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The professionalization of the counsellor role – a comparative study of Finland and Norway

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ABSTRACT

Career guidance counsellors' competence requirements in Norwegian schools have been the subject of decades-long discussion. Practitioners, experts, and stakeholders have called for precise requirements and professionalized status for counsellors, but with little results. In the Finnish context, however, career guidance is more professionalized, and the counsellor competence requirements are defined by law. Why have the two systems developed differently? In this research, we used 'historical institutionalism' as our lens and compared the two developmental histories of the counsellor role and the reasoning behind these differentiating systems. By utilizing Toulmin's model of argumentation, we analysed rationales in policy documents from ministries to expert groups to reveal how the policy rationales have formed the different statuses of the career counsellor profession in the 1950s, 1960s and 1990s. Norway and Finland saw the counsellor role similarly, but eventually, decisions on qualifications and competency were made from different perspectives.

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Competence; career guidance; guidance counsellor qualification; professionalization

Introduction

Career guidance and counselling (CGC) and its training programmes are organized, managed and evaluated differently internationally (see Haug et al., 2020; Nilsson & Hertzberg, 2022). In the Nordic countries, it is generally found that national education legislation includes career guidance and career education as a universal right to all students, and laws also state that provision should have a certain level of professionalization (Einarsdottir et al., 2023). However, countries differ widely in terms of defining the role of those who shall provide it in schools; they differ in terms of defining its content and in approach to ensuring that it is of good quality.



Hence, in the local context, training programmes, quality assurance practices and professional competence requirements modify professionalism in career guidance counselling (Nilsson & Hertzberg, 2022). According to Abbott (1988), professionalization is a process for practitioners to organize work and control expertise in a practice field, in which they have the right to form pivotal problems and seek solutions to solve them (Nilsson & Hertzberg, 2022), i.e. decide criteria for qualification for the profession. Around the world, the career guidance practice fields have solved this in many different ways, from loosely defined communities of practice to highly regulated professionalization (O'Reilly et al., 2020). Why have career guidance counsellors

achieved professional status in certain countries and not others? In this comparative article, we seek to describe the policy process towards the professionalization of career counsellors in Norwegian and Finnish schools and understand the variable development towards professional and non-professional status.

In this article, we understand 'competence' as the more abstract, loosely defined and debatable set of abilities, knowledge and skills seen as wanted or required to do the tasks connected to the counsellor role. 'Qualifications' are the determined set of abilities, knowledge, and skills needed for the role. Qualifications can be formal, as from education, or informal as from experience; it can be preferred or required. Here, we discuss the different decisions about whether qualifications should be required and formal or not for the career counsellor role in the two countries but do not discuss the specific elements of career counsellor competence per se.

Background

Even though career guidance has 'always' been a task with a place in Norwegian schools (Kjærgård, 2020), it was in the late 1950s that the responsibility for giving educational and vocational guidance was allocated to a specific role. Establishing this role in the Norwegian compulsory school was a process fraught

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with tensions and ambiguities, and the discussion pivoted around the range of competencies and possible qualifications career guidance counsellors should have. Should it be enough to be a qualified teacher with experience in education, or does the role require a more specialized and professional competence, e.g. in pedagogy or psychology (Teig, 2000)?

This question is not entirely resolved today, as the qualifications for school career guidance counsellors are still debated. Career guidance and counselling in Norwegian schools are most often the school counsellors' responsibility, and their tasks range from individual and group counselling to facilitating career learning in collaboration with the teacher staff and school management. They also often teach a mandatory career learning subject in middle school (lower secondary), from eighth through tenth grade. The counsellor role is often combined with an ordinary teacher role (Bakke et al., 2023). In the present situation, it is recommended that a school counsellor has a minimum of 30 ECTS in career guidance-related subjects on top of their formal qualification as a teacher (NOU: (2016), p. 7), leaving the theoretical and methodological basis for professional practice of career guidance open. There is a substantial push from practitioners and school leaders, career guidance experts and influential stakeholders at the policy level for educational authorities to finally set the bar (qualifications) and, as such, give career guidance practitioners in schools status as professionals (Bakke et al., 2024). However, the question about qualifications for professional career guidance practice lingers and will not likely be resolved soon.

Compared to Norway, Finland has a strictly professionalized career guidance system. Career education became embedded in the national core curricula as a compulsory school subject, and hence, guidance practitioner training stabilized during educational reforms in the 1970s. The University of Joensuu organized the first master's degree counsellor training programme in 1988, and school counsellor qualifications were standardized in legislation in 1998. Compulsive school, vocational and upper secondary guidance counsellors must complete either a specialist postgraduate diploma in guidance and counselling (60 ECTS) or achieve a master's degree in guidance and counselling (300 ECTS) (Toni & Vuorinen, 2020; Vuorinen & Lerkkanen, 2011). This presents an interesting juxtaposition of the two countries' career counsellor training systems; in Finland, the required qualifications are well-defined, while in Norway, the requirements are still debated, as well as the idea of having *required* and not *preferred* qualifications.

Our objective for this study is to identify the different policy rationales and logic around these decisions concerning career guidance practice in

Norwegian and Finnish schools. In this article, we seek to critically analyse and compare these rationales and how they have affected the professionalization process of career guidance counsellors who work in compulsory education in the two countries.

We adopt an interpretive policy studies approach where the focus is the official accounts of policy problem description, the identification of policy solutions, and the history of problem representation of particular policy areas (Browne et al., 2018). We will use these rationales to evaluate the status quo of the professionalization of career guidance practice in Norway and Finland and ask: How have the policy rationales formed the different statuses of the career counsellor profession in compulsory school?

Looking at the professionalization of career guidance in Norwegian and Finnish schools through a historical institutionalism theory lens

The pivotal question for our study is to what extent the two countries' school career guidance systems differ in degree of professionalization and why they have developed differently from what we would say is a similar starting point. Hence, a framework for understanding what professions are is necessary for a start.

