

## Engaging Norwegian Youth in Mission: An Empirical Study

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### Abstract

A reform of Christian education began in Norway in 2004 covering all those baptised in the Church of Norway from birth to 18. Mission is a significant dimension in the Plan for Christian Education but, despite the many projects initiated by congregations, relatively few deal with mission. The empirical material underpinning this article is a close study of four congregations' projects on mission and youth aged from 14 to 18. Projects with good experience in this respect were selected and the main focus was on identifying factors which accounted for the success of projects designed to engage Norwegian youth in mission. Following a brief presentation of the Norwegian background regarding Christian education and an introduction to the empirical material the main part of the article discusses factors which were crucial to the projects' success.

### Keywords

Mission, youth ministry, Christian education, congregational projects

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All baptised members of the Christian Church are called to mission. This calling rests on the Great Commandment in Matthew 28:18-20, which commissions the church to share the good news about Jesus Christ with those who have not heard about him, regardless of their place or country of residence. Mission literally means “being sent” and is part of our church identity. As Christ was sent, so is the church sent (John 20: 21). Following Christ, the church seeks to share faith and life across all borders, and invites people to fellowship through community, words and actions.

This understanding of mission is found in the Church of Norway’s *Plan for Christian Education: God Gives – We Share* (Kirkerådet 2010: 31). Mission is presented here as one of the central dimensions of a comprehensive Christian education and thus applies to all those covered by the Plan, i.e. all those baptised in the Church of Norway from birth to the age of 18. The Plan is the product of a period of experiment and development in Christian education reform from 2004 to 2008, a period characterised by a plethora of projects on Christian education initiated and run by local congregations but funded by the government. It turned out to be especially difficult to make sustainable projects that could engage the oldest age-group in the reform and relatively few projects on mission have been launched. We decided to address this challenge by setting up a research project on youth and mission, trying to find out why some congregational projects had good experiences in challenging youth to engage in mission.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> ‘We’ are the Associate Professor of Theology of Mission at the School of Mission and Theology, Dr Kari Storstein Haug and I, who worked together on this research project.

This article is based on an empirical study of the projects of four congregations on mission and youth aged from 14 to 18.<sup>2</sup> The main research question is as follows: what factors are crucial for the success of projects aimed at engaging youth in mission? The purpose of our research has not been to prove that these four projects have been successful or to what degree they have succeeded. We simply selected as our point of departure projects that had strategic plans regarding work with youth and mission as a result of which youth had enthusiastically been engaged in mission. We define success factors as a definite focus on mission, a challenge to the youth to embrace mission in different ways, and engagement of at least some of them in mission. For some young people the projects have meant that they have shifted from being indifferent to mission to becoming actively engaged with it. In working with the congregations we wanted to identify and analyse factors common to several of the projects, looking for correspondence and being aware that local conditions could also mean the success or failure of a project. Because of space limitations, however, this article's emphasis is rather on the actual factors common to several of the projects. A presentation and analysis of the crucial factors considered to have contributed to the success in the projects makes up the bulk of the article but it is necessary first to describe briefly some of the background to Christian education in Norway and introduce our empirical material.

### 1. Christian Education in the Norwegian Setting

Since the beginning of the 1700s Christian education in Norway has had two main arenas for teaching the Christian faith: state schools and confirmation. With regard to the teaching of

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<sup>2</sup> A book was published in Norwegian in 2013: Austnaberg, Hans and Kari Storstein Haug.

*Engasjement og deltagelse. Misjon i trosopplæringens ungdomsfase*, Trondheim, Akademika forlag. The present article is a revised version of the findings described in Chapter 7 of the book.

Christianity in the elementary schools, the government made it clear as far back as 1969 that this could not be considered as part of the church's remit. It was not until a new reform of the curriculum in 1997, however, when the subject "Christianity" was changed to "Christianity, religion, and life stances", that the church fully realised that its members do not receive recognised Christian education through the state schools. Great changes in society had also taken place. More religious alternatives became part of the picture and the church no longer had a monopoly in religious matters. It should be mentioned that at the beginning of the 1970s and 1980s there was within the church a growing discontent with the discrepancy between the large number of baptisms in the Church of Norway and the poor Christian education of most children. Even today about 77 per cent of the population are members of the Church of Norway and most of them still baptise their children.<sup>3</sup> In 1999 the government launched an initiative and in 2002 a governmental report suggested a comprehensive reform of Christian education in Norway.<sup>4</sup> It may sound astonishing that the government took this initiative but the minister of church affairs in the government at that time was also a leading light in church affairs.<sup>5</sup> A consensus among the political parties was obtained to support the church financially to strengthen Christian education. The first five years, starting in 2004, were to be a period of experiment and development before the reform was gradually implemented in all the congregations of the Church of Norway over the following ten years. State funding of the reform was guaranteed to reach 250 million Norwegian Kroner per year when the reform was

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<sup>3</sup> We have seen a drop in the rate of baptisms lately.

