

# Regional Cultural Understanding in Teacher Education in Latvia, Lithuania, Norway: Comparative Case Analysis

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**Abstract.** The unique cultural space of each country is comprised of the cultural diversity of its regions with the cultural heritage hidden in the outskirts and border areas of the country. The regional traditions make up an important source of value and knowledge for ensuring cultural sustainability. In teacher education this problem can be treated either in a transmissive or transformative way. It can be seen as performing particular rituals and respecting norms, or cultural values that are personally experienced and highly evaluated, as one's internally motivated involvement in exploration, cultivation, cooperation and creativity in own community without losing the national and global context.

The aim of the study is to investigate the tendencies in teacher education for promoting primary school students' regional cultural understanding in teaching practice.

To pursue the set aim, the concept of *regional cultural understanding* (RCU) was analysed, the ways of introducing regional cultural understanding in teacher education curriculum including the factors facilitating or hindering the development of regional cultural understanding in teacher education were identified.

The comparative case analysis of good practice examples in three countries was carried out to show regularities, differences and similarities of possible pedagogical approaches.

Methods: content analysis of educational documents and semi-structured interviews with teacher educators.

Sample: teacher education institutions in three countries: Latvia, Lithuania and Norway.

Results: structured suggestions for content of the studies and pedagogical approaches for development of pre-service teachers' readiness to realize regional cultural understanding in their teaching practice.

**Keywords:** regional cultural understanding, teacher education, comparative case analysis.

## Regioninės kultūros samprata rengiant mokytojus Latvijoje, Lietuvoje ir Norvegijoje: lyginamoji atvejo analizė

**Santrauka.** Straipsnyje nagrinėjama regionų kultūra, regioninių tradicijų svarba, siekiant šalies kultūrinio tvarumo. Vis dėlto regioninių tradicijų puoselėjimas dažnai laikomas kliūtimi globalizacijai ir daugiakultūriškumui. Kyla klausimas: kaip apsaugoti ir plėtoti regionų kultūrinę įvairovę, kultūros paveldą? Mokytojų rengimui tenka svarbi misija – plėtoti idėjas apie regioninės kultūros svarbą, inicijuoti jos išsaugojimą bei ieškoti jungčių tarp regioninio ir

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globalaus konteksto. Tyrimu siekiama nustatyti, kokie faktoriai skatina arba trukdo plėtoti būsimųjų mokytojų kompetencijas, kurios leistų sėkmingai ugdyti pradinės mokyklos mokinių regioninės kultūros supratimą. Lyginamoji trijų šalių (Latvijos, Lietuvos ir Norvegijos) švietimo dokumentų turinio bei pusiau struktūruotų interviu su bendrojo ugdymo ir aukštųjų mokyklų atstovais, mokytojų ugdytojais analizė leido atskleisti galimų pedagoginių metodų dėsningumus, panašumus ir skirtumus.

**Pagrindiniai žodžiai:** regioninės kultūros samprata, mokytojų rengimas, lyginamoji analizė.

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## Introduction

The sustainable and economic development of a society is not possible without the cultural understanding of the members of society. Recognizing, assessing and acquiring cultural heritage as a value is the foundation of a welfare society. The UNESCO Convention on the Conservation of the Intangible Cultural Heritage noted that regional traditions are very conservative phenomena and an important source of value and knowledge for ensuring cultural sustainability. Together with the mother tongue, oral traditions, customs, rituals, festivals, knowledge of nature and the universe, traditional craftsmanship and techniques, they form a meaningful view of the world (UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, 2003).

Every child and young individual can have equal opportunities to develop their cognitive, creative, physical, personal and social qualities through cultural education. Cultural education therefore deserves a fully-fledged place in education (National Centre of Expertise for Cultural Education and Amateur Art, 2016). Primary education in particular has a great potential there, as the child's cultural understanding begins with the closest family, the surrounding area, the country and the local community.

There is a profound correlation between the school student's understanding of the regional culture and the ability of the teacher to promote these performances.

Teacher education is linked directly to both an education policy and school practice. Education policy makers need to harmonize global contexts with national interests and regional specifics, which seems to be exclusive of each other. Cultivating the local traditions is often seen as a barrier for globalization and multiculturalism. The question is: how to protect and develop the cultural diversity of the regions with the cultural heritage hidden in the outskirts and border areas of the country. The primary school teacher is seen as an important agent for the development and expanding ideas and beliefs about the importance of the regional culture in the global world. The challenge of teacher education is to make them rather complementing than excluding each other.