Professionalisation

There are many possible frameworks for understanding what a profession is (Abbott, 1988), and some would say that this is because theorization on professions has not yet made a clear distinction between professions and occupations (Evetts, 2011). Perhaps it is more beneficial to ask what *professionalisation* is because it denotes a process rather than an end state. Professionalization has often been understood as the process leading to a self-regulating status of controlling the practice, entrance, scholarly development and accreditation of professionals within specific occupations (Abbott, 1988). Moreover, for many, what marks a profession is that the national state has trusted professional bodies enough to give them the 'regulatory bargain', which entails that professionals can get protected titles or be specially certified for their occupation. This makes it exclusive and of a higher status, and in return, professions ensure quality by maintaining qualifications and sanctioning bad and unethical practices (Gough & Neary, 2021; Larson, 2017).

There are many concerns about the regulatory bargain as the hallmark of professionalization, and criticism often emphasizes how the forming of professions is a power struggle and a mechanism of exclusion and superiority under the cover of

securing expertise in a field (Larson, 2017). This is also central in the discussion around career guidance in Norway, where practice-based and education-based career guidance competence is often seen in opposition (Bakke et al., 2024). The questions about maintaining richness and variation in competencies and backgrounds among practitioners illustrate the mechanism of exclusion in professionalization processes.

The trade-off between scholarly competence and variety in practice is important to discuss. However, in this article, we employ a relatively simple framework for professionalization to compare the statuses of career guidance counsellors in the two school systems. Writers who have recently tried to sum up the international field of career guidance systems professionalization have used six criteria to classify them as either professionalized or not. These are a shared understanding of the competency that is necessary for the role, a unified set of qualifications, a theoretical foundation acquired through education, common practice, an ethical framework and a system for quality assurance (Gough & Neary, 2021; O'Reilly et al., 2020). The regulatory bargain is thus more a question about recognition from societal and policy stakeholders and is very rare in the international career guidance field (Gough & Neary, 2021; O'Reilly et al., 2020). However, qualification requirements for career guidance counsellors in the public sector can be seen as parallel, as they either include candidates with said competency or exclude candidates lacking such competence. Hence serving the same function.

Compared to international standards, Finland has an extremely professionalized guidance system (e.g. Vuorinen, 2022). In Finland, the competency and qualifications of guidance counsellors in compulsory education, vocational and upper secondary education are defined by law (Vuorinen, 2020); the Decree on Qualification Requirements for Teaching Staff 986/1998. According to Lairio (1992), education is the main instrument for producing professional qualifications. In the early 1990s, guidance counsellor was still considered a relatively new profession in Finland. The official titles varied between study guidance counsellors and student counsellors, nonetheless fulfilling the professionalization requirements (Lairio, 1992).

Whether candidates with or without formal qualifications have access to career guidance roles in Finland and Norway is thus the central pivotal point in our study. As Finland has limited this access and Norway has not, it is reasonable to argue that the Finnish career guidance field has reached the point of professionalization while the Norwegian field has not. The Finnish and Norwegian debate on the professionalization of career guidance came from a similar

starting point, and therefore, we want to understand these different developments. We limited the scope of our study to investigate the policy level of this debate and used historical institutionalism as a framework for our inquiry.

Historical institutionalism

New institutional Theory has three major strands: sociological institutionalism, rational choice institutionalism and historical institutionalism. In our research, we utilize historical institutionalism as our lens.

Our research stemmed from discussing the differences between the authors' home countries: Why have career guidance counsellors achieved professional status in Finland and not in Norway? We chose historical institutionalism (HI) to look at the 'origins rather than the functions of the various processes' (Thelen, 1999, p. 382). According to Pierson and Skocpol (2002), historical institutionalists start by asking why something important has or has not occurred and why some patterns or events occur at certain times and places. HI scholars have posed questions such as 'Why was national health insurance deemed politically impossible in the United States when similar programs already existed in other nations?' (Immergut, 1992, p. xi) and Steinmo (1993) has studied why tax systems vary in certain countries. We adopt this comparative perspective in our research.

Historical institutionalism is about taking 'time' seriously, asking big questions, analysing macro contexts and hypothesizing about the joint effects of institutions and processes (Pierson & Skocpol, 2002). Focusing on time and big questions refers to studying the past where e.g. institutions and laws shape society over time. This emphasizes the importance of understanding the historical context in influencing current events. HI looks at 'critical junctures' and long-time processes whilst trying to comprehend the over-arching contexts and interactions which shape policymaking or even states and politics (Pierson & Skocpol, 2002). The term 'critical juncture' refers to 'situations of uncertainty in which decisions of important actors are causally decisive for selecting one path of institutional development over other possible paths' (Capoccia, 2016, p. 89). Historical institutionalists are interested in why this choice was made and the particular outcome of the choice (Steinmo, 2008). HI is not a particular theory or a specific method either; the research can be comparative and provide suggestive interpretations or models by studying materials from both primary and secondary sources (Steinmo, 2008).

According to Steinmo (2008), HI scholars are especially intrigued by ideas, values and beliefs and how they have affected history or politics. Ideas in this context are solutions to problems:

A group may agree that an idea is a “good idea” IF they agree that there is a problem that needs solving. AND they agree that this solution might solve the problem. (Steinmo, 2008, p. 131)

We approach our study similarly by exploring what ideas or solutions to a constructed problem are expressed at different times.

