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eCompetence for Social Work

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Foreword

The breakthrough of information technology in society has brought great challenges in terms of developing public services and new service concepts and working methods in the field of social work. The renewal of services requires education and research to enable the construction of new practices based on knowledge and know-how. It is vital that social workers have knowledge about the technological possibilities in order to ensure that the development work is not detached from their professional work and directed from the technological point of view foreign to them. In 2005, the University of Lapland seized upon this need for technological competence by launching the first master's degree programme of social work and information technology in Oulu. The students in that programme gained dual competence: they simultaneously become qualified social workers and acquired aptitude about and proficiency in technological applications in social work. The integration of these two fields of expertise is unique. This publication is a product of the third master's degree programme that connects social work and e-competence.

In the field of education, developing new ways of working characteristically results in the need for new educational requirements. These three master's degree programmes of social work and information technology have arisen from the opposite direction: to some extent, education has preceded the expansion of e-services. It has produced experts in the field of social work who can build novel methods and forms of practices. The practical starting point of social work education has been twofold. Firstly, it has aimed at fulfilling the increasing need for qualified social workers in Northern Ostrobothnia. The need for new social workers is increasing because a substantial number of social workers will be retiring in the near future and the turnover rate of current social workers is remarkable.

Most of the students in the current master's degree programme are already employed in the field of social work and they want to continue their careers. This educational programme has made it possible for them to obtain the qualifications they need to advance their professional skills. It is highly

probable that the need for social workers will not diminish in the future because the population is aging. This is especially pertinent in the northern and eastern parts of Finland where the aging population needs increasing care, which also correlates with the growing need for service design and the management of welfare services.

Secondly, the development of e-clienthood and the dissemination of e-services in social work have been the focus of this master's degree program. In addition, from the viewpoint of education, in general, it has been crucial to provide e-learning or virtual education for students so that they can pursue an education while also engaging in their everyday routines, for example combining their studies with full-time work. The necessity for balancing careers and coursework has both created questions and provided answers to the issue of how to provide further education for social workers in remote areas as they also continue to work.

While providing the e-services that are needed in social work has become essential, it has also proven to be challenging. Very few cities or municipal population centres are located in the target area of this master's degree programme. Therefore, obligating citizens to seek only face-to-face social and welfare services from local centres is unjustifiable. Providing social services for people who need them has proven to be more challenging than offering such things as e-banking or online shopping services. The Master's Degree Program of e-Competence in Social Work has provided notable input into developing e-services in social work by combining the possibilities of ICTs with the specific needs of social work and social services. For example, not enough social work professionals have been participating in the development of information systems processes from their early stages onwards; consequently, this has led to usability problems and system deficiencies.

Nevertheless, there is still much that needs to be developed in the field of social work and ICTs. However, this master's degree programme has led the way for bringing the field of social work into the Information Age. It has also enabled citizens to utilise IT in social work and social services and it has been on the forefront of enhancing the welfare of citizens by expanding their technological possibilities and e-competence.

At the same time, it is important to recognise that bringing new technological applications to the field of social work and social work education is a wider issue than merely integrating these two fields. Developing and integrating new services always alters the nature of professional work, its mind-sets, forms of

interaction, language and relationship to its clients. The scope of social work has to be rebuilt from a new foundation. The dual competence of social work and information technology results in the need to construct a new professional identity. We have to consider e-social work as a new area of expertise in the field of social work.

In this book, teachers and students offer their understanding of the concepts that combine social work and information technology. The viewpoints in these articles range from the need for developing social work in rural areas to the possibilities of offering new e-services in social work and to the experiences of the students who are engaged in this novel kind of education and its practice training period.

Oulu and Rovaniemi, June 2014

Kari Matela
Chairman of the steering committee

Anneli Pohjola
Responsible professor of the
master's degree programme

Introduction

The aim of *eCompetence for Social Work* is to address the current state of, and need for e-competence in, social work practice, education and future welfare services. By the term *e-competence*, we mean the skills and know-how of applying and utilising information and communication technologies (ICTs). In this publication, the focus is on social work and how it is taught.

Contemporary society is undergoing constant change. The consolidation of municipalities is the main direction being taken in regard to social policy in Finland today. An excellent example of this societal change is the fact that, during our project “Master’s Degree Program of e-Competence in Social Work”, Oulu, Haukipudas, Kiiminki and Oulunsalo merged to form one municipality: Oulu. The cooperation between nearby municipalities is one target of the social policy; therefore, the geographic and demographic factors that hinder the effectiveness of service delivery fortify the need for e-services. If the infrastructure is sufficiently strong, long distances are easier and often cheaper to overcome through e-services.

The number of net-mediated services is growing; therefore, the role of data and information has increased because they are available to everyone on the Internet. The Finnish service system has also changed: Internet-mediated services are gaining ground both with Finnish welfare service providers and with clients (see, e.g., Kärki, Laaksonen, & Hyppönen, 2012). For younger generations in particular, the use of virtual services is often the preferred choice for conducting clienthood with authorities in their everyday lives. Alternative courses of action require the multifarious assessment of the operations of authorities. However, the most common ways to analyse changes in society are from the economic or technological viewpoints, although the need for methods of different kinds is obvious (Pohjola, Kääriäinen, & Kuusisto-Niemi, 2010).

As a profession, social work has an important role in society and in people’s everyday lives. As a result of all the changes in society, social work also has to renew its methods of producing services. The encounters between professionals and clients

now take a variety of forms that extend beyond traditional face-to-face meetings; the alternatives include for example e-counselling. In some cases, the communication between professionals and clients can be conducted most effectively using technological devices and applications (Kaplan, Wade, Conteh, & Martz, 2011).

According to the definition of social work, the purposes of the profession are to promote social change, to solve challenging tasks and problems in different kinds of relationships and to enhance well-being (IFSW, 2012). As Parker-Oliver and Demiris (2006) state, the methods of managing data and information are crucial for achieving professional goals. Evidently, ICTs have become a part of citizens' everyday lives. Hence, the role of e-services and various information systems is becoming increasingly inevitable, and ICTs need to be further incorporated into social work practices. However, the implementation of ICTs has to be from the viewpoint of social work, and it is, therefore, important for social workers themselves to have an understanding of how to apply ICTs to their work. This has resulted in the need to modify social work education to respond to the changes occurring in the society.

From an educational point of view, this book is also a final report of Master's Degree Program of e-Competence in Social Work (SIMO III). The project is primarily financed by the European Social Fund (ESF), with more minor contributions by 10 municipalities from Ostrobothnia: Hailuoto, Haukipudas, Kempele, Kiiminki, Liminka, Lumijoki, Muhos, Oulu, Oulunsalo and Tyrnävä. In addition, the Oulu Arc Joint Authority (Oulunkaaren kuntayhtymä), Friends of the Young and the University of Lapland were funders of this project.

The main purpose of the SIMO III project was to creatively combine social work studies and ICTs to address the new ways of interacting with clients and their relationship with the surrounding society. The objective of the project was to understand and develop different ways of conducting social work and utilising and applying ICTs in social work practice. The programme took place in Northern Finland, which is primarily a sparsely populated area. Particularly in such areas, there is the need for varied methods of practising social work. The studies in the SIMO III programme aimed to fulfil this need by offering students the necessary education to become qualified social workers and to acquire an understanding of the possibilities of using ICTs in social work. Both the content of the studies – social work combined with information technology – and the study methods, such as blended learning and web conferencing, were geared towards achieving effortless use of current ICT applications in social work and open-mindedness towards the development of the field using ICTs.

The structure of this book

Without a context, it is difficult to illustrate social work practices. The first part of the book illustrates how social work is conducted in contemporary Finnish society both with and without the application of ICTs. In the two first chapters, the writers investigate the geographical and operational framework of the articles in this book. Everything is relative, and if we consider social work in Finland at the national level, Lapland is a sparsely populated area, whilst Oulu is a large city. The wider perspective becomes visible if we look from the European level. In this sense, Oulu is situated in the sparsely inhabited area. However, the main thrust of the articles is that if a practice is well suited to the remote municipalities, it can also be utilised in population centres.

In Chapter 4, the challenges of using technology in social work are considered. Different levels of social work practice, such as case work, community work and structural work, entail various kinds of situations in which ICTs are applied or could be used. The final two chapters of Part I comprise articles in which the students of the SIMO III programme discuss two current phenomena they faced during their studies. First, the possibilities of welfare service design are discussed using the virtual servicepoints of the Rovaniemi region as an example of the development of new e-services. Thereafter, another trend of modern society is considered within the context of social work – social media. Social media services and communities can act as a virtual working environment and as a channel for discussing and sharing collegial knowledge and ideas. The writers also ponder why only some social media sites become popular.

The central message of the SIMO III project is the need for e-competence in contemporary and future social work practice and how education must meet this need. This is also the theme of the second part of the book. The first chapter of Part II presents the current state of social work e-services in Northern Finland and the scope of information available on the Internet regarding social work and ICTs related to the same geographical area. Although the nationwide trend is to increase the number of e-services, the present situation suggests that something more is needed – perhaps e-competence of the people working in the social sector and changes in their attitudes towards ICT solutions in social work.

The second chapter in Part II introduces our ambition to fulfil the above-mentioned need for knowledge through the SIMO III programme. The social work education system in Finland creates a framework in which a master's degree programme is undertaken. The contents, methods and experiences

of the SIMO III are discussed. In the third chapter, one SIMO III student shares her story of personal and professional growth. She describes her experiences as a student striving for e-competence and how she sees her education now, after graduation, in her capacity as a social worker.

The book ends with the words of the responsible professor of the SIMO III project. She examines the renewal of social services and the role of ICTs in it. Technology-mediated change in social work has its impacts on relations connected to ways of thinking, cultural customs and service functions. The processes of transition take place always in certain context and are connected with the sociocultural phenomena.

We hope this publication provides some viewpoints concerning social work and ICTs as well as its education. The topic of e-services and the technology-enhanced management of service systems will become increasingly important in the near future, and social work education and practice must continue to be developed. Moreover, technology in general is becoming ubiquitous, always present and taken for granted, and e-competence will be one of the social worker's comprehensive skills.

Acknowledgements

As the editors, we would like to extend our appreciation to every writer who contributed to this publication. All the writers have some kind of interest in the SIMO III programme; they are employees, members of the steering group or students enrolled in the programme. We are especially proud of the contribution of our students to this publication. Each and every writer has been responsible for his or her text and its ideas.

In addition, we would like to express our gratitude to all participants in the SIMO III programme: the funders of the project, the University of Lapland, the members of various interest groups, social workers and other authorities. We also extend our compliments to our colleagues in the Faculty of Social Sciences; we are grateful for their help and support during both the writing and editing of this book and throughout the entire SIMO III project.

Rovaniemi, June 2014

Arja Kilpeläinen & Kirsi Pääkkönen

PART I:

Contemporary Social Work in Changes

Generalist Rural Social Work

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The United Nations' report (United Nations, 2012) is one of many studies that verify the breakneck speed at which the global population is urbanizing. Inevitably, this kind of development has strong impacts, more often than not negative ones, on living conditions in rural areas and this trend of development is prevalent in Finland. Reflective of this trend, it is a little surprising that there is not much more debate about social work in rural areas.

Living in rural areas presents immense challenges: an aging and diminishing population, a weakening dependency ratio, a declining number of entrepreneurs, services moving to the cities, a total lack of available services and long distances, to mention a few well-known issues (Keating & Phillips, 2008, p. 1–3; Rural Policy Committee, 2009; Global Monitoring Report, 2013; Doxey & McNamara, 2013).

This paper draws inspiration from the research of Ruth Liepins, on the basis of which I have adopted and applied Liepins' (2000a; 2000b) study of rurality through community as a heuristic framework. In it, I present an alternative summary of regional, locally-oriented rural social work. This kind of social work has been named in many earlier writings as *generalist social work* (Turbett, 2004; Saltman, Gumpert, Allen-Kendy, & Zubrzycki, 2004, pp. 516, 529; Pugh & Cheers, 2010, p. 134). In generalist social work, holistic views and methods to affect the living conditions prevail, rather than sector or narrowly-specified working methods (e.g. Saltman et al., 2004). Hence, it is considered a complementary approach to the field of social work.

I describe and define the multidimensional concept of rurality based on earlier studies. As a concept, rural is reflective of the context in which it is used, as well as the users' own experience. Although rural is popularly based on a geographical viewpoint, many researchers (e.g. Halfacree, 1995; Pratt,

1996; Green, 2003; Sherwal, 2009; Muilu, 2010) have illustrated that rurality is much more. Secondly, my focus is on generalist rural social work. As an example I have the area of Lapland that is the northernmost part of Finland, remote rural area. From the European point of view, the whole Finland except the metropolitan area is rural.

Social work with its scientific basis as a profession needs to be sensitive to the changes in surrounding society. In contemporary society, the trend towards the technology-mediated service production and technology in peoples' everyday life is strengthening all the time. Hence, one of the core issues for social work is to resonate to these kinds of changes by widening its skills of to the same direction. In the last section of this paper, I bring out this viewpoint.

In this paper, *rural* is used to describe sparsely populated areas. *Remote* depicts outlying locations far from municipal centres or cities (cf. Turbett, 2004), and *generalist social work* means non-specialised, oversectoral, multi-tasking and multiprofessional social work.

2.2 RURAL AS A CONCEPT

Providing one all-inclusive and universally endorsed definition of the concept of rural or rurality is very problematic. In fact, it is almost impossible (Halfacree, 1995, 2006; Sherval, 2009; Pugh & Cheers, 2010; Muilu, 2010; Doxey & McNamara, 2013, p. 5). The definition of rural is not universal; it means different things to different people, and the definition also depends on the context and purpose of its use. Some studies, however, have examined the concept of rural in and of itself. Halfacree (1995) described social representations of the rural in a study which summarized associations of the term *rural* by analysing data collected from residents of six English parishes. Based on data derived from both questionnaires and interviews, descriptions of rurality are contextual, relate to the type of settlement and density, are environmental, occupational, locational, functional, social and feature animals. Rural was shown as being relatively distinct from non-rural or urban, even in cases of individual variability between descriptions. Therefore, in these definitions of rural provided by residents, some, but not all, of the elements just mentioned were included. In a later study (2007), Halfacree continued his conceptual development of rurality, suggesting four categories of rural: industrialised rural, commodified rural, effaced rural and radical rural.

In addition, Pratt (1996) in his metastudy, concluded that there are many rurals which can be illustrated through the dimensions of agriculture, economic development, industrialisation, conservation, social deprivation, wilderness and healthy living. For example, rural, or rurality, is a social struggle that includes social change in rural areas, and rural can either be an ideological concept, or it can be constructed in language or in discourses used in studies.

The established way to define rural is to compare it with, or to set it apart from urban. Basic indicators for the differentiation between rural and urban are: population size, density, location, proximity, access to or lack of services and relationship between and within rural and urban areas. As a concept, rural is inevitably strongly connected with the concept of urban, even if it is not merely the residual of urban (Lohmann & Lohmann, 2005a, pp. xi–xxv). Discussion of one almost inexorably introduces the other into the conversation. In particular, the concept of rural needs urban as a mirror. Many of us, quite commonly and uncomplicatedly, perceive rural as a certain milieu: low density of people, older people, greater unemployment, agriculture as a livelihood and isolation. While, generally speaking, this is true, rural areas might contain large cities and be home to lively young or old populations. (Jakle, 1999, p. 22; Grimes, 2000; Smailes, Argent, & Griffin, 2002; Green, 2003; Hart, Larson, & Lishner, 2005, pp. 1149–1151, 1154; Hungerford, 2007, pp. 12–13; Rural Policy Committee, 2009).

Above all, in today's contemporary world, rurality is more of a social construction than an unchanging state that represents all rural spaces (Halfacree, 2007; Sherwal, 2009, p. 433). Therefore, rural areas are heterogeneous, and there is no one exhaustive definition of rurality, regardless of some general outlines. In this sense, it is important to define areas case-sensitively, depending on the intended analysis (e.g. Pratt, 1996; Muilu, 2010).

Rurality can also be considered an experiential phenomenon. Emotional associations form the centre of people's formulation of perceptions of a place (Hungerford, 2007, p. 52). People can define places by geographical attributes; however, the meaning of place is engaged in their feelings, behavior, experiences, attachments, emotions and affections considering specific concrete or abstract places (Jakle, 1999, pp. 1–2). As did Liepins (2000a, 2000b), Hungerford (2007) also studied the nature of community experiences in rural areas. She discovered similarities in comparison with cities, but also differences, which were manifested in features such as social change, kin-embeddedness or corporatization/value differences. (Hungerford, 2007, pp. 135–136.) By

creating emotional values and symbolic places, people try to bring order to their lives (Jakle, 1999, p. 20).

Liepins (2000a, 2000b) studied rurality as a socio-cultural phenomenon through the concept of community. According to her, community is strongly connected to rurality, and it has been the focus of many studies. She abandoned the perception of community as a discrete, stable and homogenous object and, instead, considered it a complex and fluid notion (Liepins, 2000b, p. 326). Liepins reconceptualised community as a temporal, locational, political and discursive context. Beyond this, community is a social phenomenon built around meanings, practices and space or structures. People act not only within their communities, but also in reciprocal interactions outside them. In Liepins' specification, meanings can be represented by widely held beliefs, shared interests and forms of social connection. Those practices include formal and informal ways people cope with their everyday lives. Finally, the cultural and economic elements of life emerge in spaces and structures. Common structures can be abstract or concrete, and both maintain and condition community. Place-based communities may highlight the importance of a material or bio-physical space where people live and execute cultural and political practices and meanings. (Liepins, 2000a, pp. 31–33.)

In this paper, I engage with the previously described concepts of rural and rurality. The leading definition of rurality emerges from geographical remoteness, even if it is not the core dimension used in analysing results. The other dimension is the number of people and sparseness of population distribution. Rurality is seen as dispersed settlement, due to long distances. Aside from these concrete indicators, rurality incorporates other natures and characteristics. Rural areas consist of spaces of different kinds and structures with their socio-cultural meanings and practices. Liepins (2000a; 2000b) had studied rurality through community. However, in this study, community is only one attribute. Community enables communality, which can be either inclusive or exclusive. All of these fluctuating and diverse characteristics illustrate rurality as a conceptual context of this study.

In Finland, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry has announced a commonly accepted definition of rural areas. Based on that declaration, types of rural areas are divided into three parts based on distance and density: *rural areas close to urban*, *rural heartland* and *sparsely populated rural areas*. This typology is an ongoing process which must be periodically evaluated and revised in response to changes in population, livelihood and administration,

as well as other fluctuations in and between municipalities. The healthiest and most prosperous rural municipalities are in *rural areas close to urban areas*, which are located primarily in the southern part of Finland. The population of these areas is growing and the dependency ratio, for example, is fairly good in these regions. Municipalities and people living in *rural heartland* are relatively wealthy on average, even if the economic structure has changed. The worst situation exists in *sparsely populated rural areas* because people are moving to the cities, primary production in agricultural fields has decreased and the dependency ratio is increasing. In general, polarisation is occurring. The number of rural municipalities and sparsely populated municipalities is increasing, while the proportion of rural heartland municipalities is decreasing. (Rural Policy Committee, 2009, pp. 41–46.)

This kind of classification may cause underbounding or overbounding (Hart et al., 2005, p. 1150). Some cities may contain areas that meet the definition of a remote rural area, yet still be categorised as cities in official statistics. One excellent example in Finland is the city of Rovaniemi. Although the geographical area of the city is 8,017.20 km², most of the people (about 51 000 out of 60 000) live in the city centre, and the largest portion of the city's area is sparsely populated. Therefore, although Rovaniemi is comprised of different kinds of areas, as a whole, these areas are classified together as a city. That means both underbounding and overbounding exist within one municipality.

2.3 LAPLAND AS A REMOTE AREA CHALLENGES SOCIAL WORK

In Finland, rural areas are geographically prominent, and the population density in those areas is low (World Bank, 2013; Rural Policy Committee, 2009, p. 42). Lapland, with its 21 municipalities, is the northernmost region in Finland. It covers one-third of the entire country, but it is home to just over 183,000 inhabitants out of Finland's 5.3 million people, and its average density is 2.0 inhabitants per square kilometer. Inside Lapland, the agglomeration of the population is focused towards cities in which over half the entire population of this region lives. As a result, the density in remote areas is even lower. Distances inside some municipalities are relatively long because of the vastness of the land area. In this sense, and in a wider perspective, this northern part of Finland represents sparsely inhabited areas extremely well.

Ageing (Figures 2.1 and 2.2) and other changes in population are both national and local phenomena which pose challenges to the capacity and abilities of social workers to support citizens in their everyday life. Finland's overall population is getting older because of the country's reduced birth rate, its citizens' longer life expectancies and because the overall proportion of elderly citizens is increasing (Parkkinen, 2007, pp. 7–8). Especially in Lapland, the average age of the population is higher, not only because of longer life expectancies, but also because of its young and working-age population's migration to the southern part of Finland (Laitinen & Pohjola, 2001, pp. 28–30; Statistical indicators, municipalities 2013.)

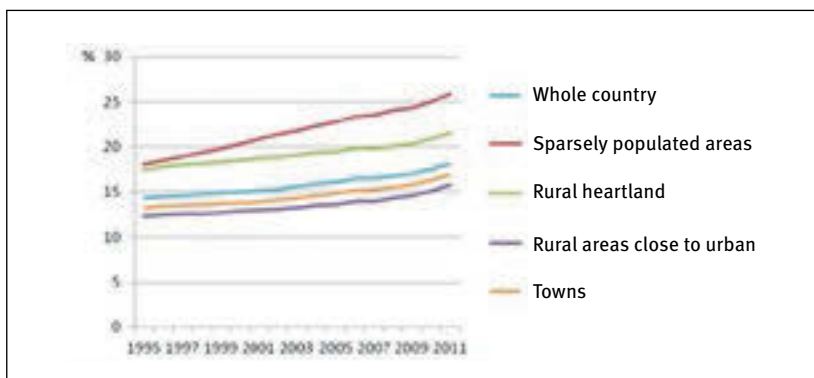


Figure 2.1.The percentage of citizens aged 65+ years in Finland regionally (Rural Policy Committee, 2014, p. 16. Translated by Kilpeläinen).

Migration and emigration are not new issues in remote areas. For example, in the 1960s, Finland experienced an enormous migration from the rural areas to the cities, although this migration decreased somewhat during the next decade (Kortelainen, 2010, p. 350).

Nevertheless, contrary to all predictions (e.g. Rintala & Heikkilä, 2004, p. 167), people still live in villages and signs indicate that they will continue to do so (Aho & Ilola, 2004, pp. 37, 45, 160–167). Still, people are forced to migrate to the cities to take advantage of better working opportunities or to pursue their education.

Together, the migration and ageing factors have caused an ever-increasing number of elderly among the overall population in Lapland compared with the demographics of the whole country (Figure 2.2).

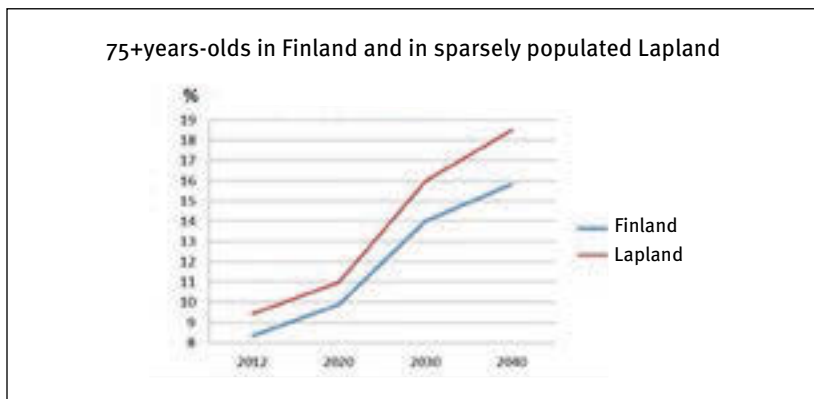


Figure 2.2. Portion of the population 75+ years-olds in Finland and in Lapland; contemporary situation and forecast (Official Statistics of Finland (OSF), 2013).

The rapid growth of an ageing population increases the need for social and health services while, at the same time, the demographic dependency ratio is declining. This means that we have fewer people of working age and more children aged under fifteen or elderly, who are 65 or older. (Official Statistics of Finland (OSF), 2010b; Official Statistics of Finland (OSF), 2010a.) Unfortunately, this kind of statistic can easily cause us to forget older people as a resource for communities (see Keating, Eales, & Phillips, 2013, p. 11). This, too, is a significant viewpoint of rural social work. All the demographic changes create a huge challenge to the service system, and information and communication technology may be one solution to this.

On the basis of the Finnish welfare system, social services, including social work, are arranged by the public sector, that is, by municipalities. Municipalities can produce services for themselves, or they can choose to buy external services. (Social Welfare Act 710/1982; Social services, 2013; Parkkinen, 2007.) They are autonomous, self-governing units; however, geographical or economic situations, for example, vary greatly between municipalities. This variation affects the arrangement and production of social services inside municipalities. The lower the municipalities' population, the more obvious it becomes that its demographic dependency ratio is negatively skewed (Regional Council of Lapland, 2010a). Diminishing taxes decrease a municipality's economic capacity to produce services while, at the same time, its

ageing population needs more services, and this causes an economic burden on the authorities (e.g. Knickman & Snell, 2002). This equation presents a threat to small municipalities and their vitality. At the Finnish national level, one attempt to solve this problem is the trend to formulate larger units by preferring municipal mergers (Programme of the Finnish government, 2011, pp. 132–139).

In rural Lapland, the closeness of nature is very important. Good opportunities for hunting, picking berries, hiking and so forth that nearby nature offers are highly esteemed benefits among villagers because people's livelihoods are traditionally gleaned from many sources. Agriculture, forestry and traditional natural economies have decreased while services, tourism, mining and entrepreneurship have increased as sources of livelihood for Lapland's people. (Suopajarvi, 2003, 139–140.) Today, tourism is one of the main sources of livelihood in Lapland (Regional Council of Lapland, 2010a; 2010b); however, the highly fluctuating seasonality of tourism causes unemployment, which leads to a demand for social work. Unemployment because of tourism can be a short-term issue, but long term unemployment is also present in Lapland's everyday life, albeit felt more strongly in some municipalities than others. On average, the unemployment rate in Lapland is higher than the national level (Regional Council of Lapland, 2010a).

As a geographical living environment with its demographic changes, Lapland poses many challenges for generalist social work, from unavoidable preconditions around learning about citizens' needs for services, to organizing, producing and implementing services, generalist social work is forced to respond, and to act, under these constraints. In addition to their geographical and physical environment, citizens belong to the social environment which consists of networks, social systems, neighborhoods, kinships, communities and society. These elements produce both emotional and experiential spaces and structures. Basically, each person is part of a larger physical, social and cultural system (Liepins, 2000b, NASW, 2005; Delanty, 2010; Kilpeläinen & Romakkaniemi, 2014).

People act reciprocally and holistically with their surrounding environments (e.g. Bronnenfenner, 1980; Luhmann, 1989). The lack of fit between environment and person may cause significant stress. The line between the tight coexistence of these two elements blurs, or even disappears, fairly frequently. For example, social work practitioners do not account for both environment and individuals. Rather, they may prefer to attempt to change

individuals to adapt to everyday environmental circumstances. (Voydanoff, 2005, p. 823; Mattaini & Huffman-Gottschling, 2012, p. 298.) Therefore, in rural social work, it is crucial to take this affiliation into account if effective services are to be offered (Greif & Lynch, 1983, pp. 37–40; Gitterman & Germain, 2008, p. 52).

2.4 GENERALIST SOCIAL WORK IN RURAL AREAS – OUT OF SIGHT?

From the perspective of social work, locality is very meaningful (Green, 2003; Turbett, 2009; Mason, 2011). It is quite different to produce and provide social work services in sparsely populated areas, compared to doing so in cities. The basic needs of individuals may be similar everywhere, but the means and ways of meeting them may be very different. In addition, operational environments pose prerequisites and possibilities.

Many studies have considered different sectors of social work, and locally-oriented social work may have been included; however, locally-oriented social work that is executed in specific regions or areas has not been so commonly examined. Because of this, rural social work as a large, but imprecise phenomenon is currently under-researched (Pugh, 2003; Mason, 2011). The main viewpoint of generalist social work is the problem-based approach (Turbett, 2009, pp. 507–509). In addition, the theories of locally-oriented rural social work are under-studied, although a couple of studies have been conducted.