The **aim** of the study is to find out what hinders or, conversely, enhances future teachers' competences to promote primary school students' regional cultural understanding in teacher education. To pursue the set aim, the concept of *regional cultural understanding* (RCU) was analysed, the ways of introducing regional cultural understanding in teacher education curriculum including the factors which facilitate or hinder the development of regional cultural understanding in teacher education were identified.

The comparative case analysis (CCA) was conducted in three countries. This research design promotes a model of multi-sited fieldwork that studies through and across sites

and scales. It encourages simultaneous and overlapping attention to three axes of comparison: horizontal, which compares how similar policies or phenomena unfold in locations that are connected and socially produced; vertical, which traces phenomena across scales; and transversal, which traces phenomena and cases across time (Bartlett, Varvus, 2017). The chosen qualitative research design includes analysis of educational documents at three levels, interviews and focus group discussions with university and school educators and education policy makers.

Three universities with interest and experience in the analysed issue, related good practice schools and different historical, political and cultural background comprise the basis for the study sample.

The study results contribute to: 1) teacher Education – by helping to integrate cultural contexts of education into the curriculum; 2) education policy – by improving and clarifying the terminology for purposefully incorporating regional cultural development into educational policy documents; 3) in regional schools – by creating a demand for teachers who are able to provide in-depth training of primary school pupils in the context of the local community.

The limits: the study does not pretend to cover the whole of teacher education practices as well as to analyse the situation in informal education in the selected countries.

## 1. Concept of regional cultural understanding

Several terms with quite similar meanings are used in scientific literature and education policy context: *cultural understanding*, *cultural awareness*, *cultural competence* and *cultural literacy*.

According to the Collins Dictionary, there is no any differences between *cultural understanding* and *cultural awareness* (Collins Dictionary, 2019). *Cultural awareness* is described as the individuals' understanding of the differences in attitudes and values between themselves and the people from other countries or backgrounds. The term *cultural understanding* usually goes together with cross-cultural perspective in education, politics or industry, the knowledge and understanding of and experiences with one's own culture as well as cultures of others that inform one's ability to navigate new experiences (Parker, Webb, Wilson 2017).

Poirier and Wooldridge define the difference between (cultural) awareness and competence as knowing how aspects of our culture have shaped our beliefs and behaviours and developmental processes, where a person demonstrates an acceptance and respect for cultural differences (Poirier, Wooldridge 2009).

Chrisman argues that an important skill for dealing with cultural diversity is *cultural competence*, which comes in the form of attitudes, practice skills, and system savviness for cross cultural situations involving individuals' flexibility and capability to properly assess and treat all people respectfully and in a suitable manner appropriate to their culture (Chrisman 2007).

For educators, it is individuals' awareness of their own cultural identity while appreciating the cultural dynamics of the children, families, and the community of the school. This understanding impacts the classroom teaching practices of a culturally competent educator (Robinson 2019).

In the context of Latvian education policy, the concept *cultural understanding* is used. *Cultural understanding and self-expression in art* is defined as a field of general education.

*Cultural literacy* is a relatively new term. It includes cultural competence but also adds the ability to critically reflect on and, if necessary, to bring about change in one's own culture. It also embraces the ability to analyse the behaviours of dominant cultures in relation to other cultures, for instance, the impact of globalization or cross-cultural partnerships on local cultures around the world (Polistina, Leader, 2009). Hirsh and others interpret the *cultural literacy* as an ability to understand and participate fluently in a given culture. According to Hirsh et al., a culturally literate person, is able to talk to and understand others of that culture with fluency, while a culturally illiterate person fails to understand culturally-conditioned allusions, references to past events, idiomatic expressions, jokes, names, places, etc. (Hirsh, Kett, Trefill, 2002).

A *region* is an area of land that has common features. These features can be natural, such as the climate or landscape. It is also understood as a contiguous geographic area comprising a number of societies that possess the same or similar traits or that share a dominant cultural orientation. Thus, cultural regions are those sharing such common characteristics as language, religious beliefs, customs and practices (Merriam-Webster's Dictionary, 2019)

The focus of this study is regional culture. The concept *regional culture* describes the whole of the environment and the cultural activities carried out therein that is created and fostered by the residents of the region and which reflects the ethnic, linguistic, historical and cultural regional identity and traditions and creates preconditions for the development of cultural and social competences in the regions which meet the needs of the modern society (Ethnic Culture, Regional Culture and Children and Youth Cultural Education 2017).