<sup>4</sup> The reform comprises all registered religions and non-faith-based organisations but we concentrate here on the Church of Norway.

<sup>5</sup> Following changes to the constitution in May 2012 the relations between church and state are also changing and the Church of Norway has been granted greater autonomy.

fully implemented.<sup>6</sup> Local projects were funded as a result of national calls and all congregations were invited to apply for funding. Initiatives starting in the local congregations were encouraged and the experiment was designed to be a bottom-up process (Hegstad, Agedal, and Selbekk 2008: 10-13).<sup>7</sup>

As a result of this period of development, the Plan for Christian Education came into being in 2010. Its aim is to

contribute to a systematic and continuous Christian education that awakens and strengthens Christian faith, imparts knowledge of the Triune God, helps in interpreting life and mastering the art of living, and encourages interest and involvement in the life of the church and the community (Kirkerådet 2010: 4).

It comprises all baptised persons aged up to 18 years, irrespective of their physical or mental degree of functionality.<sup>8</sup> At present the Plan is being implemented in deaneries in the dioceses.<sup>9</sup> This reform is one of the strongest triggers of change that has taken place in the

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<sup>6</sup> At present this equals more than 40 million US \$, which is a staggering sum in the Norwegian context, even with the history of close collaboration between state and church.

<sup>7</sup> The period of experiment and development has been combined with a considerable amount of empirical research in order to test the results of the projects and analyse the underlying theological thinking and strategies.

<sup>8</sup> An English translation of the Plan is available at [http://www.kirken.no/english/doc/engelsk/Plan\\_trosoppl\\_Engelsk.pdf](http://www.kirken.no/english/doc/engelsk/Plan_trosoppl_Engelsk.pdf) [accessed July 23, 2012].

<sup>9</sup> Representatives from the church fear, however, that it will not be fully implemented in all dioceses since the funding from the government is not inflation-proofed.

Church of Norway in recent years and it is within the context of the reform that the research for this article is situated.

## 2. Brief Presentation of the Empirical Material

The research design did not take its point of departure from a theoretical framework in order to prove or disprove a given hypothesis. We were determined to be as open-minded as possible, searching for important findings in the material. Our main method of data production was qualitative research interviews with a semi-structured design and we interviewed staff leaders, volunteers, youth within the projects, and youth who had taken part in projects previously. The total number of respondents was 41, of whom 24 were young people, most of them aged between 15 and 17. Conversation partners in the analysis of the material were predominantly researchers within the fields of mission, youth work and Christian education, but we have also made use of contributions from neighbouring fields. Reports and evaluations of the reform (all written in Norwegian) are consulted frequently.

The following is a brief presentation of the four projects selected for research.<sup>10</sup> They represent four different congregations in four dioceses of the Church of Norway. At Søndre Slagen the project consists of 15 minutes of information on mission work at the end of each session of instruction for confirmation. A former missionary or a representative of a diaconal project enthusiastically describes what they have been engaged in so the candidates for confirmation (15 years old) gain insight into and, we hope, an experience of something quite different from their own everyday life, stirring their curiosity and making an impact on them.

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<sup>10</sup> A detailed description is impossible because of space limitations but the presentation and discussion of factors crucial to success in the main part of the article relate to and complete the picture given here.

The project in Mandal is also integrated into confirmation sessions but it is part of a much larger local movement. Through being informed about and collecting money for Haydom Hospital in Tanzania, the youth get glimpses of the everyday situation of people in other parts of the world. Each year two candidates for confirmation chosen among the candidates who have sold raffle tickets for the local lottery are given a trip to Tanzania. They bring back reports to their fellow-candidates for confirmation and those starting the next year. In Strinda and Berg the project consists of a mission trip to Ecuador. It requires comprehensive preparation and requires the youth (15-17 year-olds) to talk about the trip afterwards. Parents are involved in the project and the youth have to spend a long time collecting money for the trip. The fourth project, Sub Urban in Molde is also aimed at youth after confirmation. They run a cafe, an open meeting space for whoever wants to come, where they serve meals especially designed for students living away from home. In addition, they organise and lead a youth congregation. Sub Urban considers their project as mission work in the midst of their neighbourhood and they also support a project in Cambodia.

