

CATEGORIZING A COMPETENT SOCIAL POLICY STUDENT

Analysis of Motivation Letters

To Comparative Social Policy and Welfare Programme

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ABSTRACT

People face different transitions during their life. One particularly significant transition that young people face during their life is when they are applying to education. The thesis investigates how young people reflect transitions and life-course in their motivation letters at the moment they are applying to a university. The thesis examines how applicants are categorizing a competent social policy student, how they are representing it in their motivation letters, what kind of an image they create in their motivation letters, and how do they take up a position in that model they have created. This research is a case study. It is based on a data collected from 16 motivation letters from 2008 and 2010 from young applicants applying for the Comparative Social Policy and Welfare – programme, both to the University of Tampere and Johannes Kepler Universität. Categorical analysis is the method for the analysis.

The main findings were that applicants categorize a competent social policy student to be someone who has social ideas and ideals. In addition, a competent student is someone whose personal trajectories, such as life course or individual choices, will affect the competent social policy student. Furthermore, they are creating an image of a competent social policy student, who has good language skills and a lot of international experience. In addition, they are creating an image of an active student. Finally, they create an image of a competent student who is interested about other cultures and societies. Motivation letters are one way to test the motivation of a student to study in a certain programme. Although, as the competition between students is brutal and they might exaggerate themselves in their letters. In addition, after getting accepted to the programme, they might realize how expensive it is to study abroad and decide not to take the position. Furthermore, the motivation letter only tests the motivation while applying, as when the studies start the motivation might be something very different.

Key words: Life course, transition, individualism, competent student, image

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1. INTRODUCTION

Recently there has been a growing interest in the transition from adolescence towards adulthood. One of the main reasons is because the transition to adulthood has become prolonged and got various individual paths in 21st Century (Biggart & Walther, 2006 43-44). The media has noticed the phenomenon all around the world and reported about it from time to time. For instance, *The New York Times* wrote a broad article about youth's long transition to adulthood in August 2010. The article dealt with several contemporary issues that youth faced. Young adults in the 21st Century are changing their study plans and their study places. Furthermore, they are moving from one city to another, and sometimes from one country to another. In addition, it has become normal that they move back and forth to their parents' house during their twenties, because they cannot find a work after graduation or during the summer break. *The New York Times* argue that the normal cycle of life course has become imbalanced, because youth are graduating and entering labour markets much later than they should. Furthermore, they are starting their own life, such as becoming independent and getting married later than previous generations, which makes them dependent on their parents for longer than before. For the article, *The New York Times* also interviewed Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, who was describing the emerging adulthood on the news. (*The New York Times*, 18.8.2010.)

During recent years in the trend has been that young students have a year off after graduating from upper secondary school. *Helsingin Sanomat* interviewed new young graduates at the beginning of June 2012 and all three adolescents were planning to have a year off from their postgraduate studies to do something different, such as raising their grades to get to the university programme they want to do, or going to the army or gaining work experience. Young adolescents did not see the year off as a mistake, but rather as a possibility to experience new things such as working and travelling. However, the interviewees did have future plans; all of them had plans to continue their studies to university or starting their own company. (*Helsingin Sanomat*, 3.6.2012.)

Many recent studies have focused on the individual paths youth have when growing into adults. Scholars have created several terms for this 'new youth' and their way of living. For instance, Andreas Walther (2006) is using the term "de-standardized" to describe the new situation for the youth. It means that there are no homogenous paths for the youth anymore and the possibilities in society are diverse. However, there is always the cultural and historical background affects the paths and life choices that young adults are making in their lives. (Walther, 2006, 121-122, 124.) Another good term to describe the phenomenon is "emerging adulthood", which was originally used

by Jeffrey Jensen Arnett. “Emerging adulthood” is a phrase that Arnett uses to describe the time between teenage and adulthood. It is usually the time, when people are trying to discover who they are and what they want to do with their lives. Furthermore, they have many options and possibilities in their lives, for instance different school options. (Arnett, 2004, 8.)

There are other several topics related to the transition to adulthood, such as the increasing individualization of young people, whilst they are getting older (Roberts, 1996, 227). Moreover, there are individualized paths among youth, and they have freedom to choose when they want to get married, have children and choose their field of study and where to work. (Roberts, 1996, 228, Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2001.) By being individualistic, people have the freedom to choose what to do (Bauman, 2001). In addition, many researchers have been doing extensive research about the transition from adolescence to adulthood. For instance, McAdams, et al (2006, 1379) were asking in their narrative research from youth participants what are their turning points in their life. One point of the research, examinees were describing that for instance getting into a certain school was a turning point in their life. (McAdams, et al, 2006, 1379.) Furthermore, a recently published PHD study, by Mary Aurelie (2012) researched young female students from Finnish and French universities, who were about to graduate and enter the labour markets. Because of the different backgrounds, such as cultural and societal, the interviewees’ they had very different ideas about the transition to adulthood and transition from studying to working life. (Aurelie, 2012, 15.) Aurelie’s study showed the cultural differences, for instance in Finland the young women felt that they were losing their freedom when they were graduating, because studying in Finland is very flexible and it can be organized very individualistic way (Aurelie, 2012, 261).

Little research has been done on studying what kind of individual paths and life choices lead young people to apply to certain post-secondary schools or in this case, Master’s degree programmes. Even though McAdams et al were researching turning points, they were focusing on how narratives change during the four years of studies and how the personalities develop. (McAdams, et al, 2006, 1371-1372.) In addition, Irma Garam (2009) has been studying international degree programmes in Finnish universities and applied universities. However, the research tended to focus on the university staff point of view, such as how do they elect international students into their schools, what are the methods and the tools for the application process rather than studying the paths to the international degree programmes. (Garam, 2009, 45-47.) In addition, even though there are more and more studies about international degree programmes, they are a very general overlook for the programmes and mostly quantitative studies. For instance, most of the CIMO reports have focused on where the international students come from, to which cities and universities they go to, what

kind of problems there might be during the time in Finland etcetera. In CIMO reports, there are involved both students who are studying in Finland for a shorter period and students who are doing a degree in Finland. (For instance, Garam Irma, 2010.) Therefore, none of these studies have been focusing on what is lying behind the process of applying to a programme and what we can really find from motivation letters.

The purpose of the master thesis is to study how young adults are representing transitions, life-course and individual choices and how the phenomenon can be identified from the motivation letters. By analyzing the motivation letters the applicants of Comparative Social Policy and Welfare –programme have sent to apply to the programme, I will investigate how they represent themselves in motivation letters and how do they categorize themselves as a competent social policy student. Moreover, I am studying how do they categorize an active student and take up a position in that model they have categorizes. For the data, I have 16 motivation letters, which the applicants had sent to the university when applying to the programme.

The Master thesis has been organized in the following way. This thesis continues in chapter two with a literature review. I examine deeper the concepts of individualism, individualization and life choices, yo-yo-transitions and images as well as the ideal student from the university staff point of view. In chapter three, I will look closer at the Comparative Social Policy and Welfare programme as a whole, and then international degree programmes in general. It will then go on to chapter four, where I will first present my research question. I will then describe more about the study objectives and the method, which have been chosen. In addition, I will do an example analysis where I analyse two motivation letters to see, whether the method I have chosen, will fit into the data. After that, I will continue doing the analysis, which is seen in chapters five and six. Finally, there are the discussions in chapter seven where I will discuss about the findings. In the end, there are bibliography and appendix.

2. TRANSITION FROM ADOLESCENT TO ADULTHOOD

In chapter two I will focus on the background literature, which is related to my research. The chapter focuses on five different areas that are represented in my analysis part. They are mostly about transition from adolescence to adulthood, which contains different features of life course such as individualism, yo-yo-transitions and emerging adulthood. In addition, there is a discussion about images and what kind of features university staff would like the students to have. To conclude, I will present my research questions and describe the Comparative Social Policy and Welfare – programme, and international degree programmes in general.

2.1. Individualism and individualization

The values and behavioral patterns of the society have become more individualistic over the past decades. This means that society is individualistic, and that people in society try to be as individual and unique as possible. The other side of this paradox is that people start to resemble each other and the uniqueness somewhat disappears. (Bauman, 2005.) Zygmunt Bauman states in his book “Liquid Life” (2005) that the life choices individuals make always affects to the others. In fact, people start to imitate each other’s life choices and as a result to this effect, Bauman is stating that there is no such thing as individual human being because everyone is exactly the same, even though people are desperately trying to be different from each other’s. (Bauman, 2005.) In addition, Bauman explains that individualism means freedom to choose out of different things. However, at the same time, the individuals are seen as a threat to the society and citizens. Individuals are described as a cold and cynical about the healthy society or common citizenship, as individualism always comes as a first priority to citizens. (Bauman, 2001.)

Individualism has a specific role in young people’s life choices. Especially the paths from childhood to adulthood have become very individual. Firstly, the transition from youth to adulthood has become prolonged, for instance people are older when they get married for the first time and the fertility rate has declined in Western countries. (Roberts, 1996, 227.) Unemployment amongst young people might be one reason for these causes. However, Ken Roberts (1996, 227), argues that there is a certain trend to educate the next generation better than the earlier generations, and parents and children, believe that better education is a gateway to better job possibilities and better life (Roberts, 1996, 227).

As a part of the individualization, young people have different individualized routes to working life. Especially, women and the images of modern women have become more individual in a post-modern Western world. They have freedom to decide when to get married and when to have children. In addition, women study longer and at higher educational levels. (Roberts, 1996, 228, Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2001.) In fact, individualization has accelerated competitiveness among applicants and students because there are fewer places available in the schools, but on the other hand more applicants than there used to be. The pressure is high to win over the other applicants and students. (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2001.)

Before the concept of individualization of the life cycle has changed, children and young were supposed to work full time and get married, have children and eventually retire. Contemporary, life cycle has become more like life-course, because people can study several professions during their life-time; they can get married and divorced several times. (Roberts, 1996, 231.) Zygmunt Bauman (2001), states that the meaning of word “individualism” has changed over the time. In its early stage, the word individualism had a very different meaning. The reason for this is the changes in society. Society is changing and reformulating itself all the time and therefore the meaning of individualism is changing as well. (Bauman, 2001.)

Individualism and individualization sound similar and they are easily confused. Ulrich Beck has tried to clarify the meaning of the term individualization in her interview in 1999 with Jonathan Rutherford. According to Beck & Beck-Gernsheim (2001), individualization is a concept and therefore it is different from individualism, or individual. As a term, individualization is not a new one; it has been used since the Renaissance. (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2001.)

Beck & Beck-Gernsheim (2001) uses the term individualization to describe how patterns of lifestyles have changed in the twentieth century. In addition, individualization has released people from the roles we have used to see them. For instance, housing conditions have changed dramatically; there is a freedom of education, a freedom to movement and family structures have changed. In addition, social classes have been reorganized. (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2001.) Moreover, women are no longer dependent on men, which mean that they can educate themselves, work and earn their own money. Another interesting aspect is reorganization of working life. Working life has become more flexible and there is more unemployment than there used to be, for instance. (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2001.)As a conclusion, Beck & Beck-Gernsheim (2001), states that individualization means that there is no model which one can copy to his or hers own life. Instead, one has the freedom to do his or hers own decisions concerning studying, work, and family choices. (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2001.)

Valentina Cuzzocrea (2009) has also clarified the different terms in her article about career propaganda in England and Italy. In Cuzzocreas clarification individualism means that individuals' ideas and career prospects comes first and society and society's need comes after that. The key words are individual choice and individual freedom. People are responsible only for themselves. Contrary to individualism, individualization means that one must find his or her own path, and unique way in life course. It does not include only work but other life courses as well, such as education and family. (Cuzzocrea, 2009, 44.)

2.2. Transitions and life choices

From the motivation letters, it is possible to find out what kind of background knowledge these applicants did have about the COSOPO programme, whether they had previous working experiences from the field and on the other hand why did they choose this programme. Lea Henriksson and Sanni Tiitinen have studied Finnish practical nursery students. One part of their broad study was to find out what kind of expectations these practical nurses had when they applied to the school. The study was made through theme interviews and describing life-courses. There were 15 interviewees; ages between 21 and 60 years old, only one of them was a man. The interviews were conducted during 2004-2005. (Henriksson & Tiitinen, 2011, 122-123.)

Henriksson and Tiitinen discovered several reasons why practical nurses had chosen the specific life-course of their own and they have categorized these reasons into four different groups. In the first group, there are students who have no particular reasons for why they applied to the practical nursery programme. The options have been seen as a phase in life and after the study might come something very different. In addition, they have no clear image of what kind of opportunities practical nurses have after graduation or what their real work is. (Henriksson & Tiitinen, 2011, 123.) The second reason for applying and choosing this life course was that they had some experience of field of practical nursery or from the hospital in general. For instance, the interviewees might have been doing a practical or a summer job in the hospital and they wanted to continue following their ambitions and having an education from that field. (Henriksson & Tiitinen, 2011, 125-126.) Thirdly, some interviewees thought that educational possibilities were so attractive that they decided to study a profession. Compared to the second category, third category has more experience from the field of practical nursery. However, they do not have the adequate education. In addition, they have good skills and positive image of the work. (Henriksson & Tiitinen, 2011, 126.) In the fourth category, there are people who want to change their careers. Usually they have been

working in a completely different field. However, they have decided to change the careers and life courses too. There can be several reasons for changing a career, such as allergies, dissatisfaction, and better job opportunities, to name a few. (Henriksson & Tiitinen, 2011, 127-128.) Henriksson & Tiitinen (2011, 125), point out that sometimes there are no clear lines which group one belongs to, as interviewees can belong to several categories in the same time.

Transitions can be a very narrow or very broad (Ecclestone, Blackmore, Biesta, Colley, Hughes, 2005 7). Kathryn Ecclestone, Theo Blackmore, Gert Biesta, Helen Colley and Martin Hughes (2005), have studied the transitions through lifetime in their conference paper. Scholars have examined transitions from a broad point of view. In their seminar paper published in 2005, they discuss the different transitions during the lifetime, what kind of characteristics of transitions involve, and how individuals make their choices. (Ecclestone et al, 2005, 5-7.) According to Ecclestone et al (2005, 7) one person has several transitions during his or her lifetime because the way of living has changed from just having one profession towards lifelong learning. Scholars have argued that different transitions involve various emotions, such as anger, confusion, happiness and fear. (Ecclestone et al, 2005, 6.) Mary Aurelie's research (2012) about Finnish and French young university female students entering labour markets, results were similar, they had both positive and negative emotions about the transition.