For example, Green (2003) studied rural social work in Australia. She concluded that both professional and personal challenges comprise this complex phenomenon. Working in rural areas also offers certain benefits. Being a social worker who is also a citizen, leads to interconnectedness, mutuality and reciprocity. Social workers who live in rural areas may more easily access certain information as compared to their urban counterparts, but they may, at the same time, experience ethical dilemmas about using that information. Inevitably, they also know their clients from private life. Hence, social workers play many roles, and this may pose a threat to their clients' anonymity. Reciprocity can lead to potential disadvantages. For example, small communities may enjoy stable working methods and ways of communication, while professional boundaries may become blurred or confused by a variety of roles, making adaptation of rural practice difficult. Rural social work requires a broad range of skills to solve complex problems, considering the many factors

inherent in different levels of living. In summary, rural social work has its impacts on social workers' lives, both in their personal and professional roles, and their lives over all.

Schmidt (2000) studied the implications for social work practices in northern Canadian communities and found their situations similar to those in Scandinavia, Iceland, Russia and Alaska. In addition to geographical placement, northern can instill a sense of place which is defined economically, culturally and geographically. Schmidt enumerated similar problems and challenges for rural social work as did Green, but Schmidt posited that the biggest problems are caused by education, which is aimed at urban social work. He stressed that northern rural social work practice must be connected to social development. According to Schmidt, social workers in rural northern locales must possess assessment and intervention skills that enable them to link fiscal factors to people's problems. Yet, economic solutions are not enough. Social workers must be sensitive to cultural values, local history and social changes in milieu. One of his conclusions was that practitioners should have sufficient community organisation skills, as well as respect for local traditions, wisdom and knowledge.

Turbett carried out some locally-oriented social work studies. He studied Canadian rural social work, comparing practitioners' experiences between Canada and Scotland by analysing field social work services in both Canada and Scotland (Turbett, 2006). Despite political, professional and educational trends toward relocating a professional focus into the sectoral framework of social work, generalist social work has its place and space. He concluded that rural generalists and rural models of social work are required in addition to fragmented or sector-oriented social work.

In an earlier study, Turbett (2004) focused on remote areas of Scotland and social work in these regions. A claim about shriveled rural-oriented social work has come true because of specialized social work required by national policies. Turbett preferred proactive community work, where individual needs are taken into account as well. The need for generalist social work in rural areas is obvious. Recognition of rural practice is a crucial element, as early as during professional training and education.

In 2009, Turbett's focus was on rural context, the dual relationship and culture, community, or frames of reference. Living and working alongside service users is both a challenge and a resource for generalist social work. Lack of reciprocal anonymity, for example visibility (Turbett 2004, 985), causes

social workers to walk a tightrope between formal and informal services. In conducting social work within rural networks, the provider's knowledge of local culture and networks might present challenges to successful implementations. Turbett's closing argument is that, in rural areas, social work can promote community by building capacity and helping individuals in need, but the particularities of the rural context must be taken into account.

Today, at the beginning of the 21st century, generalist social work must also recognise global development. Global environmental, demographic, livelihood and economic changes (Dominelli, 2012, pp. 201–207) exert effects on the provision of local social work as well. Mason (2011) studied the effects of natural disasters in Australia on generalist rural social work. Amid and after these crises, social work is the key profession that supports community strengths to help manage uncertainty. As a strongly ethic- and value-based profession, social work can engender and maintain hope in communities during crises.

The scarcity of specific studies of generalist social work holds true with regard to Finland, where many studies considered different social work practices in different social work sectors, but fewer studies have focused on locally conducted rural social work. However, some studies do include generalist social work. At the turn of the millennium, a series of studies called the Kemijärvi-project was executed in eastern Finland. That project also included the viewpoint of locally-oriented social work. Its main focus was on the service system, and one of the main results was the suggestion of joint service points to provide several services from one service point. This policy came to light in the beginning of the 1990s. At Kemijärvi, the project called developing welfare services continued. The target of this project was, as the name suggested, to develop welfare services by building an over-sectorial cooperative, holistic view of clients' needs, thereby connecting theory and practice in developing and connecting the management and organizing of work to the developed actions. (Väärälä, 1992.)

This widely developed project was followed by the New Research-Based Knowledge project as a part of EU's Northern Periphery Programme. This NRBK-project included many sub-projects involving peripherality and planning practices in depopulated built-up areas in the Northern Periphery. The main target of its action was to develop alternative models to produce and preserve welfare services in rural villages and towns, working at macro-, meso- and micro-levels. (Niemelä, Naukkarinen, Urponen, & Pamilo, 2001.) One of the sub-projects was conducted in Lapland and, according to its results, the decision-makers were far away from the citizens' everyday lives, services are centralized

and possibilities to participate and have an effect on people's decisions were minuscule (Laitinen & Pohjola, 2001, pp. 175–182; Kilpeläinen & Pohjola, 2007). These results illustrate a huge challenge to generalist social work.

Kröger (2011) conducted some investigations into social services and their production and organization at the municipality level. In his review of social care under change, he concluded that development policy for services has been, and still remains, in a repeating cycle. After the first powerful centralisation period in the 1970s and 1980s, a strong decentralisation period followed during the 1990s. Contemporary policy has returned to centralisation, because local discretion is seen as a source of regional inequality. The variations in responsibility between local and central levels have inevitably exerted a remarkable influence on services available to the citizens. (Kröger, 2011.) Hence, social work is connected to variations in historical time periods and the guidance of national policies toward organising and designating implementations of social work is prevailing.

In the Finnish context, other than Kröger's studies of social policy and social services, studies considering locally-oriented social work are few in number. The closest of these are studies of community social work and ecological social work adhering to sustainable ecological development. Närhi (2004) and Matthies (1993) have both completed studies in these fields. Their common study (Matthies & Närhi, 1998) concluded that eco-social social work involves systemic thinking about a person in his environment. This approach provides a holistic view in which social workers receive information from different levels within communities in support of their work. Hence, social work puts this information into practice in everyday life to achieve the best results for its clients. According to Matthies and Närhi (1998), ecologic and social sustainability are closely related concepts, which also justifies social work's role as an active contributor to local and national policies.

According to Närhi (2004), eco-social social work rests on social workers' knowledge of local and shared information, as well as on dialogical negotiation between social workers and other authorities, thereby enabling both horizontal and vertical actions in support of the well-being of the citizens, in which community had a strong role. Eco-social social work supported people's well-being by being both participative and participatory. It also included interaction between human wellbeing and social and a constructed living environment. The importance of structural social work was highlighted from an eco-social perspective. Also Roivainen (2004, 2008) carried out studies in the field of

community social work and stated that community social work is in its second coming; it should recognise local networks, cultural dimensions and local practices as crucial elements in community social work.

Some locally-oriented studies have also examined social work in cities. For example, Kopomaa has edited two books about this topic (Kopomaa 2003; Kopomaa & Meltti, 2005). Regardless, rural social work in itself is under-studied as both a generalist phenomenon and as a practice. Nevertheless, Niskala (2008), for example, modelled rural social work in her dissertation. She analysed the construction of social work processes at social work offices in three rural municipalities. According to Niskala, the process of social work enhances locality through encountering, analyzing and enabling.

In summary, generalist rural social work is multidimensional, and this complexity offers a challenging, but not commonly used field for research. In this chapter, I have described some of the studies about generalist social work. The selection is limited and is not an all-encompassing inspection of the theme. Nevertheless, even with its shortcomings, a picture of overall generalist rural social work emerges (Figure 2.3). All the dimensions interact reciprocally with one another; therefore, this kind of classification is artificial, but its simple structure illustrates the most important dimensions of generalist rural social work.

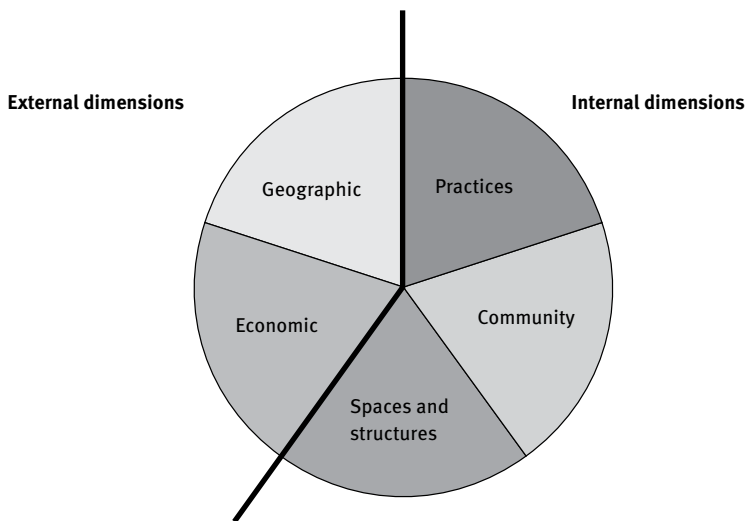


Figure 2.3. Contexts of generalist rural social work.

As described, generalist social work is not completely out of sight – even in Finland. It is more widely recognized at the international level; however, it has many scopes and operates on several levels. It is obvious that, in different studies, some levels are given more weight than others; nevertheless, geographic issues were included in the studies I have analyzed. Additionally, the roles played by other dimensions varied according to the study's viewpoint or approach, but one must keep in mind that these varied dimensions are bundled and that they overlap each other. Also, contexts are shared, at least in part, and classifications always simplify reality and real life.

2.5 TECHNOLOGY IN RURAL SOCIAL WORK

In local social work, the physical, social and cultural environments are in constant and reciprocal interaction. Locality dictates people's everyday lives, social networks and institutions. (Kilpeläinen & Romakkaniemi, 2014.) The functions between individuals and society are not unidirectional. Rather, a prerequisite for successful function in everyday life also requires actions of society. Neither people nor society can transact without a (proper) interface.

As in human ecology theory, generalist rural social work requires that the focus be on the contexts in which people live their everyday lives, as well as on the interactions between people and their environments. The permanence of connections that exist between environments and people in their contexts is meaningful. People are active participants in their environments, even if they have different skills and capacities to make choices and to act and to impact their own living environment. (Silverstein & Giarrusso, 2011, p. 35; Keating & Phillips, 2012, pp. 3–5.) Therefore, for the wellbeing of individuals and communities, generalist social work represents one possible interface between a person and environments.

However, society is getting more and more technology-based actions. As Kilpeläinen and Sankala (2010, pp. 271–283) have figured out, the context of social work, meaning the society, has changed and the need for skills in social work widen alongside the changes in society (Figure 2.4).

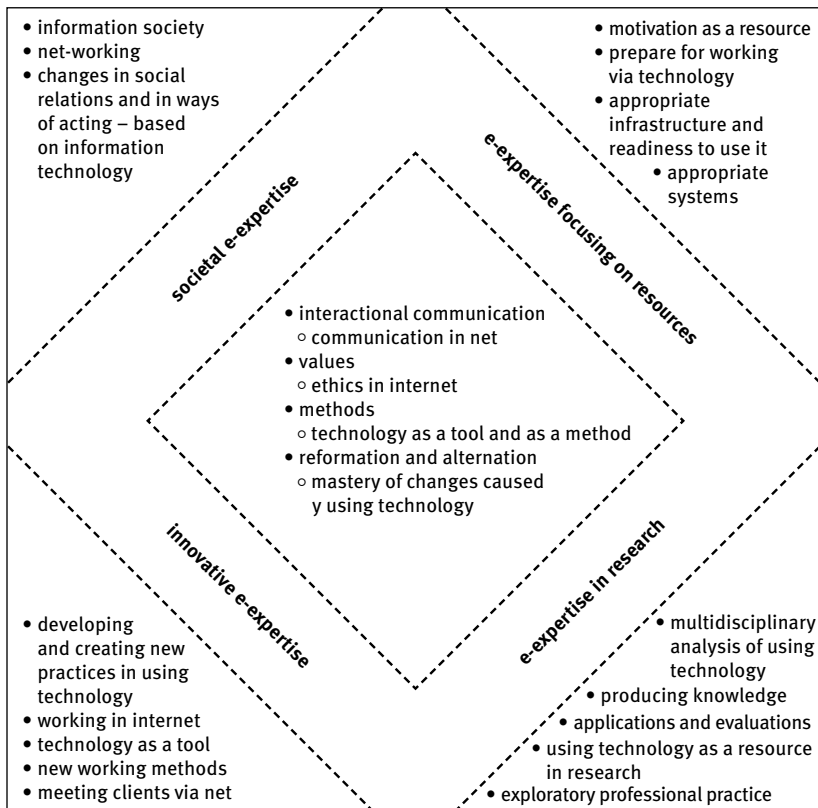


Figure 2.4. The areas of e-expertise in social work (Kilpeläinen & Sankala 2010, p. 285)
Translated by Kilpeläinen.

The fewness of the research of technology-oriented social work is present in rural social work. Because of this development the need of the research of technology-oriented social work is recognised at least in some level. This quite a new research trend would address the technology-mediated social work. The Northern Finland Centre of Excellence on Social Welfare, in co-operation with local social workers, has been developing a long-time digital services-like virtual centre for social and welfare services (virtu.fi). The centre includes counseling for citizens and peer counseling for professionals, different virtual methods for conducting digital social work, booking appointments online and so on. Obviously, our society is getting more and more virtual dimensions in everyday life and in working methods, too.

However, even if the endeavours to use information and communication technology exist in strategies and in programs of national level, it is not as a routine in everyday social work. After pondering the paucity of technological solutions inside the profession of social work, I considered at least six plausible explanations: First, the interview framework given beforehand was too limiting; therefore, social workers focused totally on structural social work. Secondly, social workers in rural areas are just now in the beginning stages of virtual social work. Thirdly, the values and possibilities of digital social work are not well enough known among rural social workers. Fourthly, the attitudes and opinions, both against and for digitalization, are unclear. Fifthly, digital social work is already such a natural part of working that special attention is not needed. Sixthly, the practices were not stressed in this data collection.

At the contemporary level, the question the benefits of digitalization for social work cannot be underestimated. Even if face-to-face contacts were preferred over technological means in rural areas (Turbett 2010, p. 136), we cannot avoid the looming technological revolution. Hence, one independent branch of studies concerning rural social work is, how it takes, adopts and utilizes information technology in conducting social work. In this study, this issue is not one of the main points of attention. Nevertheless, the role of information technology is growing rapidly, and social work is participating through development of e-services and methods of conducting social work via the Internet, thereby opening a new dimension for the research of social work.

2.6 DISCUSSION

The contemporary trend in Finnish national policy is the intent to merge small municipalities into larger units (Programme of the Finnish government, 2011). Because of that policy, social workers in rural areas are becoming more and more similar in comparison with their counterparts in urban areas, even though each of them has certain specialties and different aspects. Urban areas are getting bigger and co-opting rural areas into themselves. As a matter of fact, we now have urban social work, rural social work and ruralized urban social work. Hence, different kinds of ruralities encounter social work in different environments.

Changes in the sources of information also impact social work. The Internet has made data mining easy for professionals, as well as for clients, narrowing

the gap between participants and possibly being one reason among several that make encounters more like a partnership (Juhila, 2006). The rising consciousness of clients was a storyline in one of the discussions.

New ways to put social work into practice is also a matter of policy. Board members must demonstrate courage by facilitating trial runs or pilot programs, to test different methods, even without prior assurance of success. This is one reason to pay attention to the education of social workers. Do we educate them to the contemporary society including the modern working methods?

Social Workers' Interpretations of Generalist Social Work in Rural Areas

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This paper focuses on rural areas with the aim of revealing the ways social workers describe the work they conduct in rural areas. The most popular, and maybe the easiest, way to analyse rural areas and rurality is through the problems that occur. In this paper, the aim is to discover a new point of view regarding this urgent issue, even if we must become aware of the challenges that confront those affected by rurality.

The impetus of this study is that generalist rural social work has not been the focus of contemporary research applied to Finnish social work. Despite the fact that rural areas and municipalities comprise an enormous amount of Finland's territory, the development of social work has been focused largely on specific social work, leaving generalist social work as less of a focus of the profession. Recognizing the need for a more diverse approach to social work, this study makes a strong contribution to generalist rural social work. As such, the purpose of this study is to reassert more lateral thinking concerning rural social work.

The main focus of this paper is the social workers' interpretations of generalist social work in remote areas. Their knowledge of the conduct of social work lies within the practices of everyday social work. This huge body of wisdom and knowledge can sometimes be obscured by the tacit skills of the profession, and it is important to make it visible, conceptualizing it for the larger audience. Firstly, we describe the data used in this study and the method of analysis. The results are analysed in Chapters 3.3 and 3.4. In the last two chapters our aim is to pull together the results and reflect them within the wider context.

As our data we have information from three focus-group interviews conducted during 2012. We planned and executed these interviews with the purpose of

gathering information about structural social work in rural municipalities. Participants were local social workers from municipalities located in rural areas; however, because of the richness of the data, it was possible to analyze it from other perspectives as well. In this paper, we summarise the participants' viewpoints about generalist social work in rural areas. The interviewees work in municipalities located in Lapland, which is the northernmost region in Finland. All of the municipalities included in this study are located in sparsely populated, and geographically large, rural areas, municipalities classified as cities in national official statistics were excluded. The most important element is the opinions and knowledge of social workers who were respondents in this study, each of whom defines himself or herself as an active provider of rural social work.

While social work can be locally oriented, it can also be placeless or contemplate local professions that may be described as having no particular location. Although the data were collected in the northern part of Finland, we hope that the results of this study can be translated, or at least utilized to an appropriate extent, in other rural regions currently delivering rural social work.

3.2. DESIGN OF THE RESEARCH

3.2.1 The purpose of this study and research question

This is a descriptive study concerning the interpretations of social workers who conduct social work in rural municipalities. In this qualitative research, we dissect and analyze the execution of generalist rural social work in remote areas. Hence, the purpose of this study is to discover how social workers in rural areas identify the main characteristics of generalist rural social work. Based on this, it is possible to form one impression of generalist rural social work in rural Lapland. The specific research question is,

How do social workers in rural Lapland interpret generalist rural work?

The goal of this study is to analyse the practices of social workers in rural areas and through that to produce knowledge of it. Theories and approaches of social work come to life in practice, in the fields and in the offices. Satka and her co-researchers (2005, pp. 9–19) defined the research practices of social work as having the following elements:

1. Theme and research problems are connected with practices.
2. Initially, it is the application of research which produces information for several parties interested in an issue.
3. It is reconceptualising social work as a profession.
4. It is connected with tacit knowledge and by innovative methods used in practice.
5. Its purpose is to produce shared and collaboratively produced knowledge.
6. It brings to light the participants', both clients' and workers', personal matters concerning knowledge of social work.

The relation inside the profession and inside the science of social work is obvious, too. As described in Chapter 3.2.2, this kind of research concerning generalist rural social work has not been very popular during the last decades, from either scientific or practical perspectives. However, according to Vaininen (2011, p. 13), the context always defines possibilities to reshape and create professionalism within the profession. Therefore, the importance of making practitioners' viewpoint transparent is especially relevant in remote areas, where the possibilities for specializing are limited because of the limited number of workers.

3.2.2 The data of the study and analysis

The data of this study were collected through three focus group interviews conducted during 2012. The interviewees came from rural municipalities. Interviews lasted from 2 to 2½ hours. They were executed in Finnish, and audiotapes were transcribed by a professional typist, into 214 pages of text. All translations of the citations are made by the first author of this study. Because of language differences, some nuances may have been lost in translations, but the primary goal of retaining the original meaning of all statements has been my leading and honest intention throughout the translation process, even if the statements were not translated word for word.

The focus group participants were comprised of experienced, qualified social workers, social work managers and social instructors in rural municipalities. Three workers from the municipalities in the South, East, and Central Lapland participated in the first discussion. The second meeting was among five participants from Northern Lapland, and in the third focus group were eight workers from Western and Central Lapland. All participants expressed

willingness to participate in this study and to share their opinions and assessments of rural social work.

Participants also received pre-information about the interview and we secured their permission to record the sessions. To ensure confidentiality, we do not specify the municipalities or the individuals in this paper. When using citations, we refer only to the focus group, not individuals.

As Silverman (2001, pp. 59–63) says, doing research and being a researcher also presents the need to find the identity of the researcher, too. The researcher's orientation defines his or her role as either an insider or an outsider. In this study, the researchers' role during data collection was to be that of a listener and, in some situations, that of a moderator. In practice, this meant that, the researchers took only a minimal part in the discussion but, in some places, it made sense to ask focused questions, share remarks or make adjustments (see Ruusuvuori & Tiittula, 2005, pp. 51–56). On rare occasions, when a need arose to focus group members on the discussion, a question was directed towards a particular participant. However, the main goal of moderating was to create and maintain the discussion about pre-informed themes among the participants (Morgan, 2001, p. 146), and to ensure that all themes were included in discussions.

Themes of the discussion were social work in rural areas in general, the possibilities of impacting living conditions and the possibilities of carrying out locally-oriented social work with the purpose of building an interpretation of structural social work in rural areas. Providing themes in advance presents a risk that some crucial themes will be excluded from focus group discussion. To avoid this, the researchers' aim was to participate in the discussions as little as possible. After opening the discussion with some specific questions and comments, the researcher gave the space to the participants' reciprocal discussion. This kind of progress facilitated production of communal knowledge, both within and outside the themes given beforehand (Kilpeläinen, 2012). Interviewees completed each other's conversations and ideas, and each reflected their own thinking to others. This brought about a developing discussion about the future of social work in rural areas.

According to Liepins (2000a, pp. 29–30; 2000b, pp. 326–327), it is possible to explore rurality through the concept of community. Both geographical and abstract communities operate reciprocally within specific contexts, and this factor must be considered. Central to all activities are people in rural areas who produce cultural practices, meanings, spaces and structures. A community obviously has both inside and outside affections; therefore, the policies of surrounding regions in

the community or state must be taken into account. This interpretation was also a fundamental idea in our analysis of generalist rural social work as a social phenomenon with its meanings and practices, as well as its structures and spaces.

However, the theory formulated in previous article had an equally important role compared to the data in the analyzing process, and it guided our thinking in tandem with the role of the data (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2006, p. 99). A theory-based approach makes this study more focused because it forms the framework of thinking. In this sense, we got the “reading glasses” to our analysis process from Liepins’ work.

As an analysis technique, we used content analysis. When using content analysis, it is important that the process of analysis be visible (Krippendorff, 2004). We organized and reduced data iteratively. We began by reading the entire body of material as a whole to obtain a general view of its content. As we conducted the second reading through rural lenses, we ascertained the themes of social work in rural areas. The purpose of the first reading was to identify phrases and words connected to the key concepts (cf. Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Therefore, our first aim was to highlight expressions the interviewees used when talking about their work in rural areas. Secondly, we pointed out what they were saying and how they were talking about their clients’ everyday lives, as well as different connections with the surrounding environments.

Throughout this reading, we kept the study’s theoretical background in our mind. Hence, the analysis included both inductive and deductive stages. In summary, the data analysis procedure was intended to fracture the data into concepts, then reorganise and sort the data once or twice more. It then became possible to create and formulate results and calculate interconnections among them.

Following the theoretical background (created in previous article), the data was sorted into these five classes: geographic and demographic features, economic issues, spaces and structures, community and practices of social work. From these classes emerged a basic concept of generalist rural social work that includes two categories: external and internal dimensions. These dimensions do not exclude each other from the rural spaces or places. Instead, they are connected, intertwined and they impact each other. Processes impact one another in generalist rural social work via combinations of local and non-local actions, directions and regulations (Mardsen, 1998, p. 109). *External dimensions* mean elements impacting social work, mostly outside the profession. Social work must more or less adjust its procedures accordingly. For example, distances are what they are, and the fact that the population is ageing leaves no room for

doubt. This category addresses geographic and demographic features, as well as economic issues. Three latter classes are combined into *internal dimensions* (see Chapter 2, Figure 2.3). Social work, as a profession, is able to exert more impact on these dimensions by virtue of implementing its own way of doing things and conducting generalist rural social work. Social work is a more inside actor in these classes, and the governance of work is closer, even if the government is the same for all dimensions. Also, social work has more means to operate compared with the external dimensions.

3.3 THE IMPACT OF EXTERNAL DIMENSIONS ON GENERALIST RURAL SOCIAL WORK

3.3.1 Geographic and demographic features constitute rural social work

Basically, one of social work's primary aims is to promote change (IFSW, 2012). Doing so requires knowledge of people's everyday lives and their connections within it. Peripherality brings certain disadvantages into everyday life. The most well-known of them are distances. Although transportation appears to be a crucial element in everyday life, public transportation is quite often poor, if it exists at all (Laitinen & Pohjola, 2001; Turbett, 2009, p. 508). This was brought up in focus group discussions. Two specific comments were:

We have long distances, of course. And the lack of public transportation. Therefore having own car is necessity to fend in everyday life. (Interview 1)
How do clients manage to travel to the services? (Interview 3)

Transport shortage may preclude citizens from obtaining needed services, and it is a question of getting and delivering services. For social work, long distances necessitate long time periods spent in cars as providers go from village to village or from place to place. One interviewee said, "*Here also the travel time is time for working. [- -] If we talk about services, producing them exists a problem. How to organize services to the clients' home*" (Interview 3). Another said, "*You just think, was there a possibility to use this driving time little more useful*" (Interview 1). Excessive time spent traveling seems to lead to a feeling of insufficiency because of the long distances. Time spent driving cuts down on time needed to conduct social work in its ultimate form. Social workers in rural areas are consistently

faced with this dilemma. What is effective? And, for example, is travelling to peripheral sites worth the effort? Is the work productive enough?

Hence, the creativity of working methods is important. The time spent in cars may provide possibilities for example to organize work or to make summaries, especially if social workers are travelling together with other colleagues or authorities. It can also be considerable time to analyse his or her work or reflect it with colleagues.

Long distances push social workers to bundle and focus on clients' services. Attempts to organize services to be delivered during a single encounter or call ease both the clients' everyday lives and workers' work schedules. This approach requires a high degree of forethought. What might the clients' needs be after one month, when they may have their next meeting with a social worker or other authorities? What kinds of services or knowledge will be needed in the upcoming encounter?

Although a peripheral location can be an obstacle, it may also have a brighter side besides the long distances. As one of the participants shared, "*this is a spacious place*" (Interview 1). She considered space an advantage because it gives her enough room to live and possibility to avoid crowded environments. The other significant consideration is the importance and meaning of nature. The tight and unaffected connection to nature also gives possibilities to social work; nature can be a tool to social work, and it is also an inseparable part of everyday life in rural areas. These dimensions are described and included in following citations.

This landscape of fjelds changes people's behavior. (Interview 1)

It has to be said that when they are there middle in the nature, I have more hope with them. (Interview 2)

The meaning of the relationship between human being and nature is much more important in remote areas, it is seen what kind of impacts the reasonable doing has on people. (Interview 1)

Focus group participants were instructed to keep their mind on conducting structural social work and to think about the idiosyncrasies of social work in Lapland, rather than calculating and clarifying all the problems they encounter in their work overall. Purportedly, this was one reason why they highlighted geographical dimensions and did not spotlight all the problems they confronted in operating social work. For example, family structures and ageing were just

mentioned. However, the last one is a well-known and common issue in remote areas around the world, not just in Finnish context (World Bank, 2013; Statistical indicators, municipalities, 2013). Even so, in this study's focus group interviews, it was merely mentioned as a target of rural social work, while the problems that were brought out were those which influence the structural level of social work. It is possible that demographical elements are already included in the main body of rural social work, which is forced to take them into account when organizing the work in general, rather than focusing on detailed cases or problems. Regardless, economic issues determine also the design of generalist rural social work.

3.3.2 Economic issues call generalist rural social work

In the Nordic welfare system which prevails in Finland, social services are mainly organized, produced and funded by the public sector, by means of taxes. In 2011, the state funded 28 percent of total social security, and municipalities in Finland cumulatively funded almost 18 per cent of the total costs of social security. The greatest part Lapland's municipalities' budget spent on public welfare services, speaking exclusively of health and social services (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2013c, p. 9). For rural municipalities, producing services is a paradoxical obligation. Their economic capacity is reduced by demographic factors such as exodus and ageing (Lehtonen & Tykkyläinen, 2010, p. 373). However, the needs for services are increasing because of the same factors.

Variety and diversity are typical elements of rural livelihood, and people's incomes come from many sources. Livelihood includes both primary production and other sources of income. Traditional methods of earning one's livelihood, such as reindeer farming, have diminished (Jernletten & Klovov, 2002, p. 132), and modern professions like tourism and the service sector have increased. Reindeer farming still exists in northern Finland, although it might be of more cultural importance than economic relevance. As one interviewee stated, "*Reindeer farming, its cultural significance is bigger than to protect living*" (Interview 3). However, the importance of this cultural meaning cannot be underestimated. People's identity construct partly through these visible and invisible factors, which have their roots in history, beliefs and habits. These factors are intertwined with past and present and the values of individuals' lives changes slowly.

