

A Narrative Policy Analysis of the German
National Qualification Framework (DQR) discourse
surrounding non-formal qualifications

Abstract

After integrating also general schooling into the DQR in August 2017, the next pending debate is about the integration of non-formal qualifications into the DQR. Despite a consensus of involved actors to integrate non-formal qualifications into the DQR, the process stalled for a long time. This thesis gives an insight into the development of the DQR discourse surrounding non-formal qualification, by analyzing the internal argumentations and conflict lines through the policy narratives used in the discourse. Policy narratives can be an important factor to improve the persuasiveness of arguments, especially in complex and conflictual settings as the DQR negotiations. Hence, utilizing the analytical framework of the Narrative Policy Framework, this thesis identified the three dominant narratives of the DQR discourse surrounding non-formal qualifications – the egalitarian narrative, the hierarchical narrative, and the individualistic narrative. The analysis of these narrative displayed the dominant argumentation patterns of the DQR discourse, how the narratives are structured, and identified possible policy solutions concerning the integration of non-formal qualifications. This thesis also contributes to the small but growing basis of qualitative NPF literature, and extended the NPF's field of application to education policy issues.

Key words: Narrative Policy Framework, NPF, German Qualification Framework, DQR, Culture Theory, non-formal education

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1 Introduction

A classification of a set of competences in a National Qualification Framework (NQF) is more than just a bureaucratic act. It can make the difference between a freedom in theory and a freedom in practice. The EU's freedom of movement for workers ensures that every worker is allowed work in any EU-member state. But being allowed doesn't mean being hired. After this freedom was set in place, many workers faced the problem that their potential foreign employers didn't understand their academic and vocational degrees. For example, a Swedish employer couldn't compare the German vocational degree of his applicant to the Swedish degrees that were known to him. Hence, the Swedish employer remained unaware of his applicant's qualifications, and didn't hire him to avoid mismatch. This meant, in turn, although he had the legal right, he effectively couldn't move to Sweden because he couldn't find an equivalent occupation. To address and solve this problem, the European Qualification Framework (EQF) and the affiliated NQFs of EU-member states were created. Through these frameworks, it becomes possible to compare qualifications from different fields of education with each other – higher education to vocational education to general schooling... - on a national level, and similar qualifications across countries.

When looking at the German National Qualification Framework – *Deutscher Qualifikationsrahmen* (DQR) – there has been great progress made. In incorporating general schooling into the DQR in August 2017, the DQR now covers the whole formal education sector. This comprehensive integration stands in contrast to the integration of the non-formal qualifications. There are no non-formal qualifications in the DQR yet. And despite a commitment to also integrate this sector – from the German side in 2009, and the European Commission already in 2008 – the negotiations are still far from finalization. Due to the significant impact on the mobility of workers, that a possible integration of non-formal qualifications could have, it appears to be relevant to analyze the policy discourse surrounding these qualifications.

The DQR discourse appears as a complex and conflictful one, as the dispute around the relationship between vocational qualifications and general schooling illustrates, which resulted in a 5-year memorandum on the integration of general schooling. As a relevant approach to analyze such kinds of complex and conflictual discourses is to analyze the narratives of a policy discourse. In recent years, the influence of narratives on policy making processes was recognized in the academic community. When policy makers are confronted with uncertainty in their decision, narratives can play an influential role in the selection process of policy outcomes. As a successful and reliable method to analyze narratives

proofed to be the Narrative Policy Framework (NPF). In utilizing the NPF's methodological framework in this thesis, it will be possible to identify the narratives that are shaping the DQR discourse surrounding non-formal education. Furthermore, in applying this framework, it will offer an insight into the structure and rationalities of the policy narratives, and illustrate the basis of the current policy conflict, as well as displaying possible policy solutions to it.

In order to conduct a narrative policy analysis of the DQR discourse surrounding non-formal qualifications, this thesis will follow this structure: first, are presented the research questions, the intra and extra-academic relevance of the thesis, and key terms. In chapter 2 illustration of the background and literature surrounding National Qualification Frameworks in general, and the German Qualification Framework (DQR) in particular. Chapter 3 lays out the theoretical basis of this research by addressing the underlying theories of the NPF and the Culture Theory. Chapter 4 illustrates the methods utilized in this research to operationalize the theory and to create the data. Chapter 5 contains the narrative analysis of the identified narratives of the DQR surrounding non-formal qualifications. Lastly, chapter 6 gives concluding remarks and an outlook to future research.

1.1 Research questions and aim

The purpose of this study is to investigate the trends and conflicts within the policy process surrounding the DQR negotiations on non-formal qualifications, by analyzing the influence of narratives on the discourse.

In order to conduct a narrative policy analysis (NPF) to answer these questions, it will first be examined which policy narratives are present in the DQR discourse surrounding non-formal qualifications:

RQ 1: What policy narratives surround the DQR discourse on non-formal education?

After identifying the policy narratives present, their structure will be analyzed:

RQ 2: How are the policy narratives surrounding the DQR discourse structured?

And subsequently, it will be illustrated how the policy narratives relate to and interact with each other:

RQ 3: How do the policy narratives relate to each other?

Finally, it will be analyzed how the policy narratives are utilized by the groups participating in the DQR discourse surrounding non-formal qualifications:

RQ 4: Which are the discourse participants/coalitions utilizing the respective policy narratives?

1.2 Social and academic relevance of thesis

Academic relevance

The academic relevance of this study lies in its contribution to the Narrative Policy Framework (NPF). As extensively elaborated in chapter 5.1, the NPF is a young positivistic framework for the analysis of policy making processes, with an emphasis on the influence of narratives. There has been an intensive academic discussion, in which the NPF could prove its validity and application (Jones/McBeth 2010; McBeth et al. 2014). However, most of the studies that applied the NPF followed a quantitative approach (Jones et al. 2014: 30). Despite the existence of studies that demonstrated the successful application of a qualitative NPF analysis, the number of conducted qualitative NPF studies is still very limited (O'Bryan 2014: 108; Gray/Jones 2016; Crow/Berggren 2014). In also adopting a qualitative approach, this thesis will widen the scarce base of qualitative NPF studies, and thereby contribute to the discussion on the applicability of qualitative approaches in the NPF.

Furthermore, most of the NPF studies conducted focused on policies in the field of environmental and energy issues (Jones et al. 2014: 30). It is stated as necessary in the advancement of the NPF to extend this scope of application (Jones et al. 2014: 30; Jones/McBeth 2010: 346). Hence, this thesis will contribute to the discussion onto which policy issues the NPF can be applied. In the field of education policies, there is only one other NPF study to be found concerning higher education (Price 2016). And with regards to non-formal education policy issues, this thesis will pioneer in the application of NPF.

Social relevance

The DQR is currently already covering all fields of the formal education sector, and when implementing its commitment to the lifelong learning approach, it will cover all fields of education in the German education system (LLL). Consequently, every learner and worker in Germany will be affected by the DQR, if they not already are. Despite this striking relevance, the number of actors that are involved in the negotiation of the DQR is very low, compared to the size of the education sector in Germany. In addition, the negotiations themselves are intransparent to the public (I8; I16).

Due to this setting, the social relevance of this thesis is that it offers an insight to the DQR discussion surrounding non-formal for the large number of organizations

and stakeholders that are not participating in any body or working group of the DQR. In doing so, this thesis illustrates the trends within the discourse, and can contribute to the discussion of non-involved groups and organizations, if social or civil society activism to influence the discourse is needed.

1.3 Key terms

This thesis will rely in its definition of formal, non-formal, and informal education and learning, on the definition provided by the DQR (DQR 2013: 44; 46). It is although to mention that even amongst participants of the DQR process, there are diverging and partially competing definitions of these terms (I17; I22). However, since the DQR definitions are the official consensus and used as such by all interviewees, these definitions will be followed in this thesis as well.

Formal education

As the DQR states, “formal learning describes a learning process, that takes place in an organized and structured context that is dedicated to learning, and is typically directed at the acquirement of a qualification. Usually in form of a degree or a proof of competence; belonging to this are the systems of general schooling, vocational training, and higher education.” (DQR 2013: 44).

Non-formal education

The DQR defines non-formal education as followed: “Non-formal learning describes a learning process, that takes place in the context of a planned learning action (with regards to learning target and duration), and at which the learning is supported in a certain form (e.g. in the context of a teacher-student-setting); this can entail programs that teach vocational skills, the alphabetization of adults, and the basic education of early school leavers; typical examples of non-formal learning are internal trainings, in which enterprises seek to improve the qualifications of their employees, [...] and courses organized by civil society organizations for their members, their target group, or the general public.” (DQR 2013: 46).

Informal education

The DQR describes informal education as followed: “Informal learning describes a learning process that takes place in everyday life – at the workplace, in the family or in the leisure time – and is not organized or structured with regards to learning target, duration or promotion. From the point of view of the learner, the learning is potentially not intended. Examples for learning outcomes gained through are competencies, that are acquired through life and work experience, such as competencies acquired at the work place, project management skills, [...] language skills that were acquired during a stay abroad [...]” (DQR 2013: 44).

2 Background and literature review of Qualification Frameworks

This chapter will illustrate the development and spread of Qualification Frameworks in general, and of the DQR in particular. This will be followed up by a discussion of the relevant academic literature concerning NQFs and the DQR.

2.1 Background and literature review: National Qualification Frameworks (NQFs)

The aim and purpose of a National Qualification Framework (NQF) is to provide a structure for the development, description and systematization of the relationships between qualifications within a nation's qualification system (Gössling 2013: 12). In providing this structure, NQFs put all formally recognized qualifications of an education system in context to each other and give a structure to certificated bundles of competencies. These competences are not limited to a specific form of competence acquisition, but in principle open to any form of learning (Gössling 2013: 12).

This last aspect also marks the central criteria of most NQFs: the outcome focus. Several education systems, such as the German one, rested before the implementation of a NQF on input and procedural factors (Allais 2011: 249-51; Bohlinger 2012: 291-2). As input factors are considered the institution and setting in which the learning takes place. In this understanding, a learning result gets its validity and recognition by being conducted e.g. at a university. Process-factors are to be found in the way the learning is conducted. This entails the duration and organization of an education.

The development of National Qualification Frameworks (NQFs) can be regarded as an international trend (Bohlinger 2011: 29; Allais 2011: 233). Its beginning is to be found in Scotland (1986) where the first NQF was developed (Bohlinger 2011: 29). Soon followed by New Zealand (1991), Australia (1995), and South Africa (1995). This group of appliers grew rapidly, and in 2011 already more than 100 countries were in the process of implementing, or planning a NQF (Allais 2011: 233).

In contrast to its popularity among policy makers, there is little empirical evidence on the actual effects of NQF (Allais 2011: 238-46; Bohlinger 2012: 292-3). The

research done so far, primarily focused on the theoretical impact of NQFs on the permeability of learning pathways and matching labor market demands (Bohlinger 2012: 293). Interestingly, there is also a shortcoming in the scope of research observed with regards to policy learning. In the contemporary phase of NQF planning and development, there is little policy learning from other countries' experiences to be observed (Bohlinger 2012: 293; Raffe 2007; Young 2004).

One of the few scholar analyzing the actual effects of NQFs is Allais (2003; 2007; 2011; 2012a; 2012b). In her 2011 analysis of 16 different NQFs, she concluded that NQFs are usually introduced in the context of a neo-liberal-oriented public sector reform, advocating a marketization of education provision (Allais 2011: 249). Furthermore, there is a general trend to be seen in the perception of education. Away from the education as a good and interest in itself, and towards education as a product or service that is provided in order to achieve the desired outcome (Allais 2011: 251).

Allais's work, however, has been criticized and contested, prominently by Blackmur (2015). In this line of argument, Allais' position is regarded as ideological/normative, and rejecting existing NQFs due to their shortcomings in comparison to unachievable ideal types (Blackmur 2015: 226-7).

2.2 Background and literature review: German Qualification Framework (DQR)

The DQR is a novelty in the German education system. It is the first framework passed in Germany, that seeks to incorporate all sectors of education (DQR 2013; 18). The DQR already includes all fields of the formal education sector: higher education, vocational education, and general schooling. And the negotiations are ongoing for the non-formal and informal sector.

When looking at the development of the DQR, it becomes apparent that there is not only one initiating document/decision, but rather two (Klenk 2013: 135-6). On the one hand, there is an European impulse coming from the European Commission for the creation of the European Qualification Framework (EQF). In 2005, the European Commission began a process to develop a proposal on the creation of an EQF, which was presented to and passed by the European Parliament (EP) in 2006 (EC 2005; 2006). This proposal already contained the cornerstones of the later EQF, such as most prominently the 8 qualification levels (Gössling 2013: 19-21). In the following two years, the development was finalized and in April 2008 the EQF was passed (Klenk 2013: 137).

On the other hand, there was also a development on the national level in Germany that led to the development of a German National Qualification Framework (DQR). Based on the EP's 2006 decision to initiate the development of the EQF, the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) and the Conference of the states' culture ministers (KMK), which are responsible bodies for education in Germany, decided on the creation of a German NQF (Küssner/Seng 2006; Klenk 2013: 135-6).

Subsequently, in 2007 the two main bodies of the DQR negotiations were established. The first body, the *Bund-Länder-Koordinierungsgruppe* (B-L-KG; Federal-State-Coordination Group), consists of representatives of the BMBF, state ministries, KMK, as well as the Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology, and the Conference of Economics Ministers (KMK 2007). The B-L-KG's primary task is the political coordination of the development process. However, the work on the structure and content of the DQR took place in the second body: the *Arbeitskreis Deutscher Qualifikationsrahmen* (AK DQR; Klenk 2013: 137-8). The AK DQR is composed of representatives of the fields of higher education and general schooling, social partners (trade unions, and commercial and industry associations), vocational education, further education, as well as non-aligned experts in the field of education (Klenk 2013: 138; 143-162).