Studies show that young people rely on other people when they make decisions, even though they are more and more independent. For instance, studies from London, United Kingdom shows, that young people make decisions by themselves, but at the same time have external influences from their family and friends. In addition, their unique cultural background effects their decision making, which means that there can be some class, racial or gender issues in the background. (Ecclestone et al 2005, 9, citing Ball et al, 2000.)

There have been critical discussions, whether women have the same rights and opportunities in life-course and in transitions. Especially, with regard to, transitions in education, working life and parenthood are seen crucial for women. This is because all the fields are very favourable for men but women have to make the decisions very carefully, and it has been discussed whether women can have them all, in the same way than men can have. (Ecclestone et al 2005, 12 citing for example Hughes 2002.) However, the transitions and changes in the life-course have become everyday life for many employees in working life. Working life, which has a very strong impact on one's life-course, has changed dramatically and researchers are claiming that there are only precarious careers. By this, they mean that traditional career paths are disappearing and replaced by precarious, flexible, and changing careers. Even though people do have their individual career choices, some of

them could be forced to change career and life-course. For instance, people need to create social networks, which is even more important than it was ten years ago when the article was written. We have Facebook, Twitter and other networks which have even replaced other procedures of meeting new people, making new connections, and networks. Furthermore, people are forced to change their jobs more frequently and even study towards a new profession. In addition, employees, employers and entrepreneurs have to take risks, even though they know that it might be a bad choice and end up in failure. (Littleton, Arthur & Rousseau, 2000, 101.)

Anthony Giddens (1991) has another angle for the life-course. Giddens (1991) describes life- course more like a lifestyle. Even though the word lifestyle has a very glamorous sound to it, according to Giddens (1991) it is more than that. Despite this perhaps misleading word, we do make life choices every day. Even though the decisions sound small and meaningless in the grander scheme of things, they all create our lifestyle and life-course. Moreover, they define ourselves and answer the questions: who we are and how we are acting. Therefore, we are formulating our life-courses every day and it is possible to shape it in an individual way and direct it to the way we want it to go. On the other hand, everyone does not have the same possibilities to shape the life-course. Societal background or economical background could be an obstacle, to name a few. (Giddens, 1991.) Contemporary, people are planning their lives, such as what they are going to do next summer, next semester next day or next hour. Everybody has their own calendars, and with mobile phones and other electric reminders it is difficult to forget what to do next. Planning for life is planning for the future life course. On the other hand the 'life-plan calendars' as Giddens (1991) is calling them, are helping people to remember the important events in peoples past lives as well. Therefore it has a double meaning. Giddens (1991) is pointing out, however, that not everybody has the same options to plan their lives and reformulating it towards their wishes and desires, because everybody comes from different backgrounds.

2.3. Yo-yo transitions in a European level

In the previous subtitle there was a general discussion about transitions, however, Andy Biggart and Andreas Walther has done research about youth transitions in Europe. In their article "Coping with Yo-Yo-Transitions - Young Adults' Struggle for Support, between Family and State in Comparative perspective" (2006) authors look at the transitions in a comparative perspective and as a theory they use Gösta Esping-Andersen's regimes to understand young adults' transitions across Europe. (Biggart & Walther, 2006, 41, 46.)

Biggart and Walther (2006), as well as previous authors, state that youth's transition to adulthood is prolonged and it has become more complex. The reason for such complexity is because young people experience various transitions at the same time but in many levels of life, such as work, family, education and sexuality. In addition, transitions from youth to adulthood can change back and forward, depending on how autonomous or dependent young people are. This is called yo-yo-transitions. Moreover, authors argue that gender does not play a role in decision-making. However, in some transitions women are guided differently from men. (Biggart & Walther, 2006 43-44.)

Biggart and Walther (2006) use a term yo-yo-ization to describe the phenomenon of contemporary youth and their changes in life-courses. Yo-yo-ization means that after the reorganization of labour markets, people need to be more flexible and individualized at the same time to be able to move from one type of work to another, or from education to working life, for example. However, some people are forced to experience yo-yo-trajectories, which mean that they have to live an uncertain life. On the other hand, some young people choose to live uncertain life and to change working conditions occasionally. Even though the life courses have changed, according to authors, the labour markets are still normative and the concept of full working hours and full employment is still very highly appreciated in the European level, which means that there can be mismatches in the labour market, because labour policies and traditions do not change quickly enough. (Biggart and Walther, 2006, 44.)

In a comparative analysis, Biggart and Walther (2006) used Gösta Esping-Andersen's three different regimes (Scandinavian, Continental, Anglo-Saxon), as a basis to describe the transition regimes in Europe. In the Authors regimes, there was also included sub-protective regime, which describes Italy, Portugal or Spain the best. (Biggart & Walther, 2006, 46, Walther, 2006, 129.) In sub-protective the female employment is very low and the families are supporting the young adulthood. However, the youth do not get any entitlements from the government. In these countries higher education is a gateway to a better life. However, whilst studying students have to do informal work and they are dependent on their family support. Therefore many of them drop out from school before graduation. (Walther, 2006, 129.) In the analysis, Biggart and Walther used example countries from each regime, United Kingdom (Liberal/minimal), Denmark (Universalistic), Germany (Employment-centred) and Italy (Sub-protective). Quantitative indicators were collected from the Study on Youth and Youth Policy in Europe (IARD 2001). The idea of the study was to research how in different regimes autonomy and independency affect across different transitions among young people. (Biggart & Walther, 2006, 51.)

The findings of the research were interesting to the reader but at the same time the findings were somehow predictable. In Italy young people rely on their parents more, even if they have finished their studies and are working, and in fact in Italy prolonged youth is rather normal because unemployment rates are high for young graduates and usually young people tend to live with their parents for a long time. However, there are local differences, in Southern Italy this is typical because they lack of other alternatives and they are forced to stay at home. In Northern Italy, young people might find a job but they still have to choose to stay at home or they are still dependent from their parents. (Biggart & Walther, 2006, 54.)

In Denmark, the youth become independent from their parents at a very early stage of their life. This is partly because of the good opportunities in education, training and employment. In addition, there are good state benefits even though they do not cover all the costs of living. However, they are good surplus for everything else and it will encourage young people to be autonomous and independent. With good educational choices and possibilities, the Danish youth are free to make their own decisions and parents play a minor role in their actions. Moreover, because of the good childcare in Denmark, young women have better options in working life and education. (Biggart & Walther, 2006, 55.)

In the United Kingdom, young people get independence at a rather early stage compared with Italy. In the United Kingdom it is expected that when young people graduate they start to act more independently, find a job and move out from their parents, because of the traditional expectations of young people becoming independent rather soon, it seems like youth thinks education as an instrument or a gateway to the employment. However, because of the high costs of education and the rush to become independent, there are several subjective risks hiding behind the transitions. (Biggart & Walther, 2006, 53.)

In Germany, it is very usual to approach employment or training as soon as possible, whilst unemployment and social benefits have been seen as a stigmatizing option for young people. Therefore, young people in Germany try to find higher education or a job, even if the qualification of the programme is not that high. Compared to United Kingdom, the young people from Germany are not expected to achieve independence from their parents that soon. In Germany, parents still provide the life of their children, after their children have gotten into the education or found the job. (Biggart & Walther, 2006, 54-55.)

As a conclusion to Biggart and Walthers (2006) research, there seem to be different transition paths in European countries among young people. In addition, it seems like the society and the cultural

differences and the regimes could effect on how young people become independent, move from youth to adulthood, and make their individualized decisions about education work or family. Moreover, it seems like some young people are relying more on their parents economically and socially, than others.

2.4. Emerging adulthood

Jeffrey Jensen Arnett (2004) was the first to use emerging adulthood to describe the adolescents between teenage and adulthood. To outline the phenomenon Arnett describes the gap between young adults now and the adults in 1970's for instance. In the 1970s 21-23 year olds already had a family, career, education and a stable life, compared with today's youth of the same age, who are unstable, in the beginning of their studies, and willing to have a family, but not for the next 10 years. (Arnett, 2004.)

Although, emerging adulthood at the same time, is being very optimistic and excited about the future and the multiplicity of options and possibilities that are available for young people, such as different work opportunities, school options, but also in their love life as well. However, at the same time there is fear and uncertainty amongst the joy and optimism. In addition, it is a time, when emerging adults are focusing on themselves. They are creating skills that they need later in their lives, such as decision-making skills, such as which school would be the best option for the career. (Arnett, 2004.) One could say that emerging adulthood is learning to be independent and rely to themselves. To sum up, emerging adulthood is being extremely excited and happy about the future but at the same time being little imbalanced and afraid of the future and not knowing what is going to happen next. (Arnett, 2004.)

Plenty of research has been done in the past years by using Jeffrey Jensen Arnett's theory of emerging adulthood as a base of the study, for example McAdams, Bauer, Sakaeda et al (2006) have continued studying the concept of emerging adulthood. By studying how individuals describe their life trajectories or meaningful moments in their lives. By collecting narratives, the researchers have tried to find meaningful moments, positive and negative moments and other turning points of someone's personal life-course. (McAdams et al, 2006, 1373.)

The researchers studied the emerging adulthood in a study, which lasted for three years. There were two groups of students, the first group was at the beginning, freshmen, and the other group was third year seniors in college. After three years, the first group was seniors and the second group

had left the college already. Participants of the research were from 18 to 25 years old. (McAdams et al, 2006, 1375.) Students had to write three times during the studies, one narrative three months later the first narrative was written, and then finally three years after the first narrative. To motivate the students to write their narratives, they were paid \$50 each time they wrote the narrative. (McAdams, et al, 2006, 1378.)

The participants had to write ten meaningful or important series in their life. The writers are called the method, a guided autobiography. The guided autobiography includes ten different narratives, written by the participants. First they had to write two positive and two negative stories about their lives. Then, they had to write two turning points or trajectories in their lives. In addition, they had to write two stories about their early memories in their lives and finally, the last two were for other memories they had. (McAdams, et al, 2006, 1379.) There were differences between the narratives made in the first and third round. Compared to that, between the first and second round of writing, there were less differences. Three months is rather a short time and the participants wrote mostly about the same events they had written in the first round. The researchers found out a few reasons for these changes. (McAdams et al, 2006, 1389.)

2.5. Images

Valentina Cuzzocrea states in her article *Careers in the Shaping – Experiencing Graduate Career Propaganda in Italy and England* (2009) that working life has changed dramatically because there are no longer jobs for life. Instead of lifelong jobs, jobs are usually temporary and precarious or “portfolio careers”, as Cuzzocrea is describing the new kind of jobs. (Cuzzocrea, 2009, 4 cited Hall 1996, Arthur & Russeau 1996, Truty 2003; Ackah & Heaton 2004). In addition, employees should have individual and multiple skills and they should be capable to improve their skills and educate themselves more if needed (Cuzzocrea, 2009, 41-42.) Cuzzocrea (2009) has studied how individualism, individualization and entrepreneurship are presented in different graduate career propaganda in England and Italy. As a material, Cuzzocrea used booklets, which are offered for young graduates. (Cuzzocrea, 2009, 45.) However, in Italy there were no booklets available for young graduates because the trends of entering the labour markets are different in Italy than in England, therefore she interviewed Italian young employers (Cuzzocrea, 2009, 52).

Cuzzocrea found out that in England, a good degree from university is always a good way to enter the labour market, no matter what the field of studies have been. In addition, employers appreciate

good skills, competences, and employees should prove their knowhow by solving problems, for instance. (Cuzzocrea, 2009, 45.) In the United Kingdom, there were three different booklets, Gradjobs, Prospect Finalist and Realworld. Cuzzocrea analyzed the name and the contents of the booklets, such as the advertisements of the companies (Cuzzocrea, 2009, 45).

The name of the Gradjobs was promising because it was saying that there are jobs for young graduate people. Therefore, the booklet was giving high hopes for the graduates. In addition, the Gradjobs- booklet brought a strong image of a successful life, suggesting that not only working life would be glorious but private life would be satisfying and glorious as well. The second booklet, Realworld, suggested leaving the student life behind and rushing into the adult world, however, they have an alternative, to travel abroad for one year. It has been argued by earning money, because it is an easy option and to improve their skills. However, Cuzzocrea was criticizing that it can be only a way to improve invalid Curriculum Vitae. (Cuzzocrea, 2009, 46.)

The third booklet Prospect Finalist had two meanings in the name. On the other hand “prospects” suggest that one just has to find a unique way to success from the several opportunities. Contrary to this, “finalist” has a sound of competition. In the booklet, there were interesting and meaningful advertisements, which created a picture of a successful life after graduation or what, it should not be. Similar images and pictures were presented in other booklets as well. (Cuzzocrea, 2009, 46-47.) As a conclusion, Cuzzocrea’s article about different images did show how it is possible to create different images for the readers.

Inside of the booklet, there were different advertisements from the companies who are searching for new employees. One of the companies who searched for new workers were company called Enterprise (2004/2005, 55) which was presented in Prospect Finalist. In the advertisement, Enterprise creates two options for the graduate, to choose a job from the competing company and end up working in boring workplace which offers no satisfaction or challenges. On the other hand, if the job seeker decides to join Enterprise, he/she could get an interesting and diverse job which would be very satisfying. A creative picture usually supports the message in the advertisements and decision making for the job seeker is easy. (Cuzzocrea, 2009, 46.)

Cuzzocrea did not find any booklets from Italy. She states that reason for this might be the Italian labour markets and the lack of self-promoting when searching for a job. Furthermore, Italian labour markets are seen very bureaucratic and traditional and there are only few career services for the graduates. (Cuzzocrea, 2009, 53.) To compare and England and Italy, Cuzzocrea interviewed Italian employees to find out what kind of similarities or differences there are in England and Italy. She

discovered that in Italy the career paths are not strongly individualistic as they seem to be in England. For instance, in Italy, the companies are bureaucratic and employees feel that it is impossible to express themselves or be an individual worker in the company, which seem to be an important thing in England. (Cuzzocrea, 2009, 56-58.)

As a conclusion, in England the career paths are individual and booklets are strongly promoting the idea of an individual career and freedom to choose the individual paths. Contrary to that, in Italy the labour markets are very bureaucratic and are lacking the individual options and freedom to choose. The companies decides how employee's career paths are developing and to which direction. In addition, the markets are lacking the self-promoting in Italy, which on the other hand is strongly presented in labour markets in England. (Cuzzocrea, 2009, 60-61.)