Preferred methods of earning a livelihood are mainly dependent on the prevalent structure of economic life in a given area. In Lapland, employment distribution within the central lines of business are: the public sector (33%); trade, hotel and restaurant industry (15%); industry (14%); business services (14%); building trades (7%); transportation (6%); primary production (6%); households (5%). In 2013, the sectors experiencing the most growth are tourism and the mining industry. (Lapin suhdannekatsaus, 2013.) Peculiar to the last two are seasonality, temporality and locality. Hence, their impacts on local social work are powerful. In certain regions at certain times, the need for the services of social work is huge, while at other times it is less needed, as stated by interviewees.

They work seasonality, and off season they live on unemployment benefits. (Interview 2)

They come to work or they come for waiting jobs. Besides, there are divorced families, fathers working in mining, and the rest of the family somewhere else. This loads the need of the services of child welfare officers. In my opinion, the structure of livelihood has a direct impact on the social work and its volume as a rising effect. (Interview 3)

In some regions the situation might be opposite. There is a rather stable livelihood which offers direct sustainability for everyday life and, indirectly, a consistent reduction in the need for local social work. This kind of economic structure eases both future plans and work allocation. As one participant put it:

Means of livelihood are fairly stable. We do not have to fear that suddenly some factory is shut down and the social work has 1000 new clients. (Interview 3)

Anyhow, they might have some other worries to take care of. Venkula (2005, pp. 47–54) noted that today's national uncertainty is at least partly a repercussion of global development. Economic systems are predominant in both global and national policies, and this has caused polarization of economic levels (the rich get richer and the poor get poorer), as well as in welfare and production of service. Services, as well as political decision-making have also receded, despite the principle of subsidiarity of European Union (Venkula, 2005; European Union, 2013). Social workers have good possibilities to transmit information to the decision-makers concerning the knowledge of local living conditions.

External dimensions illustrated in this chapter are those discussed by interviewees during their conversations. However, even these three interviews revealed the diversity of rural life. In some municipalities, livelihood is stable, while in others subsistence may be earned from a part-time job and many other sources. Also, geographical conditions vary widely. Social work has little influence and power over these dimensions, and both social workers and citizens must simply accept their presence and attempt to adapt to them, thus promoting the basics as people's everyday lives continue.

Aside from these external dimensions, a number of internal elements exist, many of which are much more readily influenced by social work. Social workers can be active contributors and co-developers, working with other participants such as authorities and citizens. In this study, these elements are called internal dimensions.

3.4 INTERNAL DIMENSIONS CONCERNING GENERALIST RURAL SOCIAL WORK

3.4.1 Structures and spaces delineate generalist rural social work

The dynamics of rural social work relate to the structures where it is conducted (Pugh & Cheers, 2010, p. 27; Dominelli, 2012, pp. 194–197). As the most prominent feature of structures, the data revealed the economy of smallness in rural social work. Hence, the limitations of smallness can be mediated through other properties or attributes. Due to small population and small numbers of actors in municipalities, authorities know each other well, and social workers may even be familiar with decision-makers' viewpoints and their passions regarding municipal policy.

After the election of new municipal council, I checked carefully, which one of them are interested in social policy, elderly care and things like that. With whom is worth negotiate and talk, if I have issues to take forward. (Interview 3)

As we see, the policy of having impact is partly dependent of how well you know the co-operators like decision-makers or other authorities. In remote areas this is even more important than in cities, because actors must have good possibilities to negotiate and to advocate clients' issues both at individual level

but also at structural level. Social workers seem to be aware of the advantages of smallness. They interpret social work as a very important factor at the operative level. Social work has the ability to affect other administrative sectors, such as health care or municipal infrastructure. This is seen as an asset of smallness.

It is not so distinct space. In a way, it is strength to cross borders between different sectors. (Interview 2)

The vulnerability of smallness to reality occurs if problems emerge in cooperation within or between authorities, or between social workers and clients. For example, one participant said:

If you cannot co-operate with someone, you will lose the whole sector. And the same is considering clients. All the time there is a debate about clients' rights, and what they can do. But in our municipality, clients are not able to choose his/her social worker. (Interview 1)

Small structures cause difficulty in decision-making. Sometimes members of social welfare boards are also clients of social work. This dual position on the part of some people challenges social workers' confidentiality and professional secrecy.

In dispersed areas, client status, as it relates to social work is a basic question. Small amounts of clients in rural municipalities label both rural social work and clients in good and in bad. Clients' familiarity is presence in rural social work practice most of the time. Social workers know the clients, but also clients know social workers well. To conduct social work, this formulates one crucial point of view. Social worker can never "hide" behind the organisation, she is presence all the time both as an authority and as a person.

Because we know clients and vice versa, there is no point to try to act anything. It is the best to be just what you are on both sides. (Interview 3)

This fact produces closeness between social workers and clients, and they become a little bit more than just clients. Everyday life of people comes true in small choices and in relations between families or communities, but also in social work offices. Ways of interactions get more unofficial forms, even if they are executed in offices and in official situations.

The familiarity. Maybe it is also seen that we have doors open. (Interview 2)

The control is just a little more. Well-done job is transparent and in the end there comes a different kind of taking care and holding on clients [here in small offices, addendum A.K.] compared with big social work offices. (Interview 2)

Sometimes clients and their life situations come too close, getting “under the skin,” so to speak, of social workers. Relationships may become too tight and that closeness may extend into the worker’s life outside the office. The line between profession and private individual become blur. Therefore, some of the interviewees stated that it is easier to live in one district and work in another. This arrangement eases client encounters and mitigates the consequences of decisions made as part of their duties.

Variations in perceptions of time and temporality may create obstacles for rural social work because timing may be disconnected from people’s personal temporal life processes. However, institutional time has its impact on local lifestyle, and yet, sometimes changes can be relatively rapid.

Time and temporality, the understanding of the time are different. This maybe one special feature [of the rural social work. Addendum A.K.]. (Interview 2)

These twenty years have changed local social construction. (Interview 1)

Each client’s relationship with time is built around a connection with their cultural way of life. Even if the institutional time guidelines are working, clients live and act in their own way. Due to their customary way of taking care of business, clients may just “walk in and sit down” [at the office, addendum A.K.] (Interview 1). In a way, clients’ everyday time deviates from official time. Social workers in this study interpret this as an interesting dimension, seeing it as worth accommodating because it provides an opportunity to see people differently, encountering them in their own environments and engaged in their everyday lives.

People construct their lives in different kinds of spaces. Clients and workers may share a common history that overreaches generations, bringing the historical time into clienthood through more or less impermanent encounters. This cultural scope emphasizes the importance of spaces. As elements of their duties, social workers perceived spaces of distinctly different kinds: geographical and mental space, and experimental space, and socio-cultural space.

The dissonance between regulations and practice causes discussion and evaluation of values in contemporary everyday social work. In rural areas, just one social worker may serve the entire municipality. Nevertheless, policies, programs and acts formulate recommendations and delineate minimums for the conduct of social work, causing workers to worry and feelings of insufficiency.

About these national staff-recommendations. There is a statutory amount of social workers for the certain amount of citizens. Are these valid also here in rural areas? We have long distances and dispersed population in different villages; is the contribution of one social worker enough? (Interview 3)

Marsden (1998, p. 116), like many other researchers before and after him, confirmed that rural areas contain wide differentiation which is constantly changing. Because rural locales are in different phases, bunching them to be treated the same is an untenable approach, as demonstrated in policies, actions, practices and ways of living. Therefore, social work cannot be uniformly performed across a variety of different rural regions and municipalities, or even in different villages or rural settlements, regardless of whether the individuals' issues and problems are alike or very similar.

The living space is an individual's existential and emotional dimension of space. This emotional space is connected to the person's feelings and experiences. (Vilkuna, 1997.) Rurality can also be considered an experiential or mental space. Emotional connections to physical places develop in the course of everyday work, producing both emotional and social bonds with the place. (See also Hungerford, 2007, pp. 52, 54–55.) So, people can define places by giving them geographical attributes and indicators; however, the sense of concrete or abstract place is based on each person's feelings, behavior, experiences, attachments, emotions and affections (Jakle, 1999, pp. 1–2).

It is that spacious. It is that light. You can see far away, you see over the edges of the road far. (Interview 1)

Liepins (2000a, 2000b) studied emotional experiences and the nature of community in rural areas. She found both similarities and differences in comparison with the cities, which were emphasized in features called social change, kin-embeddedness or corporatization/value differences (see Hungerford, 2007,

pp. 135–136). Emotions and feelings connect mental and experimental spaces to specific geographical places. By means of emotional values and symbolic places and spaces, people attempt to bring order to their lives (Jakle, 1999, p. 20). This can be seen, for example, in language and dialects. The role of language is important in becoming acquainted with local environments and community. One interviewee speculated about her own migration to the rural municipality:

Some odd line, odd. I cannot say that I was not well accepted and that I haven't cooperate with everybody, but ... According to relatives, I got to know only other migrants. [- -] And then words, in the beginning all odd words were very obvious. It is a shame that I didn't write them down, because nowadays I don't even notice them. (Interview 1)

Interviewees emphasized that they frequently undergo experiences that mark their presence in a given environment as a social worker, rather than as a local individual or citizen. This illustrates their identity, position, and everyday life, too. They represent social work all the time, not just the official time. One person stated this as follows:

You are all the time a member of community WITH the vain of social work on your neck. You can't get rid of it. (Interview 2)

Social work does not conduct itself in vacuum. The operational environment of social work changes by adapting to changes within the surrounding society, or rather social work is forced to adapt, at some level, the different ways it is executed. Even if the experimental environment were their own community, outside influences cannot be avoided, whether from nearby municipalities or society at large. This reciprocal interaction was mainly advantageous because colleagues from other municipalities provided professional support, opportunities to consult or, in some cases, supervisory work elements. The feeling that support was available when needed sustained the experience as a safe working environment. However, the importance of social work was widely shared among interviewees, they saw social work “like a coordinator”; “spider in the centre of the net” [of authorities, addendum A.K.](Interview 2).

Both geographical and experiential spaces are connected with the socio-cultural space. Socio-culture is included in society, with community members

carrying their history and future in the form of contemporary behaviors. Socio-cultural environment is maintained through interactions and within social processes. (Parton & O'Byrne, 2000, pp. 25, 60–61.) It is an integral part of everyday life, and is, therefore, quite difficult to dispute. Socio-cultural actions construct social space, which incorporates everyday routines, actions followed by actions and truisms; in so doing, social space concretises social being (see Lefebvre, 1991, pp. 73, 101–103). Challenges and possibilities are strongly connected to everyday life and to interactions in a specific place, but especially at the individual level, they can also be rather similar to those in different places. One social worker crystallised this by saying:

They are the same, same challenges of life we encounter in our work. Actually, the everyday life is similar anywhere. (Interview 2)

Local and cultural experiences consist of history, contemporary life, future, attitudes and values in relation to the surrounding environment. In that way, local socio-cultural space is formulated from these elements. In addition, the feeling of one's own space and sense of us cements a feeling of commonly shared lifestyles. (Laitinen & Pohjola, 2001, p. 76; Hyväri, 2008, p. 11.) However, the way of using in personal socio-cultural space is strongly related to the locality and regional demands caused by e.g. nature or purely by personal will. This kind of locality was clearly evident during the interviews.

In a way, I have learned how to behave in according to manage here. It just is a fact, that here people place themselves in their lives differently. (Interview 3)

When there are difficulties, the help is available, because it is know, that it could be yourself in the next time. (Interview 1)

Socio-cultural elements, such as those just described, including cultural values, concepts and models of actions, formulate preconditions to social work. Peirson, Boydell, Ferguson and Ferris (2011, p. 309) stress the importance of recognizing these elements, because they interpret the function of local systems. As a profession, social work is strictly connected to the values which stem from the values of society, personal values and local community values (Banks, 2004). One aim of the socio-cultural approach is to consolidate community. In this study's data, local community appeared to play a very important role in generalist rural social work.

3.4.2 Community as a significant element in generalist rural social work

Community can be associated with different elements and issues like ethnicity, religion and class. These can be from traditional villages to urban areas, as well as local or global virtual or physical communities. Communities may exhibit historical, cultural attributes which can be seen in relation to their expression; however, these have presumptions of belonging to and participating. Hence, both experimental and interpretative phenomena can be seen. Community is connected with society, and important roles are played by both social interactions and historical dimensions. (Brennan & Luloff, 2007; Delanty, 2010, pp. X–XV; Kangaspunta, 2011.) These historical advantages and burdens comprise a solid element of generalist social work.

The historical background is known, too. That is on the other hand richness, but it can be a burden, too. (Interview 3)

Grudges and conflicts, marriages and divorces. If we add forests and fishing areas, and fights concerning them, without speaking reindeer. (Interview 1)

Historical episodes are written in everyday life and, in some cases, this causes otherness within the community. Julkunen and Rauhala (2013) concluded that otherness is rooted in genealogical, temporal and spatial concepts, within which people define and reflect themselves in relationships. This is also a question of power relations. In rural municipalities, otherness is linked to community. You are either a member of it, or you are an outsider. In some cases, the cohesion of a community can produce strong otherness and the community's power turns against an individual. This is well described in one interview of this study:

The pressure of community is seen in when community starts to hound someone out from the community. They are in touch with the authorities very powerfully, but also to the people wanted out, they brought pressure to them. (Interview 2)

According to Ruth Liepins (2000a, p. 27), “community can be conceived as a social phenomenon that unifies people in their ability to speak together even while being located in many positions and holding a variety of contrasting identities.” This culminates in the question, who is a participator and who is the outsider in which communities and at what times? The social workers in

this study also bring with them the multidimensionality of community and its networks, even if they, in some sense, considered it quite constant.

Who are able to be a part of community, it is not taken for granted. People moved in the district, in what ways they are able to be part of what community. The kindred are strongly connected to the knowing over generations, and ways of understanding [local, addendum A.K.] issues. Except the newcomer doesn't get married to the kindred and through that is included. (Interview 3)

Who is whose cousin, and sister, or otherwise mutual related. They construct different kind of networks. (Interview 1)

Closeness produces cohesion in people's everyday lives. For example, membership in the local hunt-team offers a certain dignity in community, conveying a sense of belonging to it. Social workers noted this in interviews. According to them, it seems as if individuals are members of hunt-teams as long as they are alive. This belonging is mutual, meaning that teams seem to take care of their members. Through this, people are not faceless, and everyday life is more human.

According to the interviews, social workers in rural areas are very likely to contrive dual and multiple relationships with clients. No matter how hard social workers try to avoid multiple relationships, it is not always possible. Fortunately, many of these kinds of boundary crossings are not harmful, and they are a common part of everyday life in small communities (Galbreath, 2005). Boundary crossing within relationships is a bipolar issue. On the one hand, the basis of social work has the expectation of an objective stance due to professional ethics. At the same time, in rural areas, there is a dominating need to be allowed inside the community if one is to work properly. This poses the dilemma, which one is more valuable in which situations and how can rural social work walk a tightrope between these continuing demands?

Belonging to the community in some way is an inevitable, but very influential, element of successful conduction of rural social work. The social workers who participated in this study also present themselves as part of a community. They know their clients and vice versa. For that reason, they highly value the degree of mutual trust and confidence. Because they were present in the community both on and off duty, there was no possibility of breaking away from the community after work.

Here are terribly small communities, and you are always a part of it. This is on my opinion the special character. (Interview 3)

Somehow, you are more responsible with your own faces what you do. It is more visible. (Interview 2)

In a way, in it is also the mentality of heaviness. (Interview 1)

In earlier studies (e.g. Green, 2003; Turbett, 2009), this dual relationship and the concomitant lack of anonymity are seen mostly as a hindrance. In some ways, interviewees agreed with this but, at the same time, they interpreted it more as an advantage. They said it developed their professional skills and forced them to be even more responsible in their work, if possible. Their approach to doing their jobs was as Pugh and Cheers (2010, pp. 42–43) illustrated the trend of professional development in rural social work. Social workers' personal presence produces also merits to conduct rural social work; it can even be required for formulating confident worker-client-relationship.

According to Liepins (2000a, p. 32), space, combined with structures, has a significant role in the creation of community because life, with its various dimensions, occurs in spaces through structures. However, recent developments have run down a great number of places and houses, where people formerly gathered. This reflects diminishing spaces and places to create communality. According to Payne (2005, p. 22), social work is the constructive way to function, and real participation of both authority and clients is typical.

Because small communities have small and light structures to conduct social work, it might be easier to see the needs of rural social workers when they are compared with those of their urban counterparts. The networks of authorities and administrative structures are tiny and, therefore, transparent. This fact makes these networks relatively easy to manage, both officially and unofficially. They can also be quickly and easily set in motion when needed. The capability to resonate to the sudden needs of environment is flexible. One of the interviewees put it this way:

And here are small structures, and transparent networks. [– –] And then, if something happens that need actions, it is possible to react quite rabidly. So, here it is able to work and act quite well, just because the structures and networks are thin and easy to start, in a way they are easy to manage. (Interview 3)

On the other hand, social workers must expose themselves to the needs that surround them, so this living environment places burdens on social work, as well. The work of social workers is multi-faceted, including elements of administration, service organisation and production, coordination, advocacy and support. In small districts or communities “*every person is a resource, too*” (Interview 3). In that sense, boundaries are blurred and the social worker is a key person to utilize citizens’ capabilities and resources for the welfare of individuals and the community. At the same time, the whole scale of social work lies in front of you. The acts and impacts of social work are multilevel and the importance of anticipation cannot be overstated.

In small municipality, when you know every co-partner as a person, it is screamingly easy to be in contact and guide clients, too. You know, where and to whom you are guiding clients, and it is possible right away to be in contact, make an appointment, et cetera. (Interview 1)

Community and communality prepare the way for social work to act in a wider capacity than “only” the deputy of social work per se. The importance of structural social work (Mullally, 2007; Pohjola, Laitinen, & Seppänen, 2014a) is well known, but often not included in general contemporary social work. The practice, as well as the conduction of social work, depend upon context sensitivity and, therefore, community also delineate social work. As one interviewee expressed: “*Social work lives in it, what happens around and all the solutions made there. It must be taking account to, what the situations demands*” (Interview 3). Therefore, the practices of generalist rural work are dependent on community and practices include formal and informal processes.

3.4.3 Practices create, maintain and develop generalist social work

The very concept of practice almost immediately brings to one’s mind methods, processes, practical tasks and duties to fulfill and handle. However, in this study, the approach is a little bit more abstract. During the focus group discussions, social workers did not so much discuss concrete methods in social offices or everyday duty. Neither did they analyze each and every service user group they have had during their careers. Instead, the focus of the conversations was how to organize social work in rural areas, what kind of

impacts all the codes have or what kind of applications of those codes are possible. Themes concerned values and possibilities designed to cooperate, as well as the dimensions of time and publicity as they relate to social work. Their approach to social work practices was very broad, offering an extensive picture of the holistic social work in rural areas.

The economy of smallness is dominant. At best, problems are relatively easy to handle, and it is easy to be an advocator for clients. Serving by themselves or in small units, provides the possibility to create their own ways to conduct social work, at least according to the laws. The independence of work was seen as a positive element of rural social work. (Interview 1)

Conducting social work is inevitably a question of equity. In the preceding citation, interviewees pondered their capability to treat clients equally, while still complying with the rules and laws. They recognised that the way they acted in specific situations repeated in other practices, too. In contemporary social work, legality appears to be more at centre stage. Through laws and acts, legal aspects have taken root. Intensification of the legal tradition has resulted in mostly negative discourses within social work (Sipilä, 2011, 25). The common juridicalization exerts its influence on rural social work, as well. The injunction to adapt to all the doctrines can be seen as a moral obligation which, at its worst, can happen at the expense of the basic idea of social work: the aim to help people and to support their ability to coping with everyday life.

But all connected with the contemporary world, this judicial relief and statements and others. They are important issues. Anyhow, sometimes it feels that clients do not gain so much it. Instead, they gain for services, really. (Interview 2)

However, the attitudes of social workers towards the national policy were very accurate and, at the same time, a little eclectic in a professional way. The importance of the national doctrines was admitted, in addition to recognizing the importance of local processes and practices of social work. This was illustrated by the interaction of formal and informal processes, and the high valuation of local processes was included in discussions. The staidness of incorporating new methods into social work illustrates this aptly:

We are quite slowly followed the changes. If we think the national reforms, which have come true through the program of productivity; like once a week a possibility to transact in office and otherwise only e-clienthood is possible. Yes, we have rebelled against them quite a lot. [– –] Even if the development of new ways to transact offices, like this e-clienthood, the point should be, they are just alternative options. (Interview 2)

Organizing social work is a milestone in rural areas. Lapland, for example, has 21 municipalities and the number of social workers in them varies widely. The smallest ones (three municipalities) have just one social worker, while the biggest one, Rovaniemi, has 48 social workers. In total, there are 134.85 social workers appointments in Lapland; however, in reality, in some cases where official posts for social workers exist, they are not necessarily occupied, or the appointee is not a qualified social worker. (Kostamo-Pääkkö, 2013, p. 7.) The attrition of workers and unoccupied stations exacerbates the difficulties of delivering social work in rural areas.

You by yourself create the whole picture of the situation and “act according to it. (Interview 1)

The nature of municipalities makes cooperation among different municipalities almost essential. Social workers commented on the vulnerability of small units as follows:

Small units are vulnerable? Surely, that is true. But, just that structures are so far quite unsure, still I think that we are less vulnerable in comparison with many other places. (Interview 3)

Because of the economy of smallness, the collegial support also presents a professional question. In some regions, the collegial support is readily available and located nearby. In others, colleagues are slightly harder to reach. In any case, the supporting network is a very important tool in the world of generalist rural social work. The scale of social work includes all ages, from children to the elderly and everything between. Therefore, it is almost impossible for one person to handle the entire repertoire of cases. Social workers brought this impossibility to light in their discussions:

One person cannot be perfectly qualified at the whole social welfare in every sector. You can be qualified in quotation marks, but for real, you cannot manage everything about everything, if we think from the child welfare officer until to the funeral allowance. No, it is not possible. [- -] In conclusion, clients get occasionally insufficient and not so good servicers. Just because one worker does not know. (Interview 1)

Luckily, I am not the only social worker here. In our office, we can share, there is no need to struggle all alone with the tricky questions. (Interview 1)

Somehow, if we did not have this kind of network, it would be almost impossible to execute social work here. (Interview 2)

Also, for the purposes of quality assurance, cooperation among offices and municipalities is a must. The law obliges the Finnish welfare system to maintain centres of excellence on social welfare (Laki sosiaalialan osaamiskeskustoiminnasta, 13.12.2001/1230). As of this writing, Finland has 11 of these centres. The northernmost is the Northern Finland Centre of Excellence on Social Welfare. Through this centre, social workers in Lapland are able to more easily obtain real time information, as well as consultative and peer support. Another important partner in this field is the University of Lapland, which is one of six educational institutes in the whole of Finland to offer social work education and possibility to graduate students as qualified social workers. The University of Lapland is also organizing the Master's Degree Program of e-Competence in Social Work funded by European Social Fund, municipalities in Oulu-area and one association.

Beyond the collegial support within social work, support from other nearby working authorities is important. Knowing coworkers in social work, as well as others also outside the profession, supports maintenance of the functional operation of social work. In addition to officials, non-governmental organizations are very relevant partners in ensuring the social welfare of people in rural areas. In the region of Lapland, there are about 400–500 associations in the field of social welfare (Palmgren & Martin, 2008, p. 10). The power of local NGOs lies within its participants, volunteers and salaried workers. As active actors, social workers discussed the networks they have created within the service system. Now, it is easy to contact other actors and call meetings comprised of different resources to respond to acute cases or issues. This variation is a resource for the social worker but, ultimately, it is the client who is the most important participant.

The customization and we have the overextended job description. Exactly the wideness that in many issues we have to manage with the resources at hand; to think about the eligible solutions. (Interview 3)

But we have to do the other jobs, too. So, we are forced to make limits to our work. (Interview 1)

Discussions also included contradictory opinions, especially concerning the common language in social work. As a profession, social work is based on knowledge: knowledge of clients, of the profession, of organization and of the system of which social work is a part. To simply *have* knowledge is not enough. We need to *communicate* as a “voice of social work,” and also in everyday situations. Communication is one of the crucial elements of social work. One response was, “*Yes, we must be the voice of clients. If we find some disadvantages or evils, we must advocate the issue further.*” (Interview 2.)

One communication issue centered on changes is professional language. The development of new terms puzzles the everyday social worker. Maintaining one’s skills requires you to study correct terms. Through their use, one can convince coauthors that one is a skilled social worker with something cogent to say or argue a strongly held viewpoint by delivering clear statements, such as:

It is so exciting; the terms of social work are changing time to time. In a way, you have to try to learn, because through right terms you are plausible in some degree. (Interview 3)

Perhaps the biggest problem in communication is communication with those outside the profession. Pressures from media and the demands of spontaneously sharing information in public is also a reality in social work. The roots of silence in social work may be due, at least partly, to values. Intimacy, concealment of confidential information and anonymity are basic values of social work. (Banks, 2004.) This value-based work method is inherent in the culture of social work (Sipilä, 2011, p. 79). The basic question contemplates how to discuss, and at what level of occurrence, a specific case that is widely open in the media? Additionally, the difficulties are at least doubled if one is driving on narrow roads or very busy while a journalist is asking questions. This theme was so relevant that interviewees devised a solution. They “*mapped out a way to learn, together, how to control media*” (Interview 3). The professional

skills necessary to handle and govern publicity are important in small communities where everyone knows everybody.

Turbett (2010, pp. 40–41) assembled an almost utopian list of the need and demands for social workers in rural Scotland. Even if that list is a list of ideals, rather than a list of real skills for one social worker, it gives a quite veracious picture of the multiple levels of generalist rural social work. The core points of the list are independence, self-motivation and breadth of skills. In this way, the list also represents a holistic viewpoint of social work conducted in rural areas.

It is the wideness, in several issues we have to manage the resources at hands. We really have to think and to innovate solutions fit in the situation. (Interview 3)

In small municipalities, the holistic work method makes it possible to foresee possible problems and necessary resources. Social workers are familiar with local cultures, ways of doing things, et cetera. When this knowledge is combined with historical, priori information, execution of rural social work as a holistic way to support and maintain welfare becomes possible. As one interviewee said:

Of course the creativity must be annexed to this region and to the possibilities here are. We have to be aware of them. (Interview 2)

In holistic work orientation, social workers may have long client relationships. They may work with a person from the beginning to the end of their client's life, or at least until the end of clienthood, which may last several years, or even decades. In some cases, this is very rewarding and may also offer some surprises. The process of each client is familiar and social workers become, in a way, co-players in the client's life. The mutual interaction can occasionally surprise the social worker:

During one period of my career I regarded extremely suspiciously towards rehabilitative work. I even felt it was awful bullying of people. And some day, I met one of my clients, who taking part in the rehabilitative course. This client told me, that are in his/her life is at this moment colors. In that sense, it is necessary to achieve change. It did not happened just by snapping fingers. (Interview 1)

The social work ensemble in rural areas is more than just a job to do. Social workers do their work under huge demands and presumptions. They are expected to understand locality, to adapt to living and working in the same environment and to be familiar with policies, funding mechanisms and opportunities. The expectation to maintain both community-based, collective approaches and individual casework practice methods is among the demands facing rural social workers. (Turbett, 2010, p. 146.) Because of this, the role of rural social work is not always clear; however, social workers want it to be seen “as a wider element than its mere entirety, more than just the work in a specific work area” (Interview 2). Social workers are extremely proud of this kind of work.

How it is possible to effect on people's life, work and so on. I really am impressed of the work in municipality [name erased, A.K.] has been done to decrease long-term unemployment. [- -] It is unbelievable. Just with this kind of networks close to you. (Interview 3)

In the report of Kostamo-Pääkkö (2013, p. 11), the role of generalist social work is emphasized among the body of social work in Lapland. When asking social workers for the job description, 22 per cent of them answered that they are doing generalist social work. This speaks in response to a supposition that, in rural areas, generalist social work is a reality of today.

3.5 DISCUSSION

This paper presents one possible approach to generalist rural social work, which is as a concept multilayered and multidimensional. Understanding of the subject revolves around the impact of both internal and external dimensions. In focus group discussions, social workers discussed the changes, both within and outside the area and substance in which they were working. They interpreted themselves as both formal and informal actors in municipalities. The dilemma of being both author and citizen was present in those discussions, as well. Although integration of social workers into the community might be considered a double-edged issue (e.g. Schmidt, 2000; Turbett, 2004), the benefits of doing so outweighed disadvantages in this study. Table 3.1 summarizes the dimensions and variations interviewees brought to the discussion concerning generalist rural social work.

Table 3.1. Dimensions and nuances of generalist rural social work through the interpretations of social workers in rural Lapland.