In March 2011, the AK DQR presented a preliminary draft of the DQR on which and how to classify qualifications. The relationship between vocational and general schooling, however, was severely disputed. This conflict culminated in a 5-year-memorandum on the classification of general schooling in the January agreement of 2012. In solving this conflict, it was possible to pave the way for the 2013 implementation of the first DQR (Klenk 2013: 137). The 2013 DQR contained only qualifications from the sectors of higher and vocational education, but stated its compatibility and willingness to integrate further fields of education, such as the non-formal and informal one (DQR 2013: 42; I3). The most recent development in the DQR process took place after the 5-year-memorandum ceased in spring of 2017, by integrating also the general schooling into the DQR, and thereby now covering the entirety of the German formal-education sector in the DQR (DQR 2017).

With regards to the ongoing integration of the non-formal sector, the following events appear as relevant. The 2009 proposal for a DQR for Lifelong Learning (LLL; *Deutscher Qualifikationsrahmen für lebenslanges Lernen*) addressed the idea of an integration of all aspects of education into the DQR, thereby especially targeting the sectors of non-formal and informal education. This led to the creation of the two working groups with the aim to explore the possibilities of an integration of non-formal and informal education. The first working group (AG1) addressed the field of general, political, and cultural education, whereas the second working group (AG2) focused on electrical/metal working, health/care, trade, and IT. In 2011, both working groups presented their results to the AK DQR in form of eleven recommendations. The recommendations aimed at the

selection of validation and certification methods and procedures, as well as questions of transparency (Empfehlung AGs 2011). Taken these recommendation as a basis, a subsequent working group was created to conduct an exemplary classification of selected qualifications. This is the 2013-14 expert group on the classification of non-formal learning outcomes to the DQR (*Expertengruppe zur Zuordnung von Ergebnissen nicht-formalen Lernens zum DQR*). The 2014 expert group delivered a report to the AK DQR, which recommended how to regulate and structure both requirements and procedures in the classification of non-formal qualifications (Expertengruppe 2014).

When looking at the academic research on the DQR, the work of Büchter/Dehnbostel/Hanf (2012) is first to be mentioned. In their standard work, they are analyzing the foundation and development of the DQR, and thereby providing a basis for further reading.

As interesting for the focus of this thesis appears the dissertation of Klenk (2013) on NQFs in dual vocational training systems. In this research, he analyzes the discussions around the integration of vocational education into the NQFs of Austria, Denmark, and Germany in an institutionalist research approach. Highly relevant is his detailed analysis of the actor/stakeholder structure and interaction, since there is a continuity of positions between the DQR discussion on the integration of vocational education to the one on non-formal education (I20).

Another relevant author in the analysis of the DQR is found in Gössling. In his 2013 study on the transformation of governance structures with regards to the DQR (2013). To investigate this, Gössling conducted both a document analysis and in-depth interviews. Special focus was given to the collective interpretive patterns within the DQR discourse, that were analyzed using a post-positivist approach.

One of the few reflections directly aimed at non-formal education and its (potential of) integration into the DQR, was conducted by Gutschow (2011). In Gutschow's report to the Federal Institute for Vocational Training (BiBB), she analyzes the potential of non-formal and informal competences to find recognition in the DQR. Gutschow's work gives a comprehensive insight into the challenges the AK DQR and working groups (AG1 and 2, and expert group) faced.

3 Theory

This section offers a theoretical discussion of narratives in a two-fold way. First, the general relevance and influence of narratives on policy processes will be discussed, using the theoretical framework offered by the NPF. And second, to address the question what is the content of policy narratives and which narratives are to be expected in the DQR discussion, this thesis will build on the Cultural Theory by Douglas (1970).

3.1 Narrative Policy Framework – theoretical foundation

In the first place the NPF is a policy process theory, and hence rather offers a methodological framework to analyze policy processes under inclusion of policy narratives. However, the NPF builds on a broader theoretical foundation that addresses the idea of man and human perception. Consequently, the theoretical foundation of the NPF will be discussed in the following chapter.

When looking into the core assumptions, the underlying one is: narratives matter (Jones et al. 2014: 1-3). The idea of man is not the one of a perfectly reasoning individual, no homo economicus. Instead, in the NPF the idea of man is that the individual can be persuaded by stories (Jones et al. 2014: 1-2). Reasoning takes place in a context, a narrative that is created, that gives meaning to decisions and puts them in a bigger picture (Jones et al. 2014: 2-3). Hence, the individual is understood as a homo narrans (McBeth et al. 2014: 230; Jones et al. 2014: 10). An individual who is affected by narratives in the way of how information are processed, communication is conducted, and the way the individual reasons (McBeth et al. 2014: 231-3; Jones et al. 2014: 10).

The following three core assumptions can be summarized in their function of addressing the ontological and epistemological stance of the NPF. The first assumption of this set is the one of a social construction of reality (Jones et al. 2014: 4, 9; McBeth et al. 2014: 229-30). In this understanding, NPF follows the positivist ontology of an objective world that exists independently from the human perception (Jones et al. 2014: 4, 9). The individual's perception of this reality can vary among humans based on their subjective view. As Jones et al. (2014) state: "Social construction in this context refers to the variable meanings that individuals or groups will assign to various objects or processes associated with public policy" (9).

This variation, however, is not without limits. Rather, the NPF sees a bounded relativity in place (McBeth et al. 2014: 216; Jones et al. 2014: 9). In this understanding, there is still a variation in how the social constructs of policy objects and processes are perceived, but this variation follows patterns (McBeth et al. 2014: 216; Jones et al. 2014: 9). Possible patterns that are binding the variation are belief systems, ideologies, and norms among others (McBeth et al. 2014: 216; Jones et al. 2014: 9).

The fourth core assumption of the NPF is that narratives contain generalizable structural elements (McBeth et al. 2014: 216; Jones et al. 2014: 10). In order to make this assumption, the NPF divides narratives into two components the narrative form and the narrative content (Jones et al. 2014: 4). The narrative form carries the generalizable structural elements and is described as the structure of the narrative that can be found present independent of the specific context of the narrative (Jones et al. 2014: 4-7). The narrative form consists of four elements: the setting, the characters, the plot, and the moral (Jones et al. 2014: 6-7). This constitutes the NPF's structuralist and empirical stance on epistemology, in rejecting the post-positivist assumption of a relativity and subjective interpretation (Jones/McBeth 2010: 330; Jones et al. 2014: 9).

The narrative setting displays the basic assumption on a policy problem and describes the context in which this problem is discussed (Jones/McBeth 2010: 340). Jones et al. (2014) extend on this as followed: "Elements of the setting include but are not limited to taken-for-granted facts characterized by very low levels of disagreement, unquestioned (or at least unmovable) legal and constitutional parameters [...]" (6).

The NPF operationalizes the narrative characters into heroes, villains and victims of a narrative (Jones et al. 2014: 6; McBeth et al. 2014: 228). As heroes are displayed the actors that are offering and providing a solution to the policy problem or are decreasing its harm (McBeth et al. 2014: 228; Jones et al. 2014: 6). As villains, on the other hand, are described as those actors that are causing and worsen the problem (McBeth 2010: 340). The third group of characters are the victims. As victims are described those that suffer under the policy problem (McBeth et al. 2014: 228; Jones et al. 2014: 6).

The third narrative element is the plot. The function of the policy narrative plot is to "connect characters to one another and to the policy setting" (Jones et al. 2014: 6). Thereby, the plot provides the aims for the characters and establishes the internal dynamic of the narrative. However, as Jones et al. (2014: 6) state, there is no definition by the framework on how to operationalize the plot. The NPF literature offers two solutions on how to operationalize the plot. The first is to closely follow the framework, and to operationalize the plot as a separate element next to the setting, characters, and moral of the narrative as conducted by Gray/Jones (2016: 206-8). The more common operationalization, however, regards the plot element as too closely intertwined to be regarded as a separate

element (Weible/Schlager: 2014: 242). As conducted in Ney's work (2014: 217), the narrative plot element is integrated in the setting and the characters, resulting in a less fragmented analysis of these narrative elements. Furthermore, to avoid the shortcoming of the NPF in addressing the plot element, this thesis will follow Ney's example and integrate the narrative plot element (Pierce et al. 2014: 43; Ney 2014: 217).

The fourth narrative element is the narrative moral of the story. Function of the moral is to deliver a solution for the policy problem (Jones et al. 2014: 7; McBeth et al. 2014: 216).

The second narrative component is the narrative content. This one, contrary to the narrative form, is specific to each narrative and deliver the content as well as line of argumentation for the narratives (Jones/McBeth 2010: 340; Jones et al. 2014: 8-9). However, the NPF rejects the post-positivistic claim that all narratives, and hence also their content, is relative and consequently not generalizable (Jones/McBeth 2010: 341). Instead, the NPF's understanding is that the content of a narrative is usually not random, but rather following an underlying pattern (Jones et al. 2014: 8-9). Hence, to enable a meaningful analysis, "narratives must be anchored in generalizable content to limit variability" (Jones/McBeth 2010: 341). Such an anchor can be found in belief systems, as mentioned in the NPF core assumption on bounded relativity (Jones et al. 2014: 8-9). Jones and McBeth (2010) offer two sets of belief systems to operationalize (341). The first set is the one of partisanship and ideology. The partisanship belief system is especially directed at the US American context, and offers a causal mechanism between party affiliation and a divergence in issue positions and core values of actors (Jones/McBeth 2010: 341). The same mechanism is to be observed in the ideological divide between conservatives or liberals. The second belief system theory is the Cultural Theory (CT), which will be discussed in chapter 4.2 (Jones/McBeth 2010: 342).

The fifth and last core assumption of the NPF is that narratives are operating simultaneously at three levels (Jones et al. 2014: 10; McBeth et al. 2014: 219). The levels (micro, meso and macro) are drawn to determine and signal the research scope and research object (McBeth et al. 2014: 219). The micro level is centered around the individual. On this level the analysis is focused on how the individual is influenced by and interacts with policy narratives (McBeth et al. 2014: 219; Jones et al. 2014: 12-3). The meso-level aims at the groups and advocacy coalitions and how these are utilizing the existing policy narratives (Jones et al. 2014: 15). The third level is the macro level, which aims at how policy narratives are shaped or created by cultures and institutions, and how those interact with narratives (Jones et al. 2014: 19).

3.2 Cultural Theory

When confronted with complex policy challenges, there is no obvious solution for policy actors (Ney 2014: 210). This is also the case in the DQR negotiations on the integration of non-formal education (Gössling 2013; Klenk 2013). There is a vast body of literature available on all aspects of the discussion: NQFs in general, the EQF in specific, the validation of formal education, as well as the validation of non-formal education (Klenk 2013; Dehnbostel 2013; Gössling 2013; Allais 2011; Gebrande 2011). However, due to the multitude of diverse and partially contradicting findings, there is not the one scientifically right solution for policy makers to be found. Rather, policy makers have to rely on ideas and values in order to select and interpret the facts and positions they are confronted with, in order to reach a good or desirable policy solution (Ney 2014: 210; Fischer 2003: 173). These ideas and values can be summarized under the label of cultural frames (Rein/Schön 1994; Ney 2014: 210). These cultural frames offer guidance for policy actors in selecting and contextualizing the vast and diverse multitude of opinions and positions they are confronted with by emphasizing certain aspects, while downplaying others (Ney 2014: 210). When these cultural frames are communicated in the discussion, this takes place in the form of stories (Jones/McBeth 2010: 7; Ney 2014: 210). These stories, as described in 3.1 are termed policy narratives in the NPF, and the cultural frames serve as narrative content (Jones/McBeth 2010: 7).

To analyze cultural frames, that constitute and shape narratives, the most suitable theory appears the Cultural Theory (CT) (Jones et al. 2014: 5; Jones/McBeth 2010: 342; Ney 2014: 210-2). CT's key benefit is that it provides a framework to detect cultural frames and illustrates the relationship between these (Mamadouh 1999: 396; Ney 2014: 210). First developed in 1970 by Douglas (1970; 1978; 1982), the theory was significantly extended by Thompson (et al. 1990), and Wildavsky (1987). On a first glance, the name Cultural Theory can appear as misleading or characterless, which is also represented in the inner-theoretical discussion (Mamadouh 1999: 395). Alternative terms are grid-group analysis, or theory of socio-cultural viability, however, as dominant proofed the term Cultural Theory (CT) and will be referred to as such in this thesis (Mamadouh 1999: 395).

The theoretical basis of the CT consists of three central claims: the first claim is that culture matters. In this view, social relations and constructions are subject to preferences and justifications, which are in turn culturally biased. Hence, the culture makes a difference. (Mamadouh 1999: 396)

Second, there are cultural types that can be identified and their number is limited. The CT defines a cultural type as a “viable combination of patterns of social relations and patterns of cultural biases [...]” (Mamadouh 1999: 396). This viability criterion is regarded as fulfilled once the social relations and cultural biases are mutually reinforcing, hence the cultural types bears an inner rationality

(Mamadouh 1999: 396-7). Consequently, the CT accepts that there can be several potentially contradicting rationalities, and hence truths, appear as valid at the same time (Mamadouh 1999: 397).

These viable combinations of cultural types can be analyzed and identified through two dimensions of social interaction: grid and group (Ney 2014: 210; Mamadouh 1999: 397; Jones/McBeth 2010: 342). The group dimension assesses the degree of group integration of individuals (Mars 1982: 24–28). The four defining elements of the group dimension are: “frequency (interaction); mutuality, scope (of activities) and (group) boundary” (Mamadouh 1999: 397; Mars 1982: 24–28). The grid dimension, on the other hand, displays the degree to which the individual is limited in his/her actions by the group (Douglas 1978: 16). The grid dimension’s elements are: “insulation, autonomy, control, and competition” (Mamadouh 1999: 397; Douglas 1978: 16).

The third and last claim of the CT is that the cultural types identified are universally applicable (Mamadouh 1999: 397). Based on the assumption that the two dimensions, as described in the second claim, are covering the fundamentals of human social interaction, CT claims that its cultural types can be applied in any context. (Mamadouh 1999: 397).