2.5. A competent student from the university staff point of view

Darla K. Deardorff has written in her article "Identification and Assessment of Intercultural Competence as a Student Outcome of Internationalization" (2006) about the international competence, especially with students who are studying to reach higher education after secondary school. According to the research, internationalization amongst students is growing all the time. In addition, new international university programmes held in English are increasing all the time. (Deardorff, 2006, 241.)

In Deardorff's research, she used two different methods, questionnaires and Delphi-method, when studying the international competence among students. Deardorff interviewed administrative people from the universities and scholars from different fields, such as political science and international relations. All of them had a broad experience about internationalization and they are well known around the world.(Deardorff, 2006, 244.)

The main results, Deardorff found out in her research, I will use in my thesis as support for my own findings. Firstly, for the administrative people, Dearforff did show different definitions about intercultural competence taken from the intercultural literature and the administrative staff had to rate the pieces from the literature which most likely describe the intercultural competence. To sum up some of the findings, the administrative staff thought that for instance, language skills and experiencing foreign cultures describe the intercultural competence. In addition, valuing one's self and the others or the knowledge of self and others, cross-cultural competence and other similar things were related to the concept of intercultural competence. However, if the interviewees should

decide which of the features would be the most important one, it would be the way to see other cultures and understand the world from their perspective as well. (Deardorff, 2006, 247-248.)

Even though Deardorff's research studied the administrative staff and scholars in universities in United Kingdom, United States and Canada (Deardorff, 2006, 244-245), it is possible to reflect the results she found onto my research. The features above are the features that the administrative staff and scholars appreciate and the features that the students are explaining in their motivation letters, should meet the administrative staff and scholars are wishing to find from the applicants and their motivation letters.

3. COMPARATIVE SOCIAL POLICY AND WELFARE- PROGRAMME

In this chapter I will discuss the international degree programmes in general, and the nature of the debate that has been going on after international programmes have arisen. I will then focus on the Comparative Social Policy and Welfare- programme and give some general information from it. Further, I will explain some relevant features in my master thesis and data, such as motivation letter and the meaning of a motivation letter, which will be useful later in the research as well.

3.1. International degree programmes as a possibility

In the past decades, lifelong learning as a term has spread all over the World. Lifelong learning is a significant factor in our global society in a contemporary changing World where societies are changing all the time due to various things, such as recession, factories moving to cheaper countries and population getting older. That is the reason, why education and teaching methods should change amongst the changing world. In addition, people as individuals, educate themselves several times during their life-course; some of them change a job, others do it just to entertain themselves and gain knowledge. (Jarvis, 2007.) Although Jarvis (2007) states that government is not responsible of organizing education for lifelong learners, but it is rather individual's choice, government might have power to increase or decrease study places. At the moment, when the population is getting older, perhaps nursery might be attractive study field. (Jarvis, 2007.)

At the same time, when lifelong learning has increased, has international education increased as well. Over the past few years, there has been more and more international education, and it has made a significant change in the educational field. New programmes are arising every year, and there is more equipment and technology to conquer the geographical obstacles as well, such as computers. (Crossley, 1999, 250.) Robin Mason (1998) emphasizes the meaning of good connections and good tools to contact other people online, because the technology is developing so fast. Mason gives several tools to contact other people online, however it is probable that none of the examples Mason gives in his book are used anymore. (Mason, 1998.) However, generally speaking there are plenty of Internet based tools, such as Skype and Moodle, or video conference tools and it is easy to reach other students or professors with them. Even though there is plenty of options to learn from the others and exchange the experiences cross-culturally, Crossley (1999) states that there can be difficulties about internationalizing the education as well (1999, 251).

Some arguments for and against global education are represented in Robin Mason's (1998) book, where the author is offering good arguments for other authors' criticism towards globalization. One reason for the criticism is the fear of breaking down the local community (Mason 1998, citing Brikerts, 1994, 27). However, according to Mason, the fear is unnecessary because global education creates new networks and linkages between students, professors and other university staff related to the programme. Furthermore, it is collecting people together from all around the world who are interested about the same topic. (Mason, 1998.) For instance, using different online environments such as Moodle, it is possible to keep the community alive.

On the other hand, the globalization has been seen as a possibility to learn individually, and it enables university staff and students to design the studies individually in a way that everyone could be satisfied and perhaps it also helps students not to drop out from the class because it can be more flexible in a way compared to traditional way of learning. (Mason, 1998, citing Edvards, 1995.) As a conclusion, it seems like there are both positive interest to increase international and various teaching and studying methods but at the same time, the scholars and teaching staff are worried how it affects to the traditional learning methods.

3.2. General introduction to the COSOPO- programme

International degree programmes have become very popular in Finland over the past few decades, especially master degree programmes, which have increased in Finnish universities. For instance, in 2005 there were 88 international master degree programmes but in 2008 there were 178 international master degree programmes held in English in Finland. (Garam, 2009, 5.) In 2008, the first Comparative Social Policy and Welfare (COSOPO) joint degree programme in three universities, Mykolas Romeris University (Lithuania), Johannes Kepler Universität (Austria) and University of Tampere (Finland), started. In first round of COSOPO programme, there were 23 students who are graduated or are about to graduate in the near future. In COSOPO programme's web-site, the programme is said to offer students great possibilities for their working life after graduation. Also, after graduation it is possible to continue doing PhD studies.

The first round started in 2008 and endured two years. It included three intensive programmes in all universities and online learning in Moodle environment.(COSOPO- about the programme.) The second round started in September 2010 and 18 students from three universities started their studies in the programme. However, some students from the second round also dropped out in the

beginning and during the studies. To apply to the COSOPO master's degree programme, applicants were required to write different kinds of application forms, prove that they have good English language skills and write a motivation letter, to express their interest to the programme. Two universities, University of Tampere and Johannes Kepler Universität, did require a motivation letter as one of the criteria to get into the master's degree programme, however Mykolas Romeris University had other requirements.

There are different reasons to apply for a master's degree programme. One could be that applicants are in a certain phase of their life, they are looking for something new and they are thinking about their study prospects, and future career prospects, which means that they are making life choices. Another thing could be that applicants want to make individual choices in their life-course, and do something very different contrary to other students. On the other hand, it is a good possibility to meet people who could have similar interests, such as interest towards social sciences and the same kind of a global view. All in all, COSOPO master's degree programme is a unique programme compared to other programmes from the same field. Both, life choices and individualism, will effect when they are thinking about applying to a master's degree programme. Furthermore, they have the will to study foreign cultures and meeting new people. A person must have a lot of courage to put himself/herself into a new position and travel and live abroad, without a safety net such as family and friends. Therefore, the applicants have to be confident enough and have the courage to take the next step in their studies.

The applicants may have had some expectations about their future when they applied to the programme. The programme advertisement was attractive, because they decided to apply for the programme. Maybe they saw the possibilities the programme would give to them in the future. Maybe they thought that after the graduation they would have better options in the labour markets and especially at the international level. Moreover, the international degree would be a great achievement on the curriculum vitae. In addition, the applicants wanted to improve their language skills, even though they already had good language skills. Contrary, some applicants might not think about the future prospects and possibilities after graduation, perhaps they just drifted into the programme. In addition, the application process can be seen as a competition because there were plenty of applicants and only a limited amount of places available for students. Therefore, applicants should also create an attractive picture of themselves.

My first idea was to study how COSOPO- student from the first round have integrated successfully in the labour markets. It was an interesting theme. I was interested to find out have the former

students found a job. However, after collecting the contact e-mails for few months, I found out in late December 2011 that there were only few students who had graduated. Others were still doing the thesis or they had dropped out from the programme. I decided to include the un-graduates and dropped outs to the research and I got quite far with this concept and even started collecting the material from Facebook- discussions. However, it turned out that the participants did not want to participate actively to discussions on Facebook. Assumably, there were several reasons for that. Perhaps Facebook was not that private place for discussions, even though the group was closed. In addition, the group might have had some disappointments about the programme because it was the first COSOPO- round ever, and they might have had different expectations about it. Furthermore, some of them were still doing their thesis and the topic about life after graduation did not move them. Moreover, perhaps they were busy with their lives and they did not have the time to focus on my questions and think about them through.

Due to the difficulties I faced during the data collection, I had to choose another way to approach this topic and I choose to study the motivation letters, the applicants did send to the universities when applying to the programme. Motivation letters were a solution for the data problems: I could still study COSOPO- students but the material already exists which was helping me a lot during the process. However, I did not get the motivation without difficulties. Lithuanians did not write motivation letters at all and in Johannes Kepler University the applicants wrote the letters either in English or in German. In addition, they did not save the motivation letters from the first round because of the different regulations. In Finland, the motivation letters are saved for several years, even if the applicant got refused. All in all, the amount of letters was 16 in total. The data collection did show the difficulties of the joint degree programme in three different universities. It seemed like every university had their own regulations regarding how to apply to the programme and how to archive all the material. The process of this thesis has shown me that even if there is a good idea, the topic, material, methods can change during the thesis writing.

3.3. The meaning of a motivation letter

It is common to ask the applicant to write a motivation letter or a cover letter, when they are applying to university, or exchange programme. In addition, several employers ask for a motivation letter or a cover letter to explain why they should be selected for the job. In Finland, the university asks the applicant to write a motivation letter usually when they are applying for an international bachelor degree-, master's degree-, or PhD programme. However, it could be possible to graduate

from Finnish university without writing motivation letters, for example if the student is not doing an exchange programme. However, in other countries the motivation letters are quite common. For instance, in many countries the education is chargeable and students are trying to get a grant for studying, which means that they have to send lots of applications as well as motivation letters. In most of the programmes, there are no resources available to interview the applicants in advance, which is why the motivation letter becomes the only option for the university to learn the personality of the applicant. Therefore, the meaning of motivation letter has become more and more important as a barometer of the selection criteria of students.

Garam (2009,47) researched what are the main methods in Finnish universities, and universities of applied sciences to find out if the applicant is suitable for the programme. The most popular method in Finland is a diploma from the university where the student is studying. In fact, that is the most popular criteria as, 23% of the university programmes are using that as the only criteria for the process of getting accepted on to a degree programme in Finland. However, 23% are also using the diploma and some other evidence, such as motivation letter, recommendation, essay or portfolio, to proof the applicants' knowledge and qualification for the programme. Thirdly, 20% of the universities are using the diploma, other evidence and interview to find the best, and most suitable, students for their programmes. Recruiting methods are perhaps dependent on the study programme. One could think that for example to an art programme there should be a portfolio or language test if someone is coming to study advanced Finnish or Swedish. (Garam, 2009, 46-47.). To sum up, Finnish universities and universities of applied sciences are using motivation letters, when they are recruiting students to their degree programmes.

There are different guides regarding how to write the perfect motivation letter. Especially on Internet, as there are several websites that are either offering their help to correct the motivation letter, or that give good tips how to write one. For instance, *mastersportal.eu* gives good examples of how to write a good motivation letter:

- “1. Make your goal clear; provide a short preview of the rest of the letter.
2. Why do you think that the university and the Master's program are interesting and suitable for you?
3. Focus on some of your strongest qualifications, past experiences (international experiences are always relevant) and qualities; organize the middle paragraphs in terms of the qualifications most relevant for the program, you can also refer to your CV for more details;

4. Conclude by restating your interest and show appreciation for the chance to prove yourself in the letter (in some cases you can ask for a personal interview).” (Mastersportal EU)

The Erasmus Mundus Student Handbook for applicants encourages the applicants to write something personal about themselves. In addition, if there is any experience from volunteer work or other hobbies that could help the applicants, these should be mentioned in the letter. Moreover, the guidebook suggests that the applicants should write about their academic ambitions and future career plans. The writers also suggest writing about the expectations the applicants have about the programme. (Erasmus Mundus Student Handbook.) The requirements for the COSOPO-programme are similar to Erasmus Mundus Student Handbook and are presented in chapter four. To sum up, several degree programmes are using a motivation letter as one of the selection criteria of acceptance to a programme . To write a successful motivation letter, there are plenty of guidebooks, especially online. However, usually the programmes give instructions how to write a good motivatin letter.

4. OBJECTIVES, DATA AND METHODS

In this chapter, I will first present the research question for my master's thesis, before introducing the data I have chosen. I will then present general process of qualitative analysis methods. In addition, I will examine further using categorical analysis, the method I have chosen. The most important concern is to test whether the chosen method fits the data. Therefore, at the end I will use some examples of the methods I am using for my analysis.

4.1 Research Question

People have different turning points and transitions during their lifetime. Transitions can be small or big, such as giving birth and creating a family, or moving abroad. On the other hand, the transition does not have to be that tremendous; it could be a transition from home to grocery store. (Ecclestone, et al, 2005, 7.) In this case, the turning point and transition means the possibility to be accepted on to a Master's degree programme and moving abroad to starting a new life somewhere far away from home. In addition, it meant the possibility to start a creation of new social networks, finding a new house to live in and possibly finding a job whilst studying. The possible transition and change in life is a meaningful decision in young people's lives and thus the motivation letter could be seen as a ticket to this turning point in life. Therefore, the meaning of the motivation letter is very significant.

When someone writes a motivation letter, or a cover letter to apply for a job, university programme, or grant, they should represent themselves in a certain way to the reader. Even though everyone has their own personal way of representing themselves, I am interested in the bigger picture regarding the motivation letter. I am studying how people represent themselves in the motivation letter. Especially, they wish to create a certain image about a good student, and not only create the image, they want to fit that image as well. Therefore, there is a reciprocal connection in the question and I will try to look at it from both sides.

From the data I will firstly investigate *how the applicants are categorizing a competent social policy student and how they are representing it in their motivation letters*. Secondly, I will consider *what kind of an image of a competent student they are creating in their motivation letters and how do they take up a position in that model they have created*.

I chose motivation letters as my data, because in the motivation letters people represent themselves in a positive frame and they create a certain image of themselves. From the motivation letters it is possible to categorize how do the applicants categorize a competent social policy student. Furthermore, the motivation letters are natural solution for the data because it already exists.