Geographic and demographic features (Chapter 3.3.1)	Economic issues (Chapter 3.3.2)	Structures and spaces (Chapter 3.4.1)	Community (Chapter 3.4.2)	Practices (Chapter 3.4.3)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peripherality • Long distances • Volitional choice to live there • Transport shortage • Organizing of social work • Bundling of services • Bunching of meetings • Ageing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-governing of services in the municipal level • Financial responsibility in municipal level • Economic reforms • Questions of livelihood: primary production, stable livelihood vs. seasonal livelihood, • Polarization • Clients' aim and will to cope independently 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economy of smallness: • Vulnerability • Dual positions • Clients' familiarity • Dimensions of time: institutional, historical and everyday time • Cultural structures: common history • Geographical space • Emotional space • Experiential space • Mental space • Socio-cultural space 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • History • Otherness vs. oneness • Participation • Belonging to • Personal presence • Professional presence • Dual and multiple relationships • Shared values • Visibility • Transparency • Anticipation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsibility • Accountability • Equity • Valuation of local processes • Staidness concerning new innovations • Co-operation: in and between professions, with clients • Networks • Shared knowledge • Own way to do • Professional language • Governance of media

During the discussions, people denote rural to the other people, but also to themselves. They submitted definitions for the term *rural* and shared their beliefs and conceptions transparently. Ongoing discourse took place about rurality, and about the interviewees' personal and professional relations to it and its plurality. The understanding of people's everyday lives, the skills of reciprocal interaction and ethically fair solutions necessitate a deeply rooted understanding of important values. Through this kind of holistic social work, it is possible to consider the clients one encounters as persons. This is the power of locality inside the profession, and through this inside power social work gets tools to impact people's living conditions from many angles. To successfully, the cooperation of clients is needed, too.

Geographic features turned to be essential in rural social work. They call structures, networks, communities, societies and practices. Livelihood getting from the nature provides the possibilities of living at rural areas. At the same time they call living in bucolic places formulating social networks. Sparse

population causes tenuous, but strong social structures. Distances as well as principle rights to get services produce economic challenges.

In providing services the key factor is co-operation. Beyond that, there is ongoing need to facet the practices of social work to find out innovative solutions. Social workers are in the center of service system. They know people in the area and especially their living conditions. In addition to that, they know other authorities.

Cultural characteristics produce values, norms and models of action to act in local networks and structures. Communities and practices are intertwined with each other: practices come into existence in communities culturally utilizing historical knowledge and information.

At its best, generalist rural social work can rely on a large repertoire of practice models, thanks to multidimensionality described above. Methods and means are important; however, it may be even more important to ensure the capability to understand both hidden and visible connections among issues, clients, workers, organisations and systems being conducted in rural areas. According to the results of this study, in rural areas social work is in the centre of the networks, whose borders are blurred in both concrete and abstract ways.

In addition to individual client work, generalist rural social work is working within and with structures. According to Mullally (2007, pp. 244, 306–309), the main goal of structural social work is to promote changes in society and amplify people's knowledge of social connections and structures. This is not possible without long-span proactive policy work, which should be an important part of rural social work. Unfortunately, the contemporary focus of social work seems to be at work with individuals (Dominelli, 2012). Anyhow, this is a question of professional approach to the generalist rural social work. If the basic value and conception is that person is a part of its environment and in a way a "product" of history, time, manners and practices, also social work has to take into the account all these and the relationship between person and environment.

Unlike the results of Sipilä (2011, pp. 148–149), this study verifies the meaning of community spirit and its impact in social work. Social workers appear to use both community and communality as tools in the practice of generalist rural social work. On the other hand, this is also a question of otherness and oneness (see Julkunen & Rauhala, 2013). To conduct generalist rural social work, social workers in rural areas are, to some degree, forced to be included in communities as a means of maintaining oneness. Acceptance as a member of the community is a prerequisite for building trust and confidence. As professionals, being involved in the community may cause some hindrances to the reliability

of workers, so achieving balance between oneness and otherness is an ever present element of rural social work in contemporary changing society.

The main purpose of this study has been to develop a solution for interpretation of social workers in remote areas concerning generalist rural social work. This purpose has been very challenging because of the richness, variety and locality-dependence of the phenomenon, as well as its scale. Still, after several exclusions and focusing the study, the field of general rural social work was revealed as being so full of dimensions and nuances that including them in a single study proved to be an extremely ambitious target.

Usually, and also with this study, one research project inspires new ideas and engenders the need for further studies. The richness of the data used in this study inspired us as authors throughout the research process. It also clarified the importance of further studies. It would be a very fascinating study to test these results with these involved social workers in an attempt to discover even more and deeper dimensions of generalist social work in remote areas. Also, the need for a deeper sociological approach is apparent. Social work is part of larger society, and the reciprocal interactions are needed as well as studies concerning societal impacts of social work. In this paper, the importance and role of national strategies are taken for granted. More study is needed to learn, for example, the dilemmas in generalist rural social work that are caused by mentioned guidelines and strategies, as well as regional or municipal official and unofficial strategies.

Ethics is the core issue in the successful execution of social work as a profession. Possibly, it is even more crucial in generalist rural social work. The subtleties of rural social work emphasize ethical issues, dilemmas and questions. Hence, the historical divergence between rural and urban is called into question. It may be more important to study rural social work as it is executed in different kinds of rural environments, and leave behind the comparison with urban. Each environment has its own special features, which social work must address. Rural areas exist as entities in their own right (Lohmann & Lohmann, 2005b, p. 315) and they are entitled to be treated as such.

Rural social work is at vantage point considering the national and communal changes. Social spaces are created in communities, and by key institutions establishing in the communities (Liepins, 2000b, p. 335). In rural areas, traditional public key institutions include school, grocery and post office, and these institutes are loaded with much more emotions than simply the fulfillment of their core missions. Hence, the emotional meaning of these institutions is huge for the whole community. The threat to shut down some or all of these is also a threat to community

and socio-cultural spaces; at least it incurs changes in socio-cultural space. (Smailes, 1997, p. 37; Pugh & Cheers, 2010, p. 18; Matthies, Kattilakoski, & Rantamäki, 2011, p. 130.) This kind of development has its impacts to social work, too. Changes in surrounding environment cause changes in relationships and in interactions. At the worst situation, shutting down core institutions may cause feuds, which exacerbate to take care of everyday routines, like family support in difficulties.

In supporting welfare, it is essential that, as a profession, social work recognise the possibilities and threats concerning local economic and business structures. This awareness offers tools to anticipate forthcoming changes, both advantageous and disadvantageous. Changes in livelihood lead to changes in people's lives. Reformations can originate from local changes or from national, or even from global, changes. These changes may force people to choose whether to stay in the area where they currently live or migrate to somewhere else to seek work. Inevitably, these decisions impact people's personal lives, as well as social relationships and their surrounding environment. It is the mission of social work to support citizens in discovering alternative opportunities to promote well-being and in preventing personal and communal problems (see also Turbett, 2009, p. 518).

3.6 CONCLUSIONS

Social workers in rural areas encounter both similar and different demands when compared with their urban counterparts (Turbett, 2010). In locality lies the power of generalist rural social work. At the same time, its weaknesses, too, lie in locality. Social workers in rural areas are dancing on a two-edged sword in their attempts to find the balance between possibilities and challenges, between funding and lack of it, among the different spaces in which they work, a balance in their private and professional lives, between oneness and otherness, between functional and non-functional practices.

We agree with Turbett (2010, p. 1) that: “[--] *social work practice draws generally from the same tools, methods, values and philosophies wherever practiced.*” In that case, one might ask, “Is there any need for generalist rural social work?” On the basis of this and earlier studies, there is only one answer: yes, rural areas need rural-specific generalist social work. This need also raises a question about contemporary education of social workers. Do our education programs stress specialized social work too much? If so, generalist social work gets only the second place. Another issue to consider is whether the education system relies too much on urban social

work. It is a fact that most of the people live in urban areas; however, this fact does not erase the need for the availability of equal services to all people, no matter whether they live in urban areas or in the countryside.

The context of practice fluctuates among regions. For example, resources such as the number of workers, are restricted and usually fall rather nearer the minimum than the maximum mandated by law. Therefore, it is important to identify the skills and talents of those in rural areas and use them as resources. This includes the relevancy of reciprocal support and best-fit between inhabitants and authorities in rural areas. In what ways can municipalities benefit from assets such as older people, rather than seeing them as nothing more than a burden to take care of.

Although nature is a significant factor in rural areas, the possibilities nature offers have not been adequately considered. Green social work (e.g. Dominelli, 2012) continues to rise, breaking new ground for ecological and nature-related social work. Yet, at least in Lapland, this approach is still not well enough known as it relates to the conduct of social work, even though it offers many possibilities and opportunities for different of approaches. This calls for in-depth review of the present ways of conducting social work. Changes are needed in both attitudes and policies (Lehto, 2012), and the need for further research to clarify these possibilities is undeniable.

Nature can be a working method and mean in rural social work. Beside this, the possibilities of small acts are present in generalist rural social work. Nature-related social work is another approach to rural social work. Nature can be seen as valuable resource for social work. Connections between the profession of social work and its surrounding environment are important, and it is essential to consider the impact of nature from a cultural perspective, especially in rural areas. As a ubiquitous element of rural culture, nature can be a useful tool for social workers and, at this time, all of its dimensions are understudied.

The holistic view is, of necessity, the primary method of conducting social work in rural areas. A holistic approach makes it possible to combine professional and personal experiences, and it relies on both theory and practice, also taking into account the clients' participation. As part of this approach, reflective practices help workers see clearly, both what they are doing and the reasons behind their own and their clients' behaviors. (Ruch, 2007.) Social workers may be participants in the community, but they must also be capable of seeing actions and issues from a broad perspective from the individual level, without overlooking personal needs. The skills needed to reflect multidimensional issues are crucial because the economy of smallness is inherent in generalist rural social work.

Social Work and Technological Challenges

4.1 INTRODUCTION

We are experiencing constant change; global, international and national changes are rapid and continuous. The central change agent is technology, which is spreading spatially into different areas of human activity. Technology has become a part of people's ordinary lives in every area imaginable. Using the Internet, we purchase items and deal with various official agencies. Using social media, we interact daily on global, international and national levels. Technology is present not only in the form of the Internet but also in the various everyday activities in which we engage using numerous devices and gadgets. The radical technologies of the future create a vision of rapid advancements in technology and its diffusion to all areas of human action (e.g. Linturi, Kuusi, & Ahlqvist, 2013). Technological development raises the question of technology evolving too rapidly for humans to cope with and a new kind of human-technology relationship (Parikka, 2004). Simultaneously, a segment of the population is increasingly using new technology, and this pervasive use creates mechanisms of exclusion and new social phenomena.

As people's everyday lives and arenas of action change and the number of technical applications increase, social work also has to assess the effects of technology on people, especially social work clients. People who use technology daily expect social work to move into the arenas they are using. In the near future, the changing preconditions of social work will also create technology-related challenges. The implementation of the National Client Data Repository for Social Services, and the archiving related to this and electronic services (e-services), will affect social work in the near future.

The use of technology is a part of social workers' everyday activities. Social workers use email, texting, chat and online communication to maintain contact with customers and co-operation partners, record customer information and provide consulting services and professional guidance. Even though technology has been seen as enhancing social work, it has drawn criticism because it is often employed to benefit management and administration rather than to meet the needs of customers or address social work issues. Hill and Shaw (2011) emphasise the inapplicability of technology utilisation, including to meet the needs of management, or social work technology designed solely by technicians. Instead, they recommend that focus be placed on how the use of technology supports the goals, functions, values and ethics of social work. Technology is not merely an instrument to be used; rather, it affects the content and practice of social work. From the viewpoint of the constructivist theory, the development and utilisation of technology is part of a social process (e.g. Burr, 1995). Technology is not seen as deterministic but is recognised as part of a multi-professional and multi-agency social process which is influenced, in turn, by local and national contexts. Based on this viewpoint, the social aspect and active agency of various social work operatives is emphasised in the development, utilisation and further conceptualisation of technology.

In this article, I address the enablement by technology of the goals of social work but also the accompanying challenges for social work operatives. The article is organised according to the goals and functions of social work at the individual, community and structural levels. These levels are interconnected in part because society is seen as producing social problems but also in part because social work utilises information acquired from client work to alter excluding structures (Pohjola, 2011, p. 208). By addressing the technological challenges at these various levels, I want to emphasise not only the broad scope of social work but also the interconnection between the levels. The starting point of this article is the international definition of social work:

The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilising theories of human behaviour and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work. (IFSW, 2012.)

In this article, I use the concept of technology as a superordinate term which refers to all technological applications used in the various processes, contexts and levels of social work. The problem is the lack of concepts derived from social work goals and content dealing with technology in this field. Even though the technology used in social work is mainly information technology (IT), the issue is not solely about IT but also about how technology is related to demands for change in the discussions and development efforts concerning social work and social services as a whole (Kuronen & Isomäki, 2010, pp. 205–206). I conceptualise technology as a wide system, including research, development, utilisation and evaluation, which requires interdisciplinary and multi-professional client-focused co-operation (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2010). The article commences by addressing the possibilities and challenges of social work at the individual level and then moves on to the community and finally to the structural level. I shall present examples of beneficial technology-related social work practices and the challenges related to the goals and changing preconditions of social work.

4.2 CASE WORK

Preventive action and early support are emphasised as the main orientations at all levels of social work. The goal is to support people's well-being and remove, or at least alleviate, risks to it before they transform into disadvantages and deficits of well-being. The aim of individual social work is to prevent, by early intervention, the client's and his or her family's problems from becoming more complex (Kananoja, Lähteinen, & Marjamäki, 2007, p. 122). Internet-based social work with the young has been having favourable results when the outreach has been via Internet discussion forums and new preventive work methods have been developed. Internet-based social work has been described as preventive, supportive and informative and has been said to be operating in a way acceptable to and reaching the youth (e.g. Alila & Koskenkangas, 2011; Lauha & Tuuttila, 2014). Internet-based social services guidance can also be seen as preventive work, because in it, the problems of the clients are made manifest in the early stages, and the clients are offered appropriate help before the exacerbation of their condition (Nikunlassi, 2008, p. 133).

In web-based social work and guidance, the client is sent to a personal meeting if the problems at hand require more thorough social work or a wider

network of professionals. In social work, it is typical to encounter clients whose problems have accumulated to such an extent that a single subsidy or service is not sufficient support; rather, the long-term and systematic co-operation of various professionals is needed. According to a report by Kananoja (2013, p. 31), the social work of the future will focus on drug- and alcohol-related problems, mental health, child protection, youth problems, intergenerational social problems, long-term unemployment, poverty and exclusion, the creation of a lower class, the social problems of the elderly and disabled and the challenging situations concerning the integration of immigrants.

Individual social work is based on a systematic client process that begins with the assessment of service needs and includes interventions planned, implemented and evaluated together with the client and service-providing professionals. Numerous ethical issues have been raised concerning the technology-utilising client process. In the beginning of the process, the client's relationship with technology, and the possibilities regarding its utilisation, must be assessed. In caring for the elderly and the disabled in particular, various forms of technology have been developed to enhance the client's ability to function, and their suitability to the client and his or her situation is essential. The service plan must include joint decisions concerning the technology used in the client process, and his or her right to refuse the utilisation of technology has to be respected (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2010). The client process includes constant evaluation, and the technology enables this to be interactive. In the evaluation of technological applications, in addition to their usability, the applicability to the client's needs, ability to function and life situation as a whole should be considered. The work done should be effective and should be related to the client's needs, the help or benefits received and the cost of the services (e.g. Pohjola, 2012, p. 23). In accordance with the report by Kananoja (2013), the effectiveness evaluation of client processes that include technology utilisation requires methods that are suitable for the social services and social work context.

In Finland, the technologies involved in the actual implementation of social work client processes are few. A digital portfolio is a useful example of a tool developed for young people who are at risk of exclusion. The youth use the Internet-based programme independently, which enhances their understanding of their lives and resources and enables them to make plans for the future by using various tools. The programme also enables interaction with professionals and the user's own social network. (Isotalo & Ringman, 2012.)

The use of everyday technological applications for special groups contributes to the well-being and inclusion (“Yhdessä osallistuen” -programme, n.d.) of children who need special support in their daily lives. Technological applications have also been used in the clients’ realisation of their problems and resources by writing digital stories (Lenette, Cox, & Brough, 2013) and by means of photography (Jouttimäki, Kangas, & Saurama, 2011).

The practices of individual social work will be changed by the national objective of responding via e-services to the needs of clients of different age groups regardless of administrative and organisational boundaries. The aim is to enhance the cost-effectiveness and quality of services provided by the public sector. The benefits to the client are enhanced equality, access to services and the removal of hindrances caused by distance. To the workers, the transition to e-services is justified by the transfer of bureaucratic work to electronic formats and by the possibility of a more thorough focus on clients’ work. The people’s own responsibility is emphasised in the transfer to e-services by information-providing arrangements which enhance self-care as well as various indicators and guidelines. If the previously mentioned methods prove to be insufficient, the clients are sent for professional care (“SADe-ohjelma,” n.d.). In regard to adult social work, the transfer to e-services has been accomplished to date in the application for income and daycare subsidies (Kärki, Laaksonen, & Hyppönen, 2012).

Increasing e-services is a challenge to social work because it contains both material and non-material working methods (Toikko, 2005, pp. 212–221). The process of assisting the client often includes both the subsidies (material work) and the psychosocial change work that supports his or her ability to cope. This is based upon a partnership between the social worker and the client, the participation of the client and the dialogue used in the interaction. Psychosocial change work is seen as requiring face-to-face interaction (non-material work). Clients often come into the services seeking subsidies when the objective is to alter the circumstances leading to, for example, their financial problems. When municipalities transfer to e-services, special attention should be paid to recognising the clients who need non-material social work and their referral from e-services and case management to social work clienthood. It is essential to ensure equality in e-services regardless of wealth, life situations or varying abilities to function. Social work clients are essentially people who can be excluded from the use of technology; therefore, the possibility of seeing social workers face to face must be retained. (Ministry of Social

Affairs and Health, 2010, p. 7.) In the current social work mindset, it is thought that Internet-based social work is functioning alongside, but cannot completely replace, face-to-face client work.

In addition to e-services, social work will be affected by the National Client Data Repository for Social Services. The objective is to unify social work's client data content and structures and to accelerate the real-time flow of information between various professionals and the public, private and third sectors. The objective is the modelling of processes so that models for more fluent and automated practices are created and enabled by the electric handling of client data (Ailio & Kärki, 2013). The challenge is the effect the client data repository model will have on the goals and content of social work. The unified documentation should be scrutinised from both the principles of social work and based on the effects that the documentation will have on the social workers' client work (e.g. Huuskonen, Korpinen, & Ritala-Koskinen, 2010). Laitinen (2013, pp. 58–59) states that documentation is not only a means of passing on information but also of actively building and upholding clienthood.

Hill and Shaw (2011) emphasise that the implementation of technology as a tool does not create high-quality services unless its utilisation is applicable to the goals and content of social work. The use of technology must not be defined by administration or technical experts; rather, the planning, implementation and further development should be multi-professional and interdisciplinary co-operation derived from practice. With the participation of various social work actors, the social dimension is emphasised from the perspective of social work's content, goals functions and the values and ethics incorporated therein. The inclusion of social work is needed in the utilisation of technology because technical experts have no knowledge of daily social work procedures (Hill & Shaw, 2011.) The implementation of technology increases the need for research-based information on the development of services. In social work, basic research needs to be conducted regarding the effects of the implementation of technology on clients and their everyday lives and the effects of the technology used by social workers in supporting clients' abilities to cope. Additional knowledge is also required on the methods of evaluating the practices, procedures and effectiveness of social work. The objective is to enhance innovative and research-based development of practices by increasing the co-operation between research institutions, development organisations and work organisations (Forssén et al., 2010, p. 9).

4.3 COMMUNITY WORK

In community social work, the objective at the individual level is to connect the clients, their families and social networks, thereby creating resources, social support and capital and enabling people's inclusion into society. The operating principles are the prevention of social problems, development of local services, enhancement of citizens' own initiative and the shared responsibility and recognition of the meaning of social networks (Roivainen, 2008, p. 23). People are increasingly connected to virtual communities, where communication has its own challenges. In virtual communities, communication usually takes place via writing, and the community formulates its own rules of conduct and culture of interaction. Participation often concerns a certain theme and is temporary; it is not reliant upon place and time (Holopainen, 2005).

In social work, Internet forums have been built for certain groups – for example, the Finnish Online Family Shelter (<https://www.turvakoti.net>) and Byström Youth Services (<http://irc-galleria.net/community/3400301>) – and have given people access to information and enabled them to have discussions with others who are experiencing similar life situations. Professional guidance is available in these forums through, for example, questions or chat interfaces. Virtual groups organised by the public sector – so-called institutional groups – are few. The objective of an institutional group is to function either in preventive mode or to unite clients around a certain theme.

Community social work on the Internet entails reaching those people who do not want face-to-face contact or for whom interaction via computers comes naturally. Moreover, in sparsely populated areas, participation in groups can be achieved virtually. In Internet-based communities, the essential gain is in the social support and capital acquired through peer support and in the sharing of information and insights gained through experience. Communities play a preventive role because they help people solve their problems independently while simultaneously using peer support.

To achieve Internet-based social work in the form of virtual communities, more research is required in the social sciences. This research must focus on the effects of the Internet on communication, identity construction, interaction, social control, norms and culture. International research on the aforementioned themes is presented in the work of, for example, Krug (2005) and Poletti and Rak (2014). The interaction between the virtual and the real worlds is an essential research subject. Additional research is also required on

the negative effects of technology utilization – for example, Internet-related criminality, addictions, exclusion and violence (“Sosiaalialan tiedonhallinnan tutkimusohjelma,” 2008).

4.4 STRUCTURAL WORK

Structural social work strives to alter the societal constructs that cause exclusion and increasing inequality in people’s lives (Mullaly, 2007). As society changes, in structural social work new methods of operation and ways of connecting to societal situations are being developed. The focus of structural social work is to arrive at an understanding of humans, regardless of place and time, as parts of situations, living environments and a network of structures (Pohjola, 2014, p. 33). In Finland, the need for structural social work is emphasised based on administrative and political interests. The government will to improve services through information gathering and research. The objective is to base decision-making on real-time knowledge gained through research. In addition to decision-making, knowledge is utilised to support the management in their work. Structural social work is seen as a change agent that operates on the base of experiences and expertise gained from social work at the individual and community levels, which aim to ward off social problems, develop services and other supporting measures and expedite reforms, thereby improving social well-being. In addition to information gained from social work client processes, information is provided by social reporting, the evaluation of social impact and evaluation using methods of socioeconomic research. (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2012.)

Documenting client data is important in structural social work from the viewpoint of providing information. Social workers record daily information concerning the life situations and conditions of clients. Documenting makes visible clients’ needs, resources, problems, life situations and their connections to wider local and national political, physical, cultural and social contacts. In the future, the information produced from client processes will be gathered in a national archive as meta-information that can be used in structural social work, decision-making and the development of social services and research (KanSa). The National Client Data Repository for Social Services enables real-time gathering of anonymous statistical and research information and broadens the available knowledge base (Laaksonen, Suhonen, Paakkanen, Mykkänen, & Satama, 2013, p. 29).

In developing the social work knowledge base, the provision of information via the various actors in social work is emphasised. This requires a more thorough connection between research and practice and the strengthening of social workers' research capabilities (Pohjola, Laitinen, & Seppänen, 2014b, p. 289). In structural social work, technology has been utilised to provide information, for example, in Helsinki, where an intranet forum has been opened to enable social workers to discuss and make their experiential knowledge visible. The summaries of the discussions are utilised in development and decision-making. In addition, in the provision of clients' experiential information, such sources have been used as digital stories written by clients (Lenette et al., 2013). In structural social work, additional methods of providing information are needed to ensure the effect of the information on decision-making. The proactive impact evaluation of municipal decision-making (EVA) methods structures and clarifies decision preparation and decision-making and enhances open governance and the evaluation of human effects (Sundquist & Oulasvirta, 2011).

Structural social work includes the objective of supporting people's efforts to understand the impact of structural conditions on their lives and to have an influence on these conditions as a community (Mullaly, 2007). Internet and communications technology has enabled a network de-mocracy that has increased people's possibilities of receiving information about decision-making via the publication of, for example, agendas, proceedings, planning processes and video-recorded meetings. The information about decision-making has enabled the use of various influential Internet channels, for example, by writing petitions and commenting on municipal forums. In Internet democracy, the emphasis is on supplementing citizens' possibilities to participate in municipal decision-making and enabling participation in service development (e.g. Häyhtiö, 2010). Social media has made possible the local and global self-organising communities that strive to influence decision-making by writing petitions or gathering people for demonstrations. From an ethical viewpoint, it is essential to determine whether the possibilities created by technology also increase the inclusion of those who do not acquire information related to political decision-making or use the influential methods made possible by technology.

At the societal level, more in-depth social work research needs to be carried out on the effect of technology utilisation on everyday conditions and the social impact on people's everyday lives. The broader research issues relate to the effects of societal change on well-being and on the mechanisms causing inequality and exclusion.

4.5 CONCLUSION

I have examined the possibilities and challenges created by technology in social work at the individual (client), community and structural levels. The topicality of the issue is heightened by the increasing meaning that technology has in people's lives as well as by the changing preconditions of social work. Technological applications are a tool that enables the work to be done more efficiently and economically but also makes possible the furthering of social work's inherent goals by technological means. At its best, technology creates possibilities to enhance the client's ability to cope and his or her close social network, participation in various communities and integration into society, not to mention the information provided at various levels of social work. The beneficial practices introduced in this article are examples of the possibilities of utilising today's technology in the future to create new possibilities at an increasing speed.

The technologisation of people's everyday lives and social work also represents a challenge to social work. This challenge is not only connected to the implementation of technology but also to the critical scrutiny of the impacts of technology at the individual, community and structural levels. We need more information related to how technology affects people's everyday lives and whether it is, in part, an exclusionary mechanism. In social work, technology is more than merely a tool; however, more information is required to assess its impacts on the goals and content of social work. The strengthening of technology raises the need for research-based development of social work practice. The challenge is the enhancement of the knowledge base concerning the social impacts of technology upon people's everyday lives as well as the goals and content of social work.

Even though technology is a device, machine or programme from the viewpoint of social work, technology is produced by means of a social process. Social work actors are themselves active in the planning, implementation and further development of technology, and they emphasise the content, goals, functions, values and ethics inherent in social work. In addition to emphasising economic values in the utilisation and development of technology, one must also emphasise the social impacts of technology at the individual, community and structural levels. The rapid development of technology requires the know-how of social scientists in order for social work to provide services that contribute to the goals and values inherent in it.

Information Technology and Social Work Practice: Examples of Experiences from Social Work Practice Training

5.1 INTRODUCTION

During my studies on the Master's Degree Program of e-Competence in Social Work, I had the opportunity to do a five-week social work practice training in the autumn of 2013 at the Northern Finland Centre of Excellence on Social Welfare (Poske). The focus of this article is to describe my experiences and learning outcomes during the work practice training and also highlight the e-services and particularly some new videophone services developed at Poske.

My main learning aim during the work practice training period was to learn and get familiar with Poske's multi-channel services and especially virtual servicepoints and videophone services in northernmost Finland, in Lapland. By multi-channel services, I refer to services that are designed with a user-involvement method, are easily understood and combine different services. In this article, by multi-channel services, I mean services that are personal or delivered via the Internet or videophone. My important learning objective was to get acquainted with the e-welfare services developed at Poske and also learn new methods of service design and the development processes that renew and promote the availability of welfare services in Lapland.

Before my work practice, I wondered about the prerequisites of providing and maintaining welfare services in the context of Lapland's sparsely populated area. In Lapland, distances between towns and villages are long, the land area is sparsely populated and in remote areas public transportation services are also lacking. At the moment, we are facing the fact that our Finnish welfare state and welfare services are in a period of transformation. In Finland, there is a strong tendency to reduce

the locally based services. Inevitably, we need new ways of providing welfare services, because the service production structure of welfare services is being eroded and the availability of welfare services in northern communities is being reduced.

We also need new methods of designing services. One obvious scenario must be realized: possibly and evidently, we will not have basic welfare services in close proximity to citizens without multi-channel services. When the old structures of the welfare state are in decline, we need new and alternative ways of providing and maintaining the welfare services in remote areas in order to secure the citizens' living conditions and wellbeing (Laitinen & Pohjola, 2001, p. 155). More and more, the services are only available at a greater distance; services are concentrated in central towns and district centres. Hence, the need for e-services and ICT-solutions is evident. We need the help of information and communication technology, in other words, technology-mediated welfare services. The pressure to renew and design welfare services in a new way is high in Lapland. Before the work practice training period, I wondered, could we promote the availability of services and citizens' access to welfare services via virtual service-points and also secure the welfare services in remote, rural areas.