In terms of development, an interesting element in our analysis is what we see as consistency in the development of the role in the two countries, of either more clarity and decisiveness about requirements or continuous inertia and unwillingness to formalize the counsellor role and its qualifications. Although it is not directly related to HI, the concept of path dependence in social science comes to mind, as it is a ‘construct concerned with prior conditions and the sequential patterning of subsequent events or circumstance’ (Science Direct, n.d.). We see this as relevant and want to nuance further by using the idea of *logic of appropriateness*; ‘humans maintain a repertoire of roles and identities, each providing rules of appropriate behaviour in situations for which they are relevant’ (March & Olsen, 2008, p. 4). The appropriateness of rules influences normativity, and rules ‘are followed because they are seen as natural, rightful, expected and legitimate’ (March & Olsen, 2004, p. 3). What is appropriate behaviour relates to similarity and congruence between situations rather than reflection on actual demands and requirements of the situation. They relate to institutionalized practices based on mutual, tacit and assumed understandings of the do’s and don’t in a situation or context. What is deemed appropriate comes from learning and implies history and experience, but that does not mean that past choices were good or successful. The critical question is what we can learn from the past about how career guidance was seen as part of education and investigate how that logic sits in the current context.

We will use the concepts of ‘critical juncture’ and ‘logic of appropriateness’ in the policy debates on career guidance and counselling at what we see as two central points in their developments. The first stop point is the initial debate (in both countries) in the 1950s and 1960s, during which the introduction of the school counsellor role and career guidance was debated, and decisions were made towards the end of the period. These two decades are seen as central as it was during this period that policymakers and stakeholders in the education and employment sectors, in a detailed way, set out and debated the need for career guidance and possible measures. The second

stop point is the 1990s when both countries made significant and lasting decisions about career guidance and counsellor roles in compulsory schools in the two countries. Utilizing the concepts of critical juncture and logic of appropriateness illuminates the broader historical context, revealing factors driving continuity or change in the discussions on career guidance. By examining critical moments in the development of career guidance professionalization, we can better understand the underlying patterns which have persisted or changed over time. We will detail our procedures and analysis in the next section.

Methodology

We have used Stephen Toulmin’s model for argument analysis to identify the logic of appropriateness in the rationales expressed in policy documents from governmental ministries and directorates, from expert groups advising policymakers, from legal documents and literature discussing policy’s role in the discussion on the professionalization of the career guidance role in the two countries. Since we are interested in what the problem is and its suggested solutions, we utilize Toulmin’s model of argumentation (2003) as a tool to extract the socially constructed problem, outcomes of the argumentation and the justifications behind it. Toulmin’s model assists us in finding out why a particular choice was made by looking at the problems constructed from our data – and how these problems required different solutions and why in Finland and Norway.

In a simplified form, the Toulmin (2003a) model is based on three main components: grounds, warrant and claim. Reasonable *grounds* or facts (data, evidence) include the information given on a particular subject, which eventually justifies the claim one is making. In our view, the grounds are considered socially constructed problems, and we draw attention to why specific facts are presented as problems and how they are framed (Bacchi, 2009; Browne et al., 2018). *Warrant* (because, since, justification) bridges the grounds to the argument’s claim. *Claim* (so) serves as the conclusion or outcome of the argumentation based on reasonable grounds.

We constructed tables according to the three components and inserted expressions from our data in the table. We examined the issues framed as problems during each era and the suggested solutions to these problems and justifications for the solutions. This revealed the reasoning behind developing the guidance profession and the role of guidance counsellors in each chosen decade. Using Toulmin’s model, we also strengthened our role as historical institutionalists interested in why a particular choice was made and its outcomes (Steinmo, 2008). The pivotal question for this analysis is: How have the policy rationales formed the different statuses of the career counsellor profession?

The analysis started with identifying relevant documents and literature from databases in the countries where public policy documents are stored. In Norway, the databases used were the National Library's digital database and the Storting (parliament) digital library. These two libraries have comprehensive collections of policy and governmental documents, reports (minutes) from government debates, research reports for the governments, reports to the Storting, and legislative documents like bills and proposals for legislation. The National Library also have public literature like grey literature, e.g. research reports from NGOs on policy issues, writing on policy institutions, instructional books for different public functions, shorter reports and notes from events relevant to the topic that are not published as books or similar. Data from all these types of documents have been used in the research on the Norwegian policy rationales, and they have been extracted through initial cooperation with a university library followed by snowballing and chain referencing (Goodman, 1961).

The primary documents that are used in the analysis are *Advice on social pedagogic measures in schools* (Samordningsnemda for skoleverket, 1952), *Vocational guidance for youth – Advice from the working committee on vocational guidance* (Samordningsnemda for yrkesrettlegg, 1957) as these were work groups commissioned to investigate how social pedagogy and vocational guidance were to be organized in the new school structure. *Vocational guidance in lower secondary – handbook for teachers* (Arbeidsdirektoratet, 1970) sets out how vocational guidance and orientation should be handled in schools. *Work and society* (Luihn, 1986) describe the work on vocational guidance from the perspective of the employment authorities. *Going further* (NOU 1991: 4, 1991) and *Evaluation of the Follow-Up service in Reform 94* (Egge & Midtsundstad, 1997) are the initial government reports on the need for reform, including vocational guidance and evaluating the new guidance service after 1994. Additional sources are found in the reference list.

Two reports of the Finnish data were identified by Merimaa's article (1992) about the history of vocational and study guidance in Finland, based on committee reports and memos. *The committee report for organising vocational choice guidance activities in connection with teaching* (Komiteanmietintö, 1954) consisted of various advisors and experts from education and government fields, scholars, representatives or secretaries of interest groups and unions. The memo was submitted to the Finnish Government in 1954. *The School Renewal Working Group Report* (Komiteanmietintö, 1966) was presented to the Ministry of Education. The working group defined compulsory schools' common goals based on

society's needs and the goals of compulsory school teaching. The group consisted of educational experts, advisors and scholars. *Guidance Counselling Development Working Group Memo* (Oppilaanohjauksen kehitystyöryhmän muistio, 1995) was also chosen. It was published by the Ministry of Education, which had set up a working group to evaluate the state and need for guidance and make proposals on guidance counsellor training coordination and monitoring.