### 3. Presentation and Analysis of Crucial Factors

Many different factors have been involved but we only present what seems to be crucial to the projects' success. In working with the material we have been searching for factors in common to several of the projects, but we do not assert that these factors have to be present in all the projects or to the same degree. As noted earlier, we are unable to describe the local conditions, culture, and context of each congregation, which may also have contributed to the projects' success. Perhaps it is in the intersection of local conditions and factors common to several of the projects that the most exciting transfer of learning is to be found. Thus the reader should carefully consider his/her own local situation when reflecting on the factors identified as crucial in the Norwegian projects.

In the following each factor is introduced by an indication of how they were at work in one or more of the congregations, and then the findings are discussed with reference to selected literature.

#### Personal conviction of the significance of mission

As is often the case in qualitative research, it is not only the explicit answers to questions in an interview which reveal important information. Such was the case in this research. Through many interviews, especially with the leaders, we came to see the underlying personal conviction of the significance of mission, although this is nowhere identified by the respondents as a reason for a project's success. The respondents do not even seem to be aware of this factor which we as researchers are convinced is crucial.

We see this in Søndre Slagen, where the leaders have decided that mission issues are an important part of the curriculum for confirmation. We encounter in Sub Urban a basic perception that Christians should live missional lives and that mission is a necessary element in a Christian congregation. If mission is excluded, it is impossible to build thriving local congregations, according to the thinking in Strinda and Berg. Candidates for confirmation should be aware of injustice in the world and try to do something about it. This is the conviction in the Mandal project.

It is interesting that deeply rooted personal conviction is a crucial factor here and not the theoretical arguments for mission, described, for example, in the Plan for Christian Education. Theoretical arguments in plans and documents *are* an important foundation for engaging youth in mission but it is the inner conviction that mission has to be part of any sound



Christian congregation that is essential, the belief that to be faithful to the great commission (Matt 28:18-20) the church cannot remain inwardly focused and that mission is part of the identity of the church.

Our empirical data do not assist us in answering how this deep personal conviction about mission came into being in the first place. We simply observe that this is a common feature in all our projects. It points to the often recognised opinion that it is our deep convictions that guide our actions.

Openness in thinking and acting otherwise

Openness to the new and unexpected is another implicit feature in the projects. Although it was not explicitly remarked on by the respondents, it nonetheless struck the researchers strongly. It shows itself in the conception of the projects, in their content, and in the various ways mission is presented to the youth.

Creative ideas building on resources in the local context seem to be a common point of departure for the projects. They are marked by a culture of thinking otherwise, although this sometimes has led to a more intensive use of resources and extra burdens; sometimes, however, it has released staff through the involvement of competent volunteers. The project in Mandal, for example, was a pioneer in sending youth on mission trips to see what happened to the money they sent abroad.

The main content of the projects was also marked by thinking outside the box. The mission trips in Strinda and Berg and Mandal provided extraordinary experiences. Everything in Ecuador and Tanzania was different from the youth's everyday lives in Norway. The trip was

presented to the youths' parents in Strinda and Berg as a way of learning life skills, and this proved a creative way of including parents with different attitudes to the Christian faith. "Try out new ways" is a kind of slogan in Sub Urban. Their services are experimental, making use of modern media, and they engage in all kinds of stunts to raise money for mission work in Cambodia.

Presentation of mission in new ways is important in the projects. The importance of young people sharing their experiences in mission with other young people was emphasised by several respondents, as was the description of engaging events from real life, answers to prayer or people coming to faith. The communicator should not only appeal to the intellect; elements of quirkiness and playfulness also seem to be well received. Some of the interviews, especially with the youngest group, indicated that they were often unable to recall precisely the content of a session. Maybe the communication of enthusiasm is as important as facts, or maybe more significant?