Poske is a development and professional organization. Its main purpose is to develop client work in the fields of social and health care. The main focus of Poske is to promote the wellbeing of inhabitants, develop service process methods and produce knowledge about social services. It delivers expertise in the social service sector in collaboration with municipalities, non-governmental organizations, the University of Lapland and the Lapland University of Applied Sciences. When renewing and developing new services, Poske always pays attention to Lapland's distinguishing characteristics. (http://www.sosiaalikallega.fi/poske/esittely/lappi/main_page.) The centre has several development projects with external funding, for example they have projects funded by the European Regional Development Fund. Project employees are conducting their development and expert work around Lapland.

Poske has developed the Virtual Social and Health Care Centre (www.virtu.fi), which provides e-services for citizens, clients and professionals. The focus of the working method is to strengthen the clients' and citizens' involvement in the development processes. For example, Poske has "developer-clients" and "experts of experience" who are active participants in renewing the welfare services. Furthermore, Poske organizes "discussion cafés" where the citizens can have discussions with professionals and actively take part in the service design and renewing of services. Older people have been very active in taking

part in discussion cafés and they are willing to participate in the service development processes concerning the aged population.

5.2 VIRTUAL SERVICEPOINTS AND E-WELFARE SERVICES: SOME EXAMPLES OF VIDEOPHONE SERVICES IN LAPLAND

Nowadays, there are 14 virtual servicepoints in Lapland that are designed to be used for e-services and e-contacts by citizens living in remote areas. Professionals can also use them, for example for videoconferencing. At the virtual servicepoints, citizens can use videophone services and other Internet services, for example, they can pay bills, print, copy and scan documents and deliver them to authorities and professionals. At the virtual servicepoints, citizens can also book consultations, for example with psychotherapists or geriatrists. Devices are easy to use and clear instructions and a handbook are available for citizens, clients and professionals. Servicepoints have a videophone, document camera and multi-printer. The Arctic Communicator videophone has a touch screen and it uses secured messaging via the Internet (Yliräisänen-Seppänen, 2013). A virtual servicepoint in use can be seen in Figure 5.1.



Figure 5.1. Virtual servicepoint. Photo: Pekka Ojaniemi.

During my work practice training period, I took part in several design processes aimed at generating new kinds of videophone services. There were also a lot of plans to develop and expand the videophone services in pilot-municipalities via virtual servicepoints. The Federation of Mother and Child Homes and Shelters have many e-services available and under development, too. For example, they provide crisis therapy via videophone and peer groups for mothers with infants.

Poske provides videophone consultation for social workers and other professionals who, for example, organize services for substance abusers. Professionals can get consultation on substance abuser care and also peer-to-peer consultation concerning services that are available on substance addiction in general. Peer-to-peer consultation is also available at the Virtual Social and Health Care Centre. In Lapland, we have several municipalities that have only one social worker on duty (Kostamo-Pääkkö, 2013). Obviously, these generalist social workers in rural areas cannot single-handedly deal with all the problems and service needs that citizens have. The services are frequently only available in central towns or district centres. Therefore, the need for peer-to-peer consultation with other social and health care professionals is evident (see Chapter 3 in this book).

Poske provides consultations with geriatrists and services via videophones both to the professionals and informal caregivers of close relatives with dementia. During the work practice training, I had the opportunity to participate in a development process that aims to design a new kind of geriatrist videophone service for informal caregivers of people with memory illness who live in remote areas. We co-designed two events for these caregivers. These peer groups were in rural areas and the geriatrist attended to the peer group via videophone and gave consultation and advice to caregivers. They had the opportunity to send questions and concerns to the geriatrist beforehand.

In the context of Lapland's long distances, the inequality of psychotherapy services is especially high compared with the situation in the southern part of Finland. In Lapland, there is a lack of psychotherapy services and waiting times are long. For that reason, in 2011 a new experiment was launched, its objective was to promote access to psychotherapists through videoconferencing services. Psychotherapy via videoconferencing offers one possibility of providing therapy for clients in remote areas. (Sivula, 2011, p. 20.)

A few years ago, Poske began developing a new pilot called the "depression school". It was conducted via videoconferencing services. Participants suffering

depression or mental health problems were located around Lapland and they joined in the depression school at home with their own computers. During my training period, we visited Lapland's psychiatry executive group presenting Poske's videophone services and other e-services. It was pleasing to hear that they have plans to continue and expand the promising service pilots in psychotherapy via videophones.

Lapland's employment agency is also renewing employment services via videophones. Nowadays, there is only one employment agency in the whole of Lapland, which comprises one third of Finland. Therefore, this one and only agency provides agency services to all customers in Lapland. The land area of Lapland in square kilometres is as big as the Netherlands, but we have fewer than 185,000 inhabitants in Lapland. Thus, we need ICT-services and the tendency towards videophone services is evident in order to maintain employment services in sparsely populated areas.

During my work practice training, I took part in two workshops with Lapland's employment agency staff. In renewing and designing the employment services via videophone, we used a co-design method, whereby user-experiences and interactive methods were in focus. Poske organized training periods for Lapland's employment agency staff on how to use the videophones. During the training periods, we also practised the technical matters of videophones, how to call the client, guidance on checking microphones and cameras, view, lighting, et cetera. The main focus in the practice sessions was to learn how to contact and encounter the clients and the differences compared to face-to-face interaction. In order to achieve the goals mentioned, we played the roles of different kinds of clients. During the design process, in workshops, we simultaneously developed a unique handbook for employment agency personnel called "The unique encounter – handbook for professionals to conduct videophone services" (Yliräisänen-Seppänen, 2013). The handbook includes, for example, advice on how to encounter the client via videophone and also technical support (technical checklist). Technology brings new challenges not only to citizens, but also to professionals. Therefore, a handbook for professionals is needed.

In the near future, in order to maintain services in sparsely populated areas, citizens will need more and more multi-channel services. We already have good e-service pilots and we have developed the videophone services mentioned above. For example, the experiences of psychotherapy and geriatrist consultation via videophone have been extraordinarily positive and promising. Due to

the aging population, peer support for informal caregivers of people with dementia and geriatric consultations will be needed more and more in the near future. Poske's main principles in designing services are the community based approach and the participation of end users in the design processes. During my work practice training, new kinds of videophone services were designed based on service design methods and the participatory-driven approach.

5.3 SERVICE DESIGN ENABLES THE CO-DESIGN OF SERVICES

New methods to design services are interesting and current in the present-day transformation and erosion of civil society and the public sector. Especially the Finnish welfare service system is undergoing great changes. We must rethink the way public services are designed and considered today and in the near future. During my work practice training, I was especially interested in service design, such as new methods of participatory design and co-creation of services. Thus, my focus of consideration is on service processes. Despite the challenges, the co-design of services could be the method to provide locally based services for citizens in remote municipalities in the context of Lapland's long distances.

Great Britain is a pioneer country in service design in the public sector. The British, innovative, user-centric service design model for the public sector includes four phases: co-design, co-commission, co-deliver and co-assess. Service design demands and challenges end users to actively participate in the development of their own services. (Miettinen, Myllymaa, & Jäppinen, 2010; Miettinen, 2011, pp. 31–32.) During my work practice training, I had the opportunity to take part in the co-creation of services and interactive design methods, so I also got hands-on experience of new methods. Some service design processes were at the very beginning and some were in the advanced stages.

At the University of Lapland, the Faculty of Art and Design has worked for several years with service design and service prototyping. For this purpose, the University has a prototyping lab for service and interaction design. The lab is called SINCO (Service Innovation Corner). In SINCO, you can perform service methods and service activities with innovative methods. So far, the SINCO lab has worked with companies in order to prototype new solutions for their service journeys, user interfaces and overall product experiences. Nowadays and in the near future, more and more the SINCO's focus is to actively work with public sector service developments. (Miettinen, 2012,

pp. 32–33.) For example, the employment service’s renewing process included a visit to SINCO together with Poske’s and Lapland’s employment agency staff.

User-centric thinking has traditionally been implemented by hearing the end user, whereas in service design the end users are involved in the development process from the very beginning with innovative methods. Innovative methods can, for example, be the visualized ideas described by videos, storytelling, drawings or paintings. Service ideas can be tested by acting out the service situations or by end users testing digital prototypes. At the University of Lapland, acting and prototyping can be done at SINCO. Testing and assessing results can improve the service idea. The service design process is iterative, so the process can be repeated several times. Thereby, end users are partly seen as producers of services. (Miettinen et al., 2010; Miettinen, 2011, pp. 21–23.)

Customer understanding, empathy towards end users and the participation of the services’ end users in the development process are the cornerstones of service design (Miettinen, 2011, pp. 21–23). End users are seen as a resource, not as a cost (Miettinen et al., 2010). Service processing from different points of view is the strength of co-design and especially bringing these different viewpoints together (Vaajakallio & Mattelmäki, 2011, p. 80). In the context of an aging civil society, we should especially see the aging citizens as a resource, not as a cost for the welfare state. By utilizing service design methods, we could find new social innovations for service production for the wellbeing of elderly citizens and citizens in the northern municipalities.

When renewing welfare services, we need more user engagement in the development processes. Service needs, new ideas and ways of utilizing technology are encountered when a customer and an end user are participating in the design process (Miettinen, 2012, p. 30). When rethinking and redesigning the welfare services in sparsely populated areas, participatory design and first and foremost community participatory design will be in greater focus. When co-designing the services, we must be interested in asking the central question: “Which services are important/essential for you and what’s your role in the service design process?” (“YHDESSÄ,” 2013).

5.4 MY EXPERIENCES DURING THE TRAINING PERIOD

During my work practice training, I had the opportunity to participate in a few opening events of virtual servicepoints around Lapland. Hence, I had the

opportunity to meet residents in remote areas. I heard the voices of citizens, service end users and professionals in Lapland's municipalities. It was interesting to see citizens' and professionals' attitudes towards e-services and virtual servicepoints in different municipalities where residents are living far from the central towns. I heard about the needs for services in remote areas. I also learned a lot about professionals' and citizens' capabilities in using multi-channel services. I saw the reality of the level and state of welfare services within close proximity to citizens outside the central areas.

During the work practice training, I understood the versatile possibilities of videophones in Lapland where the distances are long and locally based services are being reduced. I got a feeling for the usability and user experience of videophones. I saw the status quo of e-services in Lapland and my vision of their great possibilities in the public sector and the third sector became clearer. I realized and saw concretely that there were quite a few malfunctions and difficulties with telecommunication links in remote areas. I noticed that some professionals and citizens lacked confidence in using videophones mainly because of incompetence in technology, while others were already experienced and also keen on using e-services and videophones. In remote areas, due to the long distances, citizens and professionals already had user experience of videoconferencing.

Thanks to the work practice training, I obtained new skills and my abilities in using videophone services grew. I learned a lot about technical matters, ICT-solutions and e-services. I developed new knowledge about how to encounter and interact with clients via videophone and what kinds of competences are required for the professionals. I met many professionals in several fields around Lapland when we introduced and demonstrated the videophone services and e-services at the opening events of virtual servicepoints. Also, I had the opportunity to have discussions with several non-governmental organizations' professionals.

After my time at Poske, I was more familiar with the multi-professional way to work and my professional network increased a lot. Furthermore, I learned how to use the Arctic Communicator videophone. In my experience, it was very easy to use. On the grounds of my user experience, I think that any citizen can use the videophone regardless of age, education or ICT-skills. Of course, the handbook is needed and some citizens require brief guidance when using the videophone for the first time.

The on-going and expanding development described in this article also puts pressures and challenges on social work education. There is a strong need

to develop e-services and ICT-mediated welfare services in remote areas to maintain services in close proximity to the citizens. Therefore, social workers need more and more e-competence and they have to be familiar with e-services. Social and health care professionals require new kinds of qualifications and skills.

5.5 TOWARDS COMMUNITY PARTICIPATORY DESIGN

When we analyse the possibilities of service design in Lapland, we must recognize the state of the social services and the structure of our welfare state. In other words, we need to acknowledge the preconditions we are facing in civil society and in the communities in sparsely populated areas. During the work practice training, I saw with my own eyes how the long distances and harsh conditions challenge the Finnish welfare state as well as the availability and accessibility of welfare services in remote areas. I wonder if multi-channel services with user-involvement design will be imperative in maintaining locally based services in remote areas. In the context of Lapland's long distances, lack of public transportation and centralization of services to central towns and district centres, we need more and more ICT-mediated services like virtual servicepoints and videophone services for citizens.

Facing the challenges of the post-modern civil society, we need new ways to provide and renew the welfare services in the 21st century to also secure the possibilities of maintaining the wellbeing and livelihood of citizens in remote areas. We also need new modes of producing and designing the services. Welfare services should be renewed and developed with the method of co-production of services and according to open design principles ("YHDESSÄ," 2013). In my viewpoint, the noteworthy, co-creative and participatory design method for welfare services is co-design, which involves end users and community citizens in the design process. In service design thinking, the citizens are seen as developers and producers of services, not as a cost or only as a user. The co-production of services and the involvement of citizens secure the fact that the residents are actively participating in developing locally based services, which are essential in remote areas.

We must design new ways to formulate public service production in remote areas. Thus, ICT-solutions and multi-channel services are inevitably needed. Otherwise, the citizens in remote areas would face a lack or poverty of

services. An excellent example of innovative e-services in Lapland is psychotherapy via videophone. The distance to the nearest face-to-face psychotherapist can even be 100 kilometres, but with viable technology, it is available in everyone's living room.

It is a challenge to secure the goal of equality in the supply of services in remote areas. However, the availability and accessibility of services must be guaranteed to all citizens regardless of place of residence and age. Recent research shows that ICT-solutions can be utilized to promote equality in the regional availability of services, regardless of citizens' district of residence. All municipalities should have opportunities to organize and provide services that are in accordance with citizens' service needs. (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2013a, pp. 27–28.)

There is clear evidence that especially in remote areas like Lapland equality in the supply of locally based services can only be reached with multi-channel services. Equality between citizens must also be guaranteed in the remotest corners of Lapland. The use of service design in the public sector is needed to keep the marginal areas competitive and vital. In Lapland, we must create new ways to overcome obstacles in the context of a harsh geographic context. Service design methods offer new inclusive ways of public service design where peer-to-peer service design and participatory design build a sense of community and commitment. (Miettinen, 2012, p. 31.) Thanks to the virtual servicepoints and e-services developed by Poske, we already have several multi-channel welfare services and the Virtual Social and Health Care Centre (www.virtu.fi) in Lapland.

The University of Lapland is a unique university in Finland because it combines the competence and expertise of social work and service design. Furthermore, the Master's Degree Program of e-Competence in Social Work is a unique educational programme in Finland. This program combines social work and ICT in an innovative way, and thus provides e-competence for future social workers. eSkills are needed more and more in the social and health care sectors. Designing and renewing the welfare services and especially the multi-channel services in Lapland has only just begun; the development is continuing and multiplying. As Miettinen (2012, p. 29) writes, "Service design opens up new opportunities for Arctic wellbeing. Service design methods and tools enable active user participation in the service design process".

Using Social Media in Social Work: The Case of Sometu

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Today, social media is almost everywhere. It is a collaborative form of communication comprised of interactive and user-generated content (Heinonen & Halonen, 2007). While there is a low threshold for content creation in social media, information spreads rapidly. Kangas, Toivonen and Bäck (2007, p. 9) describe the core of social media as composed of communities, technology (Web 2.0) and user-generated content. Contacts and networks can be created by actively participating in different types of social media activities.

We chose the *Sosiaalinen media oppimisen tukena* network (Social media as support for learning, later referred to as Sometu) as our social media platform. In the Sometu network (<http://www.sometu.fi>), members share information, hold discussions, form groups, write blogs, and organise events. Sometu members include teachers, researchers, entrepreneurs, communications officers, and students who are interested in new Internet phenomena, forms of communication, and collaboration. In the autumn of 2013, there were 4820 members in Sometu. You can join Sometu and include friends by sending them an invitation. Currently there are 111 different groups in Sometu whose activities, meetings, and discussions are freely open. You can develop a common network and participate in activities by providing your own expertise and enthusiasm for all to enjoy.

We are students from the Master's Degree Program of e-Competence in Social Work.¹ As part of our studies, we conducted an experiment to determine whether

¹ Master's Degree Program of e-Competence in Social Work is a project mainly funded by the European Social Fund (ESF), organised by the University of Lapland.

social media could be put to use for professional purposes (e.g. in providing social work information). As social work students, we joined Sometu with the intention of provoking discussion, providing information and proposing current topics about social work. Although we thought that Sometu would be the right channel to share information about social work, our results surprised us.

6.2 THE HONEYCOMB MODEL OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy and Silvestre (2011, pp. 248–250) presents a honeycomb framework identifying the different functional traits of social media (Figure 6.1) and a four-phase process called the 4C model (cognize, congruity, curate, chase). First, you identify a suitable media; then you find a strategy that fits your common goals and functionalities; next you produce relevant content and it receives attention through social media.

In the honeycomb framework, the functionalities of social media are divided into seven categories or blocks: identity, conversations, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation and groups. Even though social media platforms have several different functionalities, a platform may concentrate on any number of these. For example, on the site LinkedIn, the most important element is building one’s own identity, relationships and reputation. On Facebook, the most important elements are your relationships with friends, your identity, presence, conversations and reputation. On YouTube, the most important element is sharing videos and conversations and commenting on the videos, groups and other’s reputations (Kietzmann et al., 2011, pp. 243, 248, 250.)

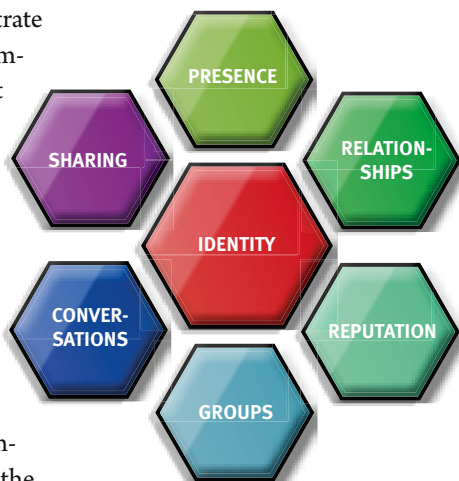


Figure 6.1. Social media functionality (Kietzmann et al., 2011, p. 243).

Identifying and reflecting on these functional building blocks becomes a central element for users to establish a clear objective of what they want from social media. The Sometu network appeared to be a plausible location for establishing discussions and sharing information about social work.

6.3 HONEYCOMB FRAMEWORK, SOMETU AND SOCIAL WORK

In the honeycomb framework, identity is a functional block representing the extent to which users are willing to reveal their identities in a social media environment. In social media, the identity of a user can be disclosed consciously or unconsciously. A user may reveal subjective information, thoughts, feelings, likes or dislikes. According to these preferences, they may also choose different social media platforms. In social media, many use their own names, whereas others may use nicknames. Professionals in various fields who want to network with their peers register on LinkedIn, for example, and use their own name (Kietzmann et al., 2011, pp. 243–244). In Sometu, users register to participate in conversations using their own name. They also often highlight their professional status to explain the perspective from which they are discussing a particular topic. Sometu seemed to be a suitable forum for teachers, who were the most active writers.

The conversations functional block represents the extent to which a user communicates with other users in social media. Many social media platforms are designed to facilitate conversations between individuals and groups. People tweet, write blogs and join dating sites to find true love, in an effort to build their own identities, improve their self-esteem or be on the cutting edge of new trends. Others see social media as a means to be heard and create a positive impact (Kietzmann et al., 2011, pp. 244–245). In Sometu, conversations were very factual. Even if opinions were expressed, they were not profoundly reflected. Comments about conversations were short, mostly passing ideas, information or links for other users. On the other hand, participating in conversations seemed easy. Interest in similar events was effectively relayed to others. Social work as a topic did not stimulate discussion. When reading the chains of messages afterwards, we realised that the topic was almost entirely ignored.

According to Kietzmann et al. (2011, p. 245), the functional block sharing represents the extent to which social media users exchange, share and receive content. The functionality of this block is manifest in the different content

productions and social groups. The Sometu members also had their own wiki site where they collaborated on documents. In Sometu, sharing was emphasised and group members informed each other about future events. Sharing was active and users participated in conversations by sharing similar things. Even though one can start their own conversation in Sometu, it is also important to actively comment on the writings of others and share points of interest. Sometu could provide a quick way to gain new perspectives, make social work more visible, stimulate discussion about social injustices and produce new information about structural social work.

The presence block represents the extent to which users may be aware of the accessibility of the other online users in the virtual world and/or in the offline world. Social media users may also share statuses (e.g. on Facebook or Twitter). With the help of this block, you can create and manage reality, proximity and be instantly in touch with friends and acquaintances. In other cases, such as LinkedIn, the relationships may be quite formal. (Kietzmann et al., 2011, pp. 245–246.) In Sometu, simultaneous physical presence was not a central question. Also, writing was not based on an immediate, interactive exchange of ideas, showing a desire to share information and have immediate answers. In Sometu another functional block was emphasised – relationships and the extent to which one can be related to, and connect with, other users. Though presence was not emphasised in Sometu, participating in common events may create productive relationships in the offline world.

The reputation block in the honeycomb framework represents the extent to which users may identify the standing of other social media users, and themselves, in that setting. This may have many different meanings depending on the social media platform selected. In most cases, it is a matter of trust or a qualitative criterion. Popularity or a positive reputation may be represented in different ways: in Twitter, this may refer to the number of followers; on a website, it may be the number of visitors; or on YouTube, it may be the number of views. The Sometu network has its own Facebook page and Twitter account with the hashtag *sometu*. This network has many visitors and groups, and on this basis, we believe that it has a good reputation among its users. Its reputation is also apparent from its members, who choose to network professionally and carry out conversations using their own names. It may be challenging to discuss social work in social media, especially when using your name. In the public sphere and media, social work often receives a negative reputation. It requires professional courage to express opinions under your name.

The functional block groups represents the extent to which social media users form communities and sub-communities. The wider your social network (i.e. the more friends, followers or contacts), the better your chances are to form and manage different groups.

Kietzmann et al. (2011, p. 247) refer to Dunbar's (1992) theory, which states that people have a cognitive limit restricting the number of stable social relationships they can have. In Sometu, there are several groups, but to participate in a group conversation you have to register as a member of that group. The groups have rules and conventions. Groups are formed based on objects of interest and all members can write freely. For example, in the citizen media group members discuss and collect information on citizen empowerment and the ways in which active adults participate on the Internet.

6.4 REFLECTION ON THE SOMETU EXPERIMENT

We started the Sometu experience with an open mind and trusted that social work would be a topic that would attract a wide spectrum of interest. We hoped that other Sometu users would participate in discussions under their own names and actively comment on our topics. We believed that we would get a chance to discuss topical themes in social work and to share our information about social work. However, our initial writings openings on themes related to social work did not attract the interest we expected. We extended the experiment by creating our own group in Sometu called SOMESOSSUT, where we continued writing and invited a total of one hundred social workers and students of social work. Despite the large number of invitations, only a few individuals chose to join the group and those that did, did not actively participate in the discussions.

It is worth considering whether we made the correct choice by selecting Sometu as a social media platform. Perhaps individuals in social work are not used to publically sharing information? A veil of secrecy may exist around social work, preventing professionals from sharing information on current social topics. It is possible that individuals have taken confidentiality so seriously that it reaches all the way to the social level, and social workers simply do not want to exercise influence or openly spread information. In light of our Sometu experiment, the "silence and invisibility" of social work is deeply rooted. However, if the platform were more suitable, social work could potentially receive huge

amounts of publicity through social media. After we completed our course, the blog *Sosiaalinen tekijä* (The Social Factor, <http://sosiaalinentekija.wordpress.com/>) became very successful in a short period of time. The blog has 2701 likes on Facebook (as of 1 April 2014) and has been read nearly 200 000 times in four months. This is good evidence of the unpredictable nature of social media.

Social media is establishing itself, especially among younger people, as an important discussion forum. Social work professionals have not yet adapted it in a prominent way, and do not yet know how to use social media to produce and share information about social work. Social workers should acquire the appropriate technological skills and be familiar with the basics of information security. There are many more reasons why we social workers should use social media; we can all be more active on various social media sites. Social media can broaden our professional networks and help us to stay informed. That being said, it is important for social workers to be ethically responsible on the Internet. We social workers are all about *social networks*. We use theories to explain relationships and networks – we have to prove that we can use them successfully in social media.

The new opportunities introduced through social media are not fully known, or being taken advantage of. In some organisations, using social media is forbidden during office hours. Thus, another important topic is the attitude of the organisation towards the use of social media at work and during office hours. Organisations in the field of social work should determine whether all social media usage is permissible, or whether it should be limited to professional use (Ministry of Finance, 2010, p. 26).

It is important for organisations in the field of social work to identify and appreciate the functionality of various forms of social media. In this way, they can select and use the appropriate social media channels to fit their objectives. After organisations have created their own social media policies, we will still need enlightened and creative employees who want to participate, influence and carry out structural social work using social media. Social media is valuable a tool for the social workers of the future.

In our experiment, we clearly chose the wrong channel for producing and spreading information about the field of social work. It is worth trying and testing new possibilities, to combine social work and social media. We should use social media as a positive platform for exchanging ideas and knowledge and promoting the profession of social work, all while being aware that we are acting as messengers of social work when we are online.

PART II:

Rising eCompetence
in Social Work

ICT-Mediated Social Work in Northern Finland – a Scoping Study

7.1 INTRODUCTION

In recent years, promoting and increasing the amount of e-services has been on the agenda of the Finnish administration (Ubiquitous Information Society Advisory Board, 2011). Although there are pressing economic grounds for this trend, the amount of e-services available in social work is still quite low, especially compared to the situation in health care.

Especially in the northernmost parts of Finland, the advantages of e-services in social and health care are notable. By Northern Finland I mean the provinces of Lapland and Northern Ostrobothnia, which are the two largest provinces in Finland, covering 43% of the total acreage of Finland (Suomen virallinen tilasto (SVT), 2014). However, the population of the area is under 11% of the total population of Finland. This means that although in a global setting, the whole of Finland is sparsely populated, the situation is even more so in the North. Low population density and long distances create challenges for maintaining functional welfare services outside urban areas. The possible advantages that e-services in social care could offer in areas such as Northern Finland brought up an interest in uncovering the situation of social care e-services in particular, and ICTs in social work in general, in the area.

This article presents a scoping study of the current ICT-related solutions and knowledge in the field of social work in Northern Finland. The aims are to find out 1) the scale and scope of e-services in social work, 2) the research and development projects done in the field in Northern Finland in recent years and 3) what publications are available through the Internet. The focus is on what is visible to the citizens: what information can easily be found in the web

pages and databases for free. For the research literature, the e-publications available via the library of the University of Lapland were also included.

There have been some literature reviews and mappings about social work informatics and ICT applications in social work in recent years (e.g. Kärki, Laaksonen, & Hyppönen, 2012; Laaksonen, 2010; Laaksonen, Kuusisto-Niemi, & Saranto, 2010; Pääkkönen & Pohjola, 2007). This article differs from them by the regional defining and the focus on easy access and the availability of information – that is to say, in e-publications. The study was not limited only to literature, but the social work practice described on the Internet was also taken into consideration in the form of e-services. The reason behind this inclusion was the objective of finding out how (or if) the development work of e-social work has been rooted into the practice.

The article begins with a description of the scoping study as a method and how it was used in this paper. The results are divided into two chapters: the first chapter presents the results of the review of the literature and the research and development activity of ICTs in social work in the area, and the latter describes the findings on the available social work e-services in municipalities of Northern Finland. In the discussion, observations during the scoping study and the study results are summed up.

7.2 METHODOLOGY

Scoping study as a review method

The use of different types of reviews has been increasing with the growth of evidence-based practice in social welfare (Laaksonen et al., 2010, p. 30). The selection of what kind of review method to use depends on the goals of the study and the impending amount of criteria-filling findings on the studied field. Salminen (2011, p. 6) divides reviews into three different categories: descriptive literary reviews, systematic reviews and meta-analyses. Of these three types, descriptive literary reviews, such as integrative reviews and scoping studies, are the most commonly used with their general nature with a wide range of materials and looser selection criteria. This kind of approach is suitable for reviewing and describing the state of new research fields like social work informatics and e-services in social work (Laaksonen et al., 2010, p. 26).

The methodological choice for this paper was a scoping study (or a scoping review). As Arksey and O'Malley (2005) describe, scoping studies are suitable for rapidly mapping the key concepts and the main sources and types of available information of a research area. The synthesis and analysis can be directed to a large range of research and also non-research materials, aiming at providing an overview of the breadth rather than depth of the information (Davis, Drey, & Gould, 2009, pp. 1386–1387). In this study, the scarcity of criteria-filling scientific papers turned the focus from research articles to a wider range of materials like grey literature (that is to say reports and other materials often produced in research and development projects). In addition to that, the contents of municipalities' web pages were also examined in order to map the types and prevalence of e-services – one essential application of the information that was reviewed.

