

Competence Framework of the Village Host



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1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the competence framework

This Competence Framework is developed under the Erasmus+ programme by 7 EU organisations and aims at identifying the key skills of Village Hosts that are able to support small villages and rural areas in improving quality of life standards. The project "The Open School of Village Hosts" proposes to create a new core of competences, currently missing in the European context, that benefits villages around Europe. The objective of the project is to create a training program, a shareable platform and a pilot project.

Being the first time such a profile is created and formalised, the partnership of Open School for Village Hosts has combined professional competences taken from different fields (such as rural development, community building, social innovation, transformative tourism, crafts and design) and identified 5 macro-competence areas and their associated learning outcomes from design discipline perspective.

Target audience of this Competence Framework are Village Hosts: people who empower social, economic and ecological life to small villages and their local economy by providing and creating sustained services for livelihoods: *positive-impact tourism, nature reconnection, adventure sports, farm-shares, learning journeys, wellness retreats, work-vacations, heritage trails, locally produced products and services*, and more. Village Hosts connect assets that may already exist in a community, but are unknown, or isolated: people, places, infrastructure, enterprises and skills. Village Hosts enable diverse partners and stakeholders to work together and collaborate.

The competence framework is the Project Result 1 and it is a document which presents competences that are highlighted as the most needed from the target audience perspective in line with the design process of *Define, Design, Deliver*, known as *Triple Design process*¹. This allows engagement in every phase by moving around and examining *why* an intervention is needed.

The levels of progression from basic to expert will be developed as methodology and assignments within the Training Programme which is the Project Result 2. The framework is aligned to European competence frameworks like *EntreComp*²,

¹ Freimane, Aija. 2021. "Decoding Design Value." *Design Principles and Practices: An International Journal—Annual Review* 15 (1): 45-54. doi:10.18848/1833-1874/CGP/v15i01/45-54; ISSN: 1833-1874 (Print); ISSN: 2473-5736 (Online)

² https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/entrecomp-entrepreneurship-competence-framework_en

*DigComp*³, *LifeComp*⁴ and *GreenComp*⁵, and is the base for future competences validation to happen after the training activities.

1.2 The identification of a new professional role

To put into practice the improvement of life of small villages and rural areas, Village Hosts seek out new connections and develop services sustained by new business trends and models: remote working, co-housing, platform co-ops and others. Village Hosts enable diverse partners and stakeholders to work together – often for the first time.

Although the description ‘Village Host’ is new, similar work is being done at a local level by local pioneers, social innovators, and enterprising local officials. But many more such people are needed. In Italy alone, 5,500 small villages (those with 5,000 or fewer inhabitants) have been declining; in Spain, 3,500; in Serbia, 4,700 – to name just three of the countries represented in this project.

Every village is unique. The Open School for Village Hosts will therefore not be based on a standard curriculum but on the range of needed competencies that will be developed throughout micro-courses corresponding to the individual needs and preferences of every Village Host.

1.3 A contextual reflection on the competencies needed for a Village Host

The role falls within the parameters of several sectors - many village hosts activities could be driven by cultural values, or by other artistic creative expressions found within the Creative and Cultural Sector. Similarly, tourism will often provide economic opportunities to small villages. With activities anchored at the local level, socio-economic cohesion is also fostered by promoting values such as solidarity, participation and cooperation, falling within the Social and Proximity Economy ecosystem.

The uniqueness of The Open School for Village Hosts and defined competence framework lies within the combination of design process and methodology. The role of Village Host as local activist requires a new competency framework, combining existing cross sectoral research and stakeholder experience.

³ https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/digcomp/digital-competence-framework_en

⁴ https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/lifecomp_en

⁵ https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/greencomp-european-sustainability-competence-framework_en

1.4 Knowledge, skills and qualities of a Village Host

An unusual combination of competencies are needed to be an effective Village Host, such as digital literacy, business planning and sustaining, as well as intrapersonal, co-creation and collaborative skills for hosting, convening, facilitating, animating, and co-ordinating.