4.2. Introducing the data

I chose to collect the data from three universities, University of Tampere, Johannes Kepler Universität and Mykolas Romeris University. The reasons for choosing these three universities were because the universities were part of the COSOPO- programme. For all of the universities there was an open call in 2008 and 2010. To apply for the programme, applicants were required to have a bachelor degree from an adequate field, such as political science, social economics, social policy, sociology, or social work (COSOPO- Admission Criteria). In addition, applicants had to have a good level of English and to prove that they had to take TOEFL or another equivalently internationally recognised language test before applying to the programme (COSOPO- Eligibility Requirements). Thirdly, they had to write a motivation letter, which I will use in my research. For the second round of the COSOPO programme in Tampere, there were very clear instructions how to write a motivation letter:

Describe the reasons why you want to study at the University of Tampere and in the (Master's) programme that you are applying to. Also indicate your intended source of funding (Please notice that the university does not have any scholarships to offer). Specify your qualifications and the extent of your knowledge in the subjects you have taken in your previous studies. Provide any further information that you feel may be relevant to your application (Max. 7000 characters) (COSOPO application material)

I will use the motivation letters that applicants sent to Johannes Kepler Universität and University of Tampere, because the data already exist. I will use the motivation letters that applicants sent to Johannes Kepler Universität and University of Tampere, because the data already exist. From Johannes Kepler Universität, I obtained the data from the university staff and the coordinators of the programme. I received the motivation letters from the university staff without any names or other personal information. However, I asked a permission to use the motivation letters individually from each COSOPO student via e-mail before I started to analyse the motivation letters. In addition, during the data collection process, I tried to get the motivation letters directly from the students who had been studying in COSOPO, however, it turned out that most of them did not have the motivation letters anymore, or they had written it in German.

It was not easy to collect the data, because of the problems with bureaucracy; for instance there were different methods of storing the motivation letters in Johannes Kepler Universität. In Johannes Kepler Universität, they do not store the motivation letters; therefore, the motivation letters from the previous round (1) were thrown away. In addition, in Johannes Kepler Universität, the language option for the motivation letter was either English or German, which is why most of the students chose to write their motivation letters in German. I chose to analyse the motivation letters that were written in English. One of the reasons was that I do not speak German and if I had translated the letters, it could have probably changed the meaning of the letter.

I obtained the data from University of Tampere in a same way as I did in Johannes Kepler Universität. However, I did not have any problems with receiving the data because in Tampere all the motivation letters should be stored for two years. In addition, university staff did have all the e-mail addresses, which helped me to find former students and ask their permission. Furthermore, those motivation letters from students who were accepted to the programme should be stored for 10 years. Some of the applicants who applied to University of Tampere did not start their studies in COSOPO and it was impossible to track down the applicants who were accepted to the programme but did not start their studies. Therefore, I obtained permission from University of Tampere, to use these motivation letters as well.

Due to different regulations between joint universities, there are no motivation letters from Mykolas Romeris University. According to the strict bureaucracy in Lithuania, it was impossible to obtain the letters. On the other hand, I obtained information that In Mykolas Romeris University, the applicants did not have to write motivation letters at all, because they got accepted to the programme in a different way. Because of the different regulations and bureaucracy, there are

different volumes of motivation letters from the University of Tampere and Johannes Kepler Universität.

In total, I obtained 16 motivation letters, nine motivation letters from male applicants and seven motivation letters from female applicants. The motivation letters are semi-formal letters to the coordinator at the university who was choosing the students for the programme. The ages of the applicants were from approximately 20 to 40 years old. It was interesting to note that not only were the applicants all over the world, but were from different study fields. It was interesting to discover that the applicants were not only from the fields of social policy and social work, but there were also applicants from study fields such as international relations, engineering, economics, development studies, political science, media studies and sociology. Some of the students had been working after doing their bachelor studies and after several years of working, had decided to return to university. On the other hand, there were students who had finished their bachelor studies directly before applying to the programme. Therefore, the age distribution was very large. Moreover, some of them had been working many years and some of them did not have any working experience at all. In conclusion, the applicants' backgrounds were very diverse.

Since the data sample was small and it was taken from a small group of people, I chose to code the motivation letters by dividing them first into male and female- categories and after that giving each paper a number. There are 16 papers, nine (9) letters from male applicants (coded M1, M2, M3...) and seven (7) letters from female applicants (coded F1, F2, F3...). It may have been interesting to add some more detailed information about the applicants, such as age or country of origin, but because the group is small and could be identified easily, I thought it better to keep the answers anonymous. Therefore, I have hidden all the information about the cities and countries the applicants mention in their motivation letters.

There could be some ethical issues when studying such a small group of motivation letters, especially when it is from a certain group. However, when a researcher treats the letters with confidence, and hides all the personal information the letters gives, it is possible to use the letters. Furthermore, I have asked permission to use the motivation letters either from the writers or from the university staff if it was impossible to track down the applicant. In addition, as I received the motivation letters from the university staff, the only information I had was the age, gender and country of origin. Some of the personal information was already hidden from the motivation letters, when I received them, such as names and cities, to mention few. Therefore, the ethical issues were taken care of at the beginning of the research.

4.3. General process of qualitative analysis

The start of the research process in qualitative analysis varies, and there can be several ways to do qualitative analysis (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). It can start with collecting data, previous experiences or formulating the research question (Alasuutari, 1995). In his book *Researching Culture* (1995), Alasuutari has used an example of his previous research process in which he conducted research with Jorma Siltari about Finnish alcohol culture. The idea for the research originally came when Alasuutari was working in a fish factory in a small village in Norway. There, he noticed that when people are migrants living and working in a small city in another country, they do not have much to do during their free time but drink, especially if they do not know the language. After the summer work in Norway, Alasuutari started developing the idea of the research, and later on, did a research about Finnish suburbs and culture of alcoholism in Finland. (Alasuutari, 1995.)

The example above is a good example of how the method and research project was chosen. I chose the method after choosing the data. However, the roots for this particular topic and method I have chosen through my interests towards different aspects of internationality. The idea of internationality started to interest me through my studies in the COSOPO – programme, and my first interest was to study previous COSOPO- students. First, I was planning to do interviews with former COSOPO- students. However, the former students did not want to participate for the research due to several reasons explained deeper in the chapter three. Nevertheless, the topic was interesting and worth researching, I decided to try to get other data from the COSOPO- students. After finding the appropriate data for my research and after reading it several times, I decided to use content analysis as a method. In conclusion, different paths can lead to data and also to the research method.

According to Coffey & Atkinson (1996), the first thing a researcher should do after collecting the data, is to identify the main themes from the data, as well as identify the patterns to research the data. Another thing, a researcher should do, is code the material s/he has. However, Coffey & Atkinson (1996) point out that coding is not a substitute for doing analysis; rather it is a helpful tool for starting the analysis and organizing the data. (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996.) Furthermore, Strauss (1987) is stating that even though collecting data can be challenging, at the same time it should be inspiring and fruitful for the researcher. As the analysis starts at the same time as the researcher is still collecting data, it is important to make notes from time to time, which helps the researcher

understand and find important things from the data. For instance, it could be useful to write a diary during the analysis collection. (Strauss, 1987.)

As Strauss (1987) states, the analysis begins while researcher is collecting data. Because my data for the thesis already existed, I did not have to do any field search or interviews. However, I had to collect the data from different sources and ask permissions for the data. After I obtained all the data, I started reading them carefully. After reading the data carefully several times, I found out that there are certain topics that are representative in several motivation letters. For instance, many of the applicants had been living abroad, either working or doing an exchange programme during high school. In addition, they had similar thoughts about justice and equal opportunities. Already at this point, I started to organize the material into certain categories, even though I had not chosen the method yet. Furthermore, I started to think which are the most important and valuable topics for the research. To put all my thoughts together, I had a notebook, where I wrote all the ideas and observations.

Sometimes it can be difficult to analyse the data, especially when consisting of larger paragraphs and texts, because it is more difficult to find a key theme or a narrative from a large paragraph. Shorter texts, such as words or sentences, are easier to understand and therefore it is easier to understand the key theme or a plot and classify it. (Weber, 1990.) However, if the researcher decides to study larger parts of text, such as paragraphs, it is possible to reduce the sentences. By cutting down the sentences, it is easier to find the essential information. (Weber, 1990.) There can be several interesting topics in the material; however, it may not be possible to study all the interesting topics in the one study. Therefore, the researcher must choose only one interesting topic, and leave out everything else. In addition, the topic or theme for the research should be narrow enough. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2003.)

Tuomi & Sarajärvi (2003) and Weber (1990) are perhaps describing very common dilemma among the researchers. When I obtained the data, I was not sure what to search from it and first I underlined every paragraph of the motivation letter until I started to create loose categories and collections of similar things together. At the end there were many different collections which could have led the thesis into different directions. Furthermore, some of the examples were too long and difficult to put into simpler form, because of the length. However, I did have some theoretical frames for the research which finally helped me to cut down the material which was very intriguing but still not suitable for the research I was examining.

An inductive method in content analysis is based on the data that researcher has. The data can be documents, articles, interviews or based on other materials. At the start of the study, the researcher must read through the material and start transferring the data into more generalized form. There are several phases for this: first the data should be transferred to subcategories and eventually will form main categories. The researcher should leave out all the irrelevant information, and take only those parts of the text, which are relevant for the research. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2003.) However, a researcher has to decide which methods are the best for their research (Weber, 1990).

Deductive data are based on a theoretical background and framework, which means that the theoretical background must already be known. However, the process of analysing is quite similar to inductive analysis. Furthermore, there is a structure for analysis and after that the researcher is trying to find words, phrases from the material which fit the analysis structure. After finding enough material from the data to analyse, it is possible to move towards more quantitative like analysis. It is possible to count how many times word 'X' has been said in the material and put the results to a matrix. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2003.) Tuomi & Sarajärvi (2003) use an example from students who have been studying a nursery. In the example, researchers have calculated in the matrix, how many times a word or certain phrases have been said in the material. There are several words related to describe "helping" and the words are put into subcategories and main categories. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2003.)

A third possible option for starting the content analysis is an abductive method. The analysis has been done in a similar way to inductive analysis. In addition, there are some differences with inductive and abductive analysis as well. In the abductive analysis, there are some theoretical background, which is out there and "commonly known" facts, but the research is not starting from the theory. In inductive analysis, the theory comes after analysing the material from private to generalized material. However, the theoretical background is not that strict in abductive way of analysing, even though in the beginning there can be a theory or commonly known facts which conducts the researcher. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2003.)

4.4. Categorical analysis

It is commonly known, that people love to put different things into groups. For instance, we categorize other people as skinny, fat, normal, smart, stupid and so on. (Hester & Eglin, 1997, 3.) Categorical analysis is strongly based on to Harold Garfinkel whose ethnomethodological point of

view is represented in the categorical analysis and Harvey Sacks who brought all the methods, such as membership and conversational categorization, to the field (Jokinen, Juhila, & Suominen, 2012). Ethnomethodology is focusing on people and their everyday life, and how they behave and talk to each other (Garfinkel, 1967). According to Garfinkel (1967) sociologists' typically choose everyday activities as examples of their studies because behind the activities there are meanings that are not explained. Usually, these everyday activities could be conversations between family members or conversations at work or school. As an example, Garfinkel (1967) used a conversation between a wife and a husband. In an example, students were supposed to write down what they were saying and what they thought they understood they were saying. (Garfinkel, 1967.)

Harvey Sacks who has been interpreting the field during 1960's and 1970's. Sacks interpreted the Membership Categorization Analysis (MCA) and Conversational Analysis (CA). (Jokinen, Juhila & Suominen, 2012.) Harvey Sacks was interested in conversations and how people communicated with each other. Moreover, he was interested in how people organized and structured their talking, such as when and how they started a conversation and what kind of greetings they used. In addition, where did they put their announcements in the conversation, in the beginning, in the middle or at the end of the conversation. He did not study only two people talking to each other, but studied group talk as well. (Sacks, 1992.) Membership Categorization has been used for both spoken and written data, whereas Conversational Analysis has been used only spoken data which means mainly conversations between people. Whilst there is a fine line between Membership Categorization Analysis and Conversational, some of the researchers mix both methods together while conducting analysis. (Jokinen, Juhila & Suominen, 2012.)

The idea of Membership Categorization Analysis (MDA), which is closer to my research, is to create collections or "membership categorization devices" (MDCs), as Hester and Eglin (1997) describe them. To put it simply, there are certain small things and then they are added to a bigger group or a collection of small things. Hester and Eglin (1997) had an example of a "family" collection. A similar example would be for instance "table", "chair" and "kitchen sink" create a bigger collection of "kitchen furniture." We know that these things belong together and they exist in the kitchen, however, because of the importance of culture in categorical analysis these things could have different meanings (Jokinen, Juhila, & Suominen, 2012). For instance, Hester and Eglin (1997), give an example of a collection of "family" which includes membership categories such as mother, father, son and daughter.

In the cultural context there can be other membership categories as well, because in different cultures the meaning of 'family' is different. (Hester & Eglin, 1997.) Therefore, the culture has a

strong impact on ethno methodological research and categorical analysis. (Jokinen, Juhila & Suominen 2012, citing Lee, 1991.) Sacks found it interesting how culture effects on people when they are describing themselves in different categories. Moreover, Sacks did not see it as a possible option to research these things by explaining something with abstracts. (Jokinen, Juhila & Suominen, 2012.) The importance of culture is relevant in my research as well, although I have not made it a topic in my thesis. However, it is worth noting that the applicants have lived in different cultures and they are bringing the cultural awareness to their motivation letters as well.

I chose categorical analysis as my method because there are categories everywhere, and it is possible to find categories from books, TV-programmes, articles and lyrics to name but a few. (Jokinen, Juhila & Suominen, 2012.) Therefore, categories could be seen in motivation letters as well. With this kind of a material, I could have chosen narrative research, for instance, however, there were not enough narrative features in the texts.

Categories are divided into different sections. Firstly, it can be divided to several various materials. Inside the group, the material can be written or spoken. Even visual categories and categorizing pictures could fit into categorical analysis; as well as non-verbal communication, which could be adequate material for categorical analysis. (Jokinen, Juhila & Suominen, 2012.) However, according to Jokinen, Juhila & Suominen (2012), visual material and non-verbal communication are used less in categorical analysis compared to other material options.

Another way to study categories is to divide them into institutional and non-institutional materials. Institutional material is produced in institutions such as universities, parliaments and other bureaus. (Jokinen, Juhila & Suominen, 2012). Compared to institutional material, non-institutional data is produced in private places, such as homes, it could be a letter, e-mail, text message or a conversation with a friend, and the material is more intimate compared to institutional. (Jokinen, Juhila & Suominen, 2012.) Reflecting upon this, my material has both features although it is an institutional letter, and directed at the university, it has written to someone, the coordinator of the COSOPO- programme. For instance, several letters starts with “Dear Mr/Ms” and the letter has been directed straight to the coordinator, not just the whole university or a department. The word “letter” is referring to something more intimate. With a different word, it could give very different ideas.