There is no single set definition of a scoping study. However, the common characteristics of scoping studies are as follows:

- the tendency to map nature and amount of evidence to reveal the breadth and depth of research activity;
- not typically aiming at formal quality assessment of reviewed studies;
- can be used as a preliminary assessment before a more systematic literature review;
- ongoing research is often included (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005; Grant & Booth, 2009; Levac, Colquhoun, & O'Brien, 2010).

Due to the limited time and effort used in execution and the exiguity of quality assessment of findings, scoping studies should not be regarded as thorough and extensive analyses of the research field (Grant & Booth, 2009, p. 101). Instead, they offer a lighter, more “quick and dirty” version of a review than for example systematic reviews, and are suitable for exploring the fields less researched by identifying the main themes, sources of evidence and gaps in research (Grimshaw, 2010; Levac et al., 2010).

Execution of the study

The aim of this study is to examine the range of social work and ICT-related publications, projects and e-services in the area of Northern Finland (in Lapland and Northern Ostrobothnia). The exact objectives are as follows:

1. to find out the scope, nature and extent of publications where social work, ICTs and Northern Finland are on view,
2. to explore the range and volume of research and development projects where social work and ICTs are connected and which are situated in Northern Finland, and
3. to map what kind of social work e-services the municipalities of Northern Finland offer to their inhabitants and how prevalent they are.

To stress the easy availability and accessibility of information and the possibilities for continuity of the research and development in the field, the data selection was restricted to the information that was available over the Internet. On the part of e-services, projects and grey literature, data was sought by searching the www-pages of relevant essential actors of social work from the area (municipalities, federations of municipalities, social work-related organizations and associations, Northern Finland Centre of Excellence on Social Welfare (Poske), universities and universities of applied sciences of the area, and other relevant organizations) and by googling different combinations of keywords. On the part of scientific research, the e-publications that were available through the University of Lapland's library were also included. The publication dates or duration of projects was restricted to include years from 2000 to the present, and the only languages included were Finnish and English. A flow chart of the data selection process is presented in Figure 7.1.

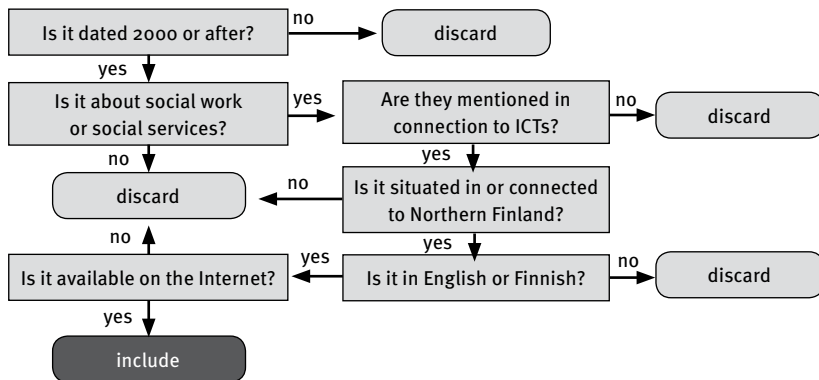


Figure 7.1. Flow chart of inclusion and exclusion process of the scoping study. Adapted from Koehn, Neysmith, Kobayashi and Khamisa (2013, p. 443).

The search terms used in the data selection were as follows: social work, social service, ICT, IT, technology, Finland, Lapland, North, Northern Finland and their Finnish counterparts. These terms were used both as single terms and in combinations to expand and narrow searches. Browsing the pre-selected www-pages and following links in them also broadened the search as after initial searches, the scarcity of the findings became evident. In addition to searches, e-publications and e-theses of the universities of the area were browsed in departments of social sciences, as well as following e-publication databases accessed via the University of Lapland: Ebsco, Elsevier, DOAJ, JSTOR Arts & Sciences, SAGE journals and SpringerLink. Grey literature was searched both by using search engines and by browsing the www-pages and looking up projects, and after that by searching with the name of the project if the project had any information pages on the Internet. As Levac et al. (2010, p. 4) suggest, this stage of the scoping study was an iterative process as searching strategies and combinations of search terms were refined during the process.

After the data searching was completed, the findings were charted. Publications and research and development projects were reviewed and divided into six categories by their theme. The themes were partly overlapping, since for example one project could contain contents of several themes, so secondary themes were listed as well as a primary theme for the projects, whereas publications were assessed to represent only one category. A total of 36 publications was included, grey literature being the most common type of publication. The amount and types of publications are summarized in Table 7.1. Information about e-services in the municipalities of the area is discussed in Chapter 7.4.

Table 7.1. Included literature by type of publication.

Type of publication	Total: 36		
Journal articles	English: 2	Finnish: 2	4
Theses	Master's: 11	Bachelor's: 3	Master's (of Social Services): 1 15
Grey literature	Project reports: 10	Project publications: 5	Other publications in series: 2 17

A total of 46 research or development projects that fit the same selection criteria as with the publications (depicted in Figure 7.1) were found from the

reviewed www-pages. Unfortunately, only a few of them had any publications listed and available on the Internet. The inclusion or exclusion of projects was done on the basis of the descriptions in either municipalities or other reviewed organizations' www-pages or projects' own www-pages, if the project did not proffer any publications.

Due to the interconnectedness of projects and non-scientific publications, Chapter 7.3 presents the findings of both the literature review and mapping of the projects under the perceived categories. The focus of the chapter is on the literature, whereas the projects offer additional viewpoints to the amount of development work in the field.

7.3 SOCIAL WORK AND ICTS IN NORTHERN FINLAND – FINDINGS OF THE SCOPING

The development of social work with ICTs in Lapland and Northern Ostrobothnia appears to be led by a few organizations. In the area of Lapland, the influence of Poske is remarkable since they organize project work, publish and act as administrators in an e-consulting and online-counselling service (as described further in Chapter 5). Similarly, in the area of Northern Ostrobothnia, the city of Oulu is a strong developer in the field of e-services, but information about the results of the development work in the form of publications proved hard to access compared to the works of Poske.

In this chapter, I present the findings of the scoping study by the categories found. The order of the presentation follows the amount of included literature in each category. The categories with two publications or less were merged into the category of "other". The included literature is summarized in Table 7.2.

Table 7.2. A summary of the 36 included publications by categories.

Category	Authors	Type of publication	Topic
eConsulting and online-counselling	Herkkuja PaKasteesta-työkalukirja (2013)	Project publication	Results of the PaKaste project, including e-consulting and online counselling
	Mehtälä (2012)	Project report	Video conferencing as e-consulting tool
	Mehtälä (2013)	Project report	eConsulting on disability services
	Okkonen et al. (2011)	Project report	eConsulting, e-services and video conferencing developed in UULA project
	PaKaste (2011a)	Project report	SW development work in PaKaste project, including e-consulting
	PaKaste (2011b)	Project report	Final report of PaKaste project
	PaKaste2 (2013)	Project report	PaKaste2 project, includes e-consulting and online-counselling
	Neijonen (2009)	Master's thesis	Online-counselling from the viewpoint of clientship
	Nikunlassi (2008)	Publication in series	Norm base and execution of online-counselling
	Seppälä (2009)	Master's thesis	Social workers' experiences of online-counselling
Work with the aged	Vesterinen (ed.) (2009a)	Publication in series	Online-counselling developed by Poske
	Alaniva et al. (2007)	Project publication	Elderly home care solutions from eRural-project
	Jumisko et al. (eds.) (2013)	Project publication	Publication of IkäEhyt project, including case management and service design
	Kairala (ed.) (2009)	Project publication	Includes an article on Poske's e-consulting
	Mäki (2011)	Project publication	Gerotechnology projects in Finland
	Ruotsalainen (2012)	Master's thesis	Aged people as participants in service design
	Väyrynen et al. (2006)	Journal article	Evaluation of HomeHelper video telephone system
eServices	Elsilä (2011)	Bachelor's thesis	Clients' and professionals' experiences of e-services
	Kilpeläinen (2012)	Journal article	The construction of knowledge in the research on technology-mediated welfare services in villages
	Merivirta (2013)	Project report	The present state and development of e-services in the municipalities of Lapland
	Siekinen (2013)	Master's thesis	The effects of IT on social work client work
	Tuohinto (2012)	Bachelor's thesis	eServices for assessing labour force service centre clients' need for services

Category	Authors	Type of publication	Topic
eCompetence in social work	Allila & Koskenkangas (2011)	Master's thesis	Youth social work on the web
	Anttila & Liimatta (2011)	Journal article	Online data security and privacy protection training for social work personnel
	Iisakka (2011)	Master of Social Services' thesis	Virtual team working in Social Insurance Institution
	Jormalainen (2005)	Master's thesis	Social workers' outlook on IT in their work
	Ohtonen (2011)	Master's thesis	Questions and answers on online-counselling from the viewpoint of e-competence
	Ukkola (2012)	Master's thesis	Social workers' experiences of youth social work on the web
Rurality	Aikio-Mustonen et al. (2006)	Project report	Developing social work in rural Lapland, using e-consultation to support social workers
	Kilpeläinen & Nikunlassi (2006)	Project publication	Projects in developing welfare services in Lappish villages
	Kilpeläinen & Seppänen (2014)	Journal article	People's use of IT in remote villages
Other	Edzen et al. (2013)	Project publication	Virtual campus of an international SW education program
	Karppinen & Paananen (2008)	Bachelor's thesis	Possibilities of Internet based self-help support groups
	Laitinen (2013)	Master's thesis	The role of information systems in the documentation of child welfare client work
	Lätti & Tiiro (2012)	Master's thesis	The visibility of clientship in empowering social work plans made in an electric client information system
	Partanen (2012)	Master's thesis	Blogs as a source of online peer support to childless women

The research and development projects (summarized in Attachment 1) are discussed in connection with the publications of each category for those projects where sufficient information could be found. However, it should be noted that only those projects' publications that are connected to both ICTs and Northern Finland to some extent and also have a connection to social work are presented here. Furthermore, all publications that were not available on the Internet were not included.

eConsulting and online-counselling – sharing the knowledge for social care professionals and for the citizens

eConsulting between social and health care professionals and online-counselling between professionals and citizens have been leading the development of social work e-services in Northern Finland. Consultation and counselling have been offered either using written, secured messaging over the Internet, or by video conferencing.

Poske launched e-consulting in child welfare in autumn 2003, followed the next year by legal matter services and early childhood education (Vesterinen, 2007b, p. 23). It provides social and health care workers with an opportunity to get consultation help from so-called e-consults, a group of experts. This makes better client service also possible in sparsely populated areas where individual professionals cannot possess specific knowledge in every field they face in their work (Herkkuja PaKasteesta -työkälukirja, 2013, p. 79; Okkonen, Anttila, Pirttijärvi, Liimatta, & Paananen, 2011, p. 9; PaKaste 2011b; Vesterinen, 2007a). In 2011, e-consulting was available in the areas of child welfare, work with the disabled, social work with adults, welfare for intoxicant users, work with the aged, and early childhood education, of which child welfare and work with the disabled were the most popular with 10 questions each during the time period of six months (PaKaste, 2011a, pp. 6–7). The development of the service has been continued after promising initial experiences (PaKaste2, 2013, p. 17).

In addition to written e-consulting, consulting via video conferencing is also used. The UULA-project (New services and operational models in Lapland) worked on developing social and health care e-services in Northern Finland, having a central role in both developing the video consulting in the Virtual Social and Health Care Centre's service and other professional video conferencing activities (Okkonen et al., 2011; Peteri, in Chapter 5 in this publication). During the project, video conferencing equipment was renewed and personnel trained to use them in all social and health care units in Lapland. The aim of the project was to support and increase the use of video conferencing between professionals to enable professional consultations, personal and group guidance and networking between professionals (Okkonen et al., 2011, p. 20).

Implementation of the e-consulting, especially via video conferencing, has not been without technical difficulties and know-how deficits. Even so, the client feedback has been positive, because the visual connection has been considered a positive factor when compared to distance consulting via

telephone connection (Mehtälä, 2012, p. 14). Unfortunately, in some cases the limitedness of resources is a hindrance to rooting the use of technology into practice after the development projects are over (Mehtälä, 2013, p. 9).

In addition to those mentioned above, e-consulting via video conferencing or written messages via protected connections have also been promoted in some other development projects in Lapland. It has been used for example in work with the aged (“Ikäihminen toimijana”, 2013), welfare for intoxicant users (“Hyvinvointi hakusessa”, 2014; “Päihdetyön kehittämissyksikkö 2008–2009”, 2013), child welfare (Aikio-Mustonen, Kumpula, Niskala, Kostamo-Pääkkö, & Salminen, 2006), work with the disabled (Mehtälä, 2012, p. 14) and work with the speech and hearing impaired (“Etäteknologia tuo tulkin...”, 2012) to ensure that health and social care workers in small municipalities are also not alone with their information needs. In addition to that, the benefits of e-consulting and the use of video conferencing include the reduced need for travelling, which saves time and money, and also increases the number of participants when compared to situations where remote participation is not an option (Okkonen et al., 2011, p. 20).

The piloting of an online-counselling service, which gives citizens opportunities to receive counselling from social and health care professionals, started in the town of Kemijärvi in 2005, as the first of this kind of social work e-service in Finland (Nikunlassi, 2008, p. 6). During the next years, the service was also gradually taken into use in many other Lapp municipalities and became part of the established operations of Poske (Nikunlassi, 2008; Okkonen et al., 2011). In the Lappish area, the service is also available in Sami language (Pakaste, 2011a, p. 9). The online-counselling is technically based on the e-consulting service and expanded to also contain client service (Herkkuja PaKasteesta -työkalukirja, 2013, p. 79).

The idea behind the online-counselling is to give citizens a data secure way of using written messages to ask about social services and benefits or to get advice for their problems from social and health care professionals. The service also aims at improving the attainability of social care workers, also in remote areas and in small municipalities. The focus is on preventative work and client relationship to social care is not required. Questions could be sent either anonymously or by electric identification by using banking credentials or an electronic identity card. An answer from a professional is sent within a week of receiving a question (Herkkuja PaKasteesta -työkalukirja, 2013, pp. 79–80; Nikunlassi, 2008; Okkonen et al., 2011; PaKaste2, 2013, p. 18).

Online-counselling has been studied from the viewpoints of e-competence of the social care workers who are answering the questions (Ohtonen, 2011), clienthood (Neijonen, 2009), and client process from the social worker's viewpoint (Seppälä, 2009). Both e-counselling and online-consulting are part of the Virtual Social and Health Care Centre's (www.virtu.fi) services. The portal is maintained by Poske, but each municipality that offers services through it has individual selection of services that it offers. In addition to Poske's portal, one federation of municipalities also has its own social and health care portal called NettiRassi (<https://www.nettirassi.fi>), where e-counselling is offered to citizens of that area.

Work with aged people

In Northern Finland, the population is decreasing, but the proportion of the aged is increasing more than in the south (see Chapter 2, Figure 2.2, in this publication). Addressing this development and the stress it puts on the offering of welfare services in the area has been on the agenda of many research and development projects. Some of the publications introduced here could also be categorized under the theme *rurality*, and vice versa, but the division has been made on the basis of the main stress of each publication.

On the national level, the KÄKÄTE-project (2010–2015) has been conducting extensive work in the field of gerotechnology and e-services for the aged. Also the municipalities of the North have been taking part in the activities of the project, although the majority of the project's publications lack an explicit connection to Northern Finland, and thus, are not included in the literature of this article. An exception to this is a report by Mäki (2011), which introduces the development projects of gerotechnology in Finland, including activities also done in Northern Finland.

The projects and publications concerning the older people can be divided into three groups. The first one covers developing technology-mediated social and health care services to help independently living older people in rural areas cope (see, e.g. Alaniva, Partanen, Kairala, & Paakkolanvaara, 2007). The second group consists of developing video conferencing and "video telephone" systems to support older people's social contacts and access to the services (Aikio, 2013; Kairala, 2009; Väyrynen, Röning, & Alakärppä, 2006; Ikäihminen toimijana, 2013). The third group of projects aims at strengthening the participation and involvement of older people in the control of their everyday life and in designing

and developing the welfare services they need (Jumisko, Jänkälä, Piekkari, & Turulin, 2013; Kairala, 2009; Ruotsalainen, 2012). The tools for this work are, for example, case management and service design (Jumisko et al., 2013).

Developing e-services

In this category, by the term e-services I mean other than e-consulting and online-counselling. On a national level, the development of e-services in social and health care has been one essential goal of the Program of the Finnish Government (2011). At the moment, in the municipalities of Northern Finland, the availability of e-services in social and health care is more or less in favour of health services – the “social” seems to be lagging behind in this development (Okkonen et al., 2011).

In Lapland and especially in the region of Oulu, Northern Ostrobothnia, there have been several interconnected e-service development projects, but most of them do not have any available publications. For example, in the project plan of Hywe (2010), three research articles were promised by the end of 2013, but none were found in this scoping study because the www-pages of the project were no longer available.

The present state and future development of e-services in Lapland is examined by Merivirta (2013). Siekkinen (2013) discusses how information technology affects social work client work in general, whereas Elsilä (2011) studied clients’ and employees’ experiences of the e-services of the Social Insurance Institution, and Tuohinto (2012) studied clients’ experiences of e-services in the Labour Force Service Centre. Kilpeläinen (2012) scrutinizes how the knowledge is constructed in the research on technology mediated welfare services in villages. The development and use of so-called virtual service points are described in Chapter 5 in this publication.

Increasing social work professionals’ e-competence

To make e-services workable, the employees in social care need to possess a certain level of e-competence. Publications and projects in this category approach the subject from two standpoints: by assessing the prevailing level of e-competence and by working on increasing it.

Ohtonen (2011) examined how e-competence shows and is needed in the answers of the online-counselling service of the city of Rovaniemi. Both the

mastery of substance knowledge and ICTs is required in the work. Jormalainen (2005) studied how social workers see ICTs in their work and how they both need it in daily work, and are frustrated if the use of it does not go as smoothly as it should. The study showed how some social workers lacked the e-competence skills and thus were encumbered by the use of technology. On the other hand, in the Social Insurance Institution's virtual working team, the needed e-competence was in use and the experiences of the working method were positive (Iisakka, 2011).

In one field of social work in particular e-competence is needed as the clients are already competent and natural users of the Internet and e-services – that is youth social work. Virtual worlds and social media services that the young use are in constant change, and if outreaching social work wants to find the young people in need of its services, the readiness and willingness of the employees to constantly develop their e-competencies must be high. Alila and Koskenkangas (2011) studied what kind of activity youth social work on the web is as a form of youth social work. Ukkola (2012) revealed how social care workers experience interaction in youth social work on the web and what kind of know-how is needed.

Seutupilotti project (2003, p. 26) emphasised the social workers' need for e-competence especially in Lapland where the advantages of e-services and other technological solutions can be great because of the long distances and possible lack of colleagues in the same post. The University of Lapland has been offering master's degree programs where social work and ICTs are connected since 2005. For a description of the current program, see Chapter 8 in this publication. On a smaller scale, Anttila and Liimatta (2011) describe how data security and privacy protection training is needed as a basic skill for all social care personnel, and this is offered as an online course.

Living and wellbeing in rural areas

Although most of Finland can be considered as rural when compared internationally, this is especially true of Northern Finland. The long distances and sparse population make offering face-to-face welfare services expensive, but ICTs offer new ways to overcome the distances.

Rurality is a theme that can also be found in many works in the previous categories about e-consulting and online-counselling, aged people, e-services and e-competence. Kylä – elämän keskus was a coalition of six independent projects between 2003 and 2007, concentrating on developing welfare in

12 villages in Lapland by project work (Kilpeläinen & Nikunlassi, 2006). In the projects, different kinds of technology based service models were developed in co-operation between municipalities.

From the individual villager's point of view, Kilpeläinen and Seppänen (2014) described what the role of ICTs is in everyday life in ageing rural villages. Aikio-Mustonen et al. (2006) concentrate on the use of ICTs to support social workers' work in rural Lapland, whereas Alaniva et al. (2007) aimed at improving the e-services for the ageing population in sparsely populated areas. The overarching desire of all the research and development in this category is the wish to maintain rural areas as habitable areas where experiences of the good life are possible.

Other

The last category is a collection of publications not apt for earlier categories. Partanen (2012) as well as Karppinen and Paananen (2008) studied the possibilities of social media for self-help and online peer support. Laitinen (2013) examined what role information systems have in the documentation of child welfare client work. Lätti and Tiiri (2012) studied how clientship is visible in empowering social work plans made in an electric client information system.

Also two educational projects are included in this category. The BCBU+ Handbook describes how a virtual cross-border campus is established in the master's degree program of comparative social work (Edzen et al., 2013). Lapland's Centre for Social Work and Social Care Education and Research (<http://www.luc.fi/sociopolis/Opetus--ja-tutkimuskeskus>) aims at strengthening the co-operation between the educational institutions and practice of the field, using new technology in its operations (Lapin sosiaalityön ..., n.d.).

7.4 AVAILABLE SOCIAL WORK E-SERVICES IN NORTHERN FINLAND

In pursuance of browsing the www-pages of municipalities in search of information about projects and publications, the availability of social work e-services was also explored. In the previous chapter, the research and development work in the field was reviewed. But to what degree has the work done and know-how gained from the projects rooted into established practice in the social services of the area?

A total of 50 municipalities – 21 from Lapland and 29 from Northern Ostrobothnia – were covered. As one municipality from Lapland and 15 municipalities from Northern Ostrobothnia bought their social and health care services from a federation of municipalities, the www-pages of five federations were also examined. All information of the e-services here is gathered from those www-pages, so the e-services found are mainly for client-to-professional interaction, not for the professional-to-professional transaction. Only two municipalities mention on their pages that their health and social care employees can use an e-consulting service.

The most common form of e-service found in the review was e-counseling for social and health care clients. Nine municipalities in Lapland used the virtu.fi-service, while three municipalities in Northern Ostrobothnia offered e-counseling through one of the e-services of the federation of municipalities, Nettirassi. One municipality had its own information and e-counseling service for the young and one municipality stated on its www-pages that the e-counseling was under development but not yet available.

Social work's e-services that enabled actual clienthood over the Internet were offered in only four municipalities – two of them offered it through the same federation of municipalities' e-service. The lack of possibilities for clienthood via e-services in social care was a bit peculiar in those eight municipalities and two federations of municipalities where the e-services were indeed offered under the Department of Social and Health Care – but on offer were only services for health care. This was the case despite the fact that the same e-service platform also offered options for social care services.

In addition to the above-mentioned e-services, there were two informative pages that were linked from the social care pages of a few municipalities in Lapland. The first one was IkäTupa (AgeRoom) developed in the IkäEhyt project to service guidance for aged inhabitants of five municipalities in Lapland. The second was a wiki called Kansalaisen käsikirja (Citizen's Handbook) that two municipalities in Northern Ostrobothnia had linked to their www-pages. It offered information, printable forms and e-services for health care, but again not for social care.

All but two municipalities offered printable forms to their citizens for returning by mail. Some municipalities did not even allow contacting the social care employees by email, only phone numbers were available.

In conclusion, Poske has contributed a lot to e-services in health and social care in Lapland. Via the virtu.fi-pages, both e-consulting for social work

professionals as well as e-services for citizens are available – although at the moment social care only has online-consultation available, not e-services enabling clienthood yet. In Northern Ostrobothnia, one federation of municipalities was offering e-services to the citizens.

Since health care is already using e-services in a more widespread way also in Northern Finland and there are already service platforms available, it could be assumed that social care will also eventually follow this trend of development. At the moment, the most common level of making good use of ICTs in social care services is to offer forms on the municipalities' www-pages to be printed and filled in by hand. Only four of all 50 municipalities gave an option to return those forms over the Internet. It was also interesting to notice that some of the municipalities had taken into use the Citizen's account-service (<https://asiointitili.suomi.fi/>), but again, from social and health care, only "the health" was using it in most cases.

7.5 DISCUSSION

The scoping study illustrated that there are quite wide-ranging development activities of ICT-mediated social work in Northern Finland. Of the 50 municipalities in the area, 24 had mentions about research or development projects in the field on their www-pages. From the other organizations, Poske and the institutions of higher education were the most active actors in research and development of e-social work. However, as was the case over half a decade ago (Päykkönen & Pohjola, 2007), it still often seems to be the case that it is challenging to gain benefits of the work already done elsewhere and establish the accomplishments of the projects to permanent operations. On the other hand, there are also bigger coalitions of projects and co-operation between the projects, and therefore knowledge sharing and continuation in the development (e.g. Kilpeläinen & Nikunlassi, 2006; development projects of Poske (<http://www.sosiaalikallega.fi/hankkeet>); development projects of the city of Oulu (<http://www.ouka.fi/oulu/kehittamishankkeet/hanketietokanta>).

This article focused on the easy availability and accessibility of information and included only the publications and information about projects and social care e-services found over the Internet. It was bothersome to discover how many www-pages had only broken links that showed how once public knowledge gathered from the project work was no longer available. In those

cases, the work done in projects is not visible after the project funding is over. One typical, yet at the same time amusing example of this phenomenon is the eRural project. The project ended in 2007, and now the link to the former www-pages of the project leads to the website of a Californian dieting firm, which has bought the domain name sustainable-health.org.

It should be noted, though, that there might be many other publications and projects in the field on the Internet that were not found in this scoping study. The importance of the choice of keywords in searching information and also in keywords of the publications and meta tags of the www-pages is crucial if the goal is to make knowledge accessible and easy to find on the Internet. In the process of this study, there were times when someone recalled that somebody had studied a certain subject, but information about it could not be found.

On the part of e-services, the supply in social care in Northern Finland is still quite low, apart from e-counselling and online-consulting. This is peculiar considering that social and health care are bundled together on the www-pages of municipalities and the e-service platforms are already available and in use – in health care. By the end of 2011, one-fourth of Finnish municipalities offered their inhabitants social services as e-services (Kärki, Laaksonen, & Hyppönen, 2012). In those municipalities where e-services were available, about half of the clients chose them for their transactions (*ibid.*). Hence, there are willing clients, technical solutions and economic incentives to offer more e-services, especially in sparsely populated areas. Is the e-competence in social work the lacking component in mobilizing and further developing the e-services?

Connecting eCompetence Skills to Social Work: The SIMO III Case as an eEducation Project

8.1 INTRODUCTION

The Finnish social protection system is based on comprehensive collective responsibility. According to welfare state principles, social services are universal and are based on the Constitution (731/1999). Municipalities are responsible for the arrangement of social and health care services. Services are mainly funded by taxes, which means that they are not charged to the recipient at the going market rate. The values of service delivery are equality and equity, and citizens' and residents' rights are grounded in legislation. As a result of contemporary societal changes and strains (economy, efficiency, and effectiveness), the aim of the Finnish policy is to produce more e-services – that is, services provided through the Internet. This process creates the need for e-competence in social work and the education of social workers.

In Finland, it is possible to study social work at six different universities. The extent and content of the degree are largely defined by the Act on Qualification Requirements for Social Welfare Professionals (272/2005; 3 §). To become a qualified social worker, students have to complete a master's degree that includes basic, intermediate, and advanced studies in social work. Every university has its own study guide that it can design and fine-tune autonomously. Owing to the aforementioned changes in society, the education system has to renew itself and provide skills that resonate with these changing needs.

In this paper, we first provide an overview of the history of social work education in Finland. The focus of this paper is on the Master's Degree Program of e-Competence in Social Work (SIMO III), which is funded

primarily by the European Social Fund (ESF). We will present this programme and the methods used during its execution and then evaluate the programme in its last few months. Finally, the paper discusses the importance of integrating e-competence into social work education. The use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) by themselves in e-learning provides the skills to understand, as well as the courage to apply and use, ICTs in social work after graduation.

8.2 A SHORT INTRODUCTION TO SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION IN FINLAND

The starting point of social work education in Finland can be traced to the end of the 1920s in Tampere. Since then, it has continued to develop. Social work education officially began in 1942 at the very same institution of higher education in Tampere. In the 1970s, social work education reached the master's degree level (Kemppainen, 2006, pp. 233–235). In 2005, education was divided into the two levels – the bachelor's (180 ECTS, three years) and the master's (120 ECTS, two years) – based on the Government Decree on University Degrees (794/2004). However, a social work qualification comprises both degrees; one is insufficient. Qualified social worker status in Finland is regulated by the Act on Qualification Requirements for Social Welfare Professionals (272/2005; 3 §). In summary, qualified social workers must complete a master's thesis, and social instructors must complete a bachelor's degree (Seppänen, 2008, pp. 15–16).

