisational issues of youth work
- psychological and pedagogical basics for working with children and young people
- the dangers of adolescence and questions of child and youth protection
- In addition, it is recommended that current issues of adolescence and youth participation, gender roles and gender mainstreaming, migration background and intercultural competence, international youth exchange and association-specific topics be included in training standards
- When applying for the Juleica, proof of participation in first aid training is required.

In addition to these, there is for example ProfilPass, which is a tool for identifying one's own competences that were acquired at some point in life, regardless of time and context. It aims at making an important contribution to the recognition of competences that were acquired informally. Although it is not youth work-specific, it can be used to evaluate learning in youth work. From 2005 the "Kompetenznachweis Kultur" (proof of competences in youth cultural education) documented competences learnt in youth cultural work. Similarly, the "Kompetenznachweis International" offers international youth work organisations different ways to professionally certify *participation* in their international projects and / or the *commitment* of the young people and the team members.

Besides competence models designed especially for the purposes of youth work, there are, for example, models for social workers, which can be applied to youth work as well. There are models for recognising learning in youth work. Development of these models and competence models of youth work have had different history, and there are differences in content. There are many stakeholders involved in creating competence models. The developments in education policy have especially influenced developments of competence-based approaches.

Germany. Summary.

What stakeholders have been responsible for creating competence frameworks?

There are national level processes for recognising competences of youth workers. In formal education, German qualifications framework is based on competences. University of applied sciences of Kempten created a competence model for youth work. German Federal Youth Council was active in promoting Juleica.

What are the contents of different competence descriptions?

Qualifikationsprofil Jugendarbeit is divided into four categories, operational competence, personal competence, professional self-identity, and scientific and theoretical basis. These topics include pedagogical competencies, organisatory aspects, advocating and promoting participation, and knowing about policies in different fields. Interestingly, the German model emphasises the theoretical and scientific aspects so that youth workers are better able to understand the nature of youth work and related disciplines, and society. Also, self-reflection is promoted. The *Qualifikationsprofil Jugendarbeit* is not based on the KSA (knowledge, skills and attitudes approach) model. Also, The German Qualifications Framework is not based on the KSA model, since it is divided into two categories: (1) professional competence, consisting of knowledge and skills, and (2) personal competence, consisting of social competence and autonomy.

Are youth work competence frameworks competence structures or competence levels models? Are they detailed (specific) or do they describe general statements (universal)?

Qualifikationsprofil Jugendarbeit is a competence structures model. There are 32 different competences. However, the breakdown into operations is not detailed. The descriptions are general, and do not describe working in concrete conditions.

How can competences be evaluated and what are the criteria for doing so? Are there policy processes to evaluate competences of youth workers, and if there are, how has the policy process evolved?

Juleica card recognizes and validates learning of youth leaders. It is a national level development.

What is known about the competence frameworks of formal youth work education? Is there a connection between these competences and other competence descriptions of youth work, such as ones used in designing training?

Based on the information, competence descriptions outside formal education have been developed with no clear connection to formal education frameworks.

5.3. Georgia

Georgia has a basic training course on non-formal education and youth work with young people. The course is on qualification level five in EQF. The aim of the program is to train non-formal

education practitioners (i.e. youth workers) to bring the practice of youth work and youth worker core competencies in line with European standards.

There is no national competence framework of youth work in the country. Due to this, Council of Europe's Youth Work Portfolio was used as a competence framework which influenced the design of the youth workers' certification course. According to Georgian legislation, a framework document of a European and/or any EU member state could be used as a model if there is no similar document in the country. Other than this, there are no youth workers' competence evaluation, recognition or validation mechanisms in the country.

In 2020 Youth Workers Association of Georgia developed the first, state-accredited short-term training certification course with support of the Youth Agency of Georgia. The content of the curriculum was developed as a competence-based approach. It aims to train youth workers to bring the practice of youth work and youth worker core competencies in line with European standards as described by the Youth Work Portfolio.

The program has five learning outcomes:

1. Organising Youth Work
2. Youth counselling
3. Management and supervision of youth projects/events
4. Communication with actors of the Youth Work field
5. Professional self-development.