A third way to divide the material could be the natural and un-natural material. The main idea of this separation between natural and un-natural is that natural material already exists when

researcher starts to study a certain topic. To give some examples, TV-programmes, newspaper articles and books are natural. Un-natural material is produced for the researcher, for instance, an interview could be seen as an un-natural. (Jokinen, Juhila & Suominen, 2012.) My material is natural because it already exists and the applicants did not write the letters thinking that someone would conduct a research about the letters. They wrote it to someone who will either accept them to the university or refuse them.

I choose the method for the thesis after reading the motivation letters. There could have been several methods that could have fitted the research, for instance narratives could have fit the research. However, there were only few letters, which fulfilled the criteria of narratives, because only few of them had a dramatic curve in the text, the beginning and the end. (Alasuutari, 1995.) Most of the motivation letters did not follow any chronology. Therefore, it seemed that the categorical analysis was the most suitable for the research.

4.5. Examples of the method

This thesis started with generalizing the data from individual and personal motivation letters to a more general and abstract phenomenon that get support from the theoretical literature. First, I took few motivation letters and used categorical analysis method to see if it was suitable for the research. By doing this, I found out that categorical analysis, as a method is suitable for the research. I got enough answers to my research questions from those two letters, which encouraged me to continue with this method. First I did different subcategories and after that I tried to find suitable main categories to them. When I was doing the sample research with two motivation letters, one interesting point was that some subcategories could fit into several main categories.

4.5.1 Creating subcategories

Before reading the motivation letters and conducting content analysis, I had preconceptions that I would discover certain kinds of information from the motivation letters. For instance, I expected to discover cultural differences from the letters, because the open call for the programme was international. In addition, I was expecting the applicants to share some personal information, such as something about their history, previous studies and why they wanted to apply for the programme. Furthermore, because of the clear instructions of how to write motivation letters from the University

of Tampere, I expected to read something about the applicants' source of funding. However, there can be other interesting and meaningful things which I could learn from the motivation letters.

First I tried to find different subcategories from the two motivation letters I was reading. At the same time that I was reading the texts, I was trying to find phrases that could answer to the research questions. If I found something, I underlined it and made some comments on the paper, if needed. I found several subcategories from the motivation letters, such as "fighting against inequality" and "working volunteer". While I was searching for the subcategories, I noticed that how difficult it is to change a sentence or several sentence into a one subcategory. It was easier with shorter sentences but became difficult when generalizing longer sentences.

Here are some examples of the sentences I found from the motivation letters and what kind of subcategories I found out while doing the sample research.

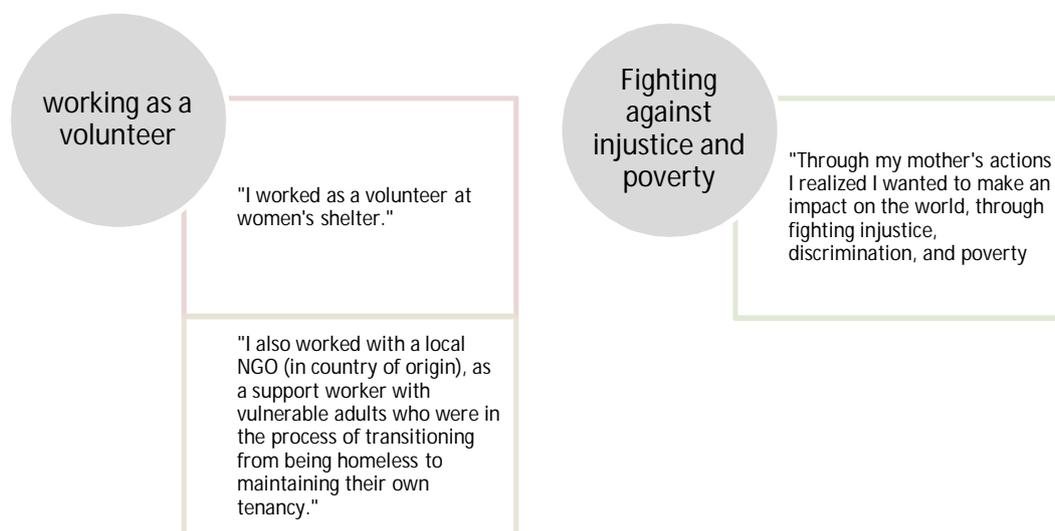


Figure 1. Example of the collections volunteer work and fighting against inequity

In the first figure (1) above, there are few examples of the analysis. In the analysis, there were several examples similar as them. After I collected the same quotations or examples from the motivation letters into a same place, I then created a more general description for them, like here "working as a volunteer." It then became a collection of similar things in a one place. On the right side, there is a "fighting against injustice and poverty". In that collection, there was only one example. However, there are more similar findings in the analysis. Furthermore, in the appendix 1 (page 66), there is a whole category where it is possible to see more examples and collections.



Figure 2. Example of the collections of Finland and University of Tampere

The second figure (2), above is an example from the images that the applicants had about Finland and the University of Tampere. Like in figure one (1), I first collected similar examples and quotations into a one-word document and then started to create new collections, rename them and describe them in a more generalised way. Whole category can be seen in the appendix 2 (page 67.)

Although I tested the categorical analysis methods on only a few examples from my main categories "A competent social policy student" and "An image of an active student" I discovered that there was enough material to continue working with this topic and the method I choose for the thesis.

4.5.2. From subcategories to main categories

After creating the subcategories, I tried to collect them under the main categories. I found four different main categories from the two motivation letters. When I was connecting subcategories with main categories, I noticed that several subcategories could fit into two or three different main categories.

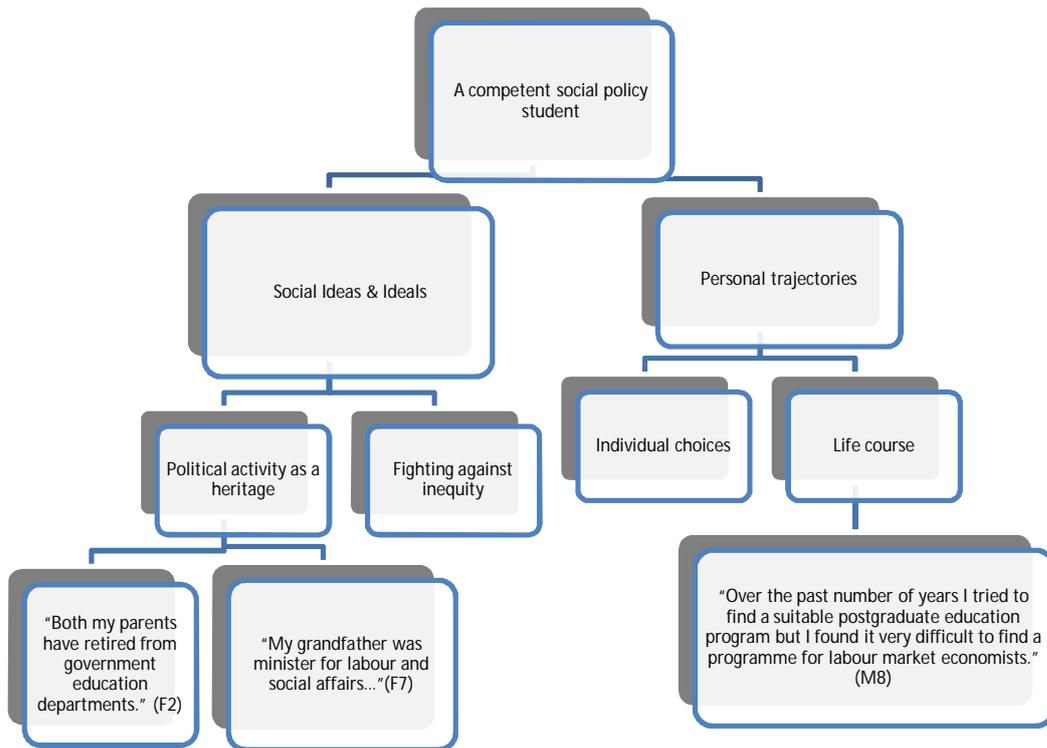


Figure 3. Main categories and subcategories as an example.

In a figure (3) above, there is one main category that forms “a competent social policy student.” Below it, there are two smaller and divided categories, “social ideas and ideals” and “personal trajectories” Below them are smaller subcategories or collections, and after that, there are a few examples from the motivation letters. The figure shows, how the categories are organized, starting from the bottom, where there are the motivation letters and the quotations. From there, it goes up, from private to a more generalized form.

Whilst conducting the example of my analysis, I found out that it was difficult to find a word or a phrase that could describe the whole sentence I chose from the motivation letters. Sometimes the sentences were too long, but on the other hand it really described something important. It was easier to find a subcategory from a shorter sentence. In addition, as mentioned before, some of the subcategories fitted to several main categories. For instance, for life-course there can be similar examples than in individual choices.

To summarize the methodological chapter, for my method I have chosen categorical analysis. Categories can be seen everywhere in our everyday life, such as in TV-programmes, articles, movies, and so on. People love to categorize things, but we cannot really predict how they are going to categorize certain objects into collections. (Jokinen, Juhila & Suominen, 2012.) Categorizing is a

way to put things into groups or collections, in a way that, in one collection all the similar examples. (Hester & Eglin, 1997.) The most famous scholars in the field of categorical analysis Harvey Sacks who interpreted the Membership Categorization Analysis (MCA) and Conversational Analysis (CA) and Harold Garfinkel who brought the ethno methodological point of view to the field. (Jokinen, Juhila & Suominen, 2012.)

To conclude what I did with the data, I first collected the material from University of Tampere and Johannes Kepler Universität. In addition, I asked for permission to use the motivation letters, either personally from the people who had written them, or from the university staff from the University of Tampere. I then started reading the motivation letters carefully, several times over. After that, I created collections, or categories, putting similar things into the same categories and moved from a private to more generalized form to get more general results. At the same time, while I was creating the collections, I already had some data which was guiding me with the data to right direction and helping me to take all the most important topics to the research.

5. A MOTIVATION LETTER AS A DESCRIPTION OF A COMPETENT STUDENT

When reading the papers through several times, a few things became apparent from the letters. People were discussing their past and future. What kind of career plans they have and what they have done already. They explained about their free time activities and tried to explain their motivation to the reader. However, the programme they were applying for was in the social policy field. Therefore most of the activities were related to social policy, such as volunteer work or a strong interest in politics. When creating categories I first separated individualism, life-course and social policy profile from each other's. However, it seems that everything arose from social policy, because that was the programme they were applying for, and the other interests they wrote about were somehow connected to social policy. Therefore, I decided to make a competent social policy student as one of my main categories.

5.1. Social ideas and ideals

Eccestone (et al, 2005, 9, citing Ball et al. 2000), states that family and friends can affect young adolescents' decisions and young people are influenced by their actions. The applicants for COSOPO -programme seem to have strong ideas and ideals regarding social policy. The applicants describe their desire to fight against inequity. They feel like they are actors in the social policy field, rather than watchers. The social ideas and ideals are divided into two smaller collections: political action as a heritage and a fight against inequity. The collections can be seen in the appendix 1 (page 66) as well.

5.1.1. Political activity as a heritage

Family background plays a part in some of the cases. It seems apparent that the applicants are from families where politics are openly discussed, therefore, it is a natural thing for them as well. For instance, family members have been working in the government in different positions such as ministers. In this case, the applicants might have received some pressure from the family unit to start studying social policy and become a part of a party, NGO or other organization. In some cases, applicants have worked already in a party. However, they are reflecting their choices to the background that they are presenting and they want to show that even though their decisions are their

own, family has a strong influence to what they are now and what they want to be in the future. The political ideas and ideals are a heritage they have received from their family.

“My grandfather was minister for labour and social affairs...”(F7)

“...and through various discussions [with grandfather]ever since I was a child have a high awareness of the problems and status quo of the labour market and politics connected to it.” (F7)

“Both my parents have retired from government education departments.” (F2)

“He [dad] has always supported and inspired me to study as much as possible so that I can gain knowledge and skills and use it to develop the community and the country I grew in.” (M1)

“Through my mother’s actions, I realized I wanted to make an impact on the world, through fighting injustice, discrimination, and poverty.” (F4)

Sometimes their parents have given them the encouragement to pursue their dreams, for example if the applicant is from ‘a third world country’ or if the applicant’s family circumstances are different and difficult, the applicant is willing to show them in the motivation letters as well. In several cases, even though the life-course has been chosen individually, the applicants might have been influenced by their parents or other relatives’ career choices. Therefore, it is natural that parents or other relatives who have had an impressive career in politics have an impact on young, growing adolescent’s ideas and opinions on some level.

5.1.2 Fighting against inequity

Fighting against inequity seems to be one very important topic in the motivation letters. The applicants believe that fighting against inequity can be done by doing something good for the society, such as working for non-governmental organization or doing volunteer work. On the other hand, it can be achieved through a strong understanding of justice.

“I strongly believe in a welfare system and highly value its importance. Social welfare state is necessary to guarantee acceptable living conditions for everyone and also for those who are not able to support themselves.” F7

“Justice and society have been important themes in my life. I was raised by a single mother, who taught me to strive to touch the lives of the people around me.” F4

“[country of origin] being listed in Least Developed Countries of the world indicates that the situation of social policy and welfare in the country is in vulnerable position.” M1

“I studied a lot about the fundamental rights whereas everyday I see violations of human rights in every part of country. This fact always made me eager to do some thing about it.” M1

“My ambition was to do something important and beneficial for the society.” M8

The applicants seem to have very strong opinions about justice, human rights and how they can achieve better results to everyone around the world. These findings are really close to Deardorff’s (2006, 247-248) findings in her article, where the administrative staff and scholars valued empathy and the trait of valuing others. The applicants can put themselves into the position of another in their motivation letters and understand what other people are going through. They have empathy towards people who are suffering and in their motivation letters they are showing the will to fight against inequality.

On the basis of the examples above, it appears the applicants are thinking that a competent student is a person, who has different experiences in their past. The experience has to be something personal and since the programme they are applying for is social policy programme, the experience should be also related to social policy or politics. Furthermore, it strengthens to Deardorff’s findings (2006, 247) about the knowledge of others. The applicants have knowledge and experience from volunteer work, which helps them to understand themselves. The motivation letters show that a competent student is active person who has worked as a volunteer while studying at university. In addition, there could be part-time work as well. Moreover, they have certain ideas and ideals about the perfect welfare state, and they want to be actors in the future by helping society to build a better welfare state. The applicants show in their motivation letters, that family background has an effect upon the person they have become. Therefore, the interest towards social policy or politics in general, comes from the family. A competent student is a person, who has ideas, ideals and family background which is helping them to achieve their goals.

