

# Organizing a Study Visit (SV)

- a few tips and tricks from the  
International People's College  
([www.IPC.dk](http://www.IPC.dk))



This document is based not only on the experience of organizing one Study Visit (May 2011 - [http://www.ipc.dk/en/special\\_activities.asp?id=9](http://www.ipc.dk/en/special_activities.asp?id=9)) but also on the contents of two Knowledge-sharing seminars organized by Cedefop (2010 & 2011) and on the many decades of experience with welcoming adult learners from around the world in the context of a non-formal residential learning space. For further information about IPC, our know-how and our courses, please visit [www.ipc.dk](http://www.ipc.dk) or contact Lucie Cizkova at [LUCIE@ipc.dk](mailto:LUCIE@ipc.dk).

## ABOUT THE VISIT

- **Why are you organizing a SV? What is the motivation?**  
Is it a personal project (precious baby) or a team/organizational effort? Do you want to gain more visibility locally and internationally? Do you want to explore a theme that's close to your heart? Do you want to show off? Do you want an extra challenge and a new experience? Do you need an excuse to contact other local organizations/policy-makers/social partners?  
>>> there are **many possible reasons** (some better than others) and it's good to be fairly open about them, especially internally, within your organization, but also in front of the participants – and ask them about the same.
- It is not always easy to allocate a large working group to the SV task. But for the sake of crisis management, it's a good idea to **share the most important documents** among a group of colleagues (consider using Dropbox) and/or to **engage different colleagues individually** in connection with small specific tasks. You **MUST** be replaceable (even though you are not 😊).
- Be true to the **culture of your organization and your region/country**. Small things convey the strongest message – time management, learning atmosphere, group treatment – these should reflect how you usually do things; it's part of the learning package.

## BEFORE THE VISIT

- **Your SV starts long before it actually does.** The moment your proposal is published in the SV Catalogue is the moment when you can start using the SV for promotion of your activities, approach, methodology and network. Use this opportunity – you can expand your contact list and really offer something of value to potential future participants and collaborators.
- Read the **Handbook for SV Organizers** and take notes of your spontaneous ideas when reading it, there's room for that on the edges of the booklet. Read it twice. Then also read the **SV Participant's Companion** – this way you know what the participants can be expected to do/know/comply by.
- Establish early and **regular email contact** with the participants and the visited organizations and guest speakers. If you are generally busy, tell them openly that you only answer emails twice/three times a week – this way there are no wrong expectations.
- When you send **group emails** that contain ESSENTIAL information, it's a good idea to **number them** (e.g. 01 – welcome, 02 – practical info, 03 – program & documents & presentation template, 04 – last minute reminders, 05 – safe journey and weather forecast). This way the participants know if they miss one email. And those who join the group later

from the waiting list also know they've received all necessary info (these emails can also be uploaded on your website for later reference).

- Remind your participants to get their **travel arrangements** taken care of in due time – it will save THEM money! A simple way is to ask them to send you their arrival/departure times a couple of months before the SV. Remind them what the **last point on the program** is – they should not leave before that (in most cases Friday 2pm)!
- In order to cut the costs and involve the participants in the planning of the social program, you can ask them to bring along some **typical snacks** from their country. Perfect for an informal evening (don't forget to give everyone a chance to say a few words about their goodies).
- Your SV participants are generally very busy people - DO NOT expect them to read more than ABSOLUTELY necessary for their safe arrival to the venue. That doesn't mean you should not provide them with **background materials** and all kinds of "food for thought" – do that but do not assume that everyone has read everything thoroughly.
- It is great if you manage to get the participants to provide you with their photo. Facebook, LinkedIn and other social media might help but you cannot expect everyone to be "there". However, having a **participant's photo (plus reading personal details)** can help you assess whether the group will be capable of managing some distance on foot. Remember that a group is only as fast as its slowest member.
- The "perfect" program consists of a balance between **theory, visits, discussions & reflection time, group report writing, participants' presentations** and some "breathing" time.
- It's a GREAT idea to send the participants a **template with some guiding questions** that they should answer in their presentations. Repeat a couple of times that they should avoid talking about a) the educational system of their country and b) tourist attractions of their region. This stuff can be shared informally or found online. You want to hear about **best practice examples** (also useful for the report) and gain a different angle of looking at the theme of your SV.