In Finland today, social work education is offered at six universities: the University of Helsinki, University of Turku, University of Tampere, University of Jyväskylä, University of Eastern Finland (University of Kuopio prior to 2010) and the University of Lapland. These universities are also responsible for formulating the national Sosnet network – that is, the Finnish National University Network for Social work (www.sosnet.fi).

Universities can define and organise their education independently. However, the basic lines are defined at the national level. Therefore, at the national level, studies are fairly alike at all six universities. In addition, the master's thesis has to be completed before one is considered qualified. Social work studies at Finnish universities are based on a combination of research, teaching and practice. The main purpose of the education is to provide the readiness and

skills necessary to solve problems scientifically, to reason and to argue decisions, statements, propositions and viewpoints in the complex society of the contemporary world. Social work studies consist of basic, intermediate and advanced studies. At every level, there is a period that includes field work, which is geared towards combining theoretical and practical knowledge. Through this kind of deepening of education and skills, it is possible to achieve the level of professional expertise necessary to develop social work into a scientific profession that has its footing in real-time research. Students get a sense of the diverse problems that people encounter in their everyday lives and how to support them in their efforts to solve these issues.

Studying social work at the university level provides various possibilities for students to have an impact as professionals after their graduation. One of the social worker's tasks is to impact living conditions at the structural level. Hence, social work practice involves the importance of prevention and attempts to impact local and national welfare policies. Producing and applying information is one of the main tools used to conduct structural social work. Therefore, having an awareness of the social sciences in general is important. Students have various opportunities to choose minor subjects at each of the six universities; this enables them to widen their knowledge and skills as qualified professional social workers after graduation. Social workers can continue their studies to the level of licentiate, professional licentiate and doctoral degree.

Social work education provides a wide repertoire of skills. After graduating, social work students are ready to act as professional social workers who are responsible for different tasks at the individual, community and societal levels. They are also able to work as actors who influence local, national and international welfare policy. Social workers can become employed to universities or research organisations. These positions provide them with opportunities to produce knowledge-based information for decision-makers at every level. Social workers may also be given useful opportunities to work on different kinds of projects.

However, the changes that are taking place in society have been immense. Individuals' needs and habits related to the use of services have changed. People, especially youth and young adults, increasingly require and use services on the Internet. The Internet has made knowledge more accessible and resulted in people becoming more aware of their rights. The service system in Finland is also facing a number of changes. In recent decades, the importance of valid

knowledge is increasing as are the attempts to improve the productivity of services. Labour markets have also changed. Earlier careers were long and permanent; however, these days, temporary part-time contracts seem to be more common (see Matthies, 2011). The need for social services can arise suddenly as people's situations and lives are changing rapidly. At the same time, even the supply of basic services is questioned, which occurs primarily because of the rising costs and difficulties associated with covering all the expenditures of the welfare service system (Strauss, 2008). Information and communication technology is seen as one solution that diminishes the costs of supplying services (e.g. Okkonen, Anttila, Pirttijärvi, Liimatta, & Paananen, 2011). Contrastingly, the skills required to use technology have not increased at the same pace as technology-based services among authorities such as social workers (Perron, Taylor, Glass, & Margerum-Leys, 2010, pp. 68–69). This kind of development has led to the need to include the study of e-competences in social work education. The SIMO III programme is one attempt to respond to the increasing needs of social work practices.

8.3 MASTER'S DEGREE PROGRAM OF E-COMPETENCE IN SOCIAL WORK

The combination of social work education and ICTs is a fairly rare coupling worldwide, although the need for this kind of competence has been recognised for over a decade (see, e.g., Parker-Oliver & Demiris, 2006; van Lieshout & Schrijen, 1999). In Finland, two universities have organised this kind of educational programme. The University of Eastern Finland has offered a Master's Programme in Health and Human Services Informatics since 2000. The only training programmes that provide social worker qualifications combined with competence in information technology have been the three master's degree programmes organised by the University of Lapland. The main financier of these programmes has been the ESF. The first Master's Degree Program of Social Work and Information Technology (SIMO) was offered in 2005–2008, followed by SIMO II in 2008–2011. Learning from the experiences of these earlier programmes and refining the contents and methods of implementation, the Master's Degree Program of e-Competence in Social Work (SIMO III) was launched in the autumn of 2011. The project was funded by the ESF, 13 Ostrobothnian municipalities, one federation of

municipalities, one association called the Friends of the Young and the University of Lapland. The programme is organised by the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Lapland.

The intake for the SIMO III programme was 25 students, who had at least completed some subject level studies in social work and a bachelor's or master's degree in any subject. The gender distribution follows that of social work in general: 23 of the students are women. This can be seen as a positive phenomenon from the viewpoint of ICTs being a traditionally male-dominated field. Most of the students work while they study, which creates challenges for them regarding their time management. The use of e-learning technologies combined with the tendency to offer contact education (either face to face or via web conferencing) in the evenings and on weekends aims to make it possible to both study and work full time.

The studies consist of basic- (25 ECTS), subject- (54 ECTS), and advanced-level (120 ECTS) studies of social work combined with information technology courses (38 ECTS). The language and methodology studies that are required are the same as those in other master's studies in the Faculty of Social Sciences. The students graduate to the Master of Social Sciences majoring in social work, and they are thus qualified social workers. The programme's aim is the achievement of *dual competence*; therefore, the studies enable students to readily understand, apply and develop various methods of carrying out social work using new technology and utilising ICTs in social work practice.

The amount of information technology in the programme is not sufficiently substantial to equip the students with the necessary skills to work as ICT professionals – for example, as programmers. Rather, it aims to give students the know-how to act as mediators between social workers and developers of information systems, to understand what is possible and how, and to have knowledge of what characteristics of the work should be brought out to ensure that social work is enhanced, not restricted, by technological innovations.

The programme is offered in Oulu, the capital of Northern Ostrobothnia, while the University of Lapland is located in Rovaniemi, which is 220 km away. Even if Oulu is one of the biggest cities in Finland, the northern region of the country is generally a sparsely populated area. Therefore, some students have long distances to travel to Oulu, where face-to-face -learning takes place. Both the geographic challenges and the theme of the programme (e-competence) are the reasons why e-learning is widely used in teaching and learning. The varied use of different kinds of technologies also familiarises the students

with them during their studies. Hence, the students are able to transfer these experiences, studying practices and skills to their working life later on. In addition, this kind of learning enables them to save on travel expenses, eases time management pressures and supports sustainable development because it requires less driving.

SIMO III was organised through contact learning, blended learning that combines contact and e-learning, distance learning, autonomous work in the form of written assignments and two periods (5 and 10 weeks) of social work practice training. In most cases, the students have the option to participate in contact teaching either by attending face-to-face meetings in Oulu or by being virtually present via web conferencing from their own computers. Two types of web conferencing software are used to enable teleparticipation: Adobe Connect and iLinc. Although the latter is used less than the former, both essentially have the same functionality. There is also the option of watching some of the recorded lectures later in one's own time via the Internet, especially if the lecture is being held during office hours when participation is difficult for students who also work. Typically, teaching arrangements enable both online and face-to-face contact learning events, as evidenced in Figures 8.1 and 8.2.



Figure 8.1. A pair of students presenting their work to a face-to-face group and to distance-learning participants in front of a webcam. Photo: Arja Kilpeläinen.

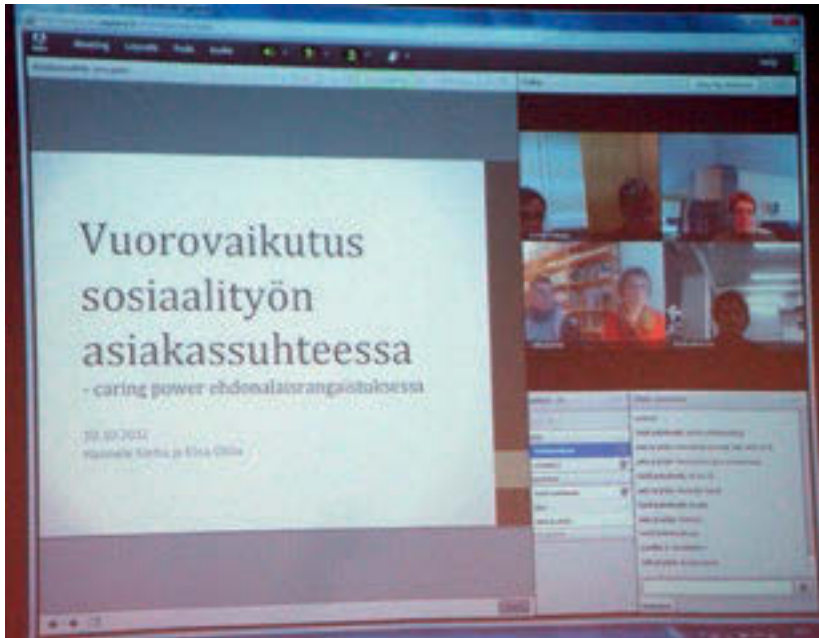


Figure 8.2. The web-conferencing software is projected onto a big screen in the classroom so that face-to-face students can see distance-learning participants as well as presentations. Photo: Arja Kilpeläinen.

Communication between teachers and students takes place primarily in an online learning environment called Discendum Optima (hereafter shortened to “Optima”). One advantage of using discussion areas in Optima compared to the use of e-mail or phone calls is the fact that the questions and answers are published for all students in the programme (or an individual course, if the discussion area of the course is used). In this way, all the other students are able to obtain the information and often advise each other or join the discussion by expressing their own opinions of the matter at hand. The second advantage is that the discussions are stored and easily readable later if the matter arises again or if the agreements need to be rechecked. Students also leave their written assignments in Optima folders. Therefore, there is no need for printing.

For the group work, various kinds of social media services, such as wikis, are used in addition to collaborative working platforms in Optima. Again, by using social media in their studies, the students become accustomed to the

various kinds of services available and are able to transfer these skills to their work. Thus, both these learning methods and the contents of the lectures build students' e-competence.

8.4 LESSONS LEARNED FROM SIMO III

The premises of the SIMO III programme were challenging. Due to the late call for funding the ESF programme, the execution time for the programme was intended to be only two and a half years, although master's studies are optimally completed in three years if the studies are full time. This challenge, combined with the fact that most of the students also work full time, made it difficult to complete the studies in time, although the first student who graduated from the programme was able to do so in two years. Fortunately, the project budget allowed for an extended period of 10 months for completion of the programme.

The tight study schedule combined with the various changes that occurred in students' private lives and working careers have delayed some students' completion of their studies. In general, combining one's work, studies and personal life is challenging, and the extent of the effort required might have come as a surprise to some students. To ensure that all students graduate, even after the end of the project, participants will be entitled to continue their studies as social work degree students at the University of Lapland.

Based on the student feedback gathered in December 2012, the possibility of studying and working simultaneously was one major reason why the students had applied for entry to the SIMO III programme. The use of e-learning technologies and different options for participating in the courses should enable students more free time. In some cases, it even makes their participation in studies possible at times when commuting to face-to-face learning events would be unfeasible. Although the technology does not always work as planned (for example, all of us who are familiar with video conferencing are probably also familiar with unstable connections and the difficulties of audio-visual settings), student feedback on web conferencing, recorded lectures and other e-learning choices has been positive. In fact, the students have stated their wish for even more flexible choices for studying and utilising ICTs in teaching. Distance-learning participants in courses alongside face-to-face groups require e-competence on the part of teachers as well as students, and the methods of teaching and learning are still developing.

I myself participated both live and via the Internet, and my experiences with both options were good. Though as a distance participant, you are more in the background, and when discussions are going on, it takes a while to get your comment through; so often the discussion had moved to the next topic when my comment appeared to others. The teachers did their best to cater to the distant participants... no complaints about that. (Student feedback from a literature seminar)

In a fast-paced master's degree programme, the students' motivation is crucial to their success in their studies. Peer support as a resource for motivation and prodding to complete the courses was mentioned several times both in common SIMO III feedback and in the feedback for individual courses. Due to the varied backgrounds of the students, each proceeded individually according to his or her personal curriculum. The core group was coherent; however, some of the students did not get to know each other very well. In future, it might help group building to increase contact education among the entire master's degree program at the start of their studies before more independent and varied learning methods begin.

In addition to giving support and motivation, peers also receive opportunities to learn from each other. The idea of collaborative learning (Mäkitalo, Weinberger, Häkkinen, Järvelä, & Fisher, 2005) is evident in this programme. Using collaborative learning methods, students study as a group and have shared aims as they work – for example, to clarify social work theories and practices. Adult students have numerous kinds of skills and know-how to share with their fellow students and their teachers as well. In this sense, it is important to utilise students as a learning resource, even if the teacher is the coordinator of the studies and their contexts.

However, it is vital to keep in mind the importance of unlearning earlier behaviours. By doing so, learning as a group is possible, and knowledge is built together based on previous as well as new information. Constructing knowledge – from individual to common, shared knowledge (Beers, Boshuizen, Kirshner, & Gijsselaers, 2005; Kilpeläinen, 2012) – is the key element in the process of collaborative learning.

Students gave positive feedback and reviews of the use of the e-learning environment as a working platform. The use of IT made it easy to share and comment on work and to exchange ideas both during the working process and after its completion. This was possible as a result of the fact that the usable learning environment was accessible 24 hours a day. It must be borne in mind, however, that technology

itself does not conduct learning; it is merely a tool. However, through technology, it is possible to use different kinds of learning methods, and technology can enable creative ways of studying and documenting study outputs during the entire learning process. However, one challenge for the teachers is determining how to make it clear that sometimes feedback may take time. Teachers of online courses are not necessarily available immediately and at all times. The balance between flexibility and stability is repeatedly under threat.

The transparency of the working process can give ideas and perspectives to students who follow their peers' examples in terms of how they work. In addition, it can also act as a form of party discipline and as a supportive element. If one student sees how others follow the course schedule, he or she might feel awkward about neglecting the timetable.

Course schedules have been a constant topic of discussion during the programme. Based on course feedback, schedules were deemed to be both too fast paced and too slow. If a course was spread out over a long period, the sense of collaboration and communality of learning weakened. Reasonably tight schedules for studying ensured that all the course mates were active online at the same time and were able to discuss as well as give and receive feedback from each other during the course. With regard to e-learning in general, the balance between the flexibility of studying times and the communality of learning were also discussed by the students in SIMO III. If persons' own studying was dependent on other students' time management (for example, in group work or for mandatory feedback to other students on their work before continuation of the process), this interdependency caused problems when not all students were committed to common schedules and goals. The unfairness of the free riders in group work also irritated some students.

I continue the same lament as the previous commenters: In our group, the work was divided unevenly. A couple of group members didn't take part in all activities, so the others had to do more... It is wrong, that you wake up to group work one day before the deadline when you had all month to do your share. We tried to maintain "party discipline" and more even distribution of the work, but we didn't succeed... I was a bit surprised, as we are all adults here. (Student feedback on the data security course)

Another point that needs to be highlighted, especially with regard to adult learners who work, is the foreseeability of the teaching and learning schedules and effective

communication regarding schedules and possible changes to them. At the same time, this is a question of participating and having a sense of belonging to the common process. All information should be easy to find and available to students as early as possible since studying sometimes involves negotiations with employers about working hours and days off. Even the tiniest possibilities to impact timetables or methods of organising one's studies are empowering.

Coordinating teaching through many channels for student groups who are in different phases of their studies was challenging from time to time. Sudden changes can cause immense challenges for students in the programme. For example, changed lecture times due to illness of the lecturer can lead to the disruption of many timetables. Therefore, the web conferencing software with its built-in option to record the lecture can be a lifeline for working students provided that the lecturers give them permission to record the lessons.

With relatively small student groups, it is possible to try different kinds of teaching and learning solutions. In this sense, SIMO III provided a beneficial field for creating and testing new teaching and learning methods. Feedback from the SIMO III students was positive regarding the diversity of the assignment types for different courses. Variety was considered refreshing, although the students also provided feedback on areas to be refined before the next execution. With regard to the theme of e-competence, the experimental and open-minded student group was ready to try different methods of studying and learning using varied online tools.

8.5 DISCUSSION

Contrary to the situation that exists in many other countries, social workers in Finland are required to complete a master's degree. The contents of the studies emphasise scientific thinking and writing skills in addition to the theories, knowledge and practices of social work. The meaningfulness of scientific writing has sometimes been questioned by the students during their studies. However, after working in the field for some time after graduation, many social workers have praised their education and the fact that it prepared them to express professional viewpoints. Due to the writing skills gained during their studies, they are able to present strong arguments, phrase their statements effectively and write correct and credible documents in their work. The e-competence skills included in their social work education at the master's-degree level are also

viewed favourably. After their dubious first impressions, the social workers discover the need for them to have ICT skills and an understanding of the field. In future, the need for e-competence in the social sector is likely to increase as the number of e-services continues to surge. One reason for this is the general ambition to have databases and information systems throughout all municipalities and even at the national level in the public sector.

In the SIMO III programme, the utilisation of ICTs in learning was a pervasive theme. One goal of the programme was to familiarise social work students with the possibilities of technological applications in their field. This was accomplished both by undertaking studies in information technology and by gaining e-competence as a concomitant of e-learning. The ample use of e-learning provided for studying alongside full-time jobs. The combination of studying and working is a demanding task for students; however, solutions such as lectures and seminars via web conferencing software enabled participation without having to use time to travel for contact learning. This was a major advantage for working students and students who live far away from contact learning sites. Moreover, recorded lectures added the flexibility of studying, although they are not yet an established practice in Finnish higher education. Little by little, e-learning practices as well contracts with lecturers concerning for example copyrights are becoming increasingly familiar. This kind of development makes it possible to create transparent cumulative learning in which students' previous skills and know-how increase and deepen.

In conclusion, e-learning adds flexibility to studying; however, it also necessitates students and teachers to have the will to acquire new knowledge and to learn new ways of working from each other. There is limited resilience and flexibility in the development of e-learning. The use of e-learning equipment, online learning tools, and, for example, social media services in learning is not always without technical and operational difficulties and hindrances; nonetheless, the advantages of e-learning are worth the inconveniences.

In contemporary society, the "little e" has become increasingly visible. We have e-business, e-services, and e-competence. Social work practices are undergoing change; therefore, the education system has to resonate these kinds of changes sensitively. To achieve this, we need more e-oriented education in social work. Through programmes such as SIMO III, e-oriented social workers must continue to enter the social work field. Social workers who graduate from this master's degree programme are breaking ground as they continue to learn new forward-looking practices.

My Journey towards eCompetence in Social Work

I wonder what to write and how to write about the client and her situation. If I write the things that I cannot be sure of, I might draw a false picture of her. Still, I cannot leave out anything crucial that was mentioned – or can I? Should I also write down on the client information system the story that she told about how she was being abused when she was a child? If I write it down, every single social worker who will work with her will get to know her story. Does she want that? [...]

This quotation is authentic. It is taken from the learning diary I wrote during a five-week period of social work practice training in autumn 2011 in the Master's Degree Program of e-Competence in Social Work (SIMO III). The quotation reflects my thoughts on the meaning and creation of knowledge in social work practice. It also tells about the potentialities and challenges that ICTs (information and communication technologies) create in social work practice.

In this short paper, I will discuss my journey of growth from a somewhat sceptical student to an e-competent social worker. My standpoint is as a social worker who works with elderly people and people with disabilities or problems relating to mental health in one of the largest municipalities in Finland. The two-and-a-half-year study program in SIMO III has challenged my prejudices towards social work in practice, towards clients of social work and towards ICTs. My aim is to discuss the meanings of SIMO III for my personal growth as a social worker.

Before I started my studies in SIMO III, I had worked as a researcher in different projects for several years. The PICYBU (Participation in Rural Communities by Young Broadband Users) project in 2005–2006 dealt with testing, piloting and evaluating how the media and ICT can contribute to the

social participation of young people living in rural areas. The Everyday-Life-Security in Villages -research project in 2009–2011 focused on expectations and possibilities of the third sector for service delivery in rural areas. The latter got me interested in the complexity of service production and pushed me to apply to SIMO III.

When I first heard about the two together: social work and information technology (IT), I started to think why on earth connect two areas of life that at first sight seem to have no connection. In the beginning of my studies in SIMO III, my primary viewpoint on social work and IT was how the clients of social work could – or could not – benefit from the use of IT. In many of my essays, I wrote about how questionable it is to increase the use of IT-based services among social work clients since they do not necessarily have the equipment or skills to use them. At the same time, I could see some possibilities that IT would offer to social work clients – easier access to services that are not dependent on time and place.

As I became acquainted with different social work theories *of* practice and theories *for* practice, I realized how ultimate and wide the central issues of social work are and how deep they go in human life and in social structures. I would regard the most rewarding and educational time as the social work practice trainings, which allowed us to meet the clients, apply and reflect on what we had learned so far. Working with a mentor for five- and ten-week periods gave us an opportunity to question the social work practices, challenge them and adapt theories into practice.

Studying social work and e-competence skills in SIMO III was rewarding. The contents of both social work and IT-courses were designed in a way that they supported and challenged us to reflect on what we had learned earlier. For example, we had to take the course of the norms of social work before social work practice training, so that we would be better prepared to work as social workers. After having limited experience (five weeks) of social work practice, we had to reflect on and deepen our problem solving skills and understanding of social work leadership, administration and economics. Naturally, in every course, we were expected to consider the matter on hand from the point of view of ICTs.

Now, after two and a half years of studies, it is quite easy to say that little did I know about the possibilities of IT in social work when I started my journey with social work and e-competence! ICTs help to search for information, to organize data and to deliver information between workers. To encounter

and to interact with clients face-to-face is an important element of social work, but I can hardly think of my work without technological tools: laptop and mobile phone, search engines and home pages, folders and directories, client information systems, text messages and e-mails. For the most part, I see ICTs as a tool for my work and as a possibility for better service availability for clients. As distances grow, it is essential to utilize many of the possibilities of ICTs to overcome challenges to produce services. Still, many possibilities of ICTs have not yet been utilized. Our methods of data gathering and our social work services outright do not recognize the “new needs” of clients as users of ICTs, nor do we utilize all the possibilities (i.e. messaging, blogs, video calls) that ICTs offer us as professionals. As an e-competent social worker, I realize well enough that I should take the first steps to start the development towards utilizing ICTs more in social work practices.

Since graduation, I have been working as a social worker with elderly people and people with disabilities or problems relating to mental health. My job is located in one of the largest municipalities in Finland. My work basically deals with case management with all its different forms or levels. The number of clients is high. My task is to evaluate the needs of clients and to arrange services in a complex environment that consists of multiple possible choices between governmental-, municipal-, venture- and third-sector services.

Owing to the studies of SIMO III, nowadays I can recognize the situations in my work where my decision-making process might be in danger of being ruled or constrained by the information system I use. If we return to the quotation with which I started this text, I can now see how the client information system guides my documentation. The system may force me to categorize, assess or judge the client and her situation, but what it cannot do is give the content and meaning to the encounter with the client. Recognizing both the possibilities and limits of ICTs in social work requires a comprehensive understanding of the ethical, theoretical and legal bases of social work. During the time that I have been working with social work in a community, I have realized that the decision-making processes in a client information system are often built up in a way that makes decision-making bureaucratic and time-consuming. This is mostly done to serve the needs of administration and monitoring, and in many cases the view of a social worker or a client is forgotten. Information systems may be difficult to use; the logic or the sense behind the system is not apparent to all social workers. To social work clients, the technical or

legal terms of a system that are included in decisions might be difficult to understand.

After the studies, I began to understand that it is not only the clients of social work who get benefits from ICTs but also workers in different fields who work for the same client. In my current work as a social worker, it is essential to know what privacy, confidentiality and information security mean. Studying the basics of legal informatics in SIMO III gave me a proper understanding of how I, as a social worker, should gather, process, share and monitor information about clients and about my own contribution as a professional. It is important to know the legislation that covers documentation and knowledge management in social work. It is necessary to understand how differently information can be understood depending on the reader. The way you document your work builds up the image and has direct effects on decisions that you – or other workers – make concerning clients' matters. How the client information systems are constructed and how they enable or restrict the documentation has an impact.

My view on social work and ICT has widened from a narrow, common-sense-based view of the benefits and limits of ICT to a wide understanding of the meaning of ICT in people's lives in general. Studying social work has taught me to see people and their lives in their social surroundings. The theoretical understanding and ethical values of social work exist nowadays in everything I do. No longer do I see only the separate benefits or limits of technology, but I understand how ICTs have changed our ways of thinking, working and confronting people. Knowledge management skills, self-confidence in using technological equipment and applications, and ideas to develop my own work and social work in general are the benefits that I have gained from my studies in SIMO III. I understand how social structures determine the work I do, but I also realize how great a responsibility we as e-competent social workers have in developing our future in the field of social work.

Social Work, Services and Technology as Relations

10.1 RENEWAL OF SERVICES

Social work and its education face new expectations based on the various simultaneous factors that are changing the society. Social welfare and health sectors are undergoing a considerable process of change. On the one hand, this is a matter of the renewal of the national service system. This reformation is implemented both by the integration of social and healthcare practices and by the substantial updating of the content of social sector legislation (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2013c). The renewal of the basic law of the social field, The Social Welfare Act, results in new definitions of policies related to specific laws (Sosiaalihuoltolaki, 2014). In addition to changes in the organisation system, the social sector will face various social problems caused by societal changes. These troubles will intertwine, forming increasingly complicated combinations – so-called wicked problems – and a whole new set of difficulties will arise. Simultaneously, demographic change, particularly the rapid increase of the aged population and the concentration of the population in central cities, poses new developmental challenges for the social services.

The transitional phase also offers possibilities for the reformation of services and education (cf. Kananoja, 1997). Technological advances provide new methods of producing and mediating information and knowledge in social work and social services. In social work with clients, new working methods and service applications become possible. Operational documentation and the management of documents in client services can be achieved more easily. In addition to formal help, technology enables new channels for clients' self-help in the form of peer support and the seeking of information about benefits and services.

With regard to social work, these changes entail the active improvement and utilisation of new technological applications as a part of the development of the field. The increasing need for services highlights the acute necessity for alternative and multi-channel services by means of which client work is carried out both face to face and virtually. The renewal of service systems addresses the urgent matter of ensuring that local services are provided in all areas nearby citizens, particularly in sparsely populated regions, and it is crucial to ensure that the complete range of services is maintained. This can be partly promoted by ICTs so that the needs for assistance can be taken care of via the Internet from within one's own home without the need to travel to distant service centres.

The possibilities of e-services are significant. However, the development of e-services requires know-how and the comprehension of technology on the part of social workers so that they can guide the development of service applications in co-operation with technology experts. Without this know-how, virtual social work applications will be developed also in the future from the viewpoint of software engineers and according to their logic, thereby making it difficult to combine technology with social work processes. Employees' participation in the development of their own work and the ability to guide the processes of development based on their professional competence is required. Social workers need competence and understanding to improve their own professional field as well as its technological applications. In this way, they are able to envision and ideate new methods of implementing services based on the needs, and from the starting point, of social work.

To achieve this aim, technological knowledge has to be integrated into social work education. This has already been realised three times in master's degree programmes that combine social work and information technology. These educational programmes, which are organised in Oulu by the University of Lapland, provide dual competence – that is to say, the qualification to act as a social worker and basic skills in information technology. The goal is for students graduating from the programme to be able to innovate and produce new multi-channel applications for social work practices while working collaboratively with technology experts.

This final chapter of *eCompetence for Social Work* aims in part to bring forth from the articles the central viewpoints of the possibilities of ICTs in social work. I aspire to fulfil this objective by meta-analysing the important relationships that exist between social work and information technology.

10.2 THE NEW STRUCTURING OF SERVICE RELATIONS

The new possibilities related to the technological applications of social work will alter patterns of work and customary service relationships. The methods and forms of encounter between clients and social workers will change. Social work has traditionally been based on personal counselling and helping the client. Face-to-face client work will continue to be the foundational pillar of social work because unravelling complicated situations in life necessitates a confidential and reciprocal person-to-person relationship (Törrönen & Veistilä, forthcoming). However, it is inevitable that ICTs are part of people's everyday lives and activities. Younger generations, in particular, live in a technologically enriched reality in which obtaining services through technology is even more natural than visiting offices. Similarly, care, rehabilitation and supported housing are, for example, constantly receiving new technological aids and means of support that enable new working practices and the expansion of the range of services.

These changes require us to contemplate the concept of service from a new perspective. Firstly, traditional client service in offices will be only one possible means of taking action in the future. The regional provision of services will change because of social and healthcare reform, and some face-to-face agency services will be available in municipalities in which citizens live, whereas some will be offered in a more centralised manner at appointed central municipalities. Hence, there is a need for alternative forms of services to cover distances. Secondly, another solution is to put services on wheels – in other words, to equip service cars to travel in sparsely populated areas to offer the services that are most commonly needed (Laitinen & Pohjola, 2001). Thirdly, an alternative to mobile services is founding fixed, part-time service points in areas in which certain services are available – for example, weekly and at defined times. The most straightforward method of implementing this is to combine several services into a joint service (Ministry of Finance, 2013).

