

Solidarity x Åland Seminar Report

On the Monday 4th of April, a group of volunteers came together with a group of people working in the third sector to learn more about solidarity. The volunteers were from all over Europe and are currently on the ESC programme in Finland. The main aims of the event were to try and improve the volunteering experience for both volunteers and the organisations they work with, whilst also highlighting the importance of the third sector, international cooperation, and making ESC more visible.

Over the prior weekend, all of the volunteers came together to learn more about Åland through some cultural and social activities, whilst also reflecting on volunteering and solidarity in some workshops. Particular highlights included a guided tour of the Åland parliament, eating lunch on the boat Nautical and our many, many, walks around Åland. The workshops held created some really interesting discussions on what's important to volunteer's when they are working, highlighting lots of similarities. The results from these sessions led to a presentation on volunteers and their motivations to volunteer, what they like and what they don't like in leadership, amongst other interesting questions.

Key findings from the discussion groups

Why volunteer?

Help others	Be part of a community	Learn
Chances to travel	Meet new people	Make a difference
Do something important/meaningful	Not wanting to work only for money	Social justice

On good leadership

Being treated as someone who can bring their own ideas, and getting feedback on these shows respect

Giving a clear working structure, where volunteers know what they are doing

A clear structure should also show volunteers where there are chances for them to bring their own ideas

Understanding that volunteers can burnout is necessary, communication can help with this

Volunteers are not homogenous, different amounts of communication will work for different people

It is important to define your role, when things are unclear there can be lots of wasted time

One clear mentor for a volunteer can provide clarity, instead of lots of different people who might say conflicting things

Expectations of both volunteer and leader should be discussed

On good volunteering

Different volunteers are looking for different things	Freedom can be great for a volunteer, but there can be too much freedom if there are no boundaries
Volunteers should never be a substitute for paid workers, this makes work much less meaningful	When volunteering you should feel like you add something different to the organisation, you should be 'the cherry on top'
It is important to be aware that work also filters into your social life	Volunteering is most meaningful when you feel like you bring something new to a team

Final Takeaways

- Boundaries are important for volunteers, understanding your role and where you have room to bring your own ideas can actually bring more freedom than absolute freedom would.
- Volunteers are not a homogeneous group, they volunteer for different reasons, and each volunteer will want and need different things from leadership.
- Communication is the only way to understand what both a volunteer wants and what the organisation wants.
- Volunteering is most meaningful when volunteers feel like they are contributing and can see the results of their contribution.

I hope you all had a good time at the seminar and either learnt something you didn't know, or were reminded of the importance of some of these takeaways. Thanks everyone for coming and hopefully we can continue to have more fruitful solidarity work on Åland in the future!