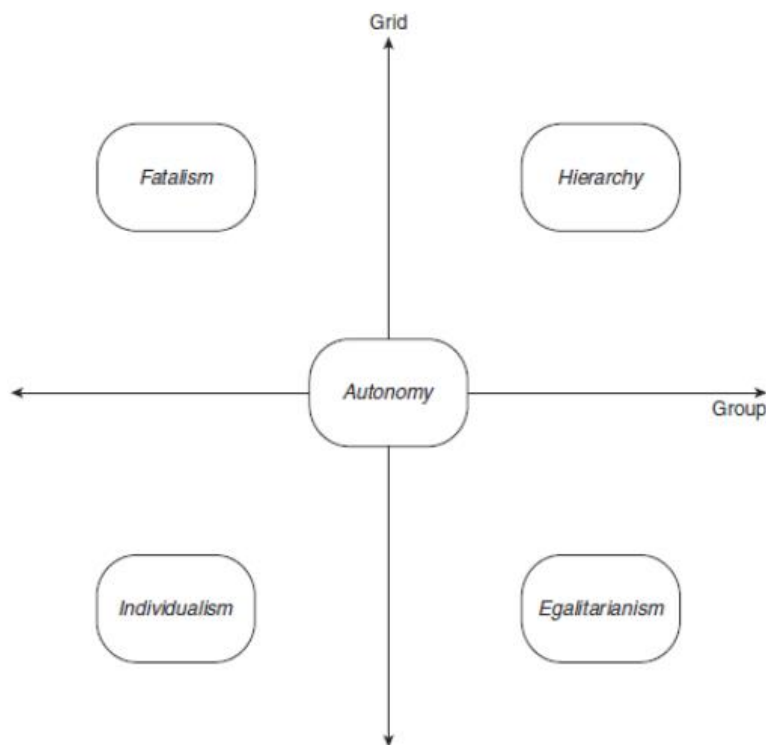


Figure 1: The Cultural Map (taken from: Ney 2014: 212; Thompson et al. 1990: 8)

As mentioned above, the number of cultural frames is limited. The cultural frames are assessed in a cultural map in which the group dimension serves as a horizontal axis and the grid dimension as a vertical one (Douglas 1978: 7; Mamadouh 398-400). This usually leads to a categorization of the cultural map into four cultural frames (see figure 1): an individualist, a hierarchical, an egalitarian, and a fatalist

frame (Thompson et al. 1990; Ney 2014: 210). However, there are also scholars in the CT that also identified a fifth frame: the autonomous frame (Douglas 1978: 18).

The cultural type in the lower left of the cultural map is most commonly referred to as the individualist frame (Ney 2014: 211; Mamadouh 1999: 401). There are also alternative terms for this frame (competition, entrepreneurs (Mamadouh 1999: 401), as well as for the other frames (collectivist frame for the hierarchical frame, or insulated for the fatalistic frame, etc. (Mamadouh 1999: 401), but this thesis will refer to the dominant terms when addressing the cultural frames. The individualistic frame is distinguished by low degree of group integration and weak role prescriptions (Mamadouh 1999: 400). In this frame the society is regarded as operating under market-like conditions, meaning that the individual is free to engage in and disengage from any social interaction on its own terms (Mamadouh 1999: 400; Ney 2014: 211). Important values of this frame are individual rights, liberties, and responsibilities (Ney 2014: 211).

The second cultural frame is to be found in the lower right corner of the cultural map and is coined as the egalitarian frame (Ney 2014: 211). This frame is characterized by strong group boundaries, but only few regulations towards the internal interaction pattern and constitution of the group (Mamadouh 1999: 400). Central values of this group are equality, solidarity, and fairness (Ney 2014: 211; Mamadouh 1999: 400). This leads to a rejection of authority structures in internal matters (Mamadouh 1999: 400).

The hierarchical frame is found in the upper right quadrant of the cultural map (Mamadouh 1999: 400). This frame sets clear and distinct group boundaries, and unlike the egalitarian one, also sets a binding structure for the individuals within the group. In the hierarchical understanding, the group is more important than the individual (Ney: 2014: 211; Mamadouh 1999: 400). As Mamadouh (1999) phrases it for this frame: "Fairness consists of equality before the law." (400). Key elements of the hierarchical frame are authority, expertise, and top-down management (Ney 2014: 211).

In the upper left of the cultural map is the fatalistic frame situated (Ney 2014: 212). Members of the fatalistic frame are poorly integrated into the collective (Mamadouh 1999: 400). However, unlike in the individualistic frame, there is still strong and binding role prescriptions onto the individuals (Mamadouh 1999: 400). Due to this setting, members of the fatalistic frame (are forced to) abstain from a shaping involvement into society, while accepting the regulations that this society applies to them (Ney 2014: 211).

The last and fifth frame is the autonomous one. Despite being mentioned in the CT discourse, it is still disputed if this frame exists (Mamadouh 1999: 400). One part of the scholars sees it located in the middle of the cultural map, hence unaffected by neither grid or group factors (Thompson et al. 1990; Mamadouh

1999: 400). Others integrate the autonomous frame in the individual frame (Douglas 1978: 41).

The discussion on the existence or absence of a fifth cultural frame, however, is negligible for the analysis of this thesis, because both the autonomous frame and the fatalistic one are considered as passive cultures (Mamadouh 1999: 403; Ney 2014: 211). Both cultural frames do not propagate an active goal that they desire to achieve (Mamadouh 1999: 403; Ney 2014: 211). Hence, these frames are usually absent in discussions (Ney 2014: 211). On the other hand, the individualistic, egalitarian, and hierarchical frames are considered as active cultures, since they try to shape society and advocate their solutions to overcome problems, ergo create policy narratives (Ney 2014: 211). Agreeing with this argumentation, this thesis will also exclude both passive frames and only take three active ones in its analysis.

4 Methodology

This section will illustrate the research methods used to enable the analysis of the DQR discourse surrounding non-formal qualifications. First and foremost, the NPF will be displayed that serves as the methodological framework. It will be shown how the research questions were operationalized utilizing the NPF. Subsequently, the development, advantages, and shortcomings of the NPF will be addressed in a literature review, and concluded with a display of the motivation to apply a qualitative NPF research design. In a second step, it will be shown how the interviews were structured, conducted and analyzed. Followed by a discussion of the interview sample. The methodological discussion will be concluded with a display of limitations that this thesis is facing.

4.1 Narrative Policy Framework – methodological framework

The methodological foundation of this thesis is to be found in the Narrative Policy Framework (NPF). To situate this young framework (created in 2005; McBeth et al. 2005) and give an initial understanding of its aim, Pierce et al. (2014) deliver a short but accurate summary of NPF's purpose and aim:

“By combining the empirical methodologies of various policy process research agendas and the recognition of the importance of policy narratives, the narrative policy framework (NPF) (McBeth et al. 2005; Jones and McBeth 2010; Shanahan et al. 2013) fills an important niche in the body of policy process theories by explicitly and empirically examining the policy narratives used by actors in the policy process.” (Pierce et al. 2014: 27).

This paper will rely in its methodology on the Narrative Policy Framework's clearly defined procedure on how to operationalize narratives. This clarity is based in the process that lead to the creation of the NPF. In his field-defining book *Theories of the Policy Process*, Paul Sabatier (2000) rejected the inclusion of post-positivistic approaches, due to their shortcomings with regards to “clear concepts, testable hypotheses, and falsification [...]” (Jones/McBeth 2010: 331). On the other hand, there was an absence of positivistic methods to study policy narratives (Jones/McBeth 2010: 330). Altogether and despite the recognition of the importance of narratives in the policy process, this leads to a lack of any viable policy process approach that could address narratives (Jones/McBeth 2010: 330-1). McBeth et al. (2004; 2005) incorporated these concerns in the creation of the

NPF and especially addressed them in Jones/McBeth's paper (2010) "Clear enough to be wrong". Their aim was to prove that the NPF offers a systematic empirical analysis of narratives while ensuring the possibility to falsify it (Jones/McBeth 2010: 330). To address narrative relativity, the NPF advises to rely on two operational strategies, as also introduced in chapter 3.1: first to define the narrative frame through context-independent narrative elements; and second, to apply an interpretation framework to the narrative content to enable an aggregated analysis (Jones et al. 2014: 5).

To enable a reliable and valid analysis of narratives that are to be found in the DQR negotiations on the inclusion of non-formal education, this thesis will operationalize narratives by utilizing NPF's framework of dividing narratives into their generalizable and context-independent structural elements: a policy narrative setting, its characters, and the moral (Jones/McBeth 2010: 340-1; Jones et al. 2014: 5-7, 16-7; Ney 2014: 216-21). The operationalization of each narrative element is conducted as illustrated in chapter 3.2.

The part of the operationalization of narratives is conducted by applying an external theory or framework that enables a structured and aggregated analysis of the specific narrative's content (McBeth et al. 2014: 217-8; Jones et al. 2014: 5). As a suitable theory, Jones et al. (2014: 5) recommend the usage of Cultural Theory (CT; Thompson et al. 1990). CT has proved to be a "robust anchor for narrative content" (Jones/McBeth 2010: 342) by providing the analysis of policy preferences (Jones/McBeth 2010: 342; Ney 2014: 210-2). Consequently, the narrative content is operationalized by aggregating the narrative content within the three active cultural frames of CT: the egalitarian frame, the hierarchical frame, and the individualistic frame (Ney 2014: 210-3). An alignment and compatibility with the CT frame by the DQR-discussion and its contained positions was determined by this thesis' author in a pre-study of the discussion, and supported by the successive interviews conducted (DIE 2011; Klenk 2013; Gössling 2013).

The egalitarian narrative (egalitarian cultural frame) is found in the DQR discussion on the inclusion of non-formal qualifications in a narrative that advocates and emphasizes the equivalence of non-formal education to formal education (DIE 2011; Gössling 2013).

The hierarchical narrative (hierarchical cultural frame) is present in the discussion in form of a narrative that stresses the quality of education and the demand for high standards of quality assurance (DIE 2011; Klenk 2013; Gössling 2013).

The last narrative is the individualistic one (individualistic frame). The narrative of this frame orbits around the individual learner and the impact of a (non-) integration of non-formal qualifications into the DQR (DIE 2011; Gössling 2013).

4.1.1 Literature review: Narrative Policy Framework

The Narrative Policy Framework was first developed in 2005 by McBeth/Jones/Shanahan (McBeth et al. 2005) and only named in 2010 (McBeth et al. 2014: 215; McBeth 2010). The NPF's aim is to close the methodological gap in the policy process literature and to offer a solution to analyze policy narratives in a positivistic and reliable manner (Jones et al. 2014: 3). The three NPF developers further delivered a body of papers that extended on the framework and addressed the shortcomings of the initial concept (McBeth/Shanahan 2004; McBeth et al. 2005; McBeth et al. 2007; Jones/McBeth 2010; Shanahan et al. 2011; 2013). According to Jones et al. (2014: 28) these papers can be regarded as the core of the NPF theory.

A meta study, conducted by Jones et al. (2014: 28), analyzed the spread and development of the NPF approach. In the period between 2005 and 2013, only 19 publications were identified that were applying the framework (Jones et al. 2014: 28-9). An analysis of the research issues revealed, that large majority of these papers (16/19) dealt with policies from the fields of environmental and energy issues (Jones et al. 2014: 30). Consequently, it was requested in the NPF literature to diversify the NPF application base (Jones et al. 2014: 30). Recent NPF studies also extended to the policy issues of firearm policies (Smith-Walter et al. 2016), political campaign financing policies (Gray/Jones: 2016), and foreign policy issues (O'Bryan et al. 2014).

With regards to the topic of this thesis, in the field of education and the policies surrounding it, only one study could be identified that is applying the NPF. This one is conducted by Price (2016) analyzes Prior Learning Assessment in Higher Education. In her study, Price analyzes the influence of Prior Learning Assessment - policy narratives on the democratic participation in higher education policy making (Price 2016: 11-2; 18-20). Theoretically, Price's work rests on three pillars (Price 2016: 18-20): first, Dewey's (1916) concept of a direct linkage between democracy, communication, and education; second, the NPF and its understanding of the structure and form of narratives (Jones/McBeth 2010); and third, the conceptualization of bias based on the works of Entman (2007). With regards to the study's methodology, Price conducted a qualitative analysis on both literature and coded interviews (Price 2016: 68-71; 84-91; 154-5).

Based on the absence of other NPF studies targeting education policies, this thesis will serve as a needed contribution to the NPF's discussion on the applicability of the framework to different policy issues, and even pioneer with regards to the analysis of policy narratives for non-formal education.

When it comes to the methods of data analysis in NPF studies, the default and most applied form is the quantitative one. When the framework was introduced, McBeth et al. (2005) emphasized the usage of a quantitative approach to achieve reliable results (419-20). In the subsequent core papers on the NPF framework,

the NPF was displayed as a “quantitative, structuralist, and positivist approach” (330). This also aligns with the meta-study of Pierce et al. (2014), who detected that most NPF studies were conducted with a quantitative data analysis (Jones et al. 2014: 36).

This dominance of quantitative approaches, however, shall not lead to the conclusion that qualitative NPF are not possible (Shanahan et al. 2014: 253-4). The NPF is also open to qualitative research designs if they follow the positivist and empiricist orientation of the framework and upholds the framework’s standards of “transparency, replication, and falsification” (Shanahan et al. 2014: 255; McBeth et al. 2014: 233). When looking at the qualitative NPF studies conducted, those proven to “perform equally well” (O’Bryan 2014: 108) compared to the traditional quantitative approaches (Jones et al. 2014: 36). Despite NPF focus on quantitative research designs, there has been a small but growing number of qualitative NPF studies conducted (Shanahan et al. 2014b: 254). Based on the analysis of the NPF field through Jones et al. (2014) and Gray/Jones (2016), as well as the research on (qualitative) NPF by the author of this thesis, a total of 9 published qualitative NPF studies could be identified: McBeth/Shanahan (2004); Rad (2012); Radaelli et al. (2013); Knox (2013); Crow/Berggren (2014); O’Bryan et al. (2014); Ney (2014); Tan (2014); Gray/Jones (2016); and Price (2016).

As distinguished in this selection appears the work of Gray/Jones (2016), as it discusses the applicability and compatibility of qualitative methods with the NPF. In a first step, Gray/Jones expand on Jones/McBeth’s framework defining work “Clear enough to be wrong?” (2010) and attempt to fill the theoretical gaps that this work left with regards to qualitative approaches (Gray/Jones 2016: 197-9). In a second step, they exemplarily demonstrate the design and how to conduct a qualitative NPF research (Gray/Jones 2016: 199-212).