In 2021 Youth Workers Association of Georgia trained the first cohort of 30 students with support of the Youth Agency of Georgia.

Georgia. Summary.

What stakeholders have been responsible for creating competence frameworks?

Youth Workers Association and Youth Agency of Georgia.

What are the contents of different competence descriptions?

The Georgian model is influenced by Youth Work Portfolio.

Are youth work competence frameworks competence structures or competence levels models? Are they detailed (specific) or do they describe general statements (universal)?

Youth Work Portfolio, on which the program is based, is a competence structures model.

How can competences be evaluated and what are the criteria for doing so? Are there policy processes to evaluate competences of youth workers, and if there are, how has the policy process evolved?

State-accredited short-term training certification course for youth workers was developed in 2020.

What is known about the competence frameworks of formal youth work education? Is there a connection between these competences and other competence descriptions of youth work, such as ones used in designing training?

There is no formal education on youth work, and consequently no connection between training and education.

5.4. Ireland

The Republic of Ireland does not have an ‘overarching’ national competence framework for youth work education and training that would apply at all levels and in all contexts. Youth work has been in the process of being professionalised for nearly 40 years. This is evidenced by the provision of higher education qualifications in youth work since the early 1980s that integrate academic and practice dimensions. These programmes at undergraduate and post-graduate level are mapped to the [National Framework of Qualifications \(NFQ\)](#) in terms of level and the [European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System \(ECTS\)](#) in terms of volume. NFQ consists of ten levels, and according to the Outline National Framework of Qualification document, the Framework levels set out a range of standards of knowledge, skill and competence”. The division into knowledge, skill and competences is used systematically in the documents. In the description, competences are about context, role, learning to learn, and insight. Level five competences requirements are as follows “Act in a range of varied and specific contexts, taking responsibility for the nature and quality of outputs; identify and apply skill and knowledge to a wide variety of contexts” (context); “Exercise some initiative and independence in carrying out defined activities; join and function within multiple, complex and heterogeneous groups” (role), “Learn to take responsibility for own learning within a managed environment” (learning to learn), “Assume full responsibility for consistency of self-understanding and behaviour” (competence).

The professionalisation process has been supported by the establishment of the North South Education Training Standards Committee [NSETS] in 2006, which endorses programmes as ‘professional’, designed to lead to employment in the sector. The NSETS criteria and procedures take into account the [National Occupational Standards for Youth Work](#) (NOS) and the [Subject Benchmark Statement for Youth Work](#). While the NOS and the Subject Benchmark have no official status in Ireland, they are considered broadly compatible with current Irish youth work practice and policy.

The NSETS endorsement process is in addition to academic validation. Many people are employed as professional youth workers without being required to have NSETS endorsed qualifications. A number of higher education institutions have designed short, certified programmes that relate to ‘core skills’ or ‘specialist’ areas of practice. These are mapped to the NFQ, though not endorsed by NSETS. In addition, other award frameworks in youth work have been developed in line with the National Qualifications Framework (NFQ) in Further Education field which are within the remit of

[Quality and Qualifications Ireland](#) (QQI). These awards do not generally lead to professional employment. For the purposes of this study, different Professional Education and Training programs for Youth Workers in Higher Education endorsed by North South Education Training Standards Committee were analysed and shorter courses were analysed, on the surface.

To highlight the variety of competence frameworks in Ireland, three examples are offered. According to NSETS Professional Endorsement, National Occupational Standards “seek to capture and define the skills, knowledge and competences used within a work sector and form an agreed set of aspects, units and elements that are used to describe the quintessential characteristics of youth work” (NSETS 2013, 10). In the documentation of National Occupational Standards for youth work, the explicit “aim to define the competencies required to carry out the functions carried out by the youth work workforce. The NOS are intended to describe the competencies required to fulfil the tasks required in the youth sector.” (National Youth Agency 2020, Appendix 1. 1.) There are 26 different functions. Performance criteria and knowledge and understanding required to successfully complete the function is offered. Detailed information on each function is offered. The NOS titles are as follows:

- YW 01 Initiate, build and maintain relationships with young people
- YW 02 Assist young people to learn and engage with the youth work process
- YW 03 Comply with legal, regulatory and ethical requirements when carrying out youth work
- YW04 Develop and maintain productive working relationships in collaboration with colleagues, agencies and stakeholders for youth work
- YW05 Enable young people to identify, reflect and use their learning to enhance their future development
- YW06 Explore the concept of values and beliefs with young people
- YW07 Apply youth work values and principles in group work
- YW08 Engage with and empower young people to make use of digital media in their daily lives
- YW09 Support young people to become responsible citizens through active involvement with youth work
- YW10 Advocate with and on behalf of young people so that their interests are represented
- YW11 Plan, prepare and facilitate learning activities with young people
- YW12 Manage resources with young people for youth work activities
- YW13 Access information with and for young people to inform decision making
- YW14 Assist young people to recognise, realise and defend their rights
- YW15 Assist young people to assess risk and make informed choices in the management of their health and well-being
- YW16 Equip young people with safeguarding techniques
- YW17 Monitor and review your organisation’s policy and practices for the protection and safeguarding of young people and self
- YW18 Engage with young people to promote their emotional wellbeing and mental health
- YW19 Develop a culture and ethos that promotes inclusion and values diversity

- YW20 Determine, evaluate and prioritise your organisation's objectives for youth work in the community
- YW21 Secure funding and resources for youth work
- YW22 Influence and develop youth work strategy
- YW23 Engage young people in the strategic development of youth work
- YW24 Monitor and evaluate the impact of youth work strategy and delivery
- YW25 Work as an effective and critically reflective youth work practitioner
- YW26 Provide leadership to other youth workers and volunteers.

Since the space of this paper is limited, only one example is offered. YW 10 (Advocate with and on behalf of young people so that their interests are represented) is "about supporting young people to develop their communication skills to represent their views and values and those of their peers, to others. It also includes identifying what the needs and interests of individuals or groups of young people are and presenting their needs and interests accurately and fairly". Thirteen different performance criteria are described, and 18 points for knowledge and understanding are described. NOS is highly detailed compared to most of the models covered in this study.

Secondly, A National Induction Training Programme for Volunteers engaged in Youth Work Practice offers a national framework for training of volunteers. The motivation to establish such a program was lack of a common framework for the training of volunteers in Ireland. The program describes five key components:

Who are we?

What do we do and where do we do it?

Why do we do it?

Who is it for and with?

How do we do it?

Core content has been identified under each component. Core content is sub-divided into core competencies for volunteers. Knowledge (I need to know), Skills (I need to be able to), Attributes/Attitudes (I am) are described. Additionally, a set of Learning Outcomes have been identified for each area of content. For example, the component Who are we is divided into the following elements of competences. 1. I need to know: the mission/vision/ethos statement of the organisation as relevant. 2. I need to be able to work within the stated mission/vision/ethos of the organisation. 3. I am willing to volunteer taking account of the mission (and ethos, vision, and values if relevant) of the organisation. (National Youth Council of Ireland 2010.)

Thirdly, there are other developments, such as the Competence Framework for Digital Youth Work, created by SKILL IT for youth, which started out as a partner building activity in 2017. This framework is divided into three zones (learning, innovation, and skills; information and media skills /literacy; life and career skills). These zones are further categorised into nine categories (Creativity and Innovation; Critical Thinking and Problem Solving; Communication Collaboration / Teamwork;

Information Literacy; Media Literacy; Flexibility and Adaptability; Social and Cross-Cultural Productivity and Accountability). (Skill IT. Competence Framework.) This model is based on understanding competences as a cluster of knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviour.

Ireland. Summary.

What stakeholders have been responsible for creating competence frameworks?

As can be seen, there are different competence frameworks for youth work in Ireland. Different stakeholders have been involved in the preparation of these. Ireland also uses documents developed in England, such as National Occupational Standards. Competence Framework for Volunteers was prepared by the National Youth Council of Ireland. Digital Competences Project was developed by SKILL IT project.

