A HANDBOOK TO HELP ESTABLISH STUDY TOURS TO RURAL RENEWABLE ENERGY PROJECTS

Renewable Energy Training and Demonstration Network for Remote Communities (REMOTE), a European Union Northern Periphery Programme project to encourage feasible renewable energy solutions in remote sparsely populated areas

[www.remoteproject.eu](http://www.remoteproject.eu)

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REMOTE STUDY TOUR CONCEPT

What is REMOTE?

The Renewable Energy Training and Demonstration Network for Remote Communities (REMOTE) is a European Union Northern Periphery Programme (NPP) project to encourage feasible renewable energy solutions in remote sparsely populated areas. It provides information, products and expert services to develop training, demonstration sites and study tour networks for renewable energy solutions that will reduce the dependence of fossil fuels in remote communities. REMOTE gives information on how to combine different sources of renewable energy, such as wind, solar and biomass, for home owners, communities, tourism operators, entrepreneurs, local government and municipal advisors in rural areas. The vision is to provide energy solutions to enhance long-term sustainability of these communities.

What is the purpose of this handbook?

This handbook will give you guidelines to establish your strategy for organizing study tours and enhancing value for your customers, enterprises and other stakeholders in the region. It describes and recommends points to consider in planning and includes practical hints for study tour organisers. The focus is to organize renewable energy study tours, for decision-makers, entrepreneurs and other professionals where the most valuable outcome from the networking will be knowledge transfer and initiatives for further cooperation and for the general public where the outcomes are to increase local tourism and awareness of the benefits of renewable energy for their communities.

While the focus is on study tours for renewable energy solutions, the guidelines in this handbook can be applied to a wide variety of activities or business sectors in areas where it is seldom easy to generate large-scale economic activities. If your region or your stakeholders have unique things that are worth seeing or experiencing, why not use this handbook to tell the world and make some business!

How have the guidelines being developed?

The concept has been tested in the west of Ireland, where tourism is well-developed but renewable energy sites are not, and Norway and Finland which provide case studies at mature renewable energy demonstration sites. The handbook has evolved from the REMOTE experience of developing study tours in these conditions. By linking best practise renewable energy applications with well-developed local cultural and natural sites, the handbook will give guidelines on how to establish common long-term networks at demonstration sites and services customised for the different conditions in partner regions.
PHASE 1: STRATEGY, ORGANIZATION AND PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

Define your reasons for organizing ‘show-how’ tours. This affects the content and the business model for your study tour so you will want to consider, for example, how you will:

- Earn money by presenting something unique and/or not easily available
- Support the companies providing technology and services
- Attract investors and new enterprises to your region
- Attract additional visitors where the current focus is in traditional tourism services
- Support technology and knowledge transfer activities in your region
- Provide activities that will benefit other stakeholders in the region
- Fund the development of your services, running costs of marketing, updating of materials and arrangements of expert tours?

Define core aspects of what you are offering on your tour

- Your areas of expertise in the renewable energy sector
- Your core customers

Define other supporting knowledge or programs that you can offer

- What else could have value for your customers?
- How will you link with other cultural or natural sites?
- From which other market areas would you like visitors?

Select the marketing channels

- How do you make contact with potential customers?
- How do you organize marketing?
- Are there partners to help with marketing?

Organize the “product development” and “production” of tours

- Prepare the core constant modules of the program
- Identify detailed content of demonstration site visits
- Link each demonstration site to the overall theme of the study tour
- Embed additional natural, historical and cultural content into the tour
- Work towards the achievement of long-term networks for the demonstration sites.

Assess the resources that are either available to you or that you need for organizing tours

- Who are the contacts, responsible persons, hosts and other stakeholders willing to help?
- Contact your main potential partners
- What are the main costs of organizing the tours?
- What is the revenue logic? Who pays what to whom?
- How much could visitors be willing to pay?
- Is it possible to make a profit?

Do your homework!