## DURING THE VISIT

- It is more than ideal to have a **permanent room** at the group's disposal. It generates ownership and gives space for decorations, posters, notes or a temporary **reference library** (where you can place the printouts of all those documents you'd like the participants to be familiar with).
- During the first day, it is really useful to establish some "common ground" in the following areas: **group dynamics** (rules of the group, how we take care of each other, who is motivated how, what's the general mood and "tone" used), **general terminology** (through a participatory activity), **program of the week** (again, don't stand in front of the participants and talk – be creative, involve them, let them surprise you), **specific terminology and definitions** within the theme of the SV (give the participants a chance to read through some of the key background materials they had already received – it's important that there's a common starting point for everyone, a minimum level of knowledge reached).
- Make sure everyone gets a chance to **learn everybody else's names**. Play a couple of name games at the beginning. Have name tags (badges) ready, put a folded A4 sheet of paper on the tables in front of the participants so that they can write their name there. This way it's not only the members of the group who can see each other's names but also the guest speakers and your colleagues. (You as the organizer have seen all the names many times but that is not the case for everyone else.)

- Small **acts of kindness** can do miracles – candy in the meeting room, a basket of fruit for the report-writing time, a small note on people’s door, keeping your promise (“I’ll find out for you later”- make sure you do!), checking the birthday calendar for possible “Happy Birthday” occasions.
- Let the group decide on who’s going to be the **responsible group reporter** during the first day. If the representative of your National Agency is coming for a visit, he/she can be the one who tells the group about how to write the report (yes, let them be the “bad guys” 😊). It’s a good idea to physically LEAVE the group when it’s time for report writing. It’s THEIR report.
- It is your choice whether you want to see some “issues” as **problems or as opportunities for learning** and mutual support. Different language levels, different temperaments and personalities, different levels of engagement and involvement – all these can be dealt with in a positive, creative and mutually enriching way. Think of a possible “buddy” system (native speaker helping a weak speaker); make group members responsible for different aspects of the program (time-keeper, question-gatherer, refreshments’ master etc.); acknowledge people’s feelings but always put the **interest of the group** and the intensity of the learning experience first. No hijacking of the program by the loud, never-satisfied complainer!
- **Prepare the certificates** well in advance. If you have a reliable printer, you can do last minute adjustments and print just before participants’ departures but designing the document should be done together with all the other prep work before the visit. The certificates can say more than just the date and title of the SV. Did the participants acquire specific skills/knowledge? Did they experience something that’s unique in Europe? Write this on the certificate – a sheet of paper has much more value when the **learning outcomes** are stated.
- **Prepare the press release** (if applicable) well in advance. You know what the visit is about and if you do half of the work for the local journalist, chances are he/she will want to come with a photographer and make a quick interview – and a big article can come out of that.
- It’s definitely a good idea (if possible) to have **one person** specifically in charge of taking photos/video and **documenting the SV**, possibly approaching the local journalists and being their contact person. It’s hard to combine this role with the role of the practical and/or academic content organizer.
- Don’t underestimate the **time needed for group discussion** after each speaker/visit. THAT’S where the learning takes place; the exchange of observations, comments and opinions is a precious and unique opportunity not only for the group but also for you as the organizer to learn something new and to multiply the individual learning via sharing.
- It’s a huge added value if you can **pair your participants with a staff member, a student, a local contact or a “friend of your organization”** and allow them to have a one-to-one talk, possibly even a structured interview (with a prepared interview guide) – this program point can come in the second half of the week where a lot of questions have already accumulated and all the curiosity can fuel the conversations. Visiting a private home is another variation.
- If non-formal, experiential and/or participatory learning is what you are familiar with, don’t hesitate to include some **games, energizers or icebreakers** into the program. (Please contact Lucie for specific tips if needed.)
- Allow for some “breathing time” **after lunch**. No matter what, it’s a tough task to be a speaker during the ‘after-lunch’ session – you might want to place some group work or report-writing or discussion there.
- **Different parts of the program fulfill different roles** – it is fair to say: “Now we are going to see the mayor – it might not be the most exciting thing for you, dear participants,

but it's really important for us as an organization to show what wonderful things (with wonderful people) we do."

#### **AFTER THE VISIT**

- **Thanking everyone** involved (internally and externally) can never be done too many times.
- **Staying in touch** with the participants is a way how to expand your organizational network, how to promote the results of the SV and how to informally spread info about who you are and what you do.
- What about **generating a CD/DVD** with photos from the week, a video, some background materials and presentations? It requires quite a bit of work already during the visit – if you don't manage to compile everything then, it's maybe too optimistic to think you can do it AFTER the visit. It can be quite time-consuming, so think twice whether to promise such a thing or not.
- Making **a collage of photos (a photo story)** is a great way how to remind the participants of their time with you. Again, it can be time consuming but a great way how to remember the SV for everyone involved.

**Have a rewarding experience; I'm sure you'll do a great job!**