5.2. Previous social and political activity

Being politically and socially active, could be seen as a good value for the programme. According to OECD research, however young adolescents’ activity in the volunteer work varies a lot, from less than 10% to more than 35%, depending on the country of origin. Furthermore, most of the adolescents in European countries in 1999-2002 and 2006 had participated in volunteer work at least once in the past 12 months before the research. For instance, in Finland, Austria, Norway and Switzerland were high on the list. (OECD- participation in volunteer work.) In the category of

previous social and political activity, many of the applicants write about their hobbies and what do they do during their free time. Most of them are both working, and also doing volunteer work. They describe themselves as active and outgoing students, who do several things at the same time. In this category there was only one subcategory, working in a political or social organization.

“I have also started a voluntary community-based social programme in my home town, to help combat the increasing spate of alcoholism and other social vices among the youth of the area.” (M4)

“I also worked with a local NGO (in country of origin) as a support worker with vulnerable adults who were in the process of transitioning from being homeless to maintaining their own tenancy.” (M9)

”I worked at the party executive committee of the [country of origin] Social Democrats.” (F7)

Most of the applicants have form of an experience from the social policy field. They have done social work, or volunteer work, and for some of them it seems more like a ‘calling’ or a ‘mission’ to help other people. Thus helping society by doing something good, they can give something back to society. The results are on the same level with OECD study as well, especially In European level. On the other hand, results show that the applicants seem to be more actively doing the volunteer work than in OECD study.

It is reasonable to highlight the volunteer work experience because of the programme and the field of social policy in general. In fact, it seems like most of the applicants have something, either volunteer work experience, or something related to politics, even if it is just an interest in politics. Zygmunt Bauman criticized the paradox of individualism in his book (2005), where the individualistic choices in fact disappear and they all become the same, as everybody has same individual ideas. In several cases of the categories in this thesis, the same effect has happened. Although it is good thing that there are similarities among the applicants, they might have been thinking that their ideas have been individual and unique compared to the others. Most of the examples are similar to each other and thus repeat the same things; therefore they are not that individualistic anymore.

5.3 Personal trajectories

The category of personal trajectories was presented in several motivation letters. The applicants have their personal trajectories, both in the past and in the future. They have made different choices and they are bringing the personal trajectories to the motivation letters. In some of the guides on how to write a good motivation letter, it is mentioned that the application should bring something

personal and relevant to it (e.g. Mastersportal.eu). Moreover, the applicants illustrating that the trajectories have been individual choices. The motivation letters have very specific and very personal information from the applicants. I have divided the personal trajectories to two more specific and detailed categories: Individualism and life course.

5.3.1. Individual choices

In a way, all of the applicants are individuals, because they choose the COSOPO- programme, which was their individual choice. They did not choose the programme because their friends chose it; at least this kind of phenomenon was not mentioned. In addition, they are adults and they can make individual choices depending upon their interests and future plans. However, there are strong voices of individualism in the applicants' letters.

Individual choices can be made already as a teenager. Even though one could think that young people under 18 years are too young to make serious decisions, young people nowadays are more independent and individuals despite the age. However, for young people less than 18 years old, it is rather difficult to make their decisions alone. Therefore they need support from their parents and other relatives. In addition, at this point of their life, usually friends' opinions matter a lot, at least for some youngsters. For instance, in a one friend circle, there could be several who have completed an exchange period during high school. However, moving abroad without family, alone, shows individualism, as they are proving that they can survive by himself/herself.

”During high school, I spent a semester in (city), USA”(F)

“Already at age 17 I had the chance to undergo an intercultural programme as an exchange student in the United States. I spent my senior high school year in... [USA] where I graduated with honors.” (F6)

Several applicants had experiences studying abroad. In fact, 9 (nine) out of 16 applicants mentioned that they had previous experiences studying or working abroad. In addition in those letters, where the applicants did not mention whether they have been studying or working abroad, most of them wrote that they are willing to study abroad or work abroad in the future. Furthermore, those applicants who did not mention about their working experiences abroad still might have had the experiences. Perhaps they chose to focus on different aspects in their motivation letters. Zygmunt Bauman (2005) stated that when people are acting individual, they in fact start to imitate each other. Especially during adolescent years it is very usual that people do something unique, for instance starting a new trend, but in fact they are copying other people's life-courses. Perhaps completing an

exchange programme abroad as a teenager could be one way to stand out from the group, but on the other hand be just like the others teenagers at the same age.

With individualization, people have more options in their lives. It has enabled women to study and work and still have the possibility for a family. On the other hand, nowadays it is acceptable if woman decides to choose the career over the family. (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2001.) Moreover, for young people, individualism is to act freely and not dependent upon their parents. The applicants have similar ideas about the individualism, individualistic choices and freedom. For some people, it is still difficult to act independently, and young adults might be still dependent of their parents, for instance financially.

“I believe the ability to take the initiative, to act independently and to consider the different opinions of the others are skills that will help me succeed in my studies.” (F4)

“I want to show that I am a responsible adult and I don’t have problems about traveling and taking care of myself.”(M6)

“As I have already have said, I have been studying in Tampere for []. During that time I had a part time job so that I was able to cover all my expenses by myself.” (F5)

“I intend to meet the cost of m studies and overall living expenses through the assistance of my uncle who is a university professor, and other family members who have agreed to finance my education in Finland.” (M4)

Individualism is about the freedom to do whatever person wants to and choose whatever they want. It is about making unique choices and trajectories amongst multiple options. (Bauman, 2001.) The letters show that the applicants have already made several individual choices in their lives and are still willing to make individual choices. While living and studying abroad, the applicants did explain that they enjoyed being independent and enjoyed controlling their own lives. One of the reasons to apply to the programme could be to gain freedom and act independently. In fact, there were mentions of the individualism and freedom that the applicants could have if they were accepted onto the programme and could move abroad. However, this point of view is more cultural. People come from all around the world and in some countries young students can act more freely than others. Perhaps moving abroad could give them the freedom to make more independent choices.

Moreover, youth are more dependent in some countries than some others are, for instance Walther’s (2006, 126), research showed that the cultural and historical background of the transition regime is effecting on the individualism and transitions of youth, and for instance in the Skandinavian countries young people are more independent but contrary to that, in Southern countries such as

Italy, the youth are more dependent on their parents. Walther's (2006) research gives support to my findings as some of the youths are still financially dependent on their family, or relatives and they need their support whilst they are studying. Especially, when students replied how they are going to finance their studies, these issues came up. Some of them were more independent, relying on their own savings but the others were still dependent on their family savings. Perhaps at this point, societal background did come up, because everybody had a different background, some of them were working life already, some of them were still students.

5.3.2. Life course

The subcategory of life-course it is an on-going situation, and people have to make decisions all the time, to make choices that satisfy them and lead them to the positions where they have always wanted to be. In this case, all the life-course choices are mostly related to studies: previous and future studies. On the other hand, there are different choices in the labour markets, which the applicants have made. Even though individualism and life-course have represented separately, it is good to remember that they can be closer to each other.

People formulate their life-course throughout their whole life. Even though they rely on their parents for a long time, during their teenage years, people start to have more possibilities to change their trajectories and reformulate their life-courses. Whilst people are young, they still listen to their families and friends while deciding what and where to study. (Ecclestone, et al, 2005, 9, citing Ball et al, 2000.) It is very common, to study abroad for one year during high school, because of globalization, different international exchange programmes and organizations it is possible to move abroad for a while.

"During high school, I spent a semester [abroad]" (F7)

"I participated in a bilateral exchange, allowing me to study at the university..., [abroad]." (F4)

Most of the applicants had previous experience from studying or working abroad. It gives a hint that these applicants have wanted to strongly move towards intercultural and international experiences, even though they have been quite young. On the other hand, going abroad as an exchange student or when studying in a university, could be seen very trendy and popular. Moreover, they have had the courage and possibility to change their life course to another dimension. Previous life-choices might have helped or encouraged to apply for the COSOPO- programme and make a change in the

applicants' life-courses. Some of the applicants might have had a clear vision of applying to an international degree programme one day. Some of the applicants might have had other options as well, and they have just drifted to apply to COSOPO- programme. However, there are similarities between the applicants' history, which could have eluded to that they would eventually apply to an international degree programme, or work and study abroad. Usually the exchange experiences have been an awakening moment in the life of applicants. The experience has given different tools to experience new things, understanding the culture, but most importantly understanding people from different cultures and with different ideas and point of views.

”This experience helped me adapt to different situations, and ignited in me a need to interact with people of different socio-economic backgrounds and innovative ideas.”
(F4)

It is a good thing to remember that not all of the applicants had such a clear image of what they want to study and how their life-course should go, because of the different personal trajectories, young people have personal study plans. On the other hand, after finishing their Bachelor studies, they might have been working in the field of their own and the work they have been caused them to drift into applying for the COSOPO- programme. Especially those people who have been studying something else than social policy or social work have found the next step in their life-course accidentally.

“Over the past number of years I tried to find a suitable postgraduate education but I found it very difficult to find a programme for... economists. I eventually found an article about the Joint Master's degree in Comparative Social Policy and Welfare and after reading the information material it became clear to me that the programme... offers a unique chance to learn about several different social security systems and the theories behind them.” (M8)

“I earned a Bachelor [from the field of business administration]... in 2004. After gaining various working experiences I would like to enhance my academic background and further specialize in the field of social policy along with the comparative analysis.” (F6)

It is normal to change a career several times, because of changes in the labour markets and several recessions, there are more and more people who have had various careers they have tried and several degrees that they have studied. The examples support the theory of “emerging adulthood” by Arnett as well. Young people try to find suitable work and study places for their personal backgrounds, and even if they have a background that is only loosely related to social policy there are still plenty of options and the future is wide open. (Arnett, 2004.)

“Dissatisfied with the direction my career had taken, I decided to consult a public sector career councillor...The councillor found, based on my own personal qualities

and intellectual interests, that I should redirect my career towards public policy development” (M5)

“Two roads in a wood and I – I took the one less traveled by, and that has made all the difference.’ The last line from Robert Frosts Poem The Road Not Taken could serve as the motto of my life. At every crossroad, I opted for the path less simple but all the more challenging.” (F7)

“I chose to dedicate my life to public policy research and development.” (M5)

Due to the different education, age, and careers, the applicants had different previous life-courses. This is noticeable in this case, where the applicants are from around 20 to around 40 years old. Moreover, the applicants did come from various fields, such as industry, economics, social work and media studies, which give evidence that they have changed their paths already during young adulthood. Some of them had been working for a longer time; they had finished their Bachelor studies many years ago and have changed their life courses several times. Similar findings were discovered in Henriksson and Tiitinen’s research (2011), as they found out that the people apply to nursery school when they want to change their life course due to different personal reasons, such as desire to change a life style, allergies or other health issues.

All in all, the life-course could change after graduating from another field, or after working awhile somewhere. The different life trajectories are shown in the applicants’ papers. Different previous trajectories of the applicants show similar results that the Walther (2006) has discovered in his research: the life trajectories of the youth vary a lot; there are no traditional paths anymore. (Walther, 2006, 121-122, 124.) Therefore, the process of becoming an adult and finding an individual path can take a while and the results give evidence that the process has been individual and different for everyone.

If the previous personal trajectories vary a lot, the future dreams and goals are more similar to each other because the programme and interests are the same, the prospects after graduation are very clear and well planned, because of the programme, and it is natural that people want to pursue working in the field of social sciences. Moreover, there are strong social policy ambitions behind the dreams and goals, and how the applicants want to further their life-courses.

“I would eventually work towards pursuing a Doctor of Philosophy (PHD) degree in the field in order to become an expert in social policy and welfare research. The PHD would put me in a better position to contribute to knowledge and research in academia and in social policy and welfare programming, analysis and evaluation at the national and international level.” (M4)

First of all, a very realistic option after finishing the Master’s degree programme, is doctoral study, either in the university they are applying for, or somewhere else. It seems like the applicants who

are planning to do doctoral studies after finishing the programme, have already thought about where to complete their doctoral studies. For some of the applicants, that was the reason to apply for the programme. These applicants have certainly thought about the future prospects after graduating from COSOPO.

“I would like to dedicate my career to social policy research and analysis in one of the EU institutions.” (F6)

“I intend to pursue career in the applied research or policy design institutions such as government agencies, NGOs or international bodies.” (M7)

“In order to pursue long term goals to research and respond to the evolving needs of Europe’s poor and vulnerable communities, I would like to apply to the Masters programme in Comparative Social Policy and Welfare. Having observed the current trends of migration from developing countries, I would like to explore the potential roles for partnerships between local community groups and state welfare provision in European contexts, where these community groups include people with international backgrounds and non-Western development experience.” (M9)

In year 2011 social policy graduate students from University of Tampere have found their job either in public sector or private sector. In addition, the municipality has given some jobs for the graduates. Moreover, non-governmental organizations are seen as a possible place to work for the people who have a degree from the field of social sciences. Even though the results are from Tampere, it gives a guide of where the students of social sciences could integrate after graduation. (Tampereen Yliopisto, Ura- ja Rekrytointipalvelut.)

The findings of Tampere University research are similar to the wishes and plans of the applicants. The public sector was strongly presented in the motivation letters, as a longer goal in working life and in life-course. Another typical way to integrate to the labour market is to work in non-governmental organizations. The private sector was mentioned only in few papers. Perhaps, this could mean that the applicants want to strongly to categorize themselves as a competent social policy student and they really want to work to create something good in the public sector or with NGOs. On the other hand, the field of social policy is so broad that it is hard to imagine what kind of job opportunities it could offer and therefore the private sector is not that clear for the applicants. It is desirable and approvable for social scientists to want to change the world. However, everyone seems to have the same individualistic ideas about their future. It could be true that they are truly willing to change the world but on the other hand, they have to create a certain image for the reader. Who would want to write that they want to make as much money as they can after graduation, or something similar.

Despite the fact that the applicants were describing their future in the field of public sector and NGOs, they also had some future plans to work in an international field of social policy. This is also a realistic plan, since the programme is international and it gives good working tools to study abroad or in international environment.