What are the contents of different competence descriptions?

NOS is based on six functional areas, which are broken down into different activities. These are (1) Working with young people and others; (2) Facilitate learning and development of young people through planning and implementing learning activities in youth work; (3) Actively demonstrate commitment to inclusion, equity and young people's interests, health and wellbeing; (4) Plan and implement strategy and youth work activities for young people; (5) Develop, lead and manage self and others; (6) Working with communities. Volunteer competences emphasizes understanding the mission of the organisation, principles of youth work in addition to different desired outcomes and methods. Three competence frameworks, examined more closely, all use different conception of competences. Policy documents in Ireland talk about knowledge, skills and competences. The National Induction Training Programme for Volunteers is based on the KSA model, and Digital Competences model understands competences as a cluster of knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviour.

Are youth work competence frameworks competence structures or competence levels models? Are they detailed (specific) or do they describe general statements (universal)?

The frameworks studied are competence structures models. National Occupational Standards is highly detailed and broken into different operations. They are not context-specific, however. Competences for digital youth work are more specific.

How can competences be evaluated and what are the criteria for doing so? Are there policy processes to evaluate competences of youth workers, and if there are, how has the policy process evolved?

The professionalisation process has been supported by the establishment of the North South Education Training Standards Committee [NSETS] in 2006 which endorses programmes as 'professional', designed to lead to employment in the sector. Despite this, many are employed as professional youth workers without being required to have NSETS endorsed qualifications.

What is known about the competence frameworks of formal youth work education? Is there a connection between these competences and other competence descriptions of youth work, such as ones used in designing training?

The background for developing competence frameworks varies. For example, the Digital Youth Work competence framework was influenced by P21 Framework for 21st Century Learning (SKILL IT, 6).

5.5. Portugal

The Main tool for describing competences of youth work in Portugal is *Recognition, Validation and Certification of Skills for Youth Worker*, which aims at allowing people who work in the youth field to acquire the certification of *Técnico de Juventude*. This training course was created to promote non-formal education and its complementarity with formal education systems; to raise the effectiveness and efficiency of the response to the current problems of young people and society. The aim was to strengthen non-formal learning, for both educators with Professional Profile, and for young people (National Model for Validation and Recognition of Skills Acquired in NFE). The youth work Professional training course in Portugal falls under the Institute for Employment and Vocational Training (IEFP).

The professional profile was published in the work-employment Bulletin of the National Agency for Qualification (ANQEP) on 8th December 2015. IPDJ (Portuguese Institute for Sport and Youth) worked in collaboration with ANQEP on the Recognition/Validation/Certification of Professional Skills. Entities accredited by the Directorate-General for Employment and Labour Relations could accredit previously obtained training and develop Certified Modular Training. The course awards a diploma of completion of the secondary education that opens further studies for higher education, and level four of the National Board of Qualifications that allow the student to enter the job market.

Youth Worker's Training Course consists of 1025 hours of predefined Short Term Training Units. When the course was developed, 500 hours were added.

The training curriculum consists of the following modules

- 1) Youth Worker – contexts and practices (25h)
- 2) Youth Cultures - young people today (25h)
- 3) Methods and tools for participation and action with young people (25h)
- 4) Youth Associations and citizenship (25h)
- 5) Management of Youth Associations (50h)
- 6) Methodology of youth work through sport (25h)
- 7) Non-Formal Education Methods and Techniques (50h)
- 8) Youth Volunteering (25h)
- 9) Opportunities for young people (50h)

- 10) Youth Information – national and international contexts and practices (25h)
- 11) Prevention and intervention with young people (50h)
- 12) Youth Policies in Portugal (25h)
- 13) Youth Policies in the world and international relations (25h)
- 14) Education and cooperation for development in the youth field (25h)
- 15) Animation and Coordination of Summer Camps (50h).

Besides these youth-work specific modules, there are other modules, used in other trainings. *Although the training course does not constitute a competence framework, it describes knowledge, skills and attitudes.* Soon after the publication of the Youth Worker's profile, several training courses were run by youth organisations and technical schools.