4.1.2 Motivation to choose qualitative NPF

As Ney (2014) states it: “Narrative analysis in general and the NPF in particular provide insight into policy processes about uncertain and complex—or “wicked”—policy challenges. Although wicked problems tend to be technical and scientific, science and technology alone provide few clues about what policy makers ought to do next” (Ney 2014: 210). Such a complex policy challenge is to be found in the discussions on the DQR, and the subordinated negotiation on the inclusion of non-formal education. In the first glance, the policy problem appears rather clear: there is a simple aim that is determined in advance (to create a NQF) and there is a vast body of literature addressing the German education system, National Qualification Frameworks in general, and the non-formal education sector, which should offer a clear advice on how and in which form to develop the DQR (Klenk 2013; Dehnbostel 2013; Gössling 2013; Allais 2011; Gebrande 2011). However, despite this promising starting position, the negotiations to

develop the first version of the DQR have been proven to bear strong (partially even fundamental) conflict and, by the time of this thesis, have entered their 12th year of negotiation (Klenk 2013; Forschung & Lehre 2010; Lehmann 2011; Kühne 2012; I3). In the analysis of such a charged field as the one of education, NPF and its focus on the discourse's narratives offer great explanation value by illuminating the underlying rationalities and patterns of the discussion (McBeth 2014: 233-4).

As the most suitable scope for this thesis, in the analysis of the DQR negotiations on the inclusion of non-formal qualifications, appears a combination of the meso-level (groups) and macro-level (institutions/culture). A meso-level analysis is the obvious choice when analyzing the DQR negotiations, since its participants (with few exceptions) are not appearing as individuals, but as representatives of their respective organizations (I3; I8; I11). Hence, by applying the meso-scope, the interaction of these participating groups can be analyzed with the narrative (Shanahan et al. 2011: 541). When analyzing the DQR, a mere analysis of the meso-level might be too shortsighted. With regards to the aim of the DQR to serve as a transparency tool covering all aspects of education, it impacts the institutional framework of the education sector. Hence, by including an analysis of the macro-level, this thesis will be able to generate insight on how the macro-level policy narratives shaping the policy arena in which the DQR discussion takes place (McBeth et al. 232).

A successful application of a meso-macro-level NPF study was conducted by Ney (2014). In his study on the social innovation governance, Ney utilized the macro-level to analyze the discursive space that was created by the narratives. This was reached by incorporating the Cultural Theory (CT) into the framework as “a measure of the potential scope of policy conflict in this discursive space” (Ney 2014: 213). Therefore, Ney's research design proofed to be a reliable solution to both operationalize narrative content and enable an analysis of the macro-level. Consequently, this thesis will follow in Ney's example and apply the same analytical structure in its study of the DQR negotiations on the inclusion of non-formal qualifications.

Despite the NPF defaulting towards quantitative data analysis, this study aligns with the significant groups of studies following a qualitative approach (Shanahan et al. 2014: 254). The motivation to choose a qualitative approach lies in the limited availability of relevant documents, which would not be numerous enough to conduct a quantitative analysis (Gray/Jones 2016: 214). Through the consensus-principle of the AK DQR, the official publications and documents surrounding the DQR have to be regarded as the result of a negotiation process. The competing narratives that were in the discussion, are hence not necessarily displayed in these. Further are the AK's session transcriptions, which would enable an analysis, not available.

Due to these shortcomings, it appeared to be more fruitful to follow an approach in this thesis that rests on qualitative interviews while staying in the positivistic framework of the NPF (Gray/Jones 2016: 201-2; 213-5). In conducting these qualitative interviews contained two advantages for the research design: first, despite the limited number of stakeholders involved in the DQR negotiation process, a qualitative approach enable an analysis of the field; and second, the individual interviews offered detailed insight into the stakeholders'/groups' positions and their individual usage/reliance of narrative, compared to the blended results found in official documents (Gray/Jones 2016: 214-5).

4.2 Interviews

The interviews conducted for this thesis were semi-structured with follow-up questions, in case of unique statements, which interviewees were asked to elaborate on, and if statements were made that opposed/contradicted the findings gathered in this thesis' pre-study of the official DQR documents (Gray/Jones 2016: 202). Of the 24 interviews conducted, 21 interviews were held via telephone, and three via Skype video chat. Except of one interview, all interviews were held with only the interviewee present. In one telephone interview, two interviewees were present (I17). The author of this thesis regards this deviation from the interview structure as justifiable, since both interviewees are from the same organization, and participated alternating in the DQR negotiations. As shown in the analysis of this interview, there are individual deviations in the perception of certain aspects of the discussion, but both interviewees share the same perception of the greater trends and narratives of the negotiation. Due to the largely similar response of both interviewees, this interview will also be referred to as one in the analysis of this thesis (I17).

To match the NPF in its requirements on reliability and reproducibility, the interviews were structured and the interview questions phrased according to the guidelines and examples provided by Gray/Jones (2016) in their guide on how to conduct qualitative NPF research (199-202; 219-20). The interview template used in this study is displayed in the appendix, both in German (as used in the interviews; appendix 1) and English (for comparison; appendix 2). Interviewees were offered the German interview template on request. The interviews were all conducted in German by the author of this thesis himself, who is a native German-speaker.

The interviews will be referred to as Interviews 1 (I1), Interview 2 (I2), ..., Interview 24 (I24). As this denomination already illustrates, this thesis will abstain from naming any specific individual or organization. This choice was favorable, since the DQR negotiation surrounding non-formal qualifications is still ongoing. Several contacted persons were reluctant to participate if they would appear with their /organization's name in this thesis. This was especially the case

for contacts in state/federal administrations or affiliated organizations. As stated by interviewees themselves, without an anonymization the interviewees would have been reluctant to give statements concerning the organization's internal position, to communicate views that are deviating from the one of the organization, or to mention comparable off-the-record-statements. To ensure the anonymization of its interviewees, this thesis will abstain from mentioning any specific details about the interviewees and their respective organizations that could uncover them. Furthermore, after conducting all interviews, each interview was assigned a randomized number (I1-I24).

For the later analysis, the recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim in German. With regards to the large amount of data gathered (over 20h of interviews in total), the author abstained from a translation of the transcripts into English and conducted the coding and analysis on basis of the German transcripts. In the process of coding, this thesis builds on the coding procedure and method illustrated by Saldana (2009) in his work "The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers" which is also recommended as essential in qualitative NPF data analysis by Gray/Jones (2016: 202). The analysis of the transcripts itself was conducted deductively based on the coding patterns provided by the NPF (setting, hero, villain, victim, moral) and the CT (egalitarian frame, hierarchical frame, individualistic frame), and inductively for emerging patterns with regards to the scope and limitation of the discursive arena (Gray/Jones 2016: 202).

4.3 Data sources and collection

The main data source of this thesis are the 24 qualitative interviews conducted. The interview method itself was already discussed in chapter 4.2, but not how the interview sample is constituted. In the period between April 6 and May 15, 24 interviews were conducted, each lasting on average 52min.

Based on the findings of a pre-study, as potential interviewees were identified the members of three committees and working groups that constitute the key group of participating stakeholders and policy makers in the DQR negotiation on the integration of non-formal qualifications. Non-formal education was discussed in the DQR-context in the following three bodies: the *Arbeitskreis DQR* (also referred to as AK DQR, or DQR committee in this thesis), the 2013-14 expert group on the classification of non-formal learning outcomes to the DQR (Expertengruppe zur Zuordnung von Ergebnissen nicht-formalen Lernens zum DQR), and the 2011 working group on the Connection Possibilities of non-formal and informal learning to the DQR in the fields of general, political, and cultural education (further referred to as AG 1; *Arbeitsgruppe über die Anschlussmöglichkeiten nicht-formalen und informellen Lernens an den DQR. Arbeitsgruppe 1: Allgemeine, politische und kulturelle Bildung*).

By setting the members of the AK DQR (35 members), the expert group (30 members), and the AG1 (19 members) as an initial sample a contact list of 68 contacts was created. The lower total number is due to some participants' membership in two working groups, and for a few even in all three. This list was expanded by a) a reference of the contacted person to the organization's current participant of the DQR process (in case of retirement or position switch in the meantime); and b) through a snowball sampling technique (see Appendix 1, question 13; Gray/Jones 2016: 201). The final contact list contained 74 potential interviewees, of which 24 agreed to an interview. This leads to an overall positive response rate of 32%.

	Total	AK DQR	Expert	AG 1	Other
Contacts	74	35	30	19	3
Interviews	24	10	11	8	2
Percent	32	28	37	42	-

Table 1: Interview participation rate, in total numbers and percentages (created by author)

But as table 1 illustrates, 32% is only an average. While 42% of AG1-members participated in the interviews (8 out of 19) and 37% of expert group members (11 out of 30), only 28% of AK DQR members (10 out of 35) agreed to an interview. An explanation for the difference in participation rates can be found in the composition of the respective groups. Due to the thematic focus of the expert group and AG1, both bodies have an over-proportionally high participation of organizations/members associated with the non-formal sector, compared to the composition of the AK DQR. Hence, a larger share of members had the motivation to participate in this study, because this covers their field of work and expertise (non-formal education). This incentive is less present in the AK DQR, due to its larger share of formal education sector organizations.

This assumption is supported by the participant structure of the interviews conducted (see table 2). Out of the 24 interviewees, eight can be assigned to the non-formal education sector. The second largest group (six interviewees) is to be found in the social partner (e.g. trade unions) and commercial and industry associations. Five interviewees are representing state or federal ministries, or working at state/federal affiliated organizations. Three academic scholars participated in this study, as well as two interviewees that can be counted to the formal sector.

Number of interviewees	24
Non-formal education sector	8
Social partners and economic associations	6
State or federal representative/ affiliated organization	5
Academic scholars	3
Formal education sector	2

Table 2: Interview participant structure by sector (created by author)

4.4 Limitations

The first limitation is found with regards to the interview sample. There was another working group in the 2011 process (AG 2), that dealt with the possibilities of a classification of non-formal and informal competencies in the fields of electrical/metal working, health/care, trade, and IT. Unfortunately, it was not possible to identify the participants of this working group. The absence of this working group is likely to have resulted in an underrepresentation of economic and business interests, and consequently the associated narratives. Despite this absence being undesirable, it doesn't condemn the sample to be intrinsically flawed. The main and decision-making body of the DQR negotiations – the AK DQR – is covered in the sample, and so is the most recent working group – the 2013 expert group. Furthermore, the 2011 AG2 also dealt with informal competences, which are not subject of this study.

The second cluster of limitations surrounds the CT. The first limitation results from the scope of CT. In providing a viable framework of cultural frames, the CT enables an operationalization of policy narrative content (as illustrated in 4.1 and 5.1). The three active cultural frames are universally present, and hence also to be found in the German policy narratives on the DQR integration of non-formal qualifications (Mamadouh 1999: 397). Despite this claim, it is to be stated that the three cultural frames, and hence the deriving policy narratives, are ideal types. Therefore, it is unlikely that the existing narratives of the DQR discussion can be reduced to a total of three. Rather it is to expect that there are numerous sub-narratives in place. Consequently, there are unavoidable blind spots in the application of CT (Ney 2014: 228).

However, this doesn't undermine the applicability of the CT. All these real existing sub-narratives can be summarized under the categories of the three active cultural frames, and hence the three selected overarching narratives. In doing so, it is also ensured that a positivistic analysis of the narratives is possible to conduct.

A further limitation with regards to CT is concerning the depth in which the cultural frames are discussed for the German education system in this thesis. The German education system offers a rich past, and is strikingly entangled with the development of the German society and nation. Therefore, the discussion of the arrangement and composition of content of each cultural frame for the overarching education system, in which the DQR negotiation takes place, would be a thesis in its own. When looking at the hierarchical narrative, its development and structure are reaching back into wilheminan/imperial times and the nationwide implementation of tripartite general schooling system (Drewek: 1997). And when addressing the egalitarian frame, the analysis would have to start with the establishment of the social democracy and the upcoming worker education in the middle of the 19th century (Olbricht 2013: 57-66).

To conduct a thorough discussion of these frames would exceed the scope of this thesis. Furthermore, it is also not the aim of this thesis to advance the CT, and to conduct a CT research on the German education system. In its over 40 years of existence, the CT is already well-established (Douglas 1970; 1978). The aim of this thesis is a) to investigate the negotiation around the DQR integration of non-formal education; and b) to contribute to and advance the NPF, and its qualitative approach in particular. With regards to these research aims, the author of this thesis chose to only conduct a basal discussion of the cultural frames, to focus on the actual aim of this study.

5 Analysis

In this chapter, the analytical framework of the NPF will be applied to the three identified narratives. This will give insights on how the generalizable elements are structured in the respective narratives. Subsequently, the narratives are analyzed in order to identify their relative strengths, downplays and vulnerabilities. Lastly, it will be illustrated where intersecting interest is found between the narratives.

5.1 Analysis of policy narratives

In this section the three narratives – egalitarian narrative, hierarchical narrative, and individualistic narrative – are individually analyzed along their generalizable narrative elements: setting, hero, villain, victim, and moral (summarized in table 3).