“Thirdly, I reckon on finding a good job in Finland after graduation from the UTA.”(M3)

“I want to take part in developing and building a strong social welfare system for the 21st century. I think the communication of needed changes and amendments and even alterations is highly important and not taken into account as much as needed nowadays. I want to change this in order to ensure the preservation of a social welfare system where nobody shall fall through the social net and which guarantees equal changes for everyone regardless of financial or social background.” (F7)

Many of the applicants stated that they would like to stay in the country where they completed their Master’s studies. On the other hand, applicants coming from third world countries, wrote, that they wanted to bring the knowledge that they have learned to their country of origin and develop the country and improve its social policies. According to Garam (2009) the idea is to integrate the students to Finnish society so that they would stay in Finland after the graduation, because the Finnish labour market needs a highly qualified foreign work-force. However, as the studies have shown, not that many students find a job in Finland after graduation. Often, students graduating from universities have problems finding job related to their studies. (Garam, 2009, 58.)

One aspect of their future plans was to change the world. In these cases, everyone had a strong social policy profile, good knowledge of welfare systems and what would be the best for the world or one part of the world. However, at some point strong opinions about changing the world and creating new social welfare systems seem to be too utopian and therefore one has to read the motivation letters with certain critical eye.

5.4. Summary

I have concluded all the main findings to table one (1) to show what kind of competent social policy student- category the applicants are creating in their motivation letters. A competent social policy student has social ideas and ideals, previous social and political activity and personal trajectories. They are very aware of the structure of the social policies and they have a good understanding of justice. In addition, they are interested to do something for the society, and give their own contribution. Furthermore, they have worked previously in social and political organizations, such

as non-governmental organizations and for political parties. They are highlighting for the motivation letters their personal trajectories such as their own individualistic choices, such as individualistic choices which they have done in the past, how they have travelled, and lived abroad.

Subcategory 2	Subcategory 1
Social ideas & ideals	Political activity as a heritage
	Fighting against inequity
Previous social & Political activity	Working in a political organization
Personal trajectories	Individual choices
	Life Course

Table1: A competent social policy student, conclusions

In addition, they explain to the reader what kind of a life-course they have experienced. How they have been unsatisfied with their career so far, or how they want to do something positive for the society and thus have decided to study further. Some of the applicants share even more personal information about their lives, such as who in their family has inspired them to study further. They are representing their ideas about the future goals they have, what they want to achieve after graduation and how the degree will help them to pursue their career prospects after graduation. As a conclusion, a competent social policy student social ideas and ideals, has previous social and political activity and has personal trajectories which have pushed him/her towards studying social policies.

6. AN IMAGE OF AN ACTIVE STUDENT

It is worth highlighting that the images can be bilateral. Whilst, the applicants are trying to give a certain image about themselves, they can however represent the images they have about the country or city or the programme and it is difficult to say, whether they are trying to promote a positive image of themselves and their knowledge, or if that is just the knowledge they have.

The applicants have different images about the country, city or university. However, they also have to give an image to the person, who will accept or reject them onto the programme. It could be difficult, because the impression can be harder to make through a letter than seeing the people in person. Therefore, it is important to promote a good image and make a good first impression. After all, the motivation letter, plus the Bachelor Degree, and proper English and other language skills, were the only requirements. Therefore, it seems like the motivation letter could be the defining thing to get to the programme. In general, the applicants are promoting a positive image of themselves. They are writing in a positive way about their studies, previous work, and their dreams. In several letters, the applicants are discussing very openly about these aspects. Actually, in every letter, it was possible to identify some kind of image; some of them are more personal than others. The whole category and subcategories can be seen in appendix 2 (67).

6.1. Language skills & international experiences

One of the most important parts of creating a positive image for the university staff, are language skills. Even though the applicants sent the TOEFL, or other language test, results with the application and motivation letter, it is important to notify language skills in the motivation letter as well. Moreover, it is important to let the university staff know that they are interested in other cultures and languages, and more importantly show a willingness to learn other languages.

“...I have lived in Finland for half a year, so I can communicate in Finnish quite fluently.” F1

“...the opportunity to rapidly improve my German...”

Dearforff's (2006) results in her research were similar. The university staff and scholars explained that language skills are very important to be successful in international studies. (Deardorff, 2006, 247.) In the motivation letters, the applicants are describing their language skills, even though it is

easy to see from the motivation letters, that they are good writers and they have good language skills, not only in English but also in Finnish. Moreover, that they are willing to learn more languages, such as Finnish and German. On the other hand, it is good to point out that some of them spoke English as a mother tongue and therefore they might have better skills to describe themselves in the letters. From that point of view the competition has been little bit unequal for some of the applicants, however, there is no need to go further analysing the language skills in this context.

One reason that could attract the applicants is the internationality of the programme. Furthermore, an image of a global applicant could be seen as a positive thing for the applicant, and it could be a qualification that the university staff would notice from the motivation letter. Perhaps, the global way of living could prove that they want to continue living that way by joining the programme.

“...at the age of 16 I lived one year [abroad].” (F1)

“Being third year student I was admitted to study at (university, abroad) for academic year as a visiting student.” (F5)

“I have also lived (abroad) for some while and I have job (abroad) if I want to work there... yeah and a place to live of course.” (M6)

Amongst the good language skills, the applicants have had several international experiences in the past. This is also a part of their life-courses and personal trajectories. Travelling and experiencing new cultures gives skills to understand different cultures and explore new things. Nowadays, it is easier for young people to go abroad and experience different cultures. Moreover, sometimes one can meet new cultures without moving abroad because of globalization. Deardorff's research (2006, 253) showed that previous international skills and intercultural competence are very important and highly valued. It showed also that people are interested in foreign cultures and it is not that difficult to adjust to foreign cultures. Most of the applicants had already completed exchange periods during their high school years or during their Bachelor studies. In addition, some of them had been working abroad for a while. They are really showing, how they are already international, and will have no difficulties living abroad. They have plenty of international experiences and they want to continue exploring new cultures and it is showing that they want their life trajectories to go towards international paths. At least, that is the image they want to give to the reader.

6.2. Information about the foreign culture

When someone is applying to a programme, which is abroad, one has to get some information about the city and country, where the programme takes place. Especially, if they has never been there before, it would be good to know, what kind of climate there is, whether the country is expensive or not, and what kind of possibilities there are for a student. The applicants will be entering a new culture; therefore they need to be sure what is ahead. The applicants' images about Finland are very traditional and it could say that most of the images are very general and well known around the world. For instance, Finland is a very cold country in the winter and it is possible to ski and do other sporting activities here in Finland.

“I cannot help but to think of the beautiful winter and peaceful life, which make Finland a popular destination for travellers, though I feel the University of Tampere is a more attractive destination for me.”(F3)

“I have been doing skiing for 5 years already. I was happy to read from the website that in the UTa I'll have the opportunity to do mounting skiing on Mustavuori and Hervanta ski slopes.” (M3)

Perhaps, further knowledge is that Finland is a democratic country and Finland has a good education system, which is free of charge at the moment. The good education system that is known all around the world is probably one of the reasons why applicants are applying for the programme.

“Finland is a country with a culture funded willpower, mutual respect, and equal opportunities for everyone to success in life appeals to me.” (F7)

“Finland is also noted as one of the leading democratic countries in the world where fundamental human rights and freedoms, the rule of law and quality of life are guaranteed to all irrespective of race and color.” (M4)

“During my staying in Finland I got to know, probably for the first time in my life, what it is like to live in a country with such a developed system of welfare and social policies.” (F1)

In the motivation letters, Finland is represented as a very democratic country, with good equal opportunities for both men and women and internationally highly appreciated education. What is interesting is that in those letters, which were sent to Johannes Kepler Universität, the applicants did not compliment Austrian society, the education, and welfare system, or culture in a way that it was complimented in the motivation letters sent to University of Tampere. If there were more letters from Austria, there might have been more variation. Motivation letters gave a good image that the

writers have a positive image of the country they are applying for and possibly moving to. Cuzzocrea (2009) wrote in her article, how different booklets suggest and give certain images for new graduates in England and Italy. In a similar fashion, applicants advertise themselves to the reader, and are putting themselves into a position of a good and motivated student. By advertising themselves as a person who knows what kind of a country they are applying for and perhaps moving to, they know what they are facing when they move in, even if they are talking only about all the positive things about Finnish society.

The University and the Comparative Social Policy and Welfare –programme seem to be well known all around the World. In the image of the applicants, the University of Tampere or Johannes Kepler Universität are respected and qualified universities. Students think that the University of Tampere has a good reputation and it is one of the best universities at the European level.

“Another value I aspect in the programme at the University of Tampere is the strong emphasis on case studies.” (F7)

“As one of the larger academic institutions in Finland, University of Tampere manifests its excellence through outstanding academic achievements and diversified research fields.” (F3)

“I am also highly impressed with the quality of academic staff, facilities and serene environment within which it is situated.” (M4)

“Having looked into other Comparative Social Policy courses, I recognize the value of the partnership between the universities in Linz, Finland and Lithuania in providing a broad resource base for comparative research.” (M9)

Internationality is highly appreciated among the applicants. For instance, the applicants think that the universities are giving internationally qualified teaching and that internationality is one of the main reasons to apply for the programme. These results are very close to Deardorff’s (2006) findings, because the applicants are willing to experience foreign cultures; they value and appreciate the university system and the country itself. Moreover, they have good knowledge to where they are applying. An interesting aspect was that the applicants mentioned the internationally respected COSOPO- programme. However, during the application process, there was no first round or the first round was still running. Maybe the applicants did have an image of qualified international programmes in general, not only COSOPO.

What is surprising, no one mentioned the free university education that Finland offers for foreign students. However, that could be only one of the reasons to apply to Finnish universities. The applicants mention the equal opportunities and a high standard of education. One reason to apply to

Finland could be also the freedom to educate oneself without paying high university fees. Especially, if looking from which countries and parts of the world the applicants are coming from.

“I also like the fact that the programme is jointly run by three universities in different settings.”(M4)

“Second, the programme is respected internationally and will contribute to my long term career goals in the public sector.” (M5)

“The degrees awarded by the university are of top quality and also internationally recognized.” (M4)

Some criticalness has to be presented here at this point of the analysis. Sometimes the applicants are trying very hard to make an impression to the university staff and it seems like many of them exaggerate a little bit. They use very vivid expressions to describe their information about the country as well as the information about the university and the COSOPO-programme itself. Though they have a good expression of Finnish, or Austrian school system, either the information they have is rather false, or they are exaggerating it to make a better impression. For instance, even though the programme is international and joint by three good universities perhaps it is too much said that it is respected internationally during the time, when no one had even graduated from the programme. Moreover, several applicants admire University of Tampere as one of the leading universities in Europe, although this could be true but there is no quantifiable truth presented in the motivation letters. Perhaps it is because the Finnish education system in general is highly valued at the international level. Furthermore, the information they have regarding Finland is very typical information from advertisements and travel guides. Finland does sound attractive, but maybe the sources they have used are designed for travelers rather than people who are planning to move to Finland. In some ways, it is portrayed as a nice winter vacation instead of living and studying in Finland.

It seems like experiencing foreign cultures and language skills are highly valued among the applicants. Everyone has language skills; they are internationally experienced already and have had the opportunities to travel around the world or study abroad previously. Therefore, they seem to be perfect applicants for the programme. Despite the criticalness above, the applicants value the comparativeness in the programme and the options that the joint degree programme is offering to them.

6.3. An active student

The applicants give an image that they are hardworking students, not only at the university but also during their free time. It is a good thing to create an image of hard working student, who has got good grades in previous studies, and who has several recognized work places on their Curriculum Vitae. Especially regarding, how the previous studies have gone, could be potentially important when applying for the programme. In addition, if there is working experience from the field of social policy, social work or other relevant job place, it creates an image of a person who is really devoted to the field and it is not just an experience a person wants to try, to see whether the field is interesting or not.

“I completed my Bachelors... with a good grade of 3.26 out of 4.” (M1)

“I used to perform some propositions on annual conference for students and post-graduates. And I even won 1st place once for my report.” (M3)

The applicants are willing to discuss their different working experiences. These experiences could help them to get into the programme. Most of the applicants do have impressive working experiences from internationally respected organizations, or nationally well-known organizations or companies. In addition, some of the applicants have experiences doing a volunteer work, which has been seen as highly appreciated in the field of social sciences.

“My proudest achievement was to successfully accomplish international support for UNESCO Convention as a policy advisor with the Government [country of origin].” (M5)

“I have worked in the international charity foundation for 6 years now and worked as a delegate of [country of origin] in the international conference. I have been working for the same foundation... [abroad] as well. I work as an international expert and deal with different kind of people from all around the world.” (M6)

“I assure you that I am a quick learner, hard working and a dedicated student.” (M1)

“I think that entering the university of Tampere (UTA) on this program will be very useful both for me and the UTA.” (M3)

Several applicants are stating that they are learning quickly, hardworking and they have a good working ethic which can be proved by teachers. One applicant states that he is willing to study in the international contest. These sentences could be closure for the motivation letters, because some of them are very strong. Another example is when one applicant wrote that getting into the programme would be useful both the applicant and the university. It gives an image that for the university it could be useful to have the applicant to study in the university. If the university decided

to fail the application, then it would be their loss. In a way, the applicants are selling an image like Cuzzocrea's article, where the booklets are trying to sell certain images for young graduates. (Cuzzocrea, 45.) In Cuzzocrea's booklets (2009, 45-46), the positive image came with certain word layout, dynamic titles and influential pictures. In a similar way, the motivation letters are trying to sell an image with a good word layout but at the same time the motivation letters suggest to the reader that this is the best motivation letter and applicant that there is.

There are several master degree programmes starting every year all around the world. When students search for interesting master degree programmes, there are several web pages helping them to find suitable universities for them. Moreover, there can be similar programmes running every year; therefore it can be assumed that the applicants are applying to several programmes, not for just one.