There is a debate in Portugal about the need of a more specific training for youth workers, in addition to the current one. There is also a debate about the need to focus more on non-formal education, particularly in youth work activities. Also, the relevance of the recognition, validation and certification of the professional skills acquired by youth worker is debated. Although a Youth Worker training already exists in Portugal, it is not a compulsory training for the employment in the youth workers profession. At this moment, there is a discussion in Portugal on whether this or another possible training to be developed should be a requirement for the exercise of the youth work profession. *Creating more detailed competence frameworks is the task of the future.*

Since creating a more detailed competence description is yet to be achieved, the five questions will not be applied to Portuguese context.

6. CONCLUSION: TOWARDS A COMMON EUROPEAN FRAMEWORK?

The preceding section on five countries has been mostly descriptive. This methodology was chosen to provide readers with information on the national level developments within the examined countries, without trying to interpret this information in the context of some theoretical framework. Given the variety in national policies, this type of framework would be too general and would probably leave out important information. As has been shown, the policy context of creating competence frameworks varies considerably. Besides the policy context, the countries differ in their theoretical orientations.

In this concluding section, three general points based on the study will be offered before tackling the five questions used to analyse the models.

Firstly, earlier mapping studies have analysed that not all the countries, such as Finland or Germany, have national level competence descriptions. While this still holds true, closer examination reveals that in both countries there are processes and documents which offer competence description. In Finland the formal youth work curriculum provides competence descriptions. In Germany, the *Qualifikationsprofil Jugendarbeit* and Juleica Card for youth leaders provide perspectives on what

youth workers and youth leaders should be able to do, what they should know and how they should behave.

It is worth noting that when trying to come up with a common European framework, one must pay attention to existing policy processes. For example, long history of Juleica Card means that it will be rather difficult to change this practice. Also, formal education curricula are notably hard to change. It is an open question how a common European competence framework should relate to these existing procedures.

Secondly, based on the examples in this study the developmental level of practice architectures of youth work also affects the use of competence descriptions. To express this in a simplified manner, the more youth work support structures there are in the country, the more complex the issue of competences is likely to be. Georgia, which in an earlier study has been described as a country whose practice architecture of youth work is in the need of development (Kiilakoski 2020), has used Youth Work Portfolio when creating their own model. Portugal, which has a strong practice architecture in need of development (Kiilakoski 2020), has developed a course for youth workers. This course is important for the development of youth work in the country. It is not based on competence frameworks and could perhaps be described as content-oriented. Finland, Germany and Ireland are all countries with strong youth work practice architectures. This means that European competence models had limited influence on related processes in these countries. They also have many points of reference for developing youth work, including but not limited to policy documents, educational policies or legislation. Since any development needs to consider existing practice architectures (such as cultural-discursive dimensions and legal dimensions), this means that possible development of European competence-based frameworks should take into account existing descriptions in different countries, their official status and different stakeholders involved.

Thirdly and more broadly, the concept of competence has been criticised for being elusive. This is true to youth work competencies as well. Some competence frameworks follow the KSA model, and see competences as being about knowledge, skills and attitudes. Others add value dimensions and observable behaviours to the list. Irish policy documents refer to knowledge, skills and competences. German Qualification framework separates between professional competence, consisting of knowledge and skills, and personal competence, consisting of social competence and autonomy. European Youth Work Portfolio and National Occupational Standards used in Ireland refer to functions or functional areas. In some cases, it was difficult to find the exact relation of the documents provided to the competence discussions in the given country. These differences complicate the analysis of the common core. If a common flexible European model is to be created, there needs to be a common understanding about the different dimensions of competencies.

Five themes were studied more closely. These included stakeholders promoting youth work; content of competences model; competence structures/competence levels distinction; policy processes in evaluating youth worker competencies; relationship between formal education and training.