	Egalitarian Narrative	Hierarchical Narrative	Individualistic Narrative
Setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - equivalence of non-formal qualification - genuine structure of non-formal education - integration on non-formal qualifications to realize LLL in the DQR 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Preservation of DQR classification standards and criteria - concern of insufficient quality of non-formal qualifications - DQR's transparency function endangered/ fear of devaluation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - focus on individual workers and learners - real life improvement of conditions
Hero	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - non-formal education providers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - formal education sector 	Absent
Villain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - formal education sector - static education system - market-oriented organizations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - non-formal sector organizations and providers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - AK DQR - non-formal education providers
Victim	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - individual learners - non-formal education sector and providers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - formal education sector - DQR certified workers - DQR framework (transparency/reputation) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - individual learners and workers - employers
Moral	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - acknowledgement of non-formal qualification's equivalence - acceptance of non-formal sector's different path of knowledge production - progress in integration debate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - conservation of formal sector's standards in classification - integration of formalized non-formal qualifications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - put individual's interest over interest of education sectors - emphasize outcome-orientation and individual competences - increase mobility and labor market position of disadvantaged workers

Table 3: Competing narrative of the DQR discourse surrounding non-formal qualifications (created by author)

5.1.1 Egalitarian Narrative

The coalition behind the egalitarian narrative is primarily composed of actors from the non-formal education sector (I3; I9; I12; I17; I18; I21; I22). Further usage of the narrative was observed in the groups of the academic scholars and the social partners (trade unions and economic associations), but also by a few state/federal authorities and affiliated organizations (I1; I6; I13; I16). These actors utilized the egalitarian narrative to advocate for a DQR integration of non-formal qualifications.

Setting

The egalitarian narrative revolves around the recognition of equivalence of non-formal education. The equivalence is directed at the field of formal education (I6; I14). In the egalitarian narrative, the non-formal education sector is regarded as an essential part of the education system (I1; I6; I16; I17; I21). The educational measures offered by the non-formal sector are of high quality and on a comparable level to the offers of the formal sector (I3; I21). Furthermore, with regards to the potential audience that each educational sector is addressing, the non-formal sector encompasses by far the largest share of potential learners – everyone over the age of 25 with a completed education (I21). Based on this relevance of the non-formal sector, proponents of the egalitarian narrative object to claims that there is any justifiable hierarchy between the different ways sectors produce knowledge (I16; I21). Formal education is not seen as the sole producer of knowledge (I6; I14). Rather, the egalitarian narrative strives for an acknowledgement of the equivalence both in the expert community (I1; I6; I16; I17; I21).

This acknowledgement of the equivalence of the non-formal goes hand in hand with the acknowledgement of its genuine character and structure (I18; I22). Non-formal education follows a different structure than formal education, this leads to different paths in knowledge generation and assessment (I18). A formalization of non-formal qualifications in the framework – as discussed in the process – would exclude central aspects of numerous non-formal offers (I18; I22). Rather, proponents of the egalitarian narrative refer to the outcome-focus of the DQR and demand a strict implementation (I16; I17; I18). This way the genuine character of the non-formal could be conserved, and the differences of the education sectors acknowledged without undermining their equivalence in the framework.

Furthermore, in integrating non-formal education and recognizing its equivalence, the DQR would live up to its claim of regulating all aspects of lifelong learning (LLL) (I1; I3; I5; I7; I8; I9; I14; I21). Based on the understanding of LLL, the individual's learning biography isn't completed after reaching an academic or vocational degree (I8). When consequently following LLL's agenda, the egalitarian narrative demands for a more dynamic education system that integrates non-formal education in an equivalent way – since it encompasses most education after the age of 25 (I3; I21). In regarding learning as a continuum, the importance of non-formal education is increased and connected to this its visibility (I1; I3; I7; I9; I21).

Hero

The egalitarian narrative abstains from the character of the hero in vast parts. Predominantly it relies on strong victim and villain roles (I1; I2; I3; I16; I21; I22). However, there is an occasional use of the hero. In these cases, the hero is to be found in the non-formal education providers (I1; I21). The egalitarian narrative describes these organizations as providers of high quality education that serve a vital role in the education system (I21). In conducting this work, the non-formal

education providers demonstrate the equivalence of the non-formal sector to the formal one (I1). Hence, the providers and their programs become examples of why and which non-formal qualifications should be classified in the DQR (I21).

Villain

The two main villains in the egalitarian narrative are seen in the representatives of the formal sector and a static education system. The formal sector is regarded as a villain due to its perceived obstruction and delay of the integration of the non-formal into the DQR. Proponents of the egalitarian narrative, view the formal education sector as dominant both in the education system and in the DQR negotiations (I3; I16). This dominance becomes obvious in the DQR negotiations that these were centered around the formal sector (I22). The formal sector is seen as the default in the negotiations, hence its standards and structure are also getting enforced upon the non-formal sector despite its perceived genuine difference (I3; I22). Furthermore, in the process of classification of non-formal qualifications, some egalitarian proponents see double standards being in place (I16; I21). This assumption is grounded on the perceived en bloc classification of qualifications from the higher and vocational education, without a thorough analysis of the outcome description of each qualification (I16; I21). Such en bloc classification, however, is denied to qualifications of the non-formal sector (I21). Instead, proponents described an overly strict classification process of non-formal qualifications compared to the prior ones (I16; I21).

The second villain of the egalitarian narrative is found in the static education system that is resistant to change (I3; I22). Instead of being open to an inclusion of non-formal education and other education fields to cover all aspects of LLL, the education system conserves its structure and path dependencies (I22). Proponents of the egalitarian narratives, see the reasons for this in the interest of strong and privileged forces in the education system to maintain these privileges also in a new setting such as the DQR (I3; I16; I18; I22). This way, it is perceived, that these privileged organizations and actors of the education system are choosing to weight their own power preservation over the societal progress, that would take place in a dynamic education framework which would incorporate non-formal education (I22).

A third less present villain is to be found in market-centric organizations. Despite the DQR being a framework that is focused on occupational qualifications, the egalitarian narrative rejects an understanding of education and qualification that is solely tailored towards economic usage (I2; I3; I5). Education is perceived as more than just a tool to achieve a job, it is regarded as a good by itself (I5). As in a humanistic understanding, education also serves the purpose to enable people to choose and to become a citizen (I5). If the understanding of education is reduced to only an economic one, essential parts of the educational and civic landscape are threatened (I3; I5).

Victim

The egalitarian narrative knows two key groups of victims: the individual learner as well as the non-formal education sector and its providers. The individual learners that the egalitarian narrative perceives as victims are disadvantaged in the current system and suffer under the non-integration of non-formal education (I1; I21; I22). Most referred to are low-skilled workers that are suffering under the intransparency of the education system (I1; I22). These low-skilled workers seek guidance on which further education measures they should take to advance, but due to the complexity of the system, are not able to find the suitable programs (I1). Consequently, less further-education is taken by low-skilled workers, due to these problems. In the logic of the egalitarian narrative, however, once the non-formal sector is integrated into the DQR, the transparency of further education would be increased and so the likelihood of low-skilled workers to identify they desired programs (I1; I22).

The second victim in the egalitarian narrative is the non-formal education itself. Non-formal education and its providers are seen as knowledge producers of high quality that are denied recognition by the formal sector (I3; I21). In this understanding, formal education organizations are seeking to prevent an inclusion of the non-formal sector to save their privileges in the education system as the only providers of recognized knowledge (I3). Despite its equivalence, the recognition as such is denied to the non-formal sector (I3). This structural power to obstruct is also observed in the AK DQR, as proponents of the egalitarian narrative state (I3; I21). Due to a perceived vast imbalance in favor of the formal sector in the AK DQR, the non-formal sector is not able to advocate its cause sufficiently and gets structurally overruled (I3; I21).

Moral

The key moral of the egalitarian narrative is that the equivalence of the non-formal sector should be accepted by all actors in the process, and the sector should be integrated into the DQR. The aim of the DQR should not only be to display the equivalence of general and vocation education, but also the equivalence of the non-formal education (I8; I16; I17; I22; DQR 2013: 9). This acceptance is regarded as withheld by the villains of the egalitarian narrative – the formal sector (I16; I22). Due to the non-formal sector's high quality education and its key role in the coverage of LLL its equivalence should be acknowledged by all participants of the DQR negotiations (I5; I8).

Linked to the acceptance of the equivalence of the non-formal, is also the egalitarian narrative's demand for an acceptance of the structural difference of the sector. The non-formal sector has a different structure than the formal one. The non-formal sector is less structured and regulated than the formal one (I8). Consequently, when assessing the non-formal sector based on criteria of the formal sector, several incompatibilities arise (I8). Therefore, egalitarian proponents demand that if the equivalence of the non-formal education itself is recognized, then the same must be the case for its structure (I5; I16; I22). Formal

education should not be the dominant force in the DQR process, and shape the integration of the non-formal sector (I16; I22).

Furthermore, the egalitarian narrative urges for a stop of the delay in the negotiations. The reoccurring debates on the fundamental character and structure of the non-formal sector are regarded by egalitarian proponents as mainly intended to delay the debate and to prolong the integration of the non-formal sector (I3; I8). From this view, there is a sufficient body of research and literature on how the integration of the non-formal sector into the DQR could be conducted (I21). There is no academic need for further rounds of research. What is needed is a stop of delay measures and to initiate progress in the classification process of selected non-formal qualifications (I3, I8; I21).

5.1.2 Hierarchical Narrative

The coalition utilizing the hierarchical narrative consists of stakeholders and groups from the formal education sector, state/federal authorities and affiliated organizations, as well as organizations from the group of the social partners (I2; I4; I8; I11; I14; I20; I23; I24). This coalition uses the hierarchical narrative to preserve the established structure of the DQR and to communicate critique towards a DQR integration of non-formal qualifications.

Setting

In the DQR negotiations on the integration of non-formal education, the hierarchical narrative's setting is formed around a threat to the quality of the DQR. In this narrative's understanding, the current DQR is perceived as a carefully manufactured compromise, especially after all fields of the formal education sector were ultimately incorporated – higher education, vocational education, and general schooling (I2; I8). Common standards were negotiated that regulated the classification criteria and ensured the respective equivalence of the education fields according to the DQR levels onto which the individual qualifications were assessed (I13). These criteria derived from the high standards of the education fields themselves, and the sector's holistic approach to qualification (I8). In this narrative, a qualification is understood as the competence to execute a profession (I2).

This lead to a conflict with regards to the integration of the non-formal education into the DQR framework. Numerous hierarchical proponents pointing out that most non-formal programs do not constitute a whole qualification, but only a sub-qualification (I2; I4; I14; I20; I23). In addition, the wide and partially unregulated structure of non-formal programs and providers creates inconsistencies in the validity and reliability in the qualifications that are potentially to be assessed (I2; I4; I14; I23).

Consequently, an integration of non-formal qualifications in the DQR would devalue the currently certified qualifications, since these would share the same level with qualifications that do not live up to the criteria they were assessed on (I2; I4; I8; I13; I23). To prevent this and to ensure the transparency function of the DQR, the strict standards, which were used in the classification of the formal sector, also must be applied in the classification of the non-formal sector, in order to ensure the comparability and equivalence of the qualifications classified in the DQR (I13; I15; I16).

Hero

Consequently, the hero of the hierarchical narrative is found in the organizations of the formal sector, that are defending the quality of DQR qualifications against the pressure of the non-formal sector to integrate unsuitable qualifications into the framework (I2; I8; I20). The formal sector, especially the higher education, is regarded here as leading by example (I20). The strict accreditation system and the well-elaborated procedure of competence identification that are in place in the formal sector, constitute to a system of quality assurance (I2). In this way, it can be assured that the skills and competencies that a learner has are corresponding to the criteria of the respective DQR qualification level (I2; I15). Hence, by applying the criteria and standards of the formal education sector to the classification of the non-formal sector, it can be assured that the standard of the framework is not diluted, and a devaluation of already classified formal qualifications is avoided (I2; I8; I13; I15; I16)

Villain

The hierarchical villain is primarily seen in the advocates and providers of the non-formal education. One hierarchical villain is seen in the proponents of the non-formal sector and the egalitarian narrative that are demanding for a prompt integration of non-formal qualifications (I4; I7; I8; I10; I20). From the hierarchical standpoint, the non-formal qualifications that are in the discussion to be classified are not fulfilling the standards applied to the qualifications of the formal sector (I20). This is based on the perceived insufficiencies in the either the comprehensiveness of the qualification or the reliability of providers (I2; I4; I14; I20; I23). Consequently, by pushing for a classification of non-formal qualifications at the point of the debate would make non-equivalent qualifications equivalent by classifying it on the same DQR level as other (formal) qualifications (I4; I8; I20). This would result in two effects for the DQR: first, the value of qualification already classified in the DQR would be undermined, since other non-formal qualifications would be classified on the same level which do not fulfill the same criteria as formal qualifications (I4; I7; I8; I10; I20). Thereby, the publicly perceived quality and competence level of the DQR level would be reduced to the one of the non-formal qualification, which in turn reduces the publicly perceived quality of the formal qualifications (I4; I20); and second, the core claim of the DQR as a transparency tool would be destroyed (I8; I11). When using the same DQR levels to describe qualifications that were classified on different criteria and

have different qualities, the DQR levels loses its informative value and so does the framework itself (I8; I11).

The second villain of the hierarchical narrative is to be found in the non-formal education providers themselves. In this narrative, it is perceived that the driving force of the non-formal sector's urge to integrate the sector is the economic self-interest of the education providers (I4; I13). The non-formal education providers are alleged to bypass the perceived necessary discussions on quality assurance in the classification, and instead are pushing for a classification of their programs and qualifications to gain a larger market share (I4; I8; I9; I13; I21; I24). Thereby the providers are seen as subordinating the interest of the education sector to their organizations' self-interest (I4).

Furthermore, several hierarchical proponents referred to the practiced misuse of the DQR label in the non-formal sector (I8; I24). It was described that in several incidents non-formal education providers advertised programs with *DQR-like* labels or which referred to a certain DQR level, even though there are no criteria for such assessment in place yet (I11; I24). Such practices mislead the learners and ultimately undermine the validity of the framework, due to the devaluation of the levels and the public perception (I8; I20).

Victim

When shifting the view to the role of the victim in the hierarchical narrative, those can be found in the formal education sector, workers with certified qualifications, and the DQR itself. The formal education sector and the value of its degrees are threatened, in the understanding of the hierarchical narrative, by a broad inclusion of non-formal qualifications (I7). As stated above, this roots in the doubt on the comparability of the non-formal sector, and the perceived insufficient procedure of competence identification and quality assurance of the non-formal sector (I2; I4; I10; I13; I15; I20).

Workers that are already certified in a formal qualification on a DQR level, are a potential victim, because the status of their formal qualification is lowered. Once non-formal qualifications are integrated into the DQR, this would result in an increased number of certified workers. In this setting, formally qualified workers would have to compete with non-formally qualified job applicants as well, which in turn leads to a more severe competition on the labor market and ultimately lowers the salaries (I7).

