



Getting on... in Scandinavia

What we found and what we learned on the Wonkhe SUs study tour
Evan Botwood, President and Rania Regaieg, President-elect - UWE Students' Union

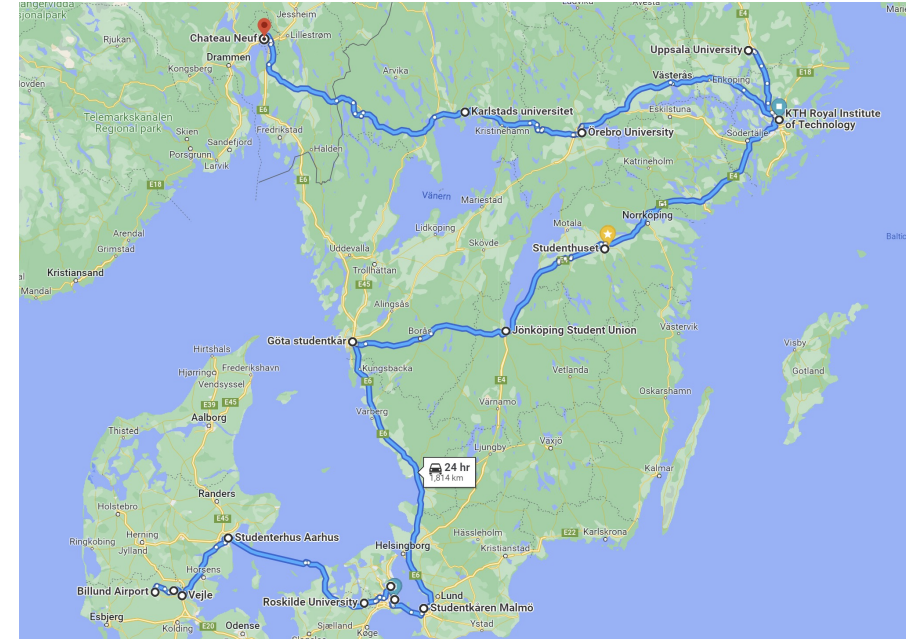
Why?

- We know that for many students, “getting in” is only the start of it
- In England, OfS’ B3 and TEF metrics are a major topic of discussion right now – and ministers are keen especially that students aren’t accepted in only to fall at the three big hurdles of getting to Y2, completing and getting a graduate job
- The continuation metric is important to students – some “drop out” for good reasons but many don’t
- Belonging is crucial – see also Wonkhe and pearson research



Scandi

- Each year Wonkhe SUs organises a study tour to Europe
- It's partly about identifying innovative practice that we can bring back to UK HE
- For obvious reasons, this year a lot of us were keen to identify the way in which Scandinavian HE builds belonging in students
- We've identified five ways in which they do this
- Caveat – student finance and wider assumptions about community!



Five belonging practices

- They build **communities** out of courses and subjects
- They build **bridging** social capital early on
- They build **linking** social capital through activities
- They build **academic confidence** through student-led activity
- They build **employment** capital through student-led activity

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1. Communities

- We tend to assume that students can only benefit from and participate from “community” if they are an on-campus, away from home student
- We also tend towards addressing student needs through individualised services, approaches and initiatives
- But both loneliness and belonging research suggests that feeling part of a community is beneficial re outcomes regardless of student characteristics
- Students more likely to find friends on their course – so it hits harder if they don't



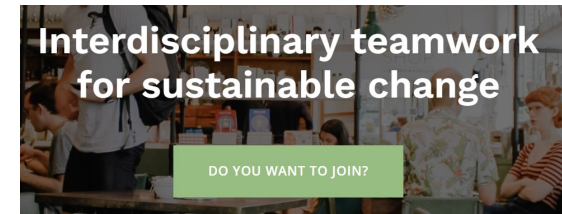
Community

- Across the three countries, almost all students belong to a “chapter”, “division” or “section” – like a mini students’ union shaped around their subject area
- These are coherent academic and social communities – which run a programme of activity from welcome to graduation
- Think “academic society” + “course reps in that subject” + “student led-careers work for those students”
- Students run these communities and consider how they can ensure everyone feels connected