There are different stakeholders involved in the process. In Finland the main drivers are formal education institutions. In Germany different governmental and civil society agents have been active. In Georgia Youth Worker's Association has been active and has been influenced by the Youth Work Portfolio. In Ireland policy processes have shaped competences, but civil society stakeholders have also created competence models. In Portugal the development of *Recognition, Validation and Certification of Skills for Youth worker* has required attention of different governmental stakeholders. This means that stakeholders involved are different in the examined countries. This is probably due to the different policy processes and may also be based on contingent (situational) factors. This study also shows that the more developed the practice architectures of youth work of the country, the more there will likely be different stakeholders.

The content of competency descriptions is harder to analyse due to different levels of specificity and different ways of verbalising the content. Therefore, any description of common themes is likely to be vague and less accurate. However, there is some extent of 'horizontal consistency' in the examined competence frameworks. They all deal with working with young people as individuals and with groups. They talk about pedagogical competences or skills. Most of the competence frameworks include organisational issues and may include working with projects. Most of them talk about supporting participation. Promoting health and well-being of the young is mentioned in most of the models.

However, the competence frameworks examined do not share a common basis. They are developed based on national realities and traditions, which means that there are lot of differences as well. Echoing earlier comparative research on 21st century competences, it can be said that consistency in the content is "obscured by the use of different grouping and categorising procedures, as well as differences in terminology chosen" (Voogt & Roblin 2012, 315). Therefore, analysing the content of competence frameworks reveals different vocabularies and perhaps ideas. To point out only a few examples, some of the competence descriptions explicitly mention political competencies and/or advocacy while others do not tackle this question explicitly. Interestingly, the question about community work competencies is answered differently, and not all the competence descriptions include it. German model emphasises theoretical and scientific competencies.

The majority of the competence frameworks are competence structures models. Competence levels model are rare. In this study, only vocational education competence framework in Finland could be seen as a competence level model. The reasons for this cannot be based on the empirical material. It can only be speculated that talking about competence levels may be seen as being harmful to the unity of the youth field, and that pointing out to differences in competences within the youth field could be seen as being too formal or too hierarchical, and maybe even exclusive. However, this begs the question if it is actually possible to combine the competences of volunteers and of professional youth workers into a single competence structure framework.

As can be seen from the descriptions of this study, the models for volunteers in Ireland and in Germany are different from professional frameworks. Irish model for volunteers emphasises the

commitment to the ethos of the organisation and working in the local community. Wider societal themes, such as a social policy related issues, management themes or promoting participation of young people in youth policy settings is not present. German Juleica holders need to know the basics of youth work, issues of child protection and more general psychological and pedagogical principles of working with young people. Compared to other German models, the emphasis is less on youth policy issues, advocacy or self-reflection. The question about the possibility of the common model for all youth work is further complicated by the fact that competence frameworks for recognising learning of the young in youth work context seems to be disconnected from competence-based approaches for youth workers.

Evaluating competences differs. Some of the models are recognised and regulated whereas some models are more tools for helping the organisations themselves to be active. Vertical consistency (understood intentions and implementation of competence models, and assessment of outcomes) varies considerably between participating countries. Juleica Card is a nationally recognised certificate, while some competence descriptions do not bear the same legal status.

One motivation of this study was to find out what are the connections between formal education and youth policy. The so called 'competence revolution' has meant that curricula are increasingly designed based on competencies. Due to the emergence of a 'competence revolution', formal education has moved towards emphasising learning outcomes and, to a certain extent, competences. On the one hand, educational institutions have professional autonomy, and they are to varying extent able to make decisions by themselves. European competence descriptions in youth work have not influenced curriculum design so far. On the other hand, educational policy is highly regulated on the national, and to a certain extent, European level. There is detailed competence description in Finnish and German universities of applied sciences, but they have not influenced the design of training. If there is a will to create a European youth work competence framework for education and training of youth workers, the question about formal education needs to be addressed more thoroughly than previously.

Lastly, competence models have sometimes been criticised for being "long lists of competencies understood properly by no one other than those who are employed to compile such lists" instead of "statements of what might be expected of a good worker in terms that are understood by those who will be affected by their work" (Halliday 2004, 585). Competence frameworks studied here use different concepts. An interesting, and perhaps even necessary, research question for further research would be examining how youth work communities have received and understood existing frameworks and finding out if the competence descriptions are intelligible and of use to them.

7. CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED IN THIS STUDY

There is a commitment in the European youth field to create a a coherent and flexible competency-based framework for the education and training of paid and volunteer youth workers. This

framework should also take into account the diversity of youth work practice architectures in different countries. Based on the results of this study, four main challenges are identified. The purpose of describing these is not to say that such a framework will be impossible, but rather to point out that the following obstacles need to be reflected when designing a European competence framework.

Conceptual challenge. This study has referred to the elusive nature of competences both in the theoretical part and in the empirical part. Therefore, we cannot assume that there is a common European understanding on what the concept of competence means. This may complicate coming up with a European framework, especially if this conceptual question is not addressed. Competences are usually based on the KSA model, which sees competences as a cluster of knowledge, skills and attitudes. In addition to this, some models talk about values and/or behaviour. Different countries may have varying theoretical ideas on what competences are, and how they relate to performing a task.

Content challenge. Different competence models of youth workers in the studied countries approach competences differently. To take just one comparison, the curriculum of Humak University in Finland describes four competences, which are pedagogical, community, social and development competencies. Qualifikationsprofil Jugendarbeit developed in Germany describes four categories of competences, which are operational competencies, personal competencies, professional self-understanding and scientific and theoretical basis. Comparison is further complicated by the fact that Qualifikationsprofil Jugendarbeit is divided into sub-categories.

Even the comparison of two models shows that the content challenge has at least two dimensions. Firstly, the number of competences described varies. Some of the models are broken down into detailed operations while others remain rather general. If a European model would be general, there still remains a question if the competences could be general enough to take into account all the existing detailed descriptions in different parts of Europe. If a European model would be detailed, there is a danger that it includes some competences that are alien to some European ways of thinking about youth work.

Second, and perhaps a more difficult problem is that the competence frameworks studied are far from identical. They are, in some cases, expressed in different terms, but more fundamental issue deals with different theoretical ideas on what youth workers should be able to do. The German case emphasizes self-reflection and also theoretical aspects, which are absent in some other models. This example highlights that there may be different theoretical conceptions of youth work, which are based on historical and social developments, but also on different intellectual traditions of thinking about issues such as growth, transitions, education, social work and citizenship.

Policy challenge. Finland, Germany and Ireland are examples of countries that have strong practice architectures of youth work. This means that there are already existing structures and policies which determine how competences can be approached. Changing these practices may be difficult.

Sometimes there is an official decision on how competences should be approached. There are also closely related decisions, for example, on the content of education which affect how competences frameworks can be created.

Formal education is a special challenge in this case. Formal education is highly regulated by the state. The processes usually have a long timespan. If the aim is to influence both formal education and training of youth workers, different higher education representatives need to be invited to the creation of a European framework. Since they are bound by the existing norms of their countries, this process might prove to be slow.

Structures vs. level challenge. A large majority of competence models examined in this study are competence structures models instead of competences level models. In practice, this means that they describe different competences and different knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and behaviour relevant to these competences. They do not describe different levels (for professional, intermediate and beginner level competencies, for example).

The aim of a European competence framework is to include both paid youth workers and volunteers. Germany and Ireland have created models for volunteers, and for paid youth workers. In both countries there are notable differences between these models. Therefore, it is not unfair to ask that if coming up with a competence model that combines both paid and volunteer youth workers has been difficult in one country, how realistic is it to succeed at the European level. A related question may be if it is realistic to assume that a coherent European model can be achieved using competence structures models instead of competence level models.

Clearly these first insights into reading in more detail competence frameworks for youth workers applied in five countries has shown that there is a rich base of knowledge that has evolved in the specific historic, cultural and political context of each country. Continuing to learn about such national frameworks and models will help to enrich European and trans-national reflections on what kind of education and training should be offered to youth workers across Europe. More importantly, these insights should be accompanied by understanding how the communities of practice of youth work receive them and even more, how young people benefitting from youth work practiced according to these models feel the impact of the education and training youth workers gain. The door is only opening.

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