In the extraction phase, text relevant to the topic was extracted from the documents. The relevant text referred to school counselling, school counsellor role, vocational orientation and guidance. See Figure A1 in the Appendix. After collecting extracts and getting a good overview of the data, the first step of the analysis was to put extracts into the table to be mapped onto the argument concepts. For each row, the extracts would be put into one or two columns (data and warrant) because the extracts represented the socially constructed problem (evidence/fact/data in the research). The *warrant* is the logic or reasoning they elicit. The length of the extracts in the data column was 10 to 250 words, depending on how large the meaning unit was judged. The warrant for each piece of data/evidence could either be found explicitly in the extracts or was based on a good overview of the data corpus and an interpretation from the researcher. In such cases, the researcher would construct a statement to state or summarize the warrant. The *claim* column is the product of the analytic process, where the evidence or state of fact from the extracts and the warrant together make it possible to state a claim (conclusion or outcome of the reasoning). Thus, the claim is what we understand as the rationale or the primary standpoint on the topic in the row.

In the final phase, we laid out our findings in a country-wise, chronological order to get an overview of the two parallel developments. From this overview, we found that *social context, education reforms, the counsellor role, career guidance competence, and implementation* were common themes, and we have used these themes as headings in our presentation of the findings.

Findings

The following section will present our findings and discuss the two tales of career guidance in Norway and Finland. In our discussion, we will use the same headings for both stop-points. We have chosen to give an account of the discussions in the two countries without having integrated 'critical juncture' and 'logic of appropriateness', the two concepts we have chosen for our analysis. However, we will get back to them in our conclusion section and draw out what we see as decisive points in these developments and how

they have affected the characteristics of the career guidance counsellor roles.

The societal context for vocational choices in the 1950s and 60s

In the 1950s and 1960s, the discussion about career guidance for young people came in the aftermath of WW2 in Norway and blended into the discussion on rebuilding society after the war. The general zeitgeist was that everyone was responsible for rebuilding society, and education for citizenship for all was an important topic. Bringing up young people to become good citizens for the good of society was seen as vital, and society should help young people find their place in it. As such, career guidance was seen as instrumental in the Norwegian 'dugnad'¹ (Luihn, 1986; Samordningsnemda for skoleverket, 1952).

Finnish society had also developed rapidly since WW2, and Finland was moving towards becoming an internationally cooperative country with new business activities and democratically active citizens. The aim was for each young person to gain an education (responding to their development) regardless of their socioeconomic situation (Komiteanmietintö, 1966). In Finland, the labour market changes were more of an all-encompassing issue. Individuals seemed uncertain about choosing vocational pathways, accessing work life and finding their place. The opportunity structure had changed, and there was a worry that a more comprehensive array of possibilities made it more difficult to make career choices. There were also a growing number of educational pathways leading to an increased number of professions that people generally knew little about. Education focused on skills and knowledge needed in future vocations. For these reasons, vocational guidance was seen as essential to help individuals. For these activities to be efficient, a capable and versatile person with specialized coaching skills had to be carefully chosen for this job (Komiteanmietintö, 1954).

In Norway, there was also a concern along the same lines focusing on how to assist young people in their transition into work, as society and the world of work had undergone significant changes like industrialization, migration, war and the emergence of the welfare state. It was also recognized that the old models did not apply here. In Norway, the division of labour between the employment and education authorities was a vital issue. The law on employment in 1947 stated that the employment authorities had the responsibility for vocational guidance for all citizens (Kommunaldepartementet, 1992), which was seen as extending into schools.

School reform discussions

Norwegian stakeholders discussed the need for significant school reforms. In addition to being a part of rebuilding society, it was also related to the changing view of teaching in the 1950s and 1960s. The philosophy underpinning teaching in the education system changed from emphasizing children's schooling to a more holistic and humanistic pedagogy where being part of a bigger picture and development were central. Children and young people were viewed as developing continuously and recognized as part of a family/school/community/society system (Arbeidsdirektoratet, 1970; Samordningsnemda for skoleverket, 1952; Samordningsnemda for yrkesrettleiing, 1957). The school reform would restructure the system and streamline it so that all young people would be able to acquire at least nine years of compulsory education and a voluntary upper secondary instead of having to navigate the seven different school types developed to meet different needs in urban and rural areas, different levels of academic abilities and different solutions for being combined with work or work training.

Societal changes also affected the school system in Finland. In the 1970s, a comprehensive school renewal was seen as pivotal for guidance; guidance was said to have been born along with the renewal to serve pedagogical and other upbringing aspects (Lairio, 1992). In the 1960s, the parallel school system was reaching its end, and rebuilding the system had to be sensitive to the stirring societal, economic, and cultural change (Vuorinen, 1992). The labour market was getting more complicated, which caused the need to regulate the division of labour, and this work was seen to be starting in the school.

The school curator/counsellor discussion

In Finland and Norway, the governments set up committees to determine how career guidance should sit in the new school systems. The Finnish Government set up a committee in 1951 to discover how vocational guidance activities could be arranged in connection with teaching in a way that considers the youth's labour force's practical direction towards work life. It also prepared a suggestion for a law and the costs (Komiteanmietintö, 1954). The Norwegian government first set up a committee investigating the need for social pedagogic measures in the education system (Samordningsnemda for skoleverket, 1952). As career guidance was seen as something different, although related to social pedagogy, there was a need for a second committee to investigate career guidance and its role and function in education (Samordningsnemda for yrkesrettleiing, 1957).