Evaluation of the experimentation in the reform of Christian education (2004 to 2008) found that creative diversity was a trend in many projects (Hauglin, Lorentzen, and Mogstad 2008:204), and our research corroborates this. Another trend has been a focus on practising Christianity to the neglect of knowledge-oriented learning (Hauglin, Lorentzen, and Mogstad 2008:138; Hegstad, Agedal, and Selbekk 2008:119). The lack of focus on knowledge-oriented learning in the phase of experimentation is somewhat in contrast to what emerged in our projects, where communication of information and knowledge is emphasised. It has to be done creatively, however. Søndre Slagen is the best example in this respect. Our research indicates that this made an impact on the youth. According to a Canadian professor of educational change, Dr Michael Fullan, knowledge creation is one of five basic components

required for lasting change in a reform project. It is important both to create new knowledge and to share implicit, experimental knowledge, and the learning should take place collectively in the natural environment (Fullan 2001:5-6, 77-105; as cited by Helgesen 2011:226, 228-229). This is similar to what happened, for example, in Strinda and Berg. The learning about mission was collectively oriented to regular meetings on Sunday evenings in the local church. New knowledge was communicated and, at the same time, the youth's own thinking about mission and mission work was openly discussed in order to make explicit their implicit thinking and prejudices. The fact that the projects did not downplay the importance of generating knowledge about mission may be relevant to their success. A key factor to remember, however, is *how* this knowledge is communicated, which leads us to the next subchapter.

### Contagious passion

The visiting missionaries who take the floor for the last 15 minutes of each teaching session at Søndre Slagen talk about something they love, something in which they have invested much of their lives. They have seen for themselves what they are talking about. The presentations are varied and not all the communicators excel, but a common denominator is that they enjoy the opportunity to share what is so important to them and they display passion in their communication. Not only do the volunteers have this passion; it is shared by the staff as well, whose intention is that the youth will be fired up in consequence. The interviews seem to indicate that this passion is contagious. The youth recount exciting stories, some of which have almost caused them to cry openly.

We suggest that the emotional commitment seen in the projects and, especially, the commitment openly displayed, are a contributory factor to the projects' success. This is in line

with what rhetoric has taught us through history.<sup>11</sup> Researchers in the rhetoric of homiletics, Lucy L. Hogan and Robert Reid compare emotional commitment (*pathos*) to the spark plugs in an engine. To let gasoline and air into the combustion chamber is not sufficient; there has to be a spark to ignite the process. Both are needed however, to get the engine going. The most effective use of emotional commitment in a sermon, these researchers assert, is when the listeners become aware that what is communicated is significant for the communicator, especially if it helps the listeners to care as well. Passion, engagement, and real emotions are contagious (Hogan and Reid 1999:71, 75-76). This learning is not restricted to preaching but concerns all kinds of communication. It is not difficult to see that the leaders in the four projects show that mission is significant in their own lives, that they care about it, and that they want to share their passion with the youth.<sup>12</sup>

The profound emphasis on passion in our material has deepened our conviction of how significant this has been for the projects' success. Such passion is ignited through personal

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<sup>11</sup> The three means of persuasion in rhetoric are *ethos*, *logos*, and *pathos*, always situated in a given context. The three work together and all of them have to be present in order to persuade a listener (Hogan and Reid 1999: 10, 42, 158). This means that passion, for instance, which is closely associated with *pathos*, cannot be the only ingredient in a successful project. It should also have a significant content (*logos*) and it should be communicated by trustworthy persons (*ethos*). All three factors seem to be present in the Søndre Slagen project.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. the biblical story about the two disciples walking towards Emmaus listening to a stranger. When they recognised him as Jesus, they said to each other: "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" (Luke 24:32, NRSV). The encounter with the risen Lord touched them deeply and led them to return to Jerusalem that night to tell the other disciples what they had experienced.

encounters with people who have the ability to move others, which is the subject of the next subchapter.

#### Genuine personal encounters through mission trips

A mission trip was a high-profile activity in two of the projects we researched. We concentrate here on Strinda and Berg, where the whole group of eleven went to Ecuador for 10 days. The trip was marked by thorough preparation. The youth themselves were required to work hard to raise money for the trip and their parents were involved, thus creating ownership of the project, which is a key factor. Another important feature is how the project connected with others. The youth sold cakes on Sunday mornings in church to raise money for the trip and so they were connected to the rest of the congregation, who also wanted to hear about the trip. They spoke about the project in local newspapers, the church bulletin and in blogs, so links were established with the rest of the neighbourhood. Thus, the trip did not take place in a vacuum but turned out to be meaningful for more than the eleven who went to Ecuador. A tight programme with active participation by the youth themselves, plus defined tasks on their return home, also contributed to the success of the trip.