Bower and Polistina point that the ability to accept and respect knowledge within local cultures and communities is also necessary for developing cultural literacy. There may be knowledge and skills for living sustainably that are already embedded in the traditions of local cultures and passed on in an integrated way through non-formal education (Bowers 2003; Polistina 2001).

It means that the term *cultural understanding* does not cover the regional culture as a transformative phenomenon. The term *cultural literacy* was chosen to be used hereafter, because it, in contrast to other concepts, also embraces an active participation of a person in cultural and social processes. It is necessary to note that in the analysis the differences between *knowing about* culture and *participation in* particular cultural practice have to be considered.

## 2. Research design

The comparative case study was chosen as an innovative approach that attends simultaneously to macro, meso, and micro dimensions of case-based research. Bartlett and Vavrus argue that the comparative case studies need to consider two different logics of comparison. The first may well identify specific units of analysis and compare or contrast them. The second processual logic seeks to trace across individuals, groups, sites, and time periods (Bartlett, Vavrus, 2017). In accordance with their suggestions, not only a particular school, an education programme or a state education policy was chosen for analysis but also **a mutual process of expanding regional cultural understanding in general education through teacher education.**

Each case includes a unity of 1) national education policy, 2) teacher education and 3) school education practice, which makes a vertical dimension of the comparison. These components are bounded differently, they possess particular beliefs, aims, content and educational approaches. A horizontal dimension embraces the comparison of cases in the three countries. A transversal dimension relates to the time; it considers how the phenomenon has come into being, how it has been appropriated by different actors, and transformed in practice. At the same time, even while including multiple sites and cases, our challenge was not to flatten the cases but rather not to ignore valuable contextual information, such as historical circumstances, or not to impose concepts or categories taken from one site onto another, not to disrupt dichotomies, static categories, but take-for-granted notions of what is really going on (Heath & Street, 2008).

As each case is unique and not comparable directly and mechanically, the process of gathering and proceeding data was open to peculiarities of each case. Every analysed case has another cultural and historical context, another structure and policy of teacher education. Each country has its own set of problems that can be addressed to promote the sustainability of language and regional culture in education, and various state and public initiatives.

Alongside Latvian as a state language in Latvia there are 7 types of dialects of the Latvian language used in ethnographic regions of Latvia. There are several cultural phenomena under the national and UNESCO protection, such as the dying indigenous Livonian language or culture and the Suiti Cultural Space (UNESCO 2009).

In Lithuania, the focus is laid on the 5 *ethnic regions* that are distinguished by the uniqueness of their folklore, music folklore, dialects, national costumes, architecture, culinary heritage and others. All this comprises the basis of the national culture. The use of the concept of an ethnographic region, when the latter is perceived as a historically formed part of territory, which retains its specific dialect, traditions and customs as well as integrated heritage of Baltic tribes, should be even more precise in Lithuania (Law on the Principles of the State Safeguarding of Ethnic Culture of the Republic of Lithuania, 21 September 1999, No.VIII-1328, Vilnius). In Norway, the attention was allocated to the Sami minority with 9 different more or less living languages. UNESCO classifies the Sami culture as that of indigenous people of Europe. Fishman's scale considers these languages to be very vulnerable (Maehlum, 2019).

Three teacher education institutions interested in expanding the understanding of regional culture in education were involved in the research as the basis for a particular case (case A in Latvia, B in Lithuania and C in Norway). The universities helped to attract the teachers and principals of good practice schools, to choose the related police and teacher education documents.

### 3. Results

Teacher education programmes are designed in accordance with the policy requirements for teacher profession, but the content of general education determines what the child is supposed to learn, and thus – what the teacher needs to know in order to teach him or her successfully. That is why the three types of documents were analysed in each case: national policy of general education (guidelines, conceptions, Education Standard), requirements for teacher profession and Primary Teacher Education Programme in a particular university. In these documents, the implementation of the term *regional cultural understanding* is analysed by counting its frequencies in them and interpreting its meaning and context.

Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with educational practitioners and researchers were a source for refinement and deeper understanding the data on the process of including the regional culture in the content of primary school and teacher education. Interviews with teacher educators helped to clarify the substantiation for developing the teacher education curriculum content and good practice school principals explained how teachers raise primary school students' understanding of regional culture in real school practice. The content analysis of qualitative data revealed the main actors, initiators, their beliefs and expectations, findings and problems of this process on each case.

Participants:

Case A – an interview with 3 teacher educators from University of Latvia, one primary school principal.

Case B – an interview with 2 teacher educators from higher institutions which prepare teachers, one art school principal, one primary school principal.

Case C – an interview with one principal of Sami language and culture school, one professor – a coordinator of the programme of South Sami language and culture teacher education. The focus group discussion held with university academic staff (6 participants).

#### *Case A*

In case A, in the conception of ongoing education reform cultural understanding is described as a complex result of education, which allows a better understanding of yourself and your culture and is an essential competence to interact with other cultures. "It is an important point of contact between different walks of life and provides the opportunity for dialogue despite differences. The child develops an understanding

of traditions, beliefs, habits, different lifestyle patterns, values, and expressions that characterize a society or a particular community. Promoting the cultural understanding is integrated in a number of learning areas with a purpose to enable the development of multidimensional understanding and attitudes based on respect for one's own culture and the diversity of other cultures" (Izglītība mūsdienīgai lietpratībai: mācību satura un pieejas apraksts, 2018, 14). In conceptions of educational reform, personally meaningful learning, learning for life, in-depth learning, collaboration of children, teachers, parents and the wider community in the learning process, exploiting the pedagogical potential of the natural and cultural environment are declared as key ideas. They match with understanding the culture as a transformative phenomenon, including an individual, family, community and intercultural contexts of culture, but do not mention its regional or ethnical aspects.

In the National Primary Education Standard and the Preschool Guidelines, cultural understanding and expression in art is defined there as a field of education. But the word *culture* appears in other, different contexts, too (frequency/number of pages are shown in the brackets). The results are as follows: cultural understanding (15/7), cultural heritage (23/0), intercultural communication (5/0), cultural identity (15/0), cultural events (1/0), cultural differences (2), cultural needs (1/0) and culture building (1/1). Cultural learning is mentioned in the following fields of education: Latvian (17x), minority language (19x), foreign language (10x), social and civic field (32x), cultural understanding and self-expression in art (23x), technology (10x), but it does not occur in mathematics, science, health and physical activity (MK Noteikumi par valsts pamatizglītības standartu un pamatizglītības programmu paraugiem, 2018; MK noteikumi par valsts pirmsskolas izglītības vadlīnijām un pirmsskolas izglītības programmu paraugiem, 2018). It can be concluded that that in case A, there is no consequent implementation of the concept *cultural understanding* in documents on education policy. So, the new curriculum cannot be a basis for the systemic development of cultural space and regional cultural values.

Whereas in the General Education Standard, the word *culture* appears 89 times in 91 pages: as a field of education (cultural competence and expression), in context of multi-culture education etc. (MK, 2018). In the Teacher Profession Standard (case A) the word *culture* was mentioned only 2 times – as a duty of the teacher to work in *multicultural* groups and as the teacher's understanding of *different cultures*. Regional or local culture is not mentioned at all. It means that if teacher educators orient towards the Professional Standard, they can wholly miss the cultural dimension in teacher education.

In teacher education, demands of education policy are coordinated with the real outcome of general education and specific interests of researchers and educators.

In case A, there is no separate programme for preparing regional culture teachers. The programme "Pre-school and Primary School Teacher" contains elective course of the Content and Methodology of Traditional Culture (3 ECT).

Teacher educators are confused that cultural understanding (together with self-expression) is included in the new Educational Standard only as a particular field of general education. In contrast, the cultural understanding as transversal competence



should be promoted through the whole teacher education and general education curriculum.

Teacher educator No. 1/A. pointed out that *teachers' cultural understanding can be integrated not only in such study courses as Children's Literature, Visual Arts Methodology, Music Content and Methodology, Cultural Theory and History, an elective course on Traditional Culture: Content and Methodology in Preschool and Primary School, but also in Maths, Natural Science, Technology and Sport.*

The respondents see the risks for promoting teacher students' cultural understanding because, in accordance with the Teacher Profession Standard, there are no credits for cultural theory, aesthetics, ethics, religion or the like in the teacher education programmes.