According to both the Finnish and Norwegian committees, vocational guidance refers to the special procedures meant to help the individual choose a profession corresponding to their conditions (in the current labour market situation, i.e. what the labour market can offer at the time). Vocational guidance also means the information parents give their children when they enter the labour market. People outside the family, such as teachers in schools also participated. Both the Finnish and the Norwegian committees stated that when the meaning and necessity of guidance became evident, it was generally agreed that adequate performance required a wide-ranging, well-organized activity.

The Finnish and the Norwegian committees examined how guidance was done in other countries. Internationally, there was debate about how to help children and young people struggling in school and many saw establishing a counselling resource connected to schools as an important first step (Vormeland, 1963).

The Finnish committee was concerned about private parties practising career guidance (as seen in, e.g. the US) because there had been negative experiences with guidance as a commercial activity. Some private parties might have been able to develop guidance with official authorities, but the committee saw a chance of 'unhealthy phenomena'; private guidance parties were too exposed to commercial views and had narrow interests. The committee stated that only statutory guidance provided by the authorities could form a broad and organized system. An official public system would strive towards an unbiased, benefit-for-all situation. They also justified this by referring to The National Work Organisation, which recommended guidance as the authorities' responsibility. As a result, the state should lead vocational guidance, and the official training of vocational counsellors would be centrally organized (*ohjauksen keskuselin*). During the time of the 1954 report, guidance was offered to students and other interested individuals by a local guidance department outside the schools. However, this was temporary, as the committee had suggested early on that a course called 'Work Knowledge and Vocational Choice' should be added as a new school subject (Merimaa, 1992), and eventually, it was decided that guidance should be placed in schools.

Inspired by this debate, Norwegian education stakeholders advised policymakers to establish a particular service with special competency and qualifications in psychology and pedagogy (*Samordningsnemda for skoleverket*, 1952). Educational stakeholders in other countries, such as Finland, would see it as important to have such counselling services within the school, dealing with general welfare and social issues, as well as career guidance. The Norwegian variant was to be established

outside the schools and be populated by psychologists and other specialists, implying that the competency requirements for these roles were high. The expert committee suggested that the professionals working in these centres should have master's degrees or higher, seeing these tasks as extraordinarily challenging and important (Vormeland, 1957, 1963). These services should deal with complicated and severe cases of maladaptation and maldevelopment in schools and would only handle vocational guidance if it were related to such cases. The Norwegian educational authorities looked for other ways to provide career guidance and counselling.

In Norway, the impression was that there was much to learn from the US variant of the school counsellor. However, the social pedagogy committee saw the American counsellor's role as primarily relevant to social welfare counselling. They saw the role as focusing on school children's well-being and cooperation with the homes or external support systems for psychological or pedagogic matters, like the psychological-pedagogical specialist service for severe cases mentioned above. Instead, it was seen as the employment authorities' responsibility to provide good quality vocational guidance because *they* were the professional body for such guidance and had the competence needed. This contention would be the crux of a system for career guidance in Norway from the 1950s on.

As the employment authorities in Norway had responsibility for vocational guidance for all citizens, the new system for career guidance would be based on close cooperation between employment and education authorities. Vocational guidance counsellors from the employment sector would be coming into schools to provide students with career guidance support. Education stakeholders advised policymakers to establish a new role in schools, a curator responsible for coordinating these external services, i.e. the career guidance and the psychological-pedagogical specialist service, and other social welfare services. The curator, which was called the *school counsellor*, should be a teacher because the one coordinating the services needed to have good knowledge of how schools worked and function as an 'all-rounder' (*Samordningsnemda for skoleverket*, 1952; *Samordningsnemda for yrkesrettleiing*, 1957). The employment authorities' representatives would educate school counsellors and teachers when they cooperated with the schools, and school counsellors could learn from them and do 'easier' tasks related to career guidance, like career education (Luihn, 1986; *Samordningsnemda for skoleverket*, 1952; *Samordningsnemda for yrkesrettleiing*, 1957; Vormeland, 1957).

In parallel, in Finland, before guidance counselling and the counsellor role in schools were adequately

established, vocational guidance in schools was the responsibility of affiliation teachers, who co-operated closely with employment offices (Multimäki, 1986; Vuorinen, 1992). Counsellors were also seen as 'all-rounders' much like in Norway. They were student observers as well as labour market and mental health experts. They were a part of the teacher community and took on the affiliation teacher's tasks.

Hence, attaching guidance to educational institutions and teaching activities was considered relevant, and employment authorities were seen as stakeholders in career guidance in both countries.

Career guidance competence and qualifications discussion

The new role raised questions about competencies. The Finnish committee was concerned about the pupils who could not self-evaluate objectively, and the parents tended to give subjective information about the children. However, pupils had to provide information about themselves. Counsellors should, therefore, receive special coaching or training, especially in psychology, to evaluate the information given to them correctly. They discussed what the official training for counsellors should actually be about. Counsellors could not get an *actual* professional education from an educational institution, even though it was centrally organized.

The Finnish committee was worried that if the standards for guidance officials were not high, the whole activity would lose its point and could lead to harmful consequences. At this stage, the qualifications had not yet been expressed explicitly. The committee saw that a suitable knowledge base was a higher education degree. However, those who had a broad knowledge of work life but had narrow basic training could be trained as well (by attending courses provided by the central organ of guidance). A psychology degree (even though stated above as applicable) was considered too long to acquire in the report (Komiteanmietintö, 1954). The committee of 1954 also objected to premade guidelines and specific qualification demands, in order to keep the training relatively short. However, the committee agreed that the qualification demands for guidance professionals had to be based on guidance's demanding and responsible nature.

The Norwegian committee emphasized the complex nature of the competency needed to provide good quality career guidance, which encompassed labour market knowledge, knowledge of the methods used for mapping interests and abilities (e.g. psychology), and personal competencies like 'people skills'. A career guidance counsellor also needed to possess some pedagogic skills, because the solution chosen in Norway meant that their task was to educate teachers

and curators/school counsellors about career education so that they could, if necessary, do the career education and some of the guidance themselves. Norwegian educational stakeholders were more concerned about the competencies the new school counsellor/curator should have when cooperating with the people from the employment authorities. They saw the school counsellor's preferred competencies mostly as related to the social pedagogy or educational welfare part of the counsellor's role.