One may ask what a mission trip can provide which cannot be obtained otherwise. We think the answer is genuine experiences but this does not emerge without good planning. From the beginning of the project knowledge through experience was emphasised and the trip itself was designed to create experiences, especially through genuine personal encounters with a range of people. After the trip, the youth in Strinda and Berg enthusiastically recalled the personal stories they had been told and the provocative questions posed by the children at a school supported by the Norwegian congregation. The encounters with youth of their own age after church and the new opportunities afforded to slum-dwellers through mission work had made a

strong impact on them. It seems that what they had got most information about before the trip made the strongest impact on them. Our interview with them after their trip revealed positive changes regarding their understanding of what mission is, their eagerness to make a difference by going back to Ecuador as volunteers, and their feeling of belonging to the local church.

Nicolas Shepherd (2007) presents an interesting perspective on the participation of youth at mass-action mission events, such as Soul in the City, London. Despite the differences between such events and the mission trips in our material, Shepherd's article sheds some light on the Norwegian situation. Shepherd compares the events with package holidays and the participants with tourists. The tourist leaves the everyday situation and spends time in an extraordinary place, and the strength of his/her experience correlates the otherness with the situation at home, Shepherd asserts. Tourists often behave differently; they may be more relaxed and spontaneous than at home. Such is also the case with the young people travelling to mass events. They may be more daring than they are at home, both generally and regarding practising their faith. Thus they may become aware of aspects of themselves and their faith that they did not realise before. The challenge posed by such events, according to Shepherd, is that the trip generates a wish for new experiences that may match the previous or are even more exciting. Connecting the experiences with the situation at home is another challenge. There is a danger that the event will remain a tourist experience. That being said, Shepherd argues that, just as a tourist experience may create interest for another culture, a Christian mass event also may ignite a spark in young people which may lead to a lasting engagement with a city or people. To get the most out of such trips thorough preparation and follow-up,

where the leaders assist the youth to think through their goals and motives for the trip and to reflect about their experiences, are needed (Shepherd 2007).<sup>13</sup>

If we apply Shepherd's analysis to the trip arranged by Strinda and Berg we see several points of contact. The youth dared more in Ecuador than at home, which may have given them faith in their own abilities. Through the genuine encounters with a variety of people, a strong spark of interest in the country was ignited, which seemed to influence their choices in the future. The trip was marked by thorough preparation but subsequent reflection could have been more emphasised, according to the vicar who arranged the trip. The presentation above has shown that it is not sufficient to arrange a mission trip and trust to providence that the result will be a positive experience. To secure a positive outcome the young people have to be thoroughly prepared.

### Building relations

In two of our projects friendly relations were crucial to success. In Sub Urban this was especially the case in the cafe, because leaders stayed in the project for a considerable time and good relations were fostered with the surrounding community. In Strinda and Berg, success was achieved through durable relations among the youth themselves, the vicar's delight in spending time with the young people, and good relations with the local congregation.

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<sup>13</sup> He also suggests that the youth should be challenged to accept longer-term commitments, e.g. to return to places where they have been and know the culture, and that a variety of experiences ought to be encouraged whereby the youth should take more and more responsibility for preparing, running and reflecting on a mission trip.

British Bishop Graham Cray lists the relational as the first of seven mission-shaped values of youth ministry (Cray 2007) and there is a comprehensive literature on the significance of relations in youth work (Dean and Foster 1998; Root 2007). In spite of some criticism on the emphasis on relations in youth ministry (e.g. Griffiths 2008; 2009), it is generally accepted that this is a significant feature. Since the relational is well-established as an important factor and because of space limitations we refrain from discussing this finding in our material in detail and simply note it was a crucial factor in our projects' success.

#### Proximity to the local context

Projects' relation to the local context seems to be crucial to success and Mandal is a good example. For a long time Mandal has felt called to assist Haydom Hospital in Tanzania. The populace in general wants to support the hospital: industry, schools, church, and individuals. Thus, the confirmation project is not confined to youth. Candidates for confirmation are given the opportunity to become part of something comprehensive and far-reaching. One of the leaders says that it is like a snowball rolling, and the youth preparing for confirmation are invited on the ride. The advice from leaders in Mandal to other congregations is to make a close study of the possibilities the local context offers and devise a project that matches them. All the projects we researched have taken the local context into consideration.