Teacher educator No. 2/A stated that *mostly it is a free choice of teacher educators to plan in-depth cultural understanding as a result of their study subject. For example, introduction of the linguacultural approach in Language (mother tongue) Content and Methodology.*

In the opinion of teacher educators, an opposition between the regional and global is present.

Teacher educator No. 3/A declared that *the need to cultivate cultural understanding in a regional context is as an old-fashioned relic.*

This expression does not contradict previously analysed documents of education policy. The individual responsibility of the teacher educator is crucial there.

There are examples, when the systemic development of primary school students' cultural understanding in education is initiated by a regional community. In recent years, several schools have been established, based on the concept of deep culture teaching and learning. Such schools offer a culture oriented curriculum that meets the National Education Standard at the same time.

The interview with school principal No. 1/A revealed the following: *we try to organize personally meaningful exploration of cultural heritage for kids. It includes place-based education, discovery of local tradition in project based learning, participation in traditional celebration of solar year.*

Interviews revealed that despite contradictions in laws and regulations, educators see general education curriculum reform as an opportunity for promoting the regional cultural understanding. They interpret the documents according to their beliefs, find what they want to see in the text, and add what seems important to them.

It can be concluded that decisive actions by individuals in teacher education, school practice or community can set precedents for development of cultural understanding in different levels of education.



## **Case B**

In case B, in the Conception of a Good School (2015), the word *culture* is used to present the school as a communicator of the cultural system, to emphasise management and arrangement culture of schools and culture of learning. It also appears that the word *culture* is considered as a part of the general competence of teachers but it was not found in the context of regional culture. Although the word *culture* is used 31 times in 22 pages in the State Education Strategy 2013-2022, the priority for regional culture is not given.

For example, the word *culture* is employed seven times within six pages to mention organizations or committees whose names contain the word *culture*. This word appeared in the quotes from M. Lukšienė six times in two pages, where the synergy of the individual and the culture of the nation is emphasized. The word in question is used ten times in nine pages to define the culture of quality in education and management culture of schools life. The word *culture* once emphasized the cultural education of teachers, which is considered to ensure the nurturance of Lithuanian cultural traditions. In this context, culture is at least partially oriented towards the importance of the Lithuanian cultural tradition, but regional culture is not distinguished. Also, two times in two pages, the word *culture* describes the responsibility for national culture or relates to the importance of a unique national culture for Lithuania trying to be among the ten most advanced member states of the European Union. One time the word *culture* defines the importance of unique culture knowledge of Lithuania and its neighbouring countries (State Education Strategy 2013-2022).

In the Description of Teachers' Professional Competence (2007), the word *culture* is used four times in connection with the cultural diversity of EU countries or multifaceted culture enriched by national minorities and three more times this word appears in the document to explain the importance of a person's co-cultural competence and seeking to explain an information culture. However, regional culture is not mentioned.

There is no separate programme in teacher education targeted at preparing teachers in regional culture. According the analysis of the study programme of preschool and elementary education, it is important to note that the programme structure does not include a specific subject for the study of regional culture. In this case, the development of cultural / national identity should become an integral part of other subjects.

Following the order of the Minister of Education and Science, the General Programme of Ethnic Culture for Basic and Secondary Education was introduced (General Programme of Ethnic Culture for Basic Education, 2012; General Programme of Ethnic Culture for Secondary Education, 2012). It is noteworthy that the development of ethnic culture is an integral part of general education, which contributes to the achievement of cultural understanding goals, which is to build up a person's competence – the abilities to recognize, respect, protect cultural diversity and participate in socially valuable activities for cultural expression (General Programme of Ethnic Culture for Basic Education, 2012; General Programme of Ethnic Culture for Secondary Education, 2012, 1). The aim of these programmes is to integrate ethnic culture into all study subjects and into

many areas of school life, where relevant issues of ethnic culture are addressed not only through subject lessons but also through non-formal education. In primary education, ethnic culture is also considered an integral part of the overall educational process.

It is clear that the ideas embodied in the document require a trained teacher to put them into practice. In case B, the research data on the opinion of teacher educators show that teacher educators are either not fully trained for regional cultural development or are dependent on the programme being studied.