The school counsellors'/curators' most important competence was their teacher background and knowledge of schools. However, regarding social pedagogy, it was believed that in addition to being a coordinator of services, they should also have some knowledge of pedagogy and psychology. This was because the counsellor should be equipped to handle the less complex cases, i.e. those not severe enough to be referred to the pedagogic-psychology external service. There was, however, a general opinion that people with such qualifications were hard to find and perhaps even more challenging to keep on the job, as professionals with special qualifications would not be satisfied with doing teacher tasks; they would have qualified beyond that level. The committee contended that a teacher with some extra knowledge of psychology or pedagogy was wanted but could not afford to see it as mandatory. The school counsellor role was established in Norwegian schools on these premises in 1959, but educational stakeholders, like professional organizations in psychology, pedagogy and teaching, strongly opposed this decision (Teig, 2000).

In other words, while the Finns decided that career guidance counsellors should be especially trained and placed in schools, the Norwegian educational authorities decided that the most important feature of a school counsellor's competence was the 'all-around teacher' who would cooperate with and learn from the visiting vocational guidance counsellor from the employment authorities.

Implementation of school counselling and career guidance

The year (1966) was pivotal for the guidance counsellor profession in Finland. The school reform committee (Komiteanmietintö, 1966) suggested that each school should have a guidance counsellor who had received special training, and it was implemented as suggested (Merimaa, 1991). The committee defined what the counsellor should know about the compulsory school (goals, subjects), studying techniques, student observation and so forth. As a result of the committee discussions, guidance counselling as a school subject was eventually added to the national curriculum in 1972 (Vuorinen, 1992).

The committee discussed *guidance* counsellors instead of vocational counsellors (used in Komiteanmietintö, 1954), denoting a broader role. Although the committee stated that students needed professional guidance in choice-making after compulsory school, compulsory schoolteachers in bigger cities or towns were unaware of their students' personalities or circumstances. Since teachers did not have enough time, education, or opportunities to sort out course or subject choices for 'abnormal' students or figure out their other 'problems', the committee stated that every school should have a guidance counsellor with specialized training. They should work as student observers and know the students and different cooperative problems and mental health issues while also being vocational guidance experts at the school. According to the committee, counsellors should receive psychological training and know the compulsory school structure and all vocational tasks in school.

As mentioned above, the school counsellor role was implemented in Norwegian schools in 1959 as an additional function to a teacher's position. The tasks assigned encompassed social pedagogic counselling and career education: helping students if they were struggling with schoolwork, helping students to assess their interests and performance ability, being in contact with the homes, giving the students an overview of educational and vocational opportunities, and helping students integrate all the knowledge they have gained about both themselves and the world to make well-funded choices when transitioning out of compulsory schooling (Forsøksrådet for skoleverket, 1960).

Thus, it was decided that career education and orientation were more technical, based on factual knowledge that teachers could acquire, e.g. through cooperation with the vocational counsellors from the Norwegian employment sector. The most important aspect of the school counsellor's role was the ability to have a holistic perspective, which also was seen to go against dividing the responsibilities of welfare counselling and career guidance between different teachers. It was also crucial that the teacher with the counsellor role continued teaching, especially in subjects where students needed to participate more fully so that the school counsellor could get closer to them. While the tasks mentioned would require counselling, implying that the counsellor would need to have 'people skills', the more specialized or complex career guidance cases were referred to external service providers:

One must assume that the local employment bureaux have guidance specialists and that the regions get their pedagogic-psychological school services established. School counsellors can get the necessary information material from these institutions, and this is also where the school shall refer their students for specific career guidance,

counselling or treatment (Forsøksrådet for skoleverket, 1960, p. 37).

While these guidelines were put down in the new curriculum and instructions for schools, the cooperation was not confirmed by law or legal regulation other than the Employment Act from 1960 (Kommunaldepartementet, 1992), saying that the employment authorities have the responsibility for career guidance for all citizens. This was questioned in the Norwegian parliament, referring to regulations in Finland, where the cooperation for career guidance between employment and educational authorities was stated in the law (Hovdhaugen, 1962). The answer from the Minister of State was that the regulations requiring the employment authorities to assist schools should be enough.

The decision to instal the counsellor role without competency requirements was criticized by teachers and professionals in the Norwegian educational field, claiming that the tasks that fell on the counsellor were far more complex and demanding than assumed by policymakers. They claimed that the risk of not having more specialized knowledge was, e.g. that problems could develop undetected because an unqualified counsellor would not know what to look for or where to start. The critics questioned why policymakers would establish such an 'empty' role without requiring skills or particular competencies to substantiate it (Forsøksrådet for skoleverket, 1969).

In other words, the Finnish and the Norwegian versions of the school counsellor are similar. They are seen as having similar sets of competencies and tasks, but with one crucial difference: while the Finnish counsellor was to become a career guidance expert *in* school and affiliation teachers were in schools as vocational counsellors, the Norwegian counsellor was supposed to aid an *external* career guidance expert coming into the school. In the next section, we will leap forward to the 1990s and look at how the 30 years between the implementation of the school counsellor role and the new reforms in this decade affected the role.

