

What makes study visits to Norway stick?

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The visits

The trip was organized to help Polish participants gain insight into the practical operation of organizations and institutions that strive for the inclusion of children and youth in decision-making processes and public participation, also by motivating children and youth to get involved and stay involved. The participants learned about public participation initiatives involving children and youth, methods of promoting voluntary work, engagement in student councils and community initiatives. A particular focus was also placed on community development measures that are designed to support vulnerable children and youth.

Kirsten Paaby from PS Paaby Prosess EDUACTION hosted the group and set up meetings with relevant organizations and institutions. The program included a presentation that introduced participants into the world of public participation in Norway and a number of meetings with Norwegian organizations to review a variety of civil society initiatives involving children and youth. "I have been working with educational study visits for 15 years now. Experiential learning is at the core when I plan and facilitate the study visits. "To be there" and meet the people face to face gives the opportunity to understand, compare and get inspired and better understand in addition to read about the country and the best practices you visit" said Kirsten when NGO Partnership Portal asked her why are such study visits important.



The group visited the Community Center in the Sagene district of Oslo where they learned about a successful model of cross-sector interaction between local authorities, non-governmental organizations and people living there. Ahmed Uzair and Tone Kronquist from the Youth Initiatives Department shared their experience regarding work with and for children and youth. The key focus of all programs and projects is to prevent marginalization and to assist young people in key defining moments of their lives.



At the Tøyen Academy in Oslo the group learned about an education scheme that aims at involving children and youth in managing the local community affairs and encourages taking responsibility for their neighborhood. The Academy also runs the Tøyen Sportsclub project which helps young people aged 15 – 23 develop leadership skills and motivates to engage in the community.



The group also spent a day visiting the community of Hokksund near Oslo and meeting with the representatives of the Øvre Eiker municipality. This is a highly proactive community that includes young people in planning for development and the future. A number of different dialogue and partnership formats are used here. Anders Steenshorne from the community shared a story about a recent project designed to increase public participation of young people in developing a zoning plan for the town center.



Grete Vandvik from Save the Children Norway shared an approach to engage children in projects that the group found very interesting. Treating each child as an individual first and as part of a larger group second is at the heart of this approach. Each child should feel that specific activities are done specially for him/her and respond to his/her needs. This is how adults can influence children and how children can influence adults' decisions, as demonstrated in BIBLO TØYEN, the Tøyen Library.

The wrap-up session

But these visits would not be complete without one key element of the program, the wrap-up session. These sessions are of particular significance as they open up to share impressions of the visit and determine the guests to reflect on what practices are in place in Norway in comparison to experiences from Poland. "The closing wrap-up workshop is of great importance for the quality and learning outcome of the visits. At least 2 hours are allocated to the workshop where I often use the method SWOT-analysis to encourage the participants to reflect back on the visit asking what inspired and why, and how to transfer what they have learned to their own national and local

context, as well to identify possible actions they can make in their community, project etc. when they come home” said Kirsten Paaby.

NGO Partnership Portal also asked Kirsten if these study visits are interesting also for the Norwegian organizations. “During the visit I try to create a shared space of commitment between the visitors and the hosting NGOs/public authorities – to make the visit a win-win learning process. I’ve seen networks and partnerships be established, people are proud to present what they have been doing and several have expressed that these visits have given them an opportunity to reflect on their own practice. I always document the main points from the closing workshop and evaluation which is communicated back to our Norwegian hosts.”

Read more about the 2009 – 2014 NGO-programmes in Poland and in other countries [here](#).

Read more about the EEA and Norway Grants 2014 – 2021 [here](#) and [here](#).

Photos by curtesy of the members of the study visit group.