The last victim in the hierarchical narrative is found in the DQR itself. By integrating non-formal qualifications that do not meet the criteria of the framework when the formal qualifications were classified, the validity of the DQR threatened (I13; I15; I16). When classifying non-formal education with lesser standards, the transparency function that is central to the DQR would be undermined (I8; I11). Furthermore, the practiced misuse of the DQR label by

some non-formal education providers is already harming the public perception of the DQR (I11).

Moral

The moral of the hierarchical narrative is that a classification of non-formal qualifications in the DQR is welcomed if it follows the high standards applied in the classification of the education fields of the formal education sector. Hence, the integration of non-formal is not an actual aim of the hierarchical narrative, this is rather to be found in the preservation of the high level of validity and reliability of the DQR framework (I2; I4; I15; I20). Consequently, the criteria and control applied in the formal education sector are regarded as the standards onto which non-formal qualification must be classified (I20). Once such setting is assured, it is regarded as possible in the hierarchical narrative, that a few, highly formalized non-formal programs could be classified in the DQR (I9; I18).

5.1.3 Individualistic Narrative

The individualistic narrative is the least frequented of the three narratives. In its supporter base, there is no cluster to be identified. Rather, there is an even spread across the different participating groups of the DQR in their usage of the individualistic narrative (I3; I6; I10; I14; I16; I17; I20; I22). This narrative was used especially in aspects of the DQR negotiation that was dominated by competing sector interest, and utilized to emphasize the interest of and impact on the individual learners and workers.

Setting

The individualist narrative emphasizes the gains that can be taken from an inclusion of non-formal education. A central part of the individualist narrative is that it fosters the employability of learners and workers (I2; I13; I16; I17). In recognizing their existing skills and making it easier to recognize newly gained ones, workers can increase their employment and life conditions easier. In a similar manner, a recognition is also benefiting the employers, since they are given a new set of tools to hire more targeted (I11; I13). In this way employers can save money by shortening the recruitment process, and having less mismatch in the recruitment conducted. In addition, a framework for non-formal education would increase the international mobility of workers (I11; I15). With such in place, German workers could easier change countries, and foreign workers' qualifications would easier be recognized on the German labor market (I11; I15).

In general, advocates of the individualist narrative are very favorable of a classification of non-formal education into the DQR, and on the DQR in general. Through the transition from an input and process-oriented framework, as it was in place before, towards an outcome-oriented one (I3; I14; I16). The individualistic narrative emphasizes that an outcome-orientation puts the learner more into the center of the education system, by reducing the institution where the learning was

conducted and the time spent on the education to side factors in assessing the qualification of the individual (I3; I14; I16).

Hero

The hero role is absent in the individualistic narrative. There is no attribution to any group that is regarded as solvers of the policy problem. Instead, the individualistic narrative is centered around the roles of the villain and victim. This is congruent with the NPF, since not every role has to be covered to constitute an analyzable narrative (Weible/Schlager 2014: 238).

Villain

The character of a villain is seen in the individualist narrative in the AK DQR itself and providers of non-formal education. As mentioned before, the individualist narratives centers around the individual itself. The villains only appear when they are regarded as obstructive to the individual's gain. The AK DQR is criticized for not addressing the needs of the individual learner insufficiently (I6). The discussion held in the AK is perceived as overly academic and detached from the realities that individual learner, worker, and trainer are facing (I6; I17). Hence, by prolonging the discussion, the AK is prolonging the presence of suboptimal conditions for the individual.

The second villain was identified in the organizations that are providing non-formal education and their self-interest (I11). In pushing for an integration of their programs into the DQR, the primary motivation and interest is not the improvement of the economic or occupational position of the individual, but the economic advancement of the own organization (I11). Consequently, it was feared, that these education providing organizations would push for a classification of their offers, instead of a comprehensive framework that would increase the transparency function of the DQR (I11). Hence, that consequently the transparency function of the DQR would be subordinated to the marketing interests of the providing organizations (I11).

Victim

The individualist narrative centers around two groups of individuals that it portrays as victims: low-skilled workers and employers. Most present of these three is the group of low-skilled workers (I15; I17; I21; I22). In the present framework, low-skilled workers are likely to have existing qualifications that are not officially recognized (I8). An integration of non-formal education into the DQR would create a framework to make these qualifications visible (I12). A (prolonged) non-integration of the non-formal sector, hence would continue to disregard these in reality existing qualifications.

The greatest beneficiaries of the DQR are found in the group of low-skilled workers (I20; I24). High-skilled workers are regarded as already recognized by the education system, and the possible advancement through the integration of non-formal education into the DQR is smaller than the one of lower-skilled ones

(I24). Hence, they would also be less affected in the case of a (prolonged) non-integration of the non-formal sector into the DQR. Furthermore, individualist narrative proponents are picturing the threat of a cost-intensive certification process. In this case, only very profitable qualifications would be economically viable, which is likely to limit the number of certified qualification to high-skilled ones due to the greater financial resources of their participant group (I24). This could lead to a structural exclusion of low-skilled workers and disadvantaged groups from the DQR in case of an unfavorable classification of the non-formal sector (I17; I22).

The second group of victims in the individualist narrative are the employers. Employers suffer under the insufficient transparency on the labor market (I5; I8; I12; I22). Under the current educational framework, employers don't have clarity about the actual skills and competencies of the applicants (I5; I22). Due to insufficient tools to determine these, either costly assessments have to be conducted in the recruitment process to ensure the qualification of the applicant, or without them the threat of a skill mismatch exists (I12). With an integration of outcome-oriented non-formal education into the DQR, skills and qualifications would be easier to identify and a more targeted recruitment could be conducted (I8; I12).

Moral

The moral of the individualist narrative is to put the interest of the individual over sector interests (I20). In this way, the integration of non-formal education into the DQR should closely follow the outcome-orientation of the DQR in general. Thereby the actual skills and competencies of the learner are central, and not the surrounding factors of the educational setting (I3; I14; I16). In a similar manner, the individual-focus should continue by creating a classification of non-formal education, which benefits the individuals of the system: learners, workers, and employers (I20). The interests of these groups should shape the classification, not the interests of the already classified education sectors or the non-formal education providers (I20). This entails that the classification should, on the one hand, strive to acknowledge the dynamic labor and learning market and be open for a comprehensive integration of non-formal education (I21); and, on the other hand, seek to display the actual qualifications of the learners, and not only fit the current offers of non-formal education providers into the framework (I22).

A comprehensive integration of the non-formal sector would increase the mobility and employability of workers both of domestic and European origin (I18). This would lift the current limitations that occur due to an incompatible framework (I18). All these measures would not only increase the employability of the workers, but ultimately improve their quality of life of the individuals affected (I21). In recognizing their qualification, workers would gain not only economic but also personal acceptance, since the systemic rejection of existing though unrecognized qualifications and skills would decrease (I21).

5.2 Relative characteristics of policy narratives

An analysis of the relative strengths, downplays, and vulnerabilities of the respective narratives appears as relevant, since it offers an insight on the persuasiveness and effective utilization of the narratives. In the discourse itself, this is likely to result in the coalitions emphasizing their narrative's strengths in their argumentation. Whereas the weaknesses offer possibilities for policy learning, due to a deviation from the narrative's logic. (Ney 2014; 223-4; Hecló 1974)

5.2.1 Egalitarian Narrative

Strengths

The strengths of the egalitarian narrative lie in its reference to the overarching EQF and its inclusion of non-formal education, as well as the capability to encompass non-linear educational biographies. The egalitarian narrative can dwell in its demand for equivalence and integration of the non-formal sector on the recommendations of the European Union. In 2008, the European parliament and council recommended the validation of non-formal education to their member states (EQF 2008). Hence, the egalitarian proponents demand for an integration of the sector can not only be argued from a position of sectoral interest, but put in a greater perspective to fulfill the European mission and to realize the recommendations given by the EP and European Council (I10).

The second strength of the egalitarian narrative is that it can display itself as the advocate of a dynamic and progressive agenda (I21). When looking at the formal education sector, it is highly tailored to serve the needs of learners that have a linear educational biography: general schooling, followed by an academic or vocation training and degree (I13). However, in case of an interrupted or non-linear educational biography, the formal sector fails to cover a significant number of learners (I21). Possible causes for this are that learners drop out of one education phase, or do not complete the transition from one education phase to the next (I21; I22). The non-formal education has the potential to fill these gaps, due to its diverse and flexible structure, and renew the stiff education system to make it suitable to the dynamic demands of the present day (I13; I21)

Downplays

This strong outcome-orientation also leads to the downplay of factors other than outcome in the egalitarian narrative. The outcome-focus of the initial framework and the EQF is emphasized, and displayed as a central characteristic of the new DQR framework (I16; I17; I21). Due to this focus, it is regarded paradox to include input or workload factors, since these are in no direct correlation to the outcome of learning measures (I16; I18). Consequently, a prominent usage of input and procedural factors is rejected by proponents of the egalitarian narrative.

A second downplay is to be identified in the context of quality assurance. Especially from the side of higher and vocational education comes the demand for a strict quality assurance, such as the one that is in place in these sectors (I20). Egalitarian proponents, however, refer to the high quality and distinctive structure of the non-formal sector in this case (I3; I8; I21). Based on this downplay, an inclusion of such rigid quality assurance measures is rejected (I20).

Vulnerabilities

When looking at the vulnerabilities of the egalitarian narrative, it becomes apparent that the heterogeneity of the non-formal sector can be an obstacle in the sector's classification, and the varying and diverse structure of non-formal education programs puts the eligibility to the DQR of the advocated non-formal sector into question. The heterogeneity of the non-formal sector is rooted first and foremost in a diverse education providers structure. Organizations in this sector have different statuses ranging from private to public and certified to not certified (I4; I20). Due to their large number, it is hard to encompass all providers operating on the German education market, which makes it unknown how many providers and programs are covered by the integration of the non-formal sector (I3; I8; I9; I18; I19). This multitude of providers and their partly unregulated work, creates an uncertainty about the reliability and quality of non-formal providers and their programs (I1; I8; I12). This, in turn, weakens the egalitarian narrative's claim of comparability between the non-formal sector and highly regulated sectors such as the higher and vocational education (I4; I9; I20; I24).

Another egalitarian trust that is vulnerable is if the program and certification structure of the non-formal sector is suitable for a classification in the DQR. A weak spot, pointed out by interviewees, was that the perceived unreliable determination of the learning outcomes in the non-formal programs (I4; I9). Especially the lack of a final testing of the education content was mentioned as a factor (I4). Furthermore, is the program structure of non-formal programs mostly seen as not comprehensive enough to cover all competency pillars of the DQR: knowledge, skills, social competence and self-competence (I20; I24). This critique is supported by the fact that, despite a small number of attempts, no non-formal qualification was regarded as suitable by the AK DQR, and rejected based on implausibility in their classification (I20).

Another vulnerability of the non-unanimous supporter structure of the egalitarian narrative. Predestinated as supporters are all organizations of the field of non-formal education (I1; I12; I20). However, numerous non-formal organizations from the fields of civic education, cultural education, and social and open youth work were fundamentally opposed to the DQR framework, and finally withdrew from the discourse after the agreement of the possibility of the exclusion of these fields were reached (I1; I3; I22). And among the rest of the rest of the non-formal community, the importance attributed to the DQR strongly varies, between high importance and neglect or unawareness (I22). When looking into the DQR negotiations, it becomes obvious that the non-formal agenda is primarily driven

by the large associations of the sector: adult education centers, and the protestant and catholic education institutes (I9). Smaller organizations of the sector struggle besides these to be recognized as relevant actors (I12). Hence it is to be summarized, that due to weak internal organization of the sector and the missing unanimity in the negotiations, the egalitarian narrative is vulnerable in the negotiations due to the weakness of its main proponent and its decreased potential to advocate the narrative itself.

And last vulnerability of the egalitarian narrative is that the impact of a DQR classification of non-formal qualifications could be very limited. This is to be assessed for the experience of the integration of non-formal education in the Netherlands, which is apart from Austria the most relevant case to the German one (I11; I24). The Dutch case shows that only a low two-digit number of non-formal qualifications were certified in the 5 years of the framework (I11). This is a relatively small number, even if scaled up to the larger number of the German population, compared to the thousands of non-formal programs offered (I8; I20). And in turn, this small number of classification of qualifications and the resulting low availability, would lead to only marginal benefits to the egalitarian victim – the individual learners - of an integration of the non-formal qualifications (I24).

5.2.2 Hierarchical Narrative

Strengths

The strength of the hierarchical narrative primarily lies three aspects: first, it can refer to a well-established and working system of quality control; second, it builds on the traditional hierarchy of the education system; and third, that it dwells on the fear of devaluation by the formal sector and its degree holders.

The first strength of the hierarchical narrative is that it can refer to an existing and established set of quality criteria and procedures in the negotiations on the DQR integration of non-formal qualifications. Up to this point, the non-formal education sector lacks sector-wide applicable quality criteria and competency identification procedures (I10; I15; I20). On the other hand, the formal sector, which is also utilized as the hero-role in the hierarchical narrative, is has a framework of competency identification procedures in place and the sector's subfield are highly regulated in legal frameworks (I2; I4; I11; I20; I23). Due to this legal regulation and recognition of the formal qualifications, these standards are also rigidly enforced and found access in the classification criteria of the DQR (I4; I11). As distinct in this context appears the higher education sector, which even has a qualification framework in place only regulation its sector (I20). Therefore, it is the strength of the hierarchical narrative that it can legitimize its comparability and quality concern claim on the non-formal sector, by referring to the formal education sector's existing and enforced set of regulations and procedures.