“To study economics at the University of Helsinki from a European and Finnish perspective, would be a personal and intellectual dream come true.” (M5)

The competition between the applicants is so hard that one has to apply to several schools. What could make Finland very attractive is not only the beautiful winter, but perhaps the option to study for free. This is a good example of how people have to apply to several universities and motivation letters are even ‘copied and pasted’ to several universities. It seems like the applicants write one motivation letter and sends it to several universities and at the end they get to choose which university is the best for their desires. This creates a key thinking point of, if the motivation letter is the only way to measure the motivation and willingness to study on a certain programme,

6.4. The image of a sophisticated students

I discovered some other interesting features from the motivation letters, which do not fit into any of the categories I have mentioned above. However, the features I observed are meaningful and important to the applicants. In addition, these features show how differently the applicants understand the concept of a motivation letter. For instance, the applicants are trying to persuade and give statements as to why they want to study on the COSOPO programme. I decided to call this subcategory as the image of a sophisticated student, because in some of the motivation letters the applicants were representing their knowledge about well-known professors or intellectuals. Moreover, they were referring to famous writers, a book or even a Disney character. Furthermore,

some of them were referring to his/hers relative. Perhaps, the applicants really enjoy reading and quoting someone famous. Another option could be that it could create an impression that the students are sophisticated, have been reading a lot, not just during their studies but also during their free time. On the other hand, they might have been impressed by someone famous and his/hers thoughts and ideas about life. However, these quotations and references fit into the motivation letters. The quotes describe how the applicants have understood the life course for instance. If someone has said it already quite well, why try to create another expression to say it. Certainly, these quotes and references describe how the applicants come from different (study) backgrounds.

“Two roads in a wood and I – I took the one less travelled by, and that has made all the difference.’ The last line from Robert Frosts Poem The Road Not Taken could serve as the motto of my life. At every crossroad, I opted for the path less simple but all the more challenging.” (F7)

“I believe what Aristotle means, ‘Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all.’ (F3)

“As professor... once said ‘my freshman course on the principles of economics opened my eyes to a new way of thinking’ it also stimulates me to think differently about the fields I am involved with.”(F3)

“Just as Aladdin, my favorite Disney character, says, I will show you the world, shining, shimmering, and splendid.” (F3)

“Since I feel that it would be reasonable to improve my knowledge in the field of social policy, I am studying in these days ‘The Student’s Companion to Social Policy’ (edited by Pete Alcock, Margaret May and Karen Rowlingson in 2008).” (F6)

As seen above, a few applicants quoted to someone famous or a popular person to make his or her ideas and opinions more actual or powerful. On the other hand, they were trying to prove that they are motivated enough already to start learning and improve their knowledge immediately. It could be one way to prove that they are serious with the application. However, perhaps they are trying to show that they have a way of looking things from a different point of view and they can be even playful for that matter and everything is not that serious, not even the application. Deardorff (2006) observed in her research, that the university staff appreciates if the students have the possibility to look the world from another perspective as well, to understand other cultures, other people’s opinions etcetera. (Deardorff, 2006, 247-248.) In addition, perhaps this is the place where the applicants have had some individual thoughts in general. After all, many of the themes that are represented in the two chapters of analysis are represented in most of the letters. However, sometimes the quotations seem to be irrational from the other text and the reader is wondering what the meaning of the quotation of Aladdin is for instance, in this context. Therefore, the quotations are

there to prove that they are sophisticated and they have read philosophers' books or poems or are influenced by other famous authors and they put them to the motivation letter to impress the reader.

6.5. Summary

In the motivation letters, the applicants want to create a certain image of them and make the university staff that is choosing the students, convinced that they are the most suitable and the best applicants for the programme. In a way, in the motivation letters, the applicants try to sell their experiences, ideas and motivations and influence the university staff. Perhaps some personal stories could impress the university staff. In addition, good knowledge of Finland or Austria, and the university itself could create a picture of a student who has been doing some research before applying to the programme. Furthermore, there could be some cultural knowledge the applicants are trying to present. Another thing is that applicants who are representing their achievements, previous working experiences and so on, are trying to create an image of active, hardworking student who has several hobbies and free time activities. The findings of the chapter five (5) can be seen in the table 2 below where all the findings are summarized to the table. The main category is “an image of an active student” and under it there are subcategory 1 and 2.

It is unsurprising that people are promote a positive image of themselves, and give an impression that they know certain things about the programme, because they have to promote themselves, to be chosen for the programme. However, it must be mentioned, that in the motivation letters of Johannes Kepler Universität there were not so many of the positive images of the university and the country, as there were for the University of Tampere,. One possible reason could be that the instructions for how to write a motivation letter were different. On the other hand, there were impressions of an active worker but they did not explain that strongly why they wanted to apply to Johannes Kepler Universität, or why they choose to study in Austria.

I observed that the motivation letters from the first COSOPO- round were hollower than the motivation letters from the second round. This could be that there were different instructions for the second round and perhaps there were no proper instructions for the motivation letters during the first round, because the content and the structure of the letters were different. In the motivation letters from the first round, the applicants represented their previous studies and if they had previous studies abroad. In addition, they explained how they are going to cover their expenses during their stay in Finland. Contrary to that, during the second round, the motivation letters were more

personal. Especially, the applicants really told about their life course, individual choices and why they wanted to study in Comparative Social Policy and Welfare – programme.

Subcategory 1	Subcategory 2
Language skills and internationality	Good English, Finnish, Germany
	Travelling & living abroad
Active as a student	Working hard both at school and during free time
	Sophisticated impression
“World Knowledge/Interest towards other societies/ social systems	Knowing a lot about foreign culture
	University & school system knowledge

Table 2: Final conclusions about an image of an active student

I observed that the motivation letters from the first COSOPO- round were hollower than the motivation letters from the second round. This could be that there were different instructions for the second round and perhaps there were no proper instructions for the motivation letters during the first round, because the content and the structure of the letters were different. In the motivation letters from the first round, the applicants represented their previous studies and if they had previous studies abroad. In addition, they explained how they are going to cover their expenses during their stay in Finland. Contrary to that, during the second round, the motivation letters were more personal. Especially, the applicants really told about their life course, individual choices and why they wanted to study in Comparative Social Policy and Welfare – programme.

All in all, the letters represent the results that Deardorff, for instance, outdetermined out in her research. They have language skills, they are interested about other cultures, they have a good knowledge of themselves, what they have done and what do they want to do in the future. Moreover, they also value others and their perspectives. Furthermore, the letters are very similar to

the guidebooks about what consists of a good motivation or cover letter. The applicants have written about their personal experiences, their future plans and why do they want to apply for the Comparative Social Policy- programme.

The applicants were trying to make an impression to the university staff that they are active students and working hard not only in the university but also during their free time. On the other hand, they showed the crucial competition in the university world, where there are only few places available in the universities and hundreds of great applicants all around the world. Therefore people had to try even harder and perhaps that is the reason why they had to exaggerate their information and achievements.

7. DISCUSSION

This Master's thesis investigated what kind of transitions and life-courses young adults were reflecting in their motivation letters when applying to a Master's degree programme for the University of Tampere and Johannes Kepler Universität in 2008 and 2010. By analysing the motivation letters the thesis sought to find answers to the research questions: how the applicants categorized a competent social policy student and represented it in their motivation letters. They also created images of an active student in their motivation letters and positioned themselves to these images.

The results did show that the applicants categorized themselves as competent social policy students who have social ideas and ideals. Social ideas and ideals come from heritage, when parents or other relatives have been working in politics. In addition, they are willing to fight against inequity. Furthermore, they have had previous social and political activity, such as working in a political organization. One important category is the personal trajectories, such as individual choices from the past and the individual choices in the future. They seem to think individualism is something that means they can act freely and independent, travel abroad, and freely choose the university they want to study at. Zygmunt Bauman find view the individualism in the same way, it is about unique and individual choises, what young people do in their lives. (Bauman, 2001.)

Life-course is very important subcategory for the applicants and through life-course they were not only reflecting the past but also the reasons why to apply to the Comparative Social Policy and Welfare –programme, but reflecting to the future as well. The life trajectories are easy to see in the motivation letters as well as the emerging adulthood that, Arnett (2004) discusses. In the motivation letters people seek a suitable life-course, and a suitable study place for their personal background. At the same time they are seeing plenty of options but are still thinking about serious adult matters, such as how they are going to survive financially in Finland or Austria. (Arnett, 2004.) The motivation letters support the statement of Andreas Walther (2006), that there are no similar pathways to adulthood anymore. Everyone has unique and personal paths, which most certainly have cultural and historical backgrounds. (Walther, 2006, 121-122, 124.)

The applicants created an active student and tried to take up a position in that active student model. They had language skills and previous international experience; they had good English skills and they had travelled, lived or worked abroad at some point in their life. This support Deardorff's

(2006, 247) findings on how university staff appreciated the students having good language skills and experience from abroad.

Furthermore, they categorized themselves as active students, who were hard working, not only in the university but also during their free time. In addition, they were giving a sophisticated impression to the readers. Cuzzocrea (2009) states the same thing in her article that with careful statements and pictures, it is possible to sell different images to the readers. They had a certain world knowledge category in their motivation letters. Moreover, they wanted to give an image that they knew a lot about different cultures and others societies. In addition, they knew a lot about the school and university system they were applying to and were trying to impress the reader with their knowledge, which is related to Deardorff's (2006, 247-248) findings with understanding of others cultures.

As the study results above show, the learning process has been interesting and meaningful for the field of social policy. There have been only few studies, which have used motivation letters to study how the applicants categorize a competent social policy student. A potential weakness of the research might have been the limited amount of motivation letters, which might not bring out the widest amount of results, and the fact that there were no motivation letters from Mykolas Romeris University. On the other hand, with only 16 motivation letters, it was possible to discover enough important answers for the research questions. Furthermore, with more data, there is always a risk of being overwhelmed with categories and not being able to coherently separate the key factors that make up a positive image of the student. Which is why this weakness, could also be strength, with a smaller data sample, the research is more focused and specific, allowing more depth.

Young people have very individualized paths and they have more freedom to choose (Roberts, 1996, 227-228). Moreover, the emerging adulthood, time before adulthood has become more prolonged and it is time when people can discover who they are and what they want to do with their lives, for instance, they can decide, what profession they want to study and where they should study it, it can be in the country of origin or abroad. One could say that for the emerging adulthood, the sky is the limit because there are so many options and so many ways to reach the goals. (Arnett, 2004, 8.) Perhaps, this is the reason; why especially in Finland young adolescents are having a year off after graduating from upper secondary school, because they are seeking their options (Helsingin Sanomat). Similar thoughts arise from the motivation letters as well, even if the applicants did have their education from some relevant field, they were searching for other options to improve their knowledge, but get more life experiences as well.

It is justifiable to say, that there is a place for international degree programmes and more specified Master's degree programmes in the field of social sciences, because young people need options for their career paths. By doing individualistic decisions and having the freedom to choose (Bauman, 2001), they can create their unique career paths and follow their career dreams such as studying and working abroad. However, one can question if the motivation letter is the only option to test the motivation of the applicant. With a motivation letter the applicant can create a certain image, which most certainly is flattering and giving an image of a competent student for the study field. However, they might fail to exaggerate during the writing process and the motivation letter and diploma might give unilateral image of the applicant to the university staff. Therefore, it is worthwhile to think, could there be some other procedures to test the motivation of the applicants, such as recommendations from the professors from home university, an idea paper for the thesis or something else. Furthermore, the analysis method shows that students and teachers could use it in other fields as well, to measure what students expect from their studies and what do they want to achieve with their studies. Nevertheless, no matter what the procedure is in the end, the emerging adults still have the freedom to choose and change the direction even if they got accepted to the programme and search something completely opposite, because they can.

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APPENDIX 1

A Competent social policy student

Subcategory 2	Subcategory 1	Examples
Social ideas & ideals	Political activity as a heritage	<p>“My grandfather was minister for labour and social affairs...”(F7)</p> <p>“Both my parents have retired from government education departments.” F2</p>
	Fighting against inequity	<p>“I studied a lot about the fundamental rights whereas everyday I see violations of human rights in every part of country. This fact always made me eager to do some thing about it.” (M1)</p> <p>“My ambition was to do something important and beneficial for the society.” (M8)</p>
Previous social & Political activity	Working in a political or social organization	<p>“I worked as a volunteer at a women’s shelter.” (F4)</p> <p>“I have also started a voluntary community-based social programme in my home town, to help combat the increasing spate of alcoholism and other social vices among the youth of the area.” (M4)</p> <p>”I worked at the party executive committee of the [country of origin] Social Democrats.” (F7)</p>
Personal trajectories	Individual choices	<p>“Already at age 17 I had the change to undergo an intercultural programme as an exchange student in the United States.” (F6)</p> <p>“I believe the ability to take the initiative, to act independently and to consider the different opinions of the others are skills that will help me succeed in my studies.” F4</p> <p>“I chose to dedicate my life to public policy research and development.” M5</p>
	Life Course	<p>“Dissatisfied with the direction my career had taken, I decided to consult a public sector career councillor...The councillor found , based on my own personal qualities and intellectual interests, that I should redirect my career towards public policy development.” (M5)</p> <p>“My future aim is to work in the social welfare section with an active research role.” (M2)</p> <p>“As a leader I’m looking forward not only to find the job but to start my own business. It will be a center of sociological researches, information and analytics. If I will manage to do it, I’m going to expand it in the whole Europe.” M3</p>

APPENDIX 2

An image of an active student

Subcategory 2	Subcategory 1	Examples
Language skills and internationality	Good English, Finnish, Germany	<i>"...I have lived in Finland for half a year, so I can communicate in Finnish quite fluently." F1</i>
	Travelling & living abroad	<i>"I have travelled extensively within [country of origin] and have explored most of its parts plain, desert or mountains. I had a privilege to make international trips as well." F2</i>
Active as a student	Working hard both at school and during free time	<i>"I took part in extracurricular activities during masters and launched the magazine [from the field of social work." (F2) "I used to perform some propositions on annual conference for students and post-graduates. And I even won 1st place once for my report." (M3) "I assure you that I am a quick learner, hard working and a dedicated student." (M1) "I have a high working moral and you can confirm it from my teachers as well."(M6)</i>
	Sophisticated impression	<i>"I believe what Aristotle means, 'Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all.' F3 "Since I feel that it would be reasonable to improve my knowledge in the field of social policy, I am studying in these days 'The Student's Companion to Social Policy' (edited by Pete Alcock, Margaret May, and Karen Rowlingson in 2008)."?????</i>
"World Knowledge/Interest towards other societies/ social systems	Knowing a lot about foreign culture	<i>"Finland is a country with a culture funded willpower, mutual respect, and equal opportunities for everyone to success in life appeals to me." (F7) "I have come to love the Finnish people; the country has a deep cultural heritage and profound and unique understanding of social public policy." (M5)</i>
	University & school system knowledge	<i>"First and foremost, it has built a huge reputation over the years as one of the leading European Universities that provide quality education to students from various parts of the world." (M4) "I have applied to JKU as I recognize JKU is a centre of excellence for Social and Economic Studies." (M9)</i>