- Ensure your presentation materials are up-to-date in all the main languages
- Talk to the tour hosts about their special know-how and their exposition
- Make arrangements for lunch and coffee breaks etc
- Do you need interpreters?
PHASE 2: ARRANGING THE TOURS

Define the categories of visitors and ‘the message’ the tours will give them

- Decision makers, officers and policy decision makers at federal or regional level:
  - highlight the effects on employment, economy etc.
  - link to national / European policies
  - bring in high-level renewable energy experts
  - avoid technical details
- Decision makers, local or municipal level decision makers:
  - highlight effects on employment, local economy, forests etc.
  - introduce easily-understood non-technical solutions
- Entrepreneurs and potential buyers:
  - keep expert messages short by concentrating on fact-based sales arguments
  - introduce other entrepreneurs using similar technologies
  - make site visits and technology presentations more dynamic
  - introduce new business models
- Researchers:
  - give more space for lectures and promote links between experts
  - concentrate on facts and ‘big picture’ arguments
- Mixtures of consultants, developers and retailers:
  - bring synergies to product development, marketing and policy development.

Try to get the list of participants as soon as possible, identify one contact person representing the visiting group and don’t forget to find out what your visitors want!

Design the program

- Time available?
  - Usually 1 day
  - 1-2 day workshops could include an entertainment or cultural program
- Define the main components and key experts/topics/demonstrations within them
  - Mini-seminars with space for visitors too
  - Demonstrations and site visits
  - Technology and company presentations
- Offer options, if possible
- Recommended group size would be 5-15 persons and a maximum of ~ 30.
  - Bear in mind site facilities and seasonal variations: in winter or in spring roads might not carry big vehicles.

Organise

- Define who is hands-on organising the tour
- Define who will host the visitors
  - recommendation is for a host that stays with the group through the whole program
  - always have a deputy available for the host – just in case
  - always have contact information of all the site visits/meetings available
• Practical tips:
  o some buses have data projectors so your visitors can have presentations on board
  o make sure that
    ▪ dietary, accommodation and physical needs of participants are catered for
    ▪ there are enough breaks and snacks in the schedule
    ▪ there is enough time for transfers between site visits
    ▪ your partners and representatives of sites know the topic of the visit
    ▪ they are prepared for it and can make presentations
    ▪ an interpreter is available if needed
    ▪ visitors have suitable information; leaflets, info cards, presentation etc.
    ▪ in case of a last-minute cancellation, you have something extra in mind when you visit sites
    ▪ the schedule isn’t too tight as the visitors might need some free time and rest (especially visitors from abroad) or even time for some shopping

Process visitor feedback and re-design
• Did the visitors get what they expected?
• What did they like most?
• What useful information did you get on visitors needs, in general or useful for your co-hosts?
• What can you improve for the next time?
• Collect feedback (e.g. via a concise questionnaire) on the day or by email shortly afterwards
• Plan how to start or continue co-operation with this group
BUSINESS MODEL EXAMPLES

This section provides case studies that should help to illustrate principles of how to organize a study tour.

Business Model 1: Voluntary community – Aran Islands, west of Ireland

The Aran Islands consists of 3 islands, ~ 3 km wide and between 5 and 15 km long, in Galway Bay in the west of Ireland. They have a population of 1300 people with 800 on the largest island, Inis Mor. Experience-related tourism is the main driver of the islands’ economy and Inis Mor attracts more than 100,000 tourists per year, mainly between May and September. The major tourist attractions are the scenery, archaeology, and cultural heritage associated with Irish language, singing and dancing. The islands import all their energy, have difficulties dealing with waste generated by the tourist industry and occasionally suffer from drinking water shortages. There is a minimal amount of renewable energy on any of the islands at present.