The second strength of the hierarchical narrative derives from and builds on the traditional hierarchy in the field of education. The traditional German education system is centered around the formal education sector in which the higher education marks the highest level of education that can be attained, followed by the vocational education (I2; I8). An example for this hierarchy is found in the education fields that were essential to the initial DQR of 2013. It was of vital interest to the actors of the negotiation to integrate the fields of higher and vocational education (I9; I19). The non-formal sector, however, was not attributed with the same priority, and its classification regarded as possible to delay up to the current day (I16; I19; I24). When considering the discussion on the integration of non-formal qualifications, it was stated by several interviewees that the formal education is set as a norm and its structure and regulations are argued to be set as the basis for an integration of non-formal qualifications (I4; I16; I19; I20; I21). All this considered, it becomes apparent that the hierarchical narrative dwells on the established status quo of the education system, whereas the egalitarian narrative aims to negate and change the traditional hierarchy.

Furthermore, the third strength of the hierarchical narrative is that it can dwell on the fear of devaluation by the formal sector and its degree holders. The official and legal recognition of the formal education sector is legitimized through its rigid regulation and strict procedures of competence identification (I2; I10; I15; I20; I23). Non-formal qualifications on the other hand lack such a framework of regulations and structures that lead to an official recognition of the qualifications (I3; I4; I13). This raises concerns within the formal education sector that an integration of non-formal qualifications into the DQR would come with the price of a compromise to settle on a lower shared quality standard (I2; I7; I10; I13; I15; I20). Consequently, the fear that the hierarchical narrative dwells on is that the official recognition of the formal degrees is undermined, since it can no longer be legitimized by the high standards in regulations and procedures, or, in turn, that the same DQR level could be reached with less effort in the non-formal track (I2; I7; I11). If such case would come into effect, it would undermine and partially negate the status, labor market benefits and privileges of formal degrees, and significantly decrease the attractiveness of a formal degree compared to a non-formal one (I7; I21). Hence, the hierarchical narrative aligns here with the economic self-interest of the formal sector organizations and degree holders to conserve as much as possible of the current education system's provisions as possible in the negotiations of the integration of non-formal qualifications into the DQR (I7; I10; I18; I20; I22).

Downplays

The hierarchical narrative disregards the non-formal sector's distinct way of knowledge production. By diverging from the fixed and rigid framework that constitutes the formal education, non-formal education can be created (I8; I13; I21). This divergence doesn't necessarily lead to a lower standard in the education provided and generated (I3; I21). One key argument for non-formal programs is that it can be more flexible than the highly regulated formal sector, and hence be

more tailored to the needs and aims of the learners (I16; 21). Consequently, the outcome of non-formal programs can be equivalent to the outcomes of formal education, despite the differences in procedure and provider structure in the generation of the knowledge (I8; I16; I21).

Vulnerabilities

In the 2012 declaration of the KMK on the DQR for LLL, it is stated that non-formal education should be part of the DQR (DQR 2012: 4). A similar declaration of intent is to be found in the 2013 DQR (DQR 2013: 6). The same was identified in the interviews. Several interviewees stated that there is a unanimous consensus on the question if non-formal qualifications should find access to the DQR (I2; I3; I10). The dissent is found on how and to which extent the integration should be conducted (I2; I3).

Due to this political backing of the integration of non-formal qualifications, the hierarchical narrative is limited in its demands, since the predefined outcome of the negotiation is intrinsically undesirable (I11). Effectively, this leads to demands of the hierarchical narrative proponents, to advocate either a prolonged negotiation, in order to conserve the status quo as long as possible (I2; I3). Or advocate for a strict set of criteria for non-formal qualifications, to keep the number of classifications low (I8; I24).

A second vulnerability of the hierarchical narrative is that it can be perceived as backwards-oriented, in comparison to the progressive egalitarian narrative. Despite of the fact that the formal education sector is considered as the backbone of the German education system and its high standards of education provision, a sole focus on this education sector is doubted to meet the challenges of a modern society (I18; I20; I21; I22). Due to its strict regulations, it is a long and time intensive process for the formal sector to create new programs in order to meet shifting demands (I21). The non-formal sector could close this gap through its dynamic and flexible structure by reacting in a short time to these demands for new programs (I21; I22).

Lastly, the concerns of a negative impact on the DQR through the integration of non-formal qualifications appear to be unproportional, with regards to the low numbers of non-formal qualification that are predicted to be classified. As a basis for the prediction on how many classifications of non-formal qualifications are to be expected, the Netherlands appear as suitable, due to its presence in the German discourse (I2; I4; I8; I10; I14; I15; I20; I21; I24). Within the first five years of the integration of non-formal qualifications, less than 30 qualifications found access to the qualification framework (I8; I11; I24). Even when scaled up to the larger number of learners in Germany, the number of potentially classified non-formal qualification appears to be low compared to the formal qualifications that already found access to the DQR (I8). Consequently, the integration of a low number of non-formal qualifications is unlikely to cause a change in character and validity of the DQR, as feared by the hierarchical narrative.

5.2.3 Individualistic Narrative

Strengths

A strong point of the individualistic narrative is that it can underline the legitimacy of the individual-focus, by referring to the EQF and its intrinsic individual-focus. Despite the presence of strong organizational and sector interests that are shaping the negotiations on non-formal education, the individualistic narrative dwells its claim's legitimacy from the overarching EQF (I22). Since the EQF advocates a stringent outcome-focus, the EQFs overall aim is also directed as the individuals and the recognition of their competencies (EQF 2008: 6). Consequently, in a debate that becomes increasingly dominated by the interests of the involved organizations and associations, advocates of the individual narratives can demand a re-focusing on the individual learner, worker, employer; to make these groups' interests visible and heard in the debate (I22).

Downplays

No downplays could be detected in the individualistic narrative.

Vulnerabilities

The primary vulnerability of the individualistic narrative lays in its weak supporter structure among the actors and organizations involved in the process. When analyzing the structure of advocates of the individualistic narrative, it becomes apparent that they are spread of the whole spectrum of organizations and educational fields involved (I4; I17). Furthermore, interviewees didn't argue solely within the individualistic framework. More often it would be an addition to the dominant egalitarian narrative – if the interviewee was more affiliated with the sector of non-formal education – or hierarchic narrative – if the interviewee was closer to formal education. Therefore, in none of the interviews conducted the individualistic narrative was the dominant narrative concerning the inclusion of non-formal education into the DQR. This is also likely to be rooted in the structure of participants in the DQR process. Organizations had to actively get involved into the process and claim their seat (I13). Consequently, the DQR committee is mostly constituted of organized interest groups. Groups that represent workers or individuals that are disadvantaged in the current education system are less organized and hence less present in the committee (I17).

A second weakness of the individualistic narrative is that a second key target group – the employers – are not exclusively dependent to gain discursive dominance to achieve their aims. Although an integration of non-formal education into the DQR would increase the transparency of applicants' qualifications and skills, it is not the case that there would be no transparency under the current setting in place (I13). Employers have long established procedures to identify suitable candidates. Consequently, they are not dependent on the DQR. This capacity to, in the worst case, to being able to cope with a non-integration without major disadvantages, gives the employers a strong stand in the negotiations (I13). Unlike the other individualistic target group – the low-skilled workers – the

employers are not dependent on discursive dominance of their narrative to implement their position. Due to their factual strength in the economic arena, they have enough potential to influence the discussion even without a dominance of the individualistic narrative.

5.3 Intersections of policy narratives

As elaborated on in chapter 4.1, the actors/stakeholders in the DQR negotiations are confronted with a complex policy challenge. The three identified policy narratives offer an interpretation framework to the involved actors. In utilizing one of the policy narratives, the stakeholders can value the presented and partly contradicting information to consequently reach a conclusion about which policy decision is desirable. A problematic situation, however, is created since all three policy narratives constitute the discursive space and are competing in this space, by advising different policy outcomes as the preferred ones. In a discourse in which the proponents of no single narrative are in a dominating majority, coalitions must be formed to create a large enough majority to pass a policy outcome. A solution to create a large enough majority is to form a coalition across narratives. Despite the fact, that the three narrative pursue follow diverging aims and sets of values, the aims are not necessarily diametrical opposites. Two narratives can advocate for the same policy outcome, even though based on different rationalities. Consequently, the aim of this chapter is to illustrate the mutual agreement, as well as rejection of the three policy narratives. These intersecting interests can be regarded as the basis for potential coalitions, and show likely policy outcomes, due to large potential coalition that advocates them. (Ney 2014: 213-5; 225-9; Hecló 1974; table 4)

	Hierarchical-Egalitarian	Hierarchical-Individualist	Egalitarian-Individualistic
Mutual Agreement	- Integration of formalized non-formal qualifications	- Protect status of officially recognized qualifications/ learners	- Outcome-orientation is beneficial economic - advancement of workers
Mutual Rejection	Market-oriented organizations/ stakeholders	Scrutiny over non-formal sector organization's self-interest	Static elements in the education system /integration opponents

Table 4: Mutual agreement and rejection of policy narratives (created by author)

5.3.1 Intersection: Hierarchical-Egalitarian narrative

When looking at the two dominant policy narratives of the discourse on the DQR integration of non-formal education, it becomes apparent that there are fundamental discrepancies between them. Especially with regards to the de facto

acknowledgement of the non-formal education's equivalence (I1; I4; I6; I8; I16; I20). However, there is also a common ground between the two narratives to be found with regards to formalized qualifications from the non-formal education sector. Programs of this category are offered in the non-formal further education sector, but follow the structure and criteria that are in the formal education sector in place. It lies in the rationalities of both narratives to advocate for an integration of these programs.

For the hierarchical narrative, such integration would leave the standards and criteria intact through which formal qualifications were classified in the DQR (I13; I15; I16). Hence, by classifying the non-formal qualifications in the same way as formal ones, the threat of introducing a second layer of standards and thereby undermining the transparency function of the DQR is avoided (I8; I11; I20).

In integrating these qualifications, non-formal qualifications find entrance to the DQR, which would underline the egalitarian narrative's claim of high quality education that is produced in the non-formal sector (I3; I6; I14; I21). In turn, such integration would effectively be an acknowledgement of the non-formal education's equivalence to formal qualifications, which is a central demand of the egalitarian narrative (I1; I6; I16; I17; I21).

There are also intersecting interests in the rejection of market-oriented actors and solutions in the negotiations. Both narratives see a primacy in the interests of the education sector. Consequently, market-interests and rationalities are welcome if they are congruent with the one of the education sector, but rejected once they diverge.

Consequently, the egalitarian narrative does not fully reject economic and market interests in the discussions around the DQR integration of non-formal qualifications, which is also inevitable in a discussion on a framework that seeks to structure vocational qualifications. However, the egalitarian narrative regards education as a good in itself, and following a humanistic understanding, also vocational education serves the development of the human character (I2; I3; I5).

The hierarchical narrative rejection of market-rationalities and its advocating actors lies in the perceived threat to the framework's quality and transparency standards. In this rationality, the economic interests of non-formal education providers to certify their offers within the DQR framework are rejected as valid reasons. The hierarchical narrative emphasizes the integrity and high quality standards of the DQR framework, over the economic interests of providers (I4; I8; I13; I22; I24).

5.3.2 Intersection: Hierarchical-Individualistic narrative

The hierarchical and individualistic narrative find a common ground in their concern on the status of the already recognized learners. Both narratives want to secure the status of the learners and workers that achieved qualifications, which are officially recognized in the formal education system (I2; I4; I13; I20). The status of these qualifications is sought to be protected during an integration of non-formal qualifications.

Although one major line of argumentation in the individualistic narrative lies in the advancement of disadvantaged individuals, the narrative also addresses the interests of already certified and recognized workers and learners. The main aim with regards to the second group, is to conduct a DQR integration of non-formal qualifications without worsen the position and status of the workers and learners whose (formal) qualifications are officially recognized and classified in the DQR matrix (I13; I20).

The focus of the hierarchical narrative lies in this matter less on the status of the individual learner, but on the status of the degree itself. It aligns with the central aim of the hierarchical narrative to keep the formal education sector as the reference and its criteria as standards (I13; I15; I16). If those are upheld in the integration, the validity of the DQR framework would be unchanged, which consequently would prevent the reputation and validity of formal education from being decreased (I2; I4; I15; I20).

Both narratives further share a mutual villain in the non-formal sector organizations and education providers. The narratives criticize that there is a strong self-interest of non-formal education providers and sector organizations to place non-formal qualification in the DQR (I7; I8; I10; I11; I13). It is fear that this self-interest is stronger than the interest to advance the DQR (I8; I11; I20).

The premise of the individualistic narrative is to improve the situation of the individual learners through the integration of non-formal qualifications into the DQR (I3; I14; I16). The non-formal sector organizations are met with skepticism in this narrative, since they are also seen to follow an agenda that seeks to strengthen the sector's organizations and education providers, instead of putting the learners in the center of their argument, as demanded by the individualistic narrative (I11; I20).

The hierarchical critique towards non-formal education providers is that those seek a comprehensive integration of non-formal qualifications into the DQR, in order to place as many of their program offers in the framework (I4; I8; I20). Hence, the motivation for this is seen, by the hierarchical narrative, to strengthen the providers' economic competitiveness, and not the advancement of the DQR framework (I4; I8; I13). Consequently, when classifying non-formal qualifications in the DQR based on sector-interests instead of match with the standards of the

framework's standards and criteria, the validity of the framework as a whole would be undermined as well as its transparency function (I4; I8; I10; I11; I20).

5.3.3 Intersection: Egalitarian-Individualistic narrative

The last cluster of intersecting policy narrative is found between the egalitarian and individualistic narrative. Both narratives share the understandings that first, the outcome and competence orientation of the DQR is beneficial, and second, that an integration of non-formal qualifications to the DQR would improve the economic situation of workers.

First, the DQR and its outcome-orientation are regarded as an achievement. It is shared by both narratives that it is positive that existing competences are the core of the framework, and factors such as the place and procedure of education became subordinate. This aligns with the position of the egalitarian narrative, that emphasizes that all competences are equivalent regardless of their place of creation (I3; I7; I16; I22). The individualistic narrative supports the strict outcome and competency focus. It's the individual and not an institution that is central in this narrative (I3; I14; I16).

Second, both narratives see an opportunity in the integration of non-formal qualifications to improve their vocational and economic situation. Through the DQR integration of non-formal qualifications, there would be possibility to recognize existing competencies that are not recognized (egalitarian motivation: I8; I14; I18), and it would create new paths to achieve a recognized qualification for workers and learners (individualistic motivation: I2; I13; I16; I17).