The societal context for vocational choices in the 1990s

At the beginning of the 1990s, Finland had entered a recession. Unemployment became one of the most significant societal issues at that period. The number of unemployed reached half a million (The Finnish National Organisation of the Unemployed, 2023), and the political decisions made weakened their situation with social security cuts. According to Mäkinen and Poropudas (2001), all actions were controlled by economic issues framing most decision-making processes, and this affected educational

resources and justified certain renewals well (see, e.g. Simola, 2014). In the mid-1990s, the recession had taken a turn for the better, but the effects could be seen in the *Guidance Counselling Development Working Group Memo* (Oppilaanohjauksen kehittämistyöryhmän muistio, 1995). The unemployment rates, changes in business, work life, education, and fast-developing society were considered complex issues, especially for the young; education could not secure jobs or positions in the labour market.

Similar problems existed in Norway. In the 1990s, educational stakeholders and policymakers discussed the growing dropout from upper secondary education combined with the hardening employment market, where dropouts no longer seemed to have good chances of getting jobs. This was also seen as related to a poorly functioning system for vocational education, a general tendency towards economic hardship in society and fewer opportunities for low-skilled work, and the international focus on the need for competence and lifelong learning (NOU 1991: 4).

Reform discussions

A significant issue related to ongoing educational renewals and the new national curriculum in Finland was the demand for new job descriptions for teaching and guidance and more guidance in schools. Schools and guidance faced pressure to change and become more flexible and individually oriented. Since the goals for compulsory school were expressed to be pupils' responsibility, increasing choice-making, flexible teaching, individual paths and study plans, counsellors' competencies should relate to understanding growth processes and helping human development (Oppilaanohjauksen kehittämistyöryhmän muistio, 1995).

Attention was drawn to the teacher's position as well. The committee recognized that the wider teaching profession is adopting guidance practices; they are transforming from 'knowledge mediators' to guiding learning processes and developing the whole school. Since guidance counsellors were teachers by training, the teacher and the counsellor had already been combined in their profession. The school was also changing and becoming a more flexible and individually oriented arena. According to the Finnish working group, there was no reason to limit the counsellor's role and training to narrow tasks. In the memo (1995), teachers (and the whole school) were steered to guide students. The committee stated that all teacher training should include guidance counselling.

The education reform in 1994 (Reform 94) had another focus in Norway. As mentioned, the topic of drop-out and heightened requirements for evolving competence in a faster-moving society and employment market made the discussion focus on how to build

a system to intervene in the dropping-out process and get young people back on track (NOU 1991: 4). This meant getting them back into education or work, preferably education. It also implied that the focus shifted to the upper secondary level, as education at this level is voluntary, and stakeholders saw it as essential to motivate young people to complete it. To the degree that the school counsellor in comprehensive school was discussed concerning the new reform, it was concluded that they were doing an essential job in supporting students in their transition to upper secondary and that they needed to develop their competence and have more resources allocated to the job (NOU 1991: 4). The call for education and qualification requirements for counsellors in compulsory school was repeated.

However, Reform 94 was about upper secondary education, which was restructured and streamlined and provided all young people between the ages of 15 and 19 a legal right (and better opportunity) to complete upper secondary. Reform 94 was about helping young people complete upper secondary education, and the support system was restructured. This also had consequences for career counselling provision for Norwegian teenagers.

The career guidance and counselling role

The cooperation on career guidance between educational and employment authorities in Norway had, at this point, been ongoing since the 1960s – in theory. However, the cooperation was only well-functioning and institutionalized in some regions and had fallen apart in others (Egge & Midtsundstad, 1997). There had also been policy-level signals that the employment authorities were pulling back their resources in this work (Helland, 1981). In reform 94, policymakers wanted to re-establish and strengthen this system (NOU 1991: 4). Ultimately, the resources were routed into a new service at the regional level, the Follow-Up Service (Oppfølgingstjenesten). The service should find, engage, and support young people dropping out of upper secondary school and support them back into education first and foremost, as well as work or labour market activities. The service should compensate for, and not prevent, dropout. The role of those working in the follow-up service should be that of coordinators engaging the employment offices, pedagogic-psychologic service for schools, and upper secondary schools to design individual follow-up programmes for dropouts. In this system, the vocational counsellors from the employment services were still central for career guidance provision. This was their expertise, and their job would be career guidance and support in employment or labour market activities.

New competencies for the counsellor role

Because of the devastating economic and labour market context, the Finnish counsellors' central professional qualification should consist of knowing the changes in work life and education and forecasting the societal situation where young people must live in the future. The guidance counsellor's role was an important link (educational supply/demand) between young people and transition phases. A counsellor was a mediator of topical knowledge about different educational and work-related systems. The working group (1995) argued that bringing society's and individual's needs closer decreased the interruption of studying and the waste of study places. They also perceived that guidance supporting transitions prevents marginalization and supports human resources and educational equality. Based on this reasoning, guidance counsellor training should be based on societal and educational institutions' internal and structural changes. The training was based on the science of education and developmental views. According to the working group's (1995) reasoning, guidance counsellors should be ready to constantly learn new things, acquire personal growth and renew their expert role.

Again, it seems clear that Finnish and Norwegian policymakers made different decisions about the career guidance counsellor role. The Finnish solution was to continue focusing on the career guidance counsellors' competency and qualifications and how they should reflect the changing contextual demands. The Norwegian solution was to continue working with the services and support system around the students rather than discussing the content of career guidance and how the counsellor's competency should reflect that.

Discussion and conclusions

To draw out some central points from our account and look at what the two countries have in common, it seems clear that career guidance has been essential in resolving significant societal issues. Career guidance was discussed concerning rebuilding societies after WW2, recession, and economic hardships that demanded action to help young people complete their education and find their place in the changing world of work. This is especially evident for Finland, as every 'movement' in the field starts with labour market changes, but for both, societal changes have impacted the role of guidance.