Three things help

- Spaces are socially sticky as well as study sticky – they are often cosy and look designed for people to spend time together in them
- Eating and drinking is a huge aspect – there were countless student organised breakfasts, coffee mornings, community meals – social activity that is course based and “back to basics”
- Most SUs and their universities have volunteering strategies that are focussed as much on students serving each other as they are on the community



Some examples

- At Copenhagen Business School, students earn “Student Citizenship points” for active participation in a student organisation that serves others.
- At KTH in Stockholm, a chapter for every subject area runs its own welcome period with scavenger hunts, meet and greets and speed networking for new students
- At Malmo the SU runs a roadshow of student breakfasts where students meet each other and discuss how their programme is going



2. Bridging social capital

- If “bonding” social capital is developed by spending time with people just like you, “bridging” social capital is developed by spending time with people not like you
- Bridging one of the things HE is supposed to deliver for students but the bigger and more stratified HE gets (both between and within universities) the harder it is to develop
- We’ve all seen formal and informal groups form of students who share characteristics – and good work in recent years has focussed on helping students find those like them



2. Bridging social capital

- Everywhere we went we saw a focus on bridging social capital from day one
- In Aarhus one project involves pairing new commuter students with “away from home” students to explore the city together – putting the commuters in charge!
- In Copenhagen the “studenterhuset” runs a programme that groups international students with home students to exchange perspectives
- In Linköping student volunteers look after groups of 15 new students that are deliberately diverse – the volunteers deliver social norming messages and host discussions about the richness of each background



3. Linking social capital

- This is the aspect of social capital about involvement in the structures that govern your experience in the university and the community
- In the UK we tend to deliver this at election time, through sporadic projects or for a select group of representatives
- Across Scandinavia we saw a number of approaches to making sure that all students are immersed early on
- The “Fadders” at Jonkoping are careful to explain how the university and city works to new students and how they can actively influence their education and study environment



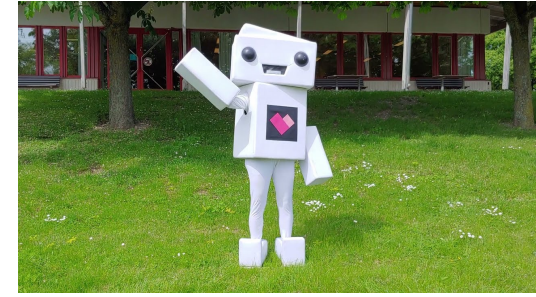
4. Academic confidence

- Once belonging is achieved, the student led chapters, divisions and sections are often instrumental in building academic confidence
- Everywhere we went we saw student-led (not just student **delivered**) projects focussed on study skills and immersion in the subject
- In Norway student associations were supported to stage week long academic conferences aimed at students outside of the subject
- In Denmark teaching awards were usually reciprocal – with staff awarding students as well as the other way around, and lots of information about how and why they won awards
- In Sweden we saw a number of recent alumni based schemes that help students with their final year
- And we saw countless example of subject associations being supported to stage study skills interventions, reducing imposter syndrome and building confidence



5. Employment

- Finally, we saw lots of examples of student led careers and business facing activity, often highly creative
- For example at Aarhus new international PhD students are paired with couples employed by local and regional businesses as people to spend time with
- “Case competitions” where students take part in designing solutions for businesses exist across the three countries
- Even fairs and networking events were student led, with high participation as a result (students go to things organised by other students)



Five big belonging questions

- Do we, with our SU, do all we can to help students build diverse and supportive communities out of our academic subjects?
- What activity deliberately helps students to spend time and build networks with those not like them?
- Do we help all students to interact with the structures that can influence their experience?
- Do we let students create, design and run initiatives that build each others' confidence?
- How much of our careers and employment activity is about students helping each other?

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