Both narratives also share a mutual villain in form of the static education system and the organizations and institutions that work against or delay an integration of non-formal qualifications into the DQR framework. The individualistic narrative argues that there is a social urge and need to integrate non-formal qualifications. Disadvantaged individuals are regarded as suffering under a framework that denies them (economic/vocational) recognition (I21). Hence, the organizations and institutions in the AK DQR that are preventing and delaying an integration of non-formal qualifications, are regarded as disregarding these disadvantaged individuals (I6; I17; I21).

The egalitarian narrative interprets the opposition to an integration as based on systemic path dependencies and the self-interest of formal education sector organizations (I3; I22). In the egalitarian narrative, it is perceived that there is a strong self-interest of the formal education sector organizations to delay the integration of non-formal qualifications from the DQR as long as possible, and to integrate as little as possible of the non-formal sector (I3; I16; I18; I22).

6 Discussion and concluding remarks

In this thesis, it was possible to determine that there are three overarching narratives in the DQR discourse surrounding non-formal education. Through the application of the Culture Theory (CT) these narratives could be identified as an egalitarian narrative, a hierarchical narrative, and an individualistic narrative (*RQ 1: What policy narratives surround the DQR discourse on non-formal education?*). In order to analyze these narratives in a reliable and positivistic manner, the analytical framework of the Narrative Policy Framework (NPF) was applied. Through the NPF it was possible and divide the narratives into their generalizable elements – setting, hero, villain, victim, and moral – to enable a further analysis of the policy narratives’ structures. The data for this analysis was won through qualitative semi-structured interviews with participants of the DQR process. The interviews were transcribed and coded utilizing the elements the NPF provided. The subsequent analysis gave deeper insight into the composition of the respective narrative elements, which also addressed the RQ 2 (*How are the policy narratives surrounding the DQR discourse structured?*) and 4 (*Which are the discourse participants/coalitions utilizing the respective policy narratives?*):

The egalitarian narrative was identified as centered around the claim of equivalence of the non-formal sector. Accordingly, it was most often referred to and utilized by actors from the non-formal education sector, but also from academic scholars, representatives of the social partners (trade unions and economic associations), as well as actors of state/federal administrations/affiliated organizations. This narrative emphasizes the importance of non-formal education providers in producing qualitative work, and criticizes formal sector organizations for blocking and derailing the discussion on non-formal qualifications in the DQR process. Consequently, it demands a recognition of the equivalence of non-formal qualifications and an integration of these qualifications.

The hierarchical narrative, on the other hand, is concerned to uphold the standards and transparency function of the DQR. Therefore, the narrative demands a strict enforcement of the currently applied formal regulations and quality assurance procedures as a policy solution (moral). The narrative’s hero is found in the formal sector, that applies and offers these regulations. When turned to the other roles, the villain was found in the organizations, participating in the DQR negotiations, that are pushing for a comprehensive integration of non-formal qualifications, that would harm the transparency of the framework and thereby workers – the victim – with formal qualifications. The hierarchical narrative is referred to and utilized by actors of state/federal administrations/affiliated organizations, social partners, and representatives of the formal education sector.

In the center of the individualistic narrative is the individual worker and learner. This narrative perceives that there is an opportunity in the DQR process to improve the economic, vocational, and social conditions of learners and workers through the integration of non-formal qualifications. These learners and workers are pictured as victims under the current regulations, since they are disadvantaged. Consequently, the individualistic narrative criticizes the deciding body of the DQR process – the villain – to neglect these individuals by prolonging the discourse on non-formal qualifications. This narrative is utilized by the smallest group in the discourse, and finds proponents in every group of DQR participants.

As investigated through RQ 3 (*How do the policy narratives relate to each other?*), this study has further shown, that there is a strong dissent between the two main narratives of the discourse – the egalitarian and hierarchical narrative. Both narratives have effectively inverted character roles. Also, the narratives' suggested policy solutions (moral) are to a large degree conflictive. A detailed analysis of the relative strengths and weaknesses of each narrative, is to be found in chapter 5.2. The individualistic narrative appears as the independent third in this constellation. Both in the coalition referring to it and the narrative's set of interests, it connects to the other two narratives. With regards to the fact, that the negotiations surrounding non-formal qualifications are still ongoing, and hence a policy solution still needs to be found, possible intersecting interests of the competing narratives were identified, even between the egalitarian and hierarchical narratives.

Concludingly, it is to state that this thesis illuminated the underlying argumentation and conflict lines of the DQR discourse surrounding non-formal qualifications, and identified which the coalitions behind these narratives are. The results of this study should give insight in the rationalities of this discourse to (civil society) actors and stakeholders that are not member of the AK DQR or associated groups, and enable these actors and stakeholders to potentially join or influence the discourse.

With regards to the academic relevance, this study successfully applied a qualitative NPF analysis, and thereby widen the literature base of this approach. Furthermore, this study contributed to the NPF application in education policy issues. Possible future research in this field could be conducted by reproducing this study, once the negotiations around the integration of non-formal qualifications are finalized and a decision is reached. This research would give great insights into the continuity and change of narratives in this discourse. A second relevant study would be found in a NPF analysis of the 2013 DQR integration of vocational training/education. This study would enable a more precise analysis of which narrative elements are constant over any aspect of the DQR, and which are specific to the different education sectors.

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8 Appendix

8.1 Appendix 1: Interview template - German

Interview Template

DQR-Narratives on informal/non-formal education: Semi-Structured Stakeholder Interview

1. Guten Tag, mein Name ist Felix Meyer. Ich bin Master-Student an der Universität Lund und führe, im Rahmen meiner Masterthesis, Interviews mit Personen über die Einbindung von informell und nicht-formal erworbenen Kompetenzen in den Deutschen Qualifikationsrahmen (DQR) durch. Wir hatten im Vorfeld einen Interviewtermin vereinbart. Das Interview sollte zwischen 30min und einer Stunde dauern. Falls, zu irgendeinem Zeitpunkt, eine Frage stelle die Sie nicht beantworten wollen, dann können Sie gerne Bescheid geben und wir fahren mit der nächsten Frage fort. Sie können das Interview jederzeit pausieren oder auch abbrechen.

2. Ich würde dieses Interview gerne zum Zweck der späteren Auswertung aufzeichnen. (Informationen über die Verwendung des Interviews und Anonymisierung in der Arbeit). Sind Sie damit einverstanden? Haben Sie noch weitere Fragen, oder können wir das Interview beginnen?

3. Zu Beginn wäre es schön, wenn Sie mir kurz Ihre Position und Organisation/Institution beschreiben könnten.

4. Wie sind Sie in die Verhandlungen um die Einbeziehung von informell und nicht-formal erworbenen Kompetenzen in den DQR eingebunden?

5. Allgemein gefragt, was ist Ihrer Haltung zur Einbeziehung von informell und nicht-formal erworbenen Kompetenzen in den DQR? Sehen Sie in der Einbeziehung einen Nutzen?

- Ist eine Einbeziehung/Reform dieses Bereichs notwendig? Welche Argumente sprechen dafür?
- Oder ist eine Einbeziehung in den DQR eher unnötig? Und gibt es potentiell negative Effekte durch eine Einbeziehung?
- Für welche Ziele/Positionen haben Sie sich besonders in den Verhandlungen eingesetzt?
- Wie würde eine ideale Einbindung informell und nicht-formal erworbener Kompetenzen, Ihrer Meinung nach, aussehen?
- Wo und wie stießen Sie auf Widerstand als Sie Ihre Positionen in die Verhandlungen einbrachten?

6. Warum wurde, Ihrer Meinung nach, informelle und nicht-formale Bildung nicht mit in den ersten DQR von 2013 mit aufgenommen?

- Gab es, Ihrer Einschätzung nach, Argumente die für eine Aufnahme zu diesem Zeitpunkt sprachen?

7. Sind Sie mit den Empfehlungen der „Arbeitsgruppen zur Einbeziehung nicht-formal und informell erworbener Kompetenzen in den DQR“ (Stand 22.11.2011) vertraut? Was ist Ihre Meinung zu diesen?

- Ja? Vollkommen? Oder in welchen Punkten und warum stimmen Sie nicht damit überein?

- Nein? In welchen Punkten und warum stimmen Sie damit nicht überein? In welchen stimmen Sie damit überein?

8. Sind Sie mit den Empfehlungen der „Expertenarbeitsgruppe zur Zuordnung von Ergebnissen nicht-formalen Lernens zum Deutschen Qualifikationsrahmen (DQR)“ (Stand 27.02.2014) vertraut? Was ist Ihre Meinung zu diesen?

- Ja? Vollkommen? oder in welchen Punkten und warum stimmen Sie nicht damit überein?

- Nein? In welchen Punkten und warum stimmen Sie damit nicht überein? In welchen stimmen Sie damit überein?

9. Ich interessiere mich für die Arbeit in Ihrem AK/in Ihrer Experten/Arbeitsgruppe. Wie lässt sich die Arbeit in dieser beschreiben?

- Zu welchen Entwürfen/Fragen herrschte (größtenteils) Einstimmigkeit? Warum war dies, Ihrer Meinung nach, unstrittig?

- Zu welchen Fragen gab es Konflikte? Welche konkurrierenden Positionen gab es in diesen, und wie wurden diese kommuniziert/argumentiert?

- Gab es in den Diskussionen „rote Linien“ in manchen Fragen? Sprich, Vorschläge/Entwürfe die von anderen Akteuren durch ein Veto blockiert wurden? Wie wurden diese kommuniziert und gerechtfertigt?

Gab es Vetos von Ihrer Seite? Zu welchen Vorschlägen/Entwürfen, und warum?

10. Wie groß würden Sie den Einfluss der europäischen Ebene auf den DQR beschreiben? Wie äußert sich der Einfluss (z.B. durch den EQF) auf a) die Initiierung des DQR; und b) auf den momentanen Stand der Einbeziehung von informell und nicht-formal erworbenen Kompetenzen in den DQR?

- Gab es, Ihrer Meinung nach, in den Verhandlungen relevante Einflüsse/wiederkehrende Beispiele aus anderen Staaten? Welche waren dies?

11. Was/welche Schritte bedarf es noch damit nicht-formal/informell erworbene Kompetenzen in den DQR aufgenommen werden?

- Ist dies in absehbarer Zeit erwartbar?

12. Gibt es Aspekte in der Einbindung von informeller und nicht-formaler Bildung in den DQR die ich in meinen Fragen nicht abgebildet habe, die aber erwähnenswert sind?

13. Abschließend noch die Frage, ob Sie mir jemanden nahelegen würden mit dem ich ein Interview durchführen sollte?

14. Dann bedanke ich mich sehr herzlich für dieses Interview.

8.2 Appendix 2: Interview template - English

Interview Template

DQR-Narratives on informal/non-formal education: Semi-Structured Stakeholder Interview

1. Hello, my name is Felix Meyer. I am a student at Lund University and for my master thesis, I currently conduct a series of interviews on the inclusion of informally and non-formally gained competencies into the German National Qualification Framework (DQR). We agreed on an interview in advance. The interview will take approximately 30 min to an hour. If, for any reason, you don't want to answer a question, we can skip that one and proceed with the next one. Also, feel free to pause or cancel the interview at any given point.

2. I would like to record this interview for a latter analysis. (Information about anonymization of results) Are you fine with that? Do you have any questions or shall we begin the interview?

3. At the beginning, it would be great if you could briefly describe your work/position and organization/institution.

4. How are you involved in the negotiations around the inclusion of informally and non-formally gained competencies into the DQR?

5. Generally speaking, what is your opinion on the inclusion of informally and non-formally gained competencies into the DQR? Do you see any use or gains from an inclusion?

- Is an inclusion/reform of this field necessary? Which arguments are speaking for it?

- Or is an inclusion of these competencies rather unnecessary? Which potentially negative effects can you see?

- Which aims/positions did you especially advocate in the negotiations?

- How would, in your opinion, an ideal inclusion of informally and non-formally gained competencies look like?

- In which contexts and how did you experience resistance in advocating your position in the negotiations?

6. Why, according to your opinion, wasn't informal and non-formal education included in the first DQR of 2013?

- In your opinion, were there any arguments that would have suggested an inclusion already at that point?

7. Are you familiar with the recommendations of the "Arbeitsgruppen zur Einbeziehung nicht-formal und informell erworbener Kompetenzen in den DQR" (22.11.2011)? What is your opinion to these recommendations?

- You agree with them? Completely? Or in which aspects do you disagree and why?

- You disagree with them? In which aspects do you disagree with them and why? Do you see any aspects in which you agree with the recommendations?

8. Are you familiar with the recommendations of the “Expertenarbeitsgruppe zur Zuordnung von Ergebnissen nicht-formalen Lernens zum Deutschen Qualifikationsrahmen (DQR)” (27.02.2014)? What is your opinion to these recommendations?

- You agree with them? Completely? Or in which aspects do you disagree and why?

- You disagree with them? In which aspects do you disagree with them and why? Do you see any aspects in which you agree with the recommendations?

9. I am interested in your work in the AK/expert group/working group. How can the work in this group be characterized?

- To which questions/proposals was there unanimity? Why were these aspects, in your opinion, so uncontroversial?

- Which questions/proposals were controversial? Which competing positions were found in these, and how were they communicated/argued?

- Were there any “red lines” in the negotiations? So, were some proposals vetoed by other actors? How were these vetoes communicated?

10. How large, in your view, would you assess the influence of the European level on the DQR? What is the influence of the European level on a) the initiation of the DQR process; and b) on the current state of the inclusion of informally and non-formally gained competencies?

- Were there, in your opinion, any relevant influences/reoccurring examples from other countries? Which were these countries, and how were they influential?

11. Which, if there are any, steps are needed, in your opinion, to finally include informally and non-formally gained competencies into the DQR?

- What time frame do you see as realistic for a final inclusion?

12. Were there aspects on the inclusion of informally and non-formally gained competencies that I haven't in this interview, but that you see as relevant?

13. Finally, do you know someone you would recommend me to conduct an interview with?

14. Thank you for the interview.