Teacher educator 1/B. mentioned: *I think it depends on the degree programme the student has chosen. For example, while studying Lithuanian philology, there is certainly more scope for developing regional cultural understanding, even if there is no well-designed subject, but ingrained integration of national knowledge, folklore, knowledge of national traditions and customs, which guarantees regional specificity. However, when studying science or other specialization programmes, I really doubt that we can talk about developing regional cultural awareness.*

Teacher educator 2/B doubted if *such teachers are training at all. While studying in two undergraduate study programmes (2004-2009), I did not take any specialized course on this subject. Nor were these topics integrated in other subjects. Now, working in teacher education myself, I also pay no attention to regional culture in my own subject. So I do not know if they are being prepared for cultural development at all.*

The research data reveal that teacher training in the area of regional cultural understanding is insufficient, and that the lack of integration into teacher training programmes regardless of the study subject or into professional development programmes is also visible.

In terms of the perspectives and opportunities offered by the development of regional culture, the participants see the integration of regional culture into study subjects or the offer of elective courses as a solution.

Teacher educator 1/B added: *at least I think cultural understanding should be an integral part of all subjects, or at least elective courses at university. Here we would like to draw attention to experience gained abroad, for example, Taiwan.*

Teacher educator 3/B said that *this should be financed through projects or programmes. Development of regional cultural education should be included into strategic goals of education both at formal and non-formal levels, not excluding teacher training programmes, etc.*

Regarding political, municipal and university support for the development of regional cultural understanding in education, no systematic assistance from the above institutions has been identified.

Teacher educator 1/B said: *here I am wondering if there is any orientation at all levels. The question is if schools themselves are interested? I do not know such schools; I*

*could not give examples where I know that regional culture is developing, apart from the established museums in schools.*

So, in case B, some of the prerequisites for developing regional cultural understanding are mainly created in basic and general education through a specially prepared programme for the study of ethnic culture. At the same time, teacher education does not provide young specialists with the opportunity to prepare themselves professionally for the implementation of a regional culture in primary and general education.

So, in case B, education policy provides a transmissive way through learning the national traditions, and a transformative way (including the person's participation), and respecting the ethnic culture as well as cultural diversity. The school culture and learning culture are seen as a significant context here.

Regional culture, the importance of learning it or its education have not been directly distinguished in some of the underlying documents that regulate the activities of Lithuanian general education institutions or the competences of contemporary teachers; the development of regional culture is better implemented at the non-formal level. The respondents see a solution in considering the integrated programmes for ethnic culture education compulsory in general education schools. Thus, teacher training in these areas should become targeted and meaningful.

### **Case C**

In case C, teacher education regulations are closely connected with the conceptions of national education policy. The National Guidelines for Teacher Education define the outcome of teacher education: "a teacher candidate is "able to see a matter from different angles, and to research professional practice from different perspectives"; a teacher is "familiar with the use of texts, narratives, festivals, teachings, rituals and other practices, ethics and aesthetics in religions and life stances"; also he/ she "is capable of discussing the significance of religion and life stances to the individual and society as a whole"; respects "the religion, life stances and ethics and the cultural conditions that form the backdrop to pupils' upbringing". The instruction of Sami pupils has a special place in Norwegian primary and lower secondary education, as the Sami culture and society are an important part of the shared cultural heritage. It is also reflected in the description of the outcomes of teacher education: "the student's knowledge of the Sami content of the national curricula for primary and lower secondary education, about the rights of Sami children and the Sami people as a recognised indigenous people, and qualification to provide instruction on Sami issues" (National Guidelines for the Primary and Lower Secondary Teacher Education Programme for Years 1-7, 2016).

The study approach is described as systematic, relevant and practical with a focus on the school's work on narratives, festivals, ethics, aesthetics and different forms of religious and life stance practice.

In different forms and combinations with other words, *culture* is present in the *Guideline for Teacher Education* 96 times in 74 pages, which shows that the issue is significant in education.

In order to make the Sami culture sustainable, the government supports the development of the special programme for education of the Sami culture and language teacher. Universities and university colleges can offer this programme for teacher for Years 1–7. Sami teacher education programme defines the focus on “Sami learning approaches and teaching methods at its core”. It also points to international perspectives, places the teaching profession in a historical, cultural and societal context, and contributes to critical reflection and insight into the profession. A graduate of the programme is supposed to be able to reinforce international and multicultural perspectives in the work of the school, facilitate the involvement of local working life, communities, arts and cultural life in the teaching in order to strengthen teacher competencies in a multicultural and multifaith society. In this programme, knowledge of religion, philosophy of life and ethics should make up a module equivalent to 15 credits integrated with the subject pedagogy and pupil-related skills (Regulations Relating to the Framework Plan for Sami Primary and Lower Secondary Teacher Education for Years, 2016). In the programme, Sami (30 credits) and Norwegian (30 credits) are compulsory. At the end of the third year, teacher students can choose a specialisation on Sami language and culture (30 credits).