2. Proposed competences for the Village Host in line with Design process

Village Hosts empower social, economic and ecological life to small villages and their local economy by providing and creating sustained services for livelihoods and connecting assets that may already exist in a community, but are unknown, or isolated. They enable diverse partners and stakeholders to work together and collaborate. Competences such as resourcefulness, self-discipline, finding inner resources, initiative, enthusiasm, resilience, openness, tolerance, empathy and ability to learn independently are regarded as personal traits for Village Host.

2.1 Process of selecting 5 macro-competence areas and associated learning outcomes

Defined selection of competencies are in line with a cross-cultural study in Italy, Spain, Hungary, Serbia, Poland and Latvia, as well as in line with the analysis of international and EU competence framework mapping.

Defined competencies are in line with Transversal (*LifeComp*), Entrepreneurial (*EntreComp*), Digital (*DigComp*) and Green (*GreenComp*) competency frameworks as defined by EU. Competencies are specified as learning outcomes that Village Hosts will be able to apply in their activities after taking individual learning paths (levels of learning progression).

Outlined competencies were selected in a waterfall methodology starting from general study of internationally defined competencies in demand until 2030 (Chapter 2) and country-specific studies across 6 project partner countries (Chapter 3). The first draft of selected competencies was tested in focus groups with stakeholders in 6 partner countries (Annex2). Received feedback was combined

and implemented into a common competence framework proposal in line with design process and competence areas according to EU and international competency study.

2.2 Proposed competences for Village Hosts

As a result, the following 5 competence areas identified in this Competence Framework will contribute to the design and structuring of the modules of the Training Program of the Open School for Village Hosts (PR2):

- Visioning and mapping opportunities (competence area (CA) 1)
- Map actors and resources (competence area (CA) 2)
- Storying the place (competence area (CA) 3)
- Make service prototypes & Curate activities and outcomes (competence area (CA) 4)
- Assemble cooperation platforms & new business models. (competence area (CA) 5)

Within above named competence areas, the following nine competencies are regarded as crucial to Village Hosts bearing in mind design process and methodologies:

- Innovative & Reflective Thinking
- Ability to act in ambiguous environments
- Benchmarking & Evaluation methodology
- Communication & Networking
- Co-designing & Co-creation
- Presentation & Digital communication
- Product & Service system innovation
- Planet & Human centric service
- Entrepreneurship (i.e. Sales / Marketing / Fundraising)

Following competencies are redefined as learning outcomes that Village Hosts will be able to apply in their activities after taking an individual learning path (levels of learning progression):

- Able to make reasoned & informed decisions (CA1)
- Able to apply analytical design mindset and design process (CA1)
- Understanding of inter and cross-cultural diversity (CA1)
- Able to maintain and to sustain relationships with local community & partners (CA2)
- Able to engage with people and organisations (CA2)
- Skilful to organise community & civic participation (CA2)
- Able to resolve conflicts (CA2)
- Able to take leadership & coordination (CA2)
- Skilled at outsourcing & delegating responsibility, tasks (CA2)

- Skilled at communicate via storytelling and placemaking (CA3)
- Able to understand methodology of product development, experience & service design (CA4)
- Able to sense visual aesthetics (CA4)
- Able to apply appropriate design methods to design user experience (CA4)
- Able to define funding opportunities (CA5)
- Competent to apply diverse fundraising strategies (CA5)
- Able to apply appropriate business model (CA5)
- Knowledgeable to develop and implement appropriate marketing strategies and audience development (CA5)

Above-described selected competences for Village Hosts will be trained as design process and design methodology in the Training Program of the Open School for Village Hosts are summarised in the Table 1.

Table 1 The main competencies for Village Hosts in line with design process, Freimane A., 2022

Triple design process	Competence area	Competence	Competence area according to EU & International competency mapping	Learning outcome
define	Visioning and mapping opportunities	Innovative & Reflective Thinking, Ability to act into ambiguity environment	Transversal Competence - Critical and Innovative Thinking / Problem solving	Able to make reasoned & informed decisions. Able to apply analytical design mindset and design process.
		Benchmarking & Evaluation methodology	Entrepreneurship competence - Design and project management for complete business cycle including strategic planning / Monitoring and evaluation	Understanding of inter and cross-cultural diversity.
	Map actors and resources	Communication & Networking	Transversal competence – Adaptability / Problem solving / Leadership / Networking / Communication / Emotional intelligence / Interpersonal Skills / Global Citizenship	Able to maintain and to sustain relationships with local community & partners Able to engage with people and organisations. Skilled at organise community & civic participation. Able to resolve conflicts.