The counsellor role has also been shaped based on similar discussions but with different outcomes. In terms of the two principles of 'critical juncture' and 'logic of appropriateness' that we have chosen to apply from historical institutionalism, we see two

factors as decisive when we compare the two countries' professionalization processes. When the school counsellor was implemented in 1959 and 1966, they were a school insider, an 'all-rounder' and coordinator of services and support. They generally worked with social pedagogy and the educational welfare of schoolchildren, and their competency and qualification as teachers were central in both countries. However, while special competence was discussed by stakeholders in education as necessary in both contexts, Norwegian policymakers chose not to implement qualification criteria and training requirements for the role; the Finnish policymakers, however, saw the role of a counsellor as so vast and vital that they needed proper training.

Hence, the different decisions on defining competency and qualifications for school counsellors are critical junctures. However, it is essential to point out that both the expert groups in Finland and Norway championed particular competency for the new role but that different decisions about implementing competency requirements were made at the policy level. Nevertheless, we also see that the decision to include or not include career guidance as a critical part of the school counsellors' tasks and competencies was significant. We argue that the decisions made regarding the implementation of the counsellor roles signify critical junctures, where one variant was to have career guidance as their particular responsibility and the other was not. Secondly, one saw it as crucial that the counsellor had education in career guidance, while the other did not.

The decisions about career guidance in the 1990s further exacerbated these differences. The Norwegian Follow-Up service was established to use the existing resources in the school system better. Hence, it was a new component in the student support *system* in Norway. At the same time, the Finnish continued their focus on the skills and competencies required for the *individual counsellor* in their support system, further confirmed by new regulations requiring specific education for career counsellors in schools. The 'logic of appropriateness' in the two tales of the Finnish and Norwegian counsellors arguably rests on what we understand as different philosophies at different ends of the system-individual continuum. Norwegian policymaking has been argued to be profoundly system-oriented, especially related to career guidance (Bakke, 2021), and the Norwegian counsellor designed as a system coordinator illustrates that.

The Finns based the development of guidance and counsellor competencies on societal needs, with a stronger focus on the individual – both students and counsellor. There has even been a conceptual change in guidance; it concerns everyone at different educational levels and institutions (Suorsa et al., 2021). Guidance concepts, services and methods

have become more comprehensive with the strengthening of the view of lifelong learning; it can refer to a broader perspective, i.e. preventing marginalization, in which not only schools but youth, health and employment sectors participate (VTV, 2015). Also, at the national level, actors interested in guidance, such as ministries and interest groups, call for multi-professional guidance work and individual guidance services to raise the competence level of pupils (and all citizens) for labour market needs (Harjula et al., 2021).

In conclusion, societal, psychological, and pedagogical issues, youth phenomena, employment and education systems, and career guidance have developed in range, reach, and complexity since the implementation of counsellor roles in Finland and Norway. The two countries have approached these challenges differently and followed an inherent logic, which meant working on different levels to meet them – on the individual or the systemic level. We cannot conclude if one approach or the other is preferable, as both have their challenges.

Norwegian school counsellors have felt overwhelmed, lost and lacking the skills and time to fulfil their tasks (Buland & Mathiesen, 2008; Buland et al., 2015). However, the recent introduction of a *new* system, a framework for quality in career guidance developed in cooperation between policymakers, educators, researchers and practitioners within the field, has focused on the *content* of career guidance and as such, given school counsellors a more scholarly and solid foundation for their work (Bakke et al., 2023; Holm-Nordhagen et al., 2022; Mordal et al., 2022). In Finland, the call for a co-operative and multi-professional guidance system has become more prevalent, shifting the focus from the qualifications of the individual counsellor. The challenges of guidance have become more diverse; hence, the Ministry of Education and Culture and the European Social Fund have extensively financed various developmental projects of guidance – trying to answer to the needs of education and work life (Suorsa et al., 2021). The problem seems to be implementing these guidance projects (e.g. youth participation, marginalization); they sometimes lack evaluation of results and have not increased the founding of multi-professional networks (VTV, 2015).

Through this analysis, we gained insights into how various factors influenced the professionalization of career counsellors in the two countries. This understanding helps to grasp the complex interplay of historical, cultural, and institutional factors shaping policy decisions. Ultimately, our study contributes to broader discussions on developing career guidance practices and the counsellor profession while also emphasizing the importance of context-specific approaches to studying professionalization. Finally,

we hope that the two national fields will draw out experience and learn from each other as the career guidance systems in the two countries continue to evolve. Ultimately, the most fortunate solution is, most certainly, to have professional and competent career counsellors populating a well-functioning system.

Note

1. *Dugnad* refers to unpaid, voluntary work for the common good, and the term has particular relevance to the rise of social democracy in the post WW2 society in Norway.

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Appendix

Figure A1. Illustration of the table used for Toulmin's model.

	Data	Warrant	Claim	Period
Norway	However, much speaks AGAINST a division. There are great demands on an advisor. The holistic point is so important that one must avoid dividing up and instead give up specialist knowledge on the part of the adviser. Distributing tasks and having more people doing them is irrational and leads to duplication of effort.	Since the overall perspective is achieved by seeing the pupil in everyday school life, having contact with the parents and talking to the pupils ...	Good contact and an overall perspective are more important than specialization regarding the competence that must be localized at the school.	1950s and 1960s
Finland	Labour market changes, the young face multiple (challenging) career and school-related choices	Since individuals need information and professional guidance to make choices and arrange their studies suitably ...	A capable, specialized person must be carefully chosen – GCs responsible for school vocational guidance.	
Norway	There is a need for a substantial increase in training places in working life. In a joint statement, the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions (LO) and the Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise (NHO) have cooperated to realise this.	Training must take place in working life because experience from work is practice-based and specific, and employers should also contribute ...	Working life is a separate arena for competence development. Arrangements for training workshops, etc., must be further developed.	1990s
Finland	High and continuous youth unemployment rates, distress from recession	Since education no longer guarantees secure positions in the labour market for young people ...	GC professional qualification consists of understanding changes in work life/education and forecasting societal situations where the young must live in the future.	