

European Wergeland Centre

Learning Democracy at Utøya

Hate speech is texts, words, images or symbols used to spread hate and threats, and to encourage violence towards a person or a group based on their assumed or real belonging to a group¹

“Learning democracy at Utøya” aims to strengthen the democratic competences of young people. Utøya was the second target for the 2011 terrorist attacks in Norway, and using this as a “starting point”, students and their teachers are encouraged to reflect on and discuss the meaning of different democratic values, and how these values are challenged in society today. Through a 3-day workshop followed by student-led activities at their respective schools, the participants are also encouraged to talk about controversial issues, engage in dialogue and listen to other arguments, and to act as role models for their peers.

About Utøya and the rationale behind the Project

Utøya is a small island of 0,1 km², about a 45 minute drive from Oslo. Since 1950, it has been owned by the political youth party AUF (Norwegian Worker’s Youth League), and it is used for political and social events both by AUF, various NGOs, organizations and associations, as well as other political youth parties.

On 22 July, 2011, a 32-year-old Norwegian terrorist killed 77 people in two different attacks in Norway. The terrorist arrived on Utøya during the annual AUF summer camp, after detonating a bomb in the government quarter in Oslo. Eight people were killed by the bomb, while he shot and killed 69 people, and wounded several, at Utøya. Most of the dead were young people under the age of 20. The terrorist explicitly stated that his rationale for killing all of these young people was their political views and their engagement.

We experience and live in a polarized political climate in which different anti-democratic views are increasingly gaining more support. Therefore, prevention of hate speech, hate crime and radicalization is becoming more urgent.

Based on recommendations from RAN (European Union’s Radicalization Awareness Network) as well as experience drawn from other anti-hate speech activities organized by The European Wergeland Centre in Poland and Greece, this project emphasizes young

¹ Translated from the Norwegian *Stop Hate Speech Campaign*

people's capacity and their ability to positively influence their peers. There is great potential in placing young people at the center and acknowledging them as "influencers" and role models, and to develop their capacity of *how* rather than *what* to think and act in a democratic society.

Utøya serves as a very real starting point for democratic dialogue. It offers a unique opportunity for young people to reflect on what democracy means for them, and how they can promote democracy in their everyday lives.

Project aims

- Strengthen the democratic competence of young people;
- Strengthen teachers' confidence and skills in teaching about and discussing difficult or controversial topics, including 22 July, 2011;
- Creating 'safe spaces' where students can express their opinions, concerns and debate with others;
- Re-establish Utøya as a place where young people learn *about, through and for* democracy and human rights

The program

Up to 8 groups composed of 3 students and one teacher take part in each workshop. Most of the activities take place on Utøya, which has meeting facilities and a learning centre, as well as accommodation possibilities for all the participants. During the workshop, the student groups develop their own activity plan, outlining what they want to present and what activities they want to carry out at their schools upon return. They do this with the support of their teachers as well as the trainers.

On day 1, before going to the island, the students visit the 22 July Centre in Oslo, which is located in the government quarter. The Centre contains an exhibition about the two attacks, and the students visit the exhibition and later work in groups to make their own exhibition with photos and Twitter messages. Day 1 also includes a meeting with one of the young people who was on Utøya on 22 July, 2011. This offers a chance to ask questions, and listen to their story and experience on that day and during the aftermath.

Day 2, students and teachers spend most of the day in parallel sessions. The students first get familiar with the concept of engagement – what does engagement mean, what engages you, and what is important from various perspectives? Later in the day they discuss democratic values – what they are, and how is their own engagement linked to these values? They also talk about democratic dilemmas and challenges – how do certain values collide, how to handle disagreement, and how to argue their case?

“By listening to other people, I can also develop and improve my own opinions, and in turn share them with others. Instead of simply thinking by and for myself”.
Madin (9th grade), participant April 2016

While the students discuss these issues, the teachers are presented with methods on how to teach controversial issues in the classroom. What is defined as ‘controversial’ will vary depending on country, region and context. 22 July, 2011 is one example, based on a 2015 report on how it is (not) taught and discussed in Norwegian schools today². However, the ability to understand and engage in dialogue with others whose opinions differ from one’s own is central to democratic citizenship and essential for protecting and strengthening democratic societies going forward. Teachers are instrumental in creating an atmosphere of trust in the classroom, a ‘safe space’, where such competences can be developed. They need to be prepared in advance to deal with situations related to controversial issues such as hate speech and discrimination.

The second part of day 2, for the students, starts with a roleplay where they explore how to argue and solve conflicts, given the context and group they are assigned to. While this is taking place, the teachers learn and discuss how to support the students in their school presentations and activities. The day ends with time for individual reflection and social activities.

The final day is dedicated to collecting and discussing ideas for, and developing, the student activities. All of the groups make presentations about what they have planned for their peers, before a closing session and departure for Oslo.

“Learning democracy at Utøya” does not end when the participants leave the island. Back at their own schools the students, with the support of their teachers, share what they have learned and carry out activities with their peers.

“They talk without a script, clearly and somewhat emotional. And they make constant connections between the tragedy at Utøya and the necessity of learning about democracy. It turned out so well.”
Bente (teacher), participant September 2016

² Når terror ties ihjel – En diskusjon om 22. juli og demokratisk medborgerskap i skolen (Anker and von der Lippe)

Learning democracy at Utøya is developed and carried out, in cooperation, by The European Wergeland Centre, 22 July Centre, Rafto Foundation for Human Rights, and Utøya AS.

The first workshop was organized in April 2016.

About The European Wergeland Centre (EWC)

EWC is a European resource centre on education for human rights, democratic citizenship, and intercultural understanding. EWC works with all Council of Europe member states, and has for several years been involved in, and developed, capacity building activities on combating hate speech and the prevention of radicalization and extremism.

Facts	
Target group	Secondary school students (15-16 years old) and teachers from Norway and other Council of Europe member states
Main topics	Democratic values and how they are challenged today / Freedom of expression and hate speech / Extremism as a threat to democracy / Democracy and the internet: possibilities and challenges / Intercultural and democratic competences in practice
Duration	A 3-day workshop, followed by student-led in school activities
Number of participants	Up to 32 per workshop (8 groups of 3 students and one teacher).
Resources	<i>Bookmarks. A Manual for combating Hate Speech online through human rights education</i> (Council of Europe) / <i>Compass: Manual for human rights education with young people</i> (Council of Europe) / Engagement cards (Rafto Foundation for Human Rights) / <i>Teaching Controversial Issues</i> (Council of Europe)
Results per December 2016	Three 3-day workshops carried out in 2016; 18 groups (73 students and teachers) participated; At least 890 students trained through peer-to-peer activities at the different schools, as well as presentations for parents and other teachers