		Co-designing & Co-creation	Transversal competence –Leadership / Networking / problem solving / Interpersonal Skills	Able to take leadership & coordination. Skilful to outsourcing & delegating responsibility, tasks.
design	Storing the place	Presentation & Digital communication	Digital competence - Technology awareness / Digital marketing / Digital communication	Skilled at communicate via storytelling and placemaking.
	Make service prototypes & Curate activities and outcomes	Product & Service system innovation	Entrepreneurship competence - Design and project management for complete business cycle including strategic planning / Copyright and immaterial law / Critical and Innovative Thinking Green competence - To live, work and act in a sustainable manner	Able to understand methodology of product development, experience & service design. Able to sense visual aesthetics.
		Planet & Human centric service	Transversal Competence - Interpersonal Skills / Communication / Emotional intelligence	Able to apply appropriate design methods to design user experience.
deliver	Assemble cooperation platform & new business models	Entrepreneurship (i.e. Sales / Marketing / Fundraising)	Entrepreneurship competence - Strategic and financial management / Marketing	Able to identify funding opportunities. Competent to apply diverse fundraising strategies. Skilled at applying appropriate business models. Knowledgeable to develop and implement appropriate marketing strategies and audience development.

3. Methodology

The target group of the entire project (PR1, PR2, PR3, PR4, PR5) are the practitioners; therefore, the target audience was involved throughout different phases of developing and validating the competence framework. To build the Competence Framework mixed methods research was performed in six phases.

3.1 Phase 1 | State-of-the-art: International Regulatory and Desk research

Phase 1 combines desk and regulatory research based on EU and international studies and forecast in demand skill & competency analysis. International Regulatory and Desk Research was carried out by design researcher Dr Aija Freimane and leading partner Matera Hub.

3.2 Phase 2 | Country (culture)-specific professional and theoretical competence mapping

In Phase 2 The desk research was carried out in each project partner country combining country-specific and national regulations.

3.3 Phase 3 | Select and develop a draft competence framework for Village Hosts

The competence map was derived based on country specific (culture-specific) study and ethnographic study (observation, interviews with stakeholders) bearing in mind design process and 15 years of design educational experience (Annex 1) delivering new product and service development through design of the researcher and educator Dr Aija Freimane who was responsible for competence framework.

Competence framework was developed as a waterfall methodology starting from general study of internationally defined competencies in demand until 2030 (Chapter 2) and country-specific studies across 6 project partner countries (Chapter 3). Draft of the competence framework was confirmed by project partners, iterated and improved to be ready for validation with stakeholders in the Phase 4.

3.4 Phase 4 | Focus groups to validate developed draft competence framework

The objective of the focus group was to obtain a validation of the in-depth analysis of needs and competences identified during the desk research, in order to enable the partnership to develop training material that takes into account the specific contexts. Methodology of the focus groups are described in the Annex 2.

Each partner provided the agenda and discussion topics that included participants' personal experiences, barriers they encountered, needs and areas of opportunity that should be explored and needs.

All partners used the same set of activities, questions and tools which were translated into national languages based on the templates provided. This enabled cross-country and cross-cultural comparisons, leading to the development of comprehensive research and learning materials. Results of the focus groups are added in the Annex 3.

3.5 Phase 5 selecting the core competencies according to the design

Received feedback from the phase 4 was combined and implemented into a common competence framework proposal in line with design process and competence areas according to EU and international competency study.

3.6 Phase 6 Peer review

Phase 6 validated developed competence framework as a peer review with stakeholders. The role of the peer reviewer was to analyse content, evaluating the quality and coherence of the competence framework and PR1 output for the Open School for Village Hosts Erasmus+ project.