The reform of Christian education may be called a contextual reform, characterised by a bottom-up process from the very beginning (Hauglin, Lorentzen, and Mogstad 2008:204). The evaluation of the reform found that a majority of the new projects are grounded in the local context and the evaluation group asserts that in order for external drivers to influence a project, they have to embrace the local culture (Hauglin, Lorentzen, and Mogstad 2008:211-213). Our findings support this general trend.



Significant players in the local context are enthusiasts who are willing to spend their time and energy on church-related work. Such enthusiasts turned out to be vital actors in several projects in the reform (Hauglin, Lorentzen, and Mogstad 2008:212), as was also the case in our projects. In Mandal, for example, a group called Friends of Haydom cooperates closely with the church staff by visiting the confirmation sessions and assuming responsibility for the mission trip to Tanzania, including the cost. In most projects in the reform, enthusiasts have been given subordinate roles as assistants and the main design of the projects has been decided by staff members (Hauglin, Lorentzen, and Mogstad 2008:145, 154). In the four projects we selected the volunteers were given independent and meaningful tasks, while at the same time the cooperation between volunteers and church staff was characterised by close collaboration, sharing of labour, and respect. Maybe this approach to local volunteers has contributed to the successful embedding of the project in the local context?

#### Creation of coherence between part and whole

When asked why their project was successful one of the leaders in Søndre Slagen answered: “It is because of the confirmation programme as a whole”. He said that the candidates for confirmation enjoy being there and look forward to the sessions. The leaders, on the other hand, are proud of the programme and the participation of the volunteers from the congregation builds ownership and unity in terms of prayer and support. The 15 minutes of information on mission at the end of each session are part of a wider positive context. Part and whole influence each other to the benefit of the project.

This greater context which forms part of the projects may be interpreted as a significant “plausibility structure”.<sup>14</sup> Acceptance of the Christian faith cannot be taken for granted in today’s society; nor can a positive view of mission. Therefore, socialisation in the Christian faith is necessary if faith and mission are to become plausible (Hegstad, Aagedal, and Selbekk 2008:122). This seems to be most visible in the Strinda and Berg project. Coherence is a key feature in terms of securing lasting changes in a reform, according to Professor Michael Fullan. If the people involved do not understand the relation of tasks, projects, and processes to the larger whole, this may reduce enthusiasm and stall progress. Focusing on the parts alone makes it difficult to see the larger picture (Fullan 2001:6, 107-119; as cited by Helgesen 2011:229). The leaders in our projects seem to have managed to create coherence by ensuring that the projects are supported by other structures within and outside the congregation. This may be a crucial factor in their success.

#### 4. Conclusion

The main thrust of this article was analysis of the factors driving the success of projects aimed at engaging youth in mission. We did this by conducting a close empirical study of four congregations with promising projects, where youth have been challenged to mission in different ways. By analysing the empirical data we singled out the following factors as crucial to the success of the four projects:

- personal conviction of the significance of mission
- openness in terms of thinking and acting otherwise
- contagious passion
- genuine personal encounters through mission trips

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<sup>14</sup> A concept coined by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, in *The Social Construction of Reality. A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. London: Penguin, 1967.

- building relations
- proximity to the local context, where local enthusiasts are given independent and meaningful tasks
- creation of coherence between part and whole

These factors stand out in our material but we are not able to decide which of them are absolutely necessary; nor do we assert that all of them have to be present in order for a project on youth and mission to be successful. We nevertheless recommend other projects of this kind to reflect closely on these factors.

A possible limitation of our research design may be that we have not stated concise criteria for success in the researched projects, which we could have done.<sup>15</sup> Instead of stating criteria for success our point of departure was four projects which already had good experiences of engaging youth in mission and then we investigated these projects in order to trace the factors essential for this success. It was a conscious choice because we wanted to focus on *why* these projects seemed to have good experiences and to give weight to actual congregational practice, without making absolute claims about the exclusivity of our findings. Further research – and practical congregational projects on youth and mission – will show whether the factors presented in this study are helpful.

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<sup>15</sup> It would have been possible to measure our projects' success in relation to the overall aim of Christian education in Norway, or to investigate whether the projects managed to reach a majority of their age group (which is a key concern in the Plan for Christian Education), or whether each project had succeeded in fulfilling its internal purposes. As argued at the beginning of the article we made other decisions.

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<sup>16</sup> All translations of non-English titles are preliminary and done by me.

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