Interviews with teacher educators revealed that in case C, the teacher education programme is differentiated, for example, on one campus, Lule Sami language and culture teachers are prepared, whereas on another campus, teachers of South Sami language and culture are being trained.

The ideas in the policy documents on the importance of cultural understanding in education are confirmed by interviews.

The teachers and the general education system have all the necessary preconditions for implementing the content of cultural understanding in teacher and general education.

The initiative of the regional community to use their language and culture is perceived as an important driver of cultural and linguistic sustainability for teacher educator’s opinion.

Teacher educator No.2/C said: *the Sami language and culture teacher programme is rather and it has been implemented for 2 years. We need to work on increasing the Sami society interest in their life style, traditions, usage of language and young people interest to become a teacher of it. There is a lack of teachers, especially if we talk about south Sami teachers. We would like to see the growing interest of ethnic Sami in our programme, who will become ambassadors and promoters of linguistic and cultural sustainability of the region.*

The implementation of the Norwegian education policy (Sami culture and language) documentary plans require teacher training, and a number of schools have adapted to regional needs. The biggest problem is that actually one school offers a Sami culture-oriented education programme for the Sami community in a large region.

School principal No.1/C said that *to learn the traditions of our ancestors means to “find a sense of home”.* *There is a demand for our school, but there is a problem. If*

*parents choose Sami school for their kids, that is, for younger school-age children, this means staying out of the family for a long time. This is not traditional.*

To address this, distance studies of the Sami language and culture are offered. However, the school principal No.1/C does not see this as a long-term solution.

School principal No.1/C also referred to the lack of Sami language and culture teachers:

*A big challenge for me as a school principal is how to hold a teacher without overloading his/ her. All schools in the area need a Sami language and culture teacher to meet the standard requirements. We are pleased to have a teacher programme, but we are currently suffering from a shortage of well-trained teachers.*

The analysis of case C shows a high level of alignment between education policy and teacher education.

## Conclusions

**Horizontal dimension of CCA.** Different backgrounds of each case impact the importance and content of regional cultural understanding in teacher education, for example, indigenous culture, dialects, ethnicity, national culture etc. In all cases, the culture is mentioned in education policy regulations in the individual, national and global contexts by postulating the openness, tolerance and multiculturalism. The regional or local context of culture is only mentioned in a few places. The related importance of regional cultural literacy in education is argued in different ways, depending on the cultural-historical, economic and political context: as the need to preserve cultural heritage, to ensure cultural and linguistic sustainability, to respect minority rights or organic child development (e.g., sense of place), etc.

**Vertical dimension of CCA.** In all cases, there are three mutually connected levels of educational regulations with more or less coordinated conceptions, aims, outcomes and content of learning. If education policy documents are conceptually and successively harmonized, the systemic development of cultural understanding can be implemented in both teacher education and school practice. Uncoordinated documents allow teachers to interpret the content of regional culture and the importance of its understanding in different ways, depending on the values of the institution or the views of the individual teacher. It can be either a great opportunity or risk. If the institution (university or school) is interested in promoting the regional cultural understanding in education, it can be developed in a responsible and deep way. If the institution has other priorities, students will stay out of this knowledge; this could create inequality between young teachers and their primary school students as well.

**Transversal dimension of CCA.** The development of the idea about the inclusion of regional cultural understanding in teacher education has followed different paths. The initiative can come from local communities, and it is related to the understanding of the situation and the need to solve a particular problem, to participate, to change the

situation, to reduce the threats etc. The risk is to stay at the local level, to stay alone with this problem, to have no impact on teacher education. The opportunity is to learn and to conceptualize, and to see the commonalities with others.

Teacher education institutions, as initiators of the process, develop a conceptual framework of RCU, which can help to communicate the ideas correctly and to coordinate different actors. But they can do nothing if there is no responsiveness from the local community.

For the national policy, the idea of promoting the regional cultural understanding in education is not self-evident. If national policies are oriented towards sustainability, the concern for cultural and regional development is a necessary and organic issue there.

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