Fourthly, another option is to establish regional virtual service points where citizens are able to use videophone services to gain guidance for applications for benefits and to have live online meetings with the authorities (www.virtu.fi). Fifthly, a more far-reaching application is a virtual social and healthcare centre in which a wide variety of potential services is available. The selection of services can be carried out via home computer and

range from the delivery of application forms to private therapy sessions (www.sosiaalikallega.fi). Different forms of services complement each other and give the clients and the authorities alternative options for utilising the services.

Sixthly, in addition to having interactional clienthood with professionals, various self-acquired services are increasingly important. Citizens seek the information they need in different situations in their lives, follow information about their own well-being or give peer support to each other. The basic form is information produced via www pages or social media. The greatest challenges in this regard are how to maintain up-to-date information, make it easy to find and logical, make the pages easy to use and advance information literacy. To promote these aims, multifaceted research-based knowledge, feedback practices and evaluation are required. Currently, for example, the www pages of municipalities' departments of social services or other service points act only partly as a selection of self-acquired services. The available information is fragmented and the communication with service needs is weak. (Koskela & Salmela, 2010.)

Seventhly, the growing tendency for self-acquired services is related to various "own well-being" and "own health" indicators and follow-up forms, whereby a person actively develops his or her own everyday activities to support the construction of his or her social welfare and health. This is also connected to the possibility of performing transactions in official service systems by managing his or her own process progress via the Internet. It is essential to transfer the ownership and management of one's own welfare information to the client if he or she wishes.

Eighthly, a new kind of community whose members connect via social media (Puohiniemi, 2006) and offer peer support and assistance to other citizens is an important aspect of the self-administered range of future services. These can be mobilized by a social worker, as action that is possibly supported by authorities, or as a completely unprompted and active coalition of people and groups. The Internet poses a platform for rapid communication and the meeting of shared interests. This makes it possible for there to be various forms of mutual assistance, joint advocacy, events, statements and actions of impact. The increasing use of technology brings new opportunities to the groups of client developers. The regulatory nature of services and courses of action are in transition, and at the same time, social work practices are being reshaped.

10.3 THE RENEWING THE SERVICE MENU AND ITS RELATIONS

The rapid technological developments in social work remind us that the possibilities of developing work and the methods of providing services to clients are unlimited. In fact, development is restricted solely by our ability to see possible new opportunities for action. Another restriction is related to the time horizon needed for the changes; practices are constructed step by step in everyday work, not revolutionary overnight. The implementation of technological applications is a matter of the multileveled alteration of thought and methods of action, changes of identity, language, communication, competence, participation and relations. These are the factors that are in dire need of research knowledge and information related to the functionality of the applications that have already been implemented.

The services that are constructed in a new way provide possibilities and tools for citizens, clients and professionals alike as well as for experts of everyday experience and client developers. The scope of applications for technology in social work can be analysed according to a few main classifications:

- Technology-supported working and communication tools (for example, videophones, videoconferencing equipment, technological aids, smart devices and gerotechnology)
- Services producing information (for example, www pages, e-handbooks and portals)
- Technologically supported range of services (for example, virtual social and healthcare centres, e-counselling, online therapy and distance interpretation)
- Methods supporting clients' everyday lives and coping (for example, e-services, virtual case management and "virtual shoulder" services)
- Self-help and peer networks (for example, online communities; "own well-being and health" sites and indicators; peer-support groups in social media)
- Realisation of client democracy and inclusion (for example, participation channels and client developer groups on the Internet, social media communities and user blogs)
- Production of knowledge and information related to client work (for example, client work documentation, statistics, client flows and cost control)

- Research-based knowledge production (for example, aggregation of welfare information, client profiles and the development of working methods)
- Support of professionalism and work (for example, online supervision of work and e-consultations)

In relation to technology-supported social work, the possibilities related to technology entail striving to advance in all operational dimensions of work. The main focus is on the renewal of working methods when technology acts as a tool in processes. Thus, the focus is on the development of services and new service concepts; it is not on technology for its own sake.

Nevertheless, as technology is a tool for the development of services, it also has notable multidirectional effects that are yet to be comprehended. The language we use in these connections stems from technology, which both bewilders and directs our thinking and our relationship to the renewal of services. We should ponder how we can shape technology according to social work objectives. In doing so, we need to acquire an understanding of both technology and social work, the competence related to combining the two and the service design to implement their co-application.

10.4 CHANGING RELATIONS

The technology-mediated change occurring within social work is not neutral. It permanently alters the relations connected to ways of thinking, cultural practices and service functions. It is important to be sensitive, in multilayered ways, to cultural, historical, local, communal and professional values, knowledge and traditions. The processes of change are always sociocultural and contextual and are interlaced with social, environment-bound, institutional and professional changes. All factors of change are bound to time, space and place. Whereas in the context of technology, it is typical to claim applications to be independent of these, it narrowly means institutional time and place. However, the time and space dimensions of everyday life also have a strong presence.

Similarly, the language used adheres to time and place. Language builds relationships and atmosphere. The language in technological applications is often written. We should consequently aim to deepen our understanding of

how written language can mediate presence, empathy, reciprocity, trust and sensitivity. Interaction is a central element in social work, and in technology-mediated action, it differs from in face-to-face work. It is important to find out, how to be accessible, unambiguous and punctual without resorting to administrative and distancing formalities or rigid administrative language. Language always has power, and if used unskillfully, it can create feelings of otherness and exclusion.

An important question related to technologically mediated services is how different groups of the population and different people can access them. Central viewpoints are the availability and accessibility of services, which are connected to easy access and usability. Everybody should have equal opportunities to obtain services. This means developing various low-threshold and anonymous services. It is important to design such technological applications that do not create digital divides between people in different situations, limit their rights to services, or cause poverty of services to persons whose abilities or other characteristics do not enable equal access to ICT-services. The starting point of all development work is the question of how citizens and clients can benefit from the technological applications provided in social work.

The issue in the relation of technology-mediated service applications to proactive and conductive versus reactive and reconstructive effects is also connected to the matter of time. All of these are needed in social work processes; however, it is essential to ponder the role of social work as a producer of change and where the focuses of change are set. The question is how technology-mediated services can act as a generator and an empowering instrument regarding the future possibilities for people and communities. In this way, these services could support citizens' everyday lives by enhancing their security, trust, attachment, inclusion and sense of belonging.

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APPENDIX 1:

List of Research and Development Projects from the Scoping Study in Chapter 7

Aidosti kansainvälinen Porukoitten Rovaniemi, 2013–2023 https://www.rovaniemi.fi/fi/Palvelut/Kuntainfo/Projektit-ja-hankkeet/PORO	Social integration, work with the immigrants
Avaus – tulevaisuuden hyvinvointipalvelut, 2011–2015 http://www.ouka.fi/avaus	eServices
Barents Cross Border University development project (BCBU), 2011–2013 http://bcbu oulu.fi/bcbu_enpi.htm	Social work education
Communities On Line (COL), 2000–2001 http://www.tokem.fi/Suomeksi/Tutkimus-ja-kehitys/Hankkeet-%28vanha%29/Paattyneet-1994---2006/COL	eServices
eHyte – sähköinen hyvinvointikertomus, 2012–2014 http://oulu.ouka.fi/kehittamishankkeet/kehittamisohjelmat/hankekortit/Hankekortti1.asp?ID=564	Social work informatics, administration
Eppi – Pohjois-Pohjanmaan Etäpalveluhanke, 2011–2013 http://www.ouka.fi/oulu/eppi/	eServices, video conferencing
eRural – Sustainable rural health care networks, 2005–2007 http://www.lapinamk.fi/fi/Tyoelamalle/Tutkimus-ja-kehitys/Hankkeet-Kemi-Tornio/Paattyneet-2007/eRural	Rurality, work with the aged
Hywe – Hyvinvointialan tutkimustoiminnan kehittäminen Oulun Eteläisen alueella, 2010–2012 http://www.oamk.fi/hankkeet/kotimaiset_paattyneet/?hanke_id=282	Social work informatics, management
Hyvinvointi hakusessa – riippuvuus riskinä, 2012–2015 http://www.sosiaalikallega.fi/hankkeet/hyvinvointi-hakusessa	Substance abuse and mental health services, e-consulting, online-counseling
Hyvinvointitili, 2012–2014 http://www.sosiaalikallega.fi/hankkeet/virtu-asiointia-videoyhteydella/hyvinvointitili-hankefakta/index_html	Self-help, e-services
Hyvän ikääntymisen kehittämissympäristö Sonectus, 2012–2014 http://www.sonectus.fi	Work with the aged
iKONTAKT, 2010–2012 https://sites.google.com/site/kuntatietohallinto/	eServices, social work informatics, management
IkäEhyt, 2011–2013 http://some.lappia.fi/blogs/ikaehyt/	Work with the aged

Ikäihminen toimijana, 2013–2014 http://www.sosiaalikallega.fi/hankkeet/ikaihminen_toimijana	Work with the aged
Kylä – elämän keskus, 2003–2006 http://www.sosiaalikallega.fi/hankkeet/paattyneet-hankkeet/kylien_hyvinvointipalvelut	Rurality, online-counseling
Kylässä hyvä - kotona paras 2, 2014–2016 http://www.missaparas.fi/	Rurality, work with the aged
Kytke – Asiakkaan ja kodin kytkeminen sosiaali- ja terveydenhuollon saumattomaan hoito- ja palveluketjuun, 2010–2012 http://oulu.ouka.fi/kytke/	eServices, management
KÄKÄTE – Käyttäjille kätevä teknologia, 2010–2015 http://www.ikateknologia.fi	Work with the aged
Lapin seniori- ja vanhustyön kehittämysyksikkö, 2007–2009 http://www.sosiaalikallega.fi/hankkeet/paattyneet-hankkeet/kehittamisyksikot/seniorei-ja-vanhustyon-kehittamisyksikko	Work with the aged, e-consulting
Lapin sosiaalityön ja sosiaalialan opetus- ja tutkimuskeskus, 2010–2014 http://www.luc.fi/sociopolis/Opetus-ja-tutkimuskeskus	Social work education
Luoteis-Lapin seudullinen ikäihmisten palvelurakenteen ja prosessien kehittämishanke, 2005–2007 http://www.sosiaalikallega.fi/hankkeet/paattyneet-hankkeet/Luoteis_Lapin_vanhustyo	Work with the elderly
MAINIO, Käyttäjälähtöisen kehittämisen menetelmät, palvelut sekä innovaatioympäristöt, 2012–2013 http://www.mainio.eu/	Service design
Move – Monialainen verkkuuorisotyöhanke, 2011–2013 http://oulu.ouka.fi/kehittamishankkeet/kehittamisohjelmat/hankekortit/Hankekortti1.asp?ID=549	Youth social work on the web
ONION – Hyvinvointipalveluiden avoin ja modulaarinen tietojärjestelmäarkkitehtuuri ja ekosysteemi, 2013–2014 http://oulu.ouka.fi/kehittamishankkeet/kehittamisohjelmat/hankekortit/Hankekortti1.asp?ID=591	eServices, management
PaKaste, 2009–2011 http://www.sosiaalikallega.fi/hankkeet/kaste/lappi/sosiaalityo	eConsulting
PaKaste 2, 2011–2013 http://www.sosiaalikallega.fi/hankkeet/pakaste2	eConsulting, online-counseling
"Palveluja kyliin" – palveluyrittäjyyttä välittäjäorganisaatiolla, 2013–2014 http://www.pll.fi/pll-ryn-hanketoiminta/kaeynnissae/palveluja-kyliin.php	Rurality
Palveluseteli- ja ostopalvelujärjestelmän sekä toiminnan muutoksen (PSOP), 2013–2015 http://oulu.ouka.fi/kehittamishankkeet/kehittamisohjelmat/hankekortit/Hankekortti1.asp?ID=605	eServices, management
Pohjoisen hyvinvoinnin tietopaikka – Pohjoisen hyvinvointitieto yhtenevään tiedonhankintaan, 2011–2013 http://www.ulapland.fi/Suomeksi/Yksikot/Yhteiskuntatieteiden-tiedekunta/Tutkimus/LAPPEAn-hanketoiminta/Tutkimushankkeet/Pohjoisen-hyvinvointitieto-yhtenevaan-tiedonhankintaan	Social work informatics, management
Pohjois-Suomen verkostokonsultaatiohanke, 2003–2004 http://www.sosiaalikallega.fi/hankkeet/paattyneet-hankkeet/verkostokonsultaatio	eConsulting
Päihdetyön kehittämysyksikkö, 2008–2009 http://www.sosiaalikallega.fi/hankkeet/paattyneet-hankkeet/kehittamisyksikot/paihdetyon-kehittamisyksikko	Work with substance abusers, e-consulting

<p>Seudullinen virtuaaliluorisotyön hanke, 2007–2010 http://oulu.ouka.fi/kehittamishankkeet/kehittamisohjelmat/hankekortit/Hankekortti1.asp?ID=508</p>	Youth social work on the web
<p>Seutupilotti-hanke, 2002–2003 http://www.sosiaalikallega.fi/hankkeet/paattyneet-hankkeet/seutupilotti</p>	eCompetence
<p>Sosiaalityön e-osaamisen maisterikoulutus (SIMO III), 2011–2014 http://www.ulapland.fi/simo</p>	Social work education
<p>Sosiaalityön informaatioteknologinen maisterikoulutus (SIMO2), 2008–2011 http://www.ulapland.fi/Suomeksi/Yksikot/Yhteiskuntatieteiden-tiedekunta/Opiskelu/Oppiaineet-ja-maisteriohjelmat/Maisteriohjelmat/Sosiaalityon-e-osaamisen-maisterikoulutus/SIMO-II-2008-2011</p>	Social work education
<p>SKY – sosiaali- ja terveysalan simulaatio- ja kehittämissympäristö, 2012–2014 http://some.lappia.fi/blogs/skyhanke/etusivu/</p>	Service design
<p>Sohvi, 2012–2014 http://www.oamk.fi/hankkeet/kotimaiset_kaynnissa/?hanke_id=1094</p>	Social work informatics, management
<p>Sosiaali- ja terveystoimen sähköinen toimintatapa ja teknologia, 2008–2011 http://oulu.ouka.fi/kehittamishankkeet/kehittamisohjelmat/hankekortit/Hankekortti1.asp?ID=485</p>	Management
<p>Sosiaalitoimen asiakastietojärjestelmät -kehittämishanke Lapin läänissä, 2006–2007 http://www.sosiaalikallega.fi/hankkeet/paattyneet-hankkeet/teknologia_hanke</p>	Online-counseling
<p>Tulevaisuuden palveluyhteiskunta, 2008–2011 http://oulu.ouka.fi/kehittamishankkeet/kehittamisohjelmat/hankekortit/Hankekortti1.asp?ID=466</p>	Management, e-services
<p>Uula – Uudet palvelut ja toimintamallit Lapissa, 2008–2011 http://www.lshp.fi/default.aspx?nodeid=11182&contentlan=1</p>	Video conferencing, e-consulting, online-counseling, e-services
<p>VALO – Valinnanvapaus Oulussa, 2010–2011 http://oulu.ouka.fi/kehittamishankkeet/kehittamisohjelmat/hankekortit/Hankekortti1.asp?ID=538</p>	Management
<p>Vammaispalveluhanke – Vammaispalvelujen valtakunnallinen kehittämissanke, 2010–2013 http://www.llky.fi/site?node_id=1141</p>	Work with the disabled, e-consulting, service design
<p>VIRTU – asiointia videoyhteydellä, 2012–2014 http://www.sosiaalikallega.fi/hankkeet/virtu-asiointia-videoyhteydella/virtu-hankefakta/index_html</p>	Video conferencing, online-counseling, e-services
<p>Yhdessä voimistuen, 2004–2006 http://www.sosiaalikallega.fi/hankkeet/paattyneet-hankkeet/kehittamisyksikot/sosiaalityo_Lappi</p>	Rurality, e-consulting

A List of Publications Produced During the SIMO III Project

MASTER'S THESIS

- Huhta, S. & Patokoski, H. (2013). *"Kuka viereesi jää?" – Sosiaalinen tuki vuonna 2030 tulevien ikääntyneiden kertomana* ["Who will stand by you?" – Social support in the year 2030 as told by the aged of the future to come]. Master's thesis. Rovaniemi: University of Lapland.
- Hyppänen, H. (2012). *Narratiivinen tutkimus – vanhempien kokemuksia huoltoriidasta* [A narrative study – parents' experiences with custodial disputes]. Master's thesis. Rovaniemi: University of Lapland.
- Laitinen, T. (2013). *Asiakastyön dokumentointi sosiaalityössä: lastensuojelun asiakkaat ja asiakuudet asiakasasiakirjoissa* [The role of information systems in the documentation of child welfare client work]. Master's thesis. Rovaniemi: University of Lapland.

PEER-REVIEWED ARTICLES

- Kairala, M., Lähteinen, S., & Tiitinen, L. (2012). Rakenteellisen sosiaalityön osaaminen sosiaalityön opetuksen käytäntöyhteydessä [Structural social work expertise in practice education. In N. Tuohino, A. Pohjola & M. Suonio (Eds.), *Sosiaalityön käytännönopetus liikkeessä* [Changing social work practice education] (pp. 36–55). Rovaniemi: Finnish National University Network for Social Work.
- Kilpeläinen, A. (2012). Civil szervezetések és szociális szolgáltatások Finnország távoli kistélepolése [Non-governmental organizations and welfare in Finland's remote villages]. *A Falu*, 27(2), 47–54.
- Kilpeläinen, A. (2012). Tiedon rakentuminen kylien teknologiavälitteisten hyvinvointipalvelujen tutkimuksessa [The construction of knowledge in research on technology-mediated welfare services in villages]. *Janus*, 20(3), 268–285.
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- Kilpeläinen, A. (2014). The role of non-governmental organizations in promoting welfare in rural villages of Northern Finland. In F. Bódi, G. Fábíán, M. Fónai, J. Kurkinen, T. Lawson & H. Pietiläinen (Eds.), *Access to services in rural areas*:

- A comparison of Finland and Hungary*. Vol XXVII of the Series: Studies in Comparative Social Pedagogies and International Social Work and Social Policy. Bremen.
- Kilpeläinen, A., & Romakkaniemi, M. (2014). Paikallisuus rakenteellisessa sosiaalityössä [Locality in structural social work]. In M. Laitinen, A. Pohjola & M. Seppänen (Eds.), *Rakenteellinen sosiaalityö* [Structural social work] (pp. 136–161). Tallinn: UNIpress.
- Kilpeläinen, A., & Salo-Laaka, M. (2012). Asiakasosallisuus teknologisoituvassa palvelujärjestelmässä [Client participation with a technologised service system]. In A. Pohjola, T. Kemppainen & S. Väyrynen (Eds.), *Sosiaalityön vaikuttavuus* [Effectiveness of social work] (pp. 303–322). Rovaniemi: Lapland University Press.
- Kilpeläinen, A., & Seppänen, M. (2013). Information technology and everyday life in ageing rural villages. *Journal of Rural studies*, 33, 1–8. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2013.10.005>. Online first.
- Romakkaniemi, M., & Kilpeläinen, A. (2013). Masennuksesta kuntoutuva ihminen pirstaleisessa palvelujärjestelmässä [A person recovering from depression in a fragmented service system]. *Kuntoutus-lehti*, 36(2), 29–40.
- Romakkaniemi, M., & Kilpeläinen, A. (2013). Asiakkuus terveydenhuollon sosiaalityössä – terveydenhuollon sosiaalityöntekijät asiakkaiden toimijuuden tilojen rakentajina [Clientship in health care social work – health care social workers as builders of spaces of agency for clients]. In M. Laitinen & A. Niskala (Eds.), *Asiakkaat toimijoina sosiaalityössä* [Clients as actors in social work] (pp. 244–271). Tampere: Vastapaino.
- Romakkaniemi, M., & Kilpeläinen, A. (submitted). Meaningful elements in recovering from major depression as a basis for developing social work in mental health services. *Social Work in Mental Health*.

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- Kattilakoski, M., Kilpeläinen, A., & Peltomäki, P. (2012). Johdanto [Introduction]. In M. Kattilakoski, A. Kilpeläinen & P. Peltomäki (Eds.), *Yhteisöllisyydellä hyvinvointia ja palveluja maaseudulle* [Wellbeing and services to rural areas through communality] (pp. 10–13). Maaseutupolitiikan yhteistyöryhmän julkaisu 1/2012. Helsinki: Rural Policy Committee.
- Kilpeläinen, A. (2012). Virtuaaliyhteisöllisyys hakeutuu maaseudulle [Virtual communality finds its way to the countryside]. In M. Kattilakoski, A. Kilpeläinen & P. Peltomäki (Eds.), *Yhteisöllisyydellä hyvinvointia ja palveluja maaseudulle* [Wellbeing and services to rural areas through communality] (pp. 14–24). Maaseutupolitiikan yhteistyöryhmän julkaisu 1/2012. Helsinki: Rural Policy Committee.
- Kilpeläinen, A., Suonio, M., & Väänänen-Fomin, M. (2013). Oppimateriaalin kehittäminen yliopisto-opetukseen sosiaalityön valtakunnallisessa verkostossa – tapausesimerkinä sosiaalioikeuden materiaali [Developing educational materials for university teaching in a national social work network – case materials on social rights]. In T. Joutsenvirta & L. Myyry (Eds.), *Sulautuvaa opetusta ja oppimista – luokkahuoneista verkkoon* [Blended learning – from classrooms to the net]

(pp. 31–37). Helsinki: University of Helsinki. Retrieved from <http://www.helsinki.fi/valtiotieteellinen/julkaisut/sulop2013.pdf>

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OTHER ARTICLES AND PAPERS

- Aalto, L., & Karhu, H. (2014, April 15). Sähköisillä palveluilla laatua ikäihmisten elämään [Quality life for older people through e-services]. *Kaleva*, p. 4.
- Huhta, S., & Patokoski, H. (2013). Vauhdilla verkkoon [Quickly to the net]. *Vanhustenhuollon uudet tuulet*, 7/2013, 20–21. Retrieved from http://www.valli.fi/pdf/Uudet_tuulet_72013.pdf
- Kairala, M., Kilpeläinen, A., & Rossi, E. (2014, March 10). Ikääntyneiden oikeus moniammatilliseen seniori- ja vanhustyöhön [The right of aged people to multidisciplinary senior and elderly work]. [Blog post]. Retrieved from <http://sosiaalinentekija.wordpress.com/2014/03/10/ikaantyneiden-oikeus-moniammatilliseen-seniori-ja-vanhustyohon/>
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- Kilpeläinen, A. (2013). Virtuaalinen yhteisöllisyys maaseudun voimavarana [Virtual communality as a resource in rural areas]. *MaaseutuPlus kylät & korttelit*, 1/2013, 20–21.
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PRESENTATIONS IN NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL SEMINARS, CONFERENCES, AND LECTURES

Alakärppä, I., Jaakkola, E., Päykkönen, K., & Vántänen, J. (2014). Experiences of the elderly, their relatives, and volunteers with a social media application in monitoring

- of wellbeing. Paper presented in *the 6th international conference on eHealth, telemedicine, and social medicine eTelemed, Barcelona, Spain, 23–27 March 2014* (pp. 105–110). Barcelona: IARIA.
- Retrieved from http://www.thinkmind.org/index.php?view=article&articleid=etelemed_2014_5_40_40087
- Huhta, S., & Patokoski, H. (2012). Kuponen kuumaa sosiaalista mediaa [A cup of hot social media]. A workshop in *Hyvinvointifoorumi: sosiaalisen median valoja ja varjoja [Welfare forum: The lights and shadows of social media] seminar, Kemi, 21 March 2012*. Kemi: Kemi–Tornio University of Applied Sciences.
- Kairala, M. (2013). Emme voi ratkaista ongelmia ajattelemalla samalla tavalla kuin silloin, kun loimme ne [We cannot solve problems by thinking the same way as thought when we created them]. A lecture in *Ikäihmisen vireä huomien - Pohjois-Suomen gerontologinen kongressi [An active tomorrow for older people – Northern Finland's gerontological congress], Oulu, 18 April 2013*. Oulu: Oulu University of Applied Sciences.
- Kilpeläinen, A. (2011). Sosiaalityön koulutus e-osaamista tukemassa [Social work education in support of e-competence]. *Sosiaalista teknologiaa 2.0*. [Social technology 2.0] seminar, Oulu 5–6 October 2011.
- Kilpeläinen, A. (2011). Miten voitetaan pitkien etäisyyksien aiheuttama eriarvoisuus sosiaali- ja terveyspalveluissa? Verkossako ratkaisu? [How can the inequality in social and health services caused by long distances be overcome? Is the net the answer?]. *Palvelujen tarve, saatavuus ja oikeudenmukaisuus [The need for accessibility and equality of services] seminar, Rovaniemi, 21 November 2011*. Rovaniemi: University of Lapland.
- Kilpeläinen, A. (2011). Online learning: Feedback and evaluation. *Development of education in the field of substance abuse prevention in the Murmansk region – project seminar, Murmansk 22–25 November 2011*.
- Kilpeläinen, A. (2012). Informaatioteknologian hyödyntäminen palvelutapahtumassa -työryhmä [A workgroup of ICTs for service events]. *Aikuissosiaalityön päivät [Adult social work days], Rovaniemi, 24–25 January 2012*.
- Kilpeläinen, A., & Päykkönen, K. (2012). *Tiedonhallinta informaatioteknologisessa yhteiskunnassa [Information management in an information community]*. Lecture. University of Lapland.
- Kilpeläinen, A. (2012). Do virtual communities diminish loneliness in rural areas? *41st Annual Conference of British Society of Gerontology, Keele University, 11–13 July 2012*.
- Kilpeläinen, A. (2012). Technology-mediated services for the elderly in outlying villages. *Ageing connects. International federation on ageing global connections, Prague, 28 May – 1 June 2012*. Moderator of the workshop.
- Kilpeläinen, A. (2012). Evolving welfare services through IT. First joint summer school. Multidisciplinary dialogue – Wellbeing, Technology, and the Environment, Rovaniemi, 27–31 August 2012.
- Kilpeläinen, A. (2013) *IT-based inclusion and exclusion*. Lecture, 19 March 2013. Rovaniemi.

- Kilpeläinen, A., Kairala, M., & Pääkkönen, K. (2013). Social work education, e-services, and ageing in rural areas. Poster presentation at *IAGG the 20th IAGG world congress of gerontology and geriatrics. "Digital ageing: A New Horizon for Health Care and Active Ageing"*, Seoul, South-Korea, 23–27 June 2013.
- Ohtonen, V. (2011). e-Asiantuntijuus sosiaalipalveluiden verkkoneuvonnassa [e-Competence in online-counselling social services]. *Sosiaalista teknologiaa 2.0*. [Social technology 2.0] seminar, Oulu 5–6 October 2011.
- Ohtonen, V. (2011). e-Asiantuntijuus sosiaalipalveluiden verkkoneuvonnassa [e-Competence in online-counselling social services]. Final seminar of the Uula project, Rovaniemi, 24 November 2011.
- Pääkkönen, K. (2012). *Ikääntyvät ja sosiaalinen media* [The elderly and social media]. Lecture. University of Lapland.
- Pääkkönen, K. (2013). *Sosiaalinen media ja ikäihmiset* [Social media and the aged]. Lecture. University of Lapland.
- Pääkkönen, K. (2014). *Ikääntyneiden sosiaalisen median käyttö* [How older people use social media]. Online-lecture. University of Lapland.

PARTICIPATION AND PUBLIC ADVOCACY/SOCIAL IMPACT

- | | | |
|-----------------|-----------|---|
| Kairala, M. | 2012 | Vice member of the Sosiaalihuollon asiakastietomallin asiantuntijaryhmä [the Expert Group in charge of the social care client information model], National Institute for Health and Welfare |
| Kilpeläinen, A. | 2012– | Chairperson of the Online Learning Executive Committee, Finnish National University Network for Social Work (Sosnet) |
| | 2011–2012 | Member of the Online Learning Executive Committee, Finnish National University Network for Social Work (Sosnet) |
| | 2011–2012 | Member of the Inhibition of Plagiarism group, University of Lapland |
| | 2012– | Member of the Steering Group for green care in Lapland |
| | 2011–2012 | Member of the Steering Group for the Lappilainen Green Care project feasibility study |
| | 2009–2011 | Vice chairperson of the Steering Group for the Arjen Turvaa Kylissä project |
| | 2008–2014 | Member of the Welfare Services Theme Group, Rural Policy Committee, (YTR, since 2012 TEM) |