The Aran Island Energy Cooperative was established as a voluntary community group with the vision of making the islands self-sufficient in energy by 2022. The principal means to achieve self-sufficiency is (1) retrofit of community housing, (2) solar heating of water, (2) generation of electricity by on-shore wind and Photovoltaic panels, (3) replacement of oil and coal heating with heat pumps and (4) replacement of diesel operated transport with electric vehicles. The Cooperative is not-for-profit with membership open to all residents, businesses and voluntary groups on the Islands. It allows 1 share of €100 for a member resident on the islands and 2 shares for resident businesses and voluntary groups. The Energy Cooperative has also established a wholly owned commercial company for ventures that involve some business risk. This is open to shareholder investment up to 49% and pays dividends. The Cooperative has embraced – and informed – the guidelines outlined in this brochure:

Reasons for organizing show-how tours

- Aran Islands study tours will attract investors and new enterprises to the islands encouraged by a low-cost, guaranteed energy supply, and the potential to use the Aran Islands brand name
- They will offer additional options to traditional tourism services, so attracting a greater number and diversity of visitors
- They will showcase a viable example of a sustainable community, so providing a regional hub for knowledge exchange activities
- They may generate a profit that can be re-invested in the Cooperative to realize its vision of energy self-sufficiency by 2022

Core areas of expertise

- Community activists identified experts (from Dublin) with experience in establishing an energy cooperative and spin-off activities
- Local community members with specific skills were identified to facilitate the tours
Other programmes

- The tours were structured to involve visits to the iconic archaeological sites
- They included a visit to a recycling/composting centre
- Participants were encouraged to stay overnight to experience local food and music
- The tours can be offered through Irish

Core customers and market areas

- General tourists
- Investors and renewable energy developers
- Local authorities and policy makers
- Researchers
- Community groups from the mainland
- Youth groups from schools and colleges
- Active retired groups

Main partners

- Regional tourist office
- Galway, Clare, Mayo and Donegal County Councils (i.e. those with islands offshore)
- National and regional (Tipperary, Donegal) Energy authorities

Marketing channels

- Social networks
- Regional tourist office
- Regional and national media via press releases, articles by supportive journalists

Product development

- Sites identified and content developed
- Presentation materials, scenarios and renewable energy cards to provoke discussion
- Questionnaire returned at the end of the tour

Key points for the success of the study tours

- The Cooperative established links with the community and used support of off-island networks of local authorities, tourist agencies, educational institutions and the local REMOTE partner.
Business Model 2: Public sector – private sector partnership - Hardanger, Norway
The Norwegian Museum of Hydro Power and Industry (NVIM: www.nvim.no) was a former hydropower station. It offers many different heritage tourist and adventure tourism activities mixed with local science and technology education.

Reasons for organizing show-how tours
- Establish a marketable renewable energy theme-based tourist package out of a collaboration with local industry and tourist service providers
- Increase the number of visitors to the museum and its locality
- Use the history, local food and knowledge about hydropower in western Norway to stabilize tourism in the region

Core areas of expertise
- Tourist services
- Local industry

Other programmes
- kW + (www remoteproject eu)

Core customers and market area
- Regional tourists

Main partners
- OpplevOdda – a company arranging ‘Via Ferrata’
- Trolltunga Hotel
- Eivind Tvedt - a small private hydropower company that wants to use local energy in industrial production for a local small-scale cider-company
- Hardanger Sideri AS - a company that manufactures turbines for the hydropower industry (Energy Teknikk AS).

Marketing channels
- The partners have not any common business model yet but are developing a common profile and joint marketing materials.
- Common marketing makes the product easier to sell through the destination companies, tourist agency and tour operators.
- By knowing others businesses and products, it is easier market each other and contribute the success of companies and the region

Product development
- Each product is a ‘pearl’. As small businesses are vulnerable and may become invisible on the market, ‘pearl chains’ will be developed to increase their visibility and resilience

Key points for the success of the study tours
- An established network of tourist and renewable energy providers
Business Model 3: Not-for-profit educational organisation - Brigit’s Garden, west of Ireland

Brigit’s Garden is a not-for-profit environmental education charity ~ 20km from the city of Galway. It consists of 16,000 m² of a mixture of woodland and grassland, and promotes an understanding of Ireland’s natural and cultural heritage. Its nature trails and Celtic-themed gardens attract 20,000 tourists per year from the region, nationally and internationally. Visitors learn about local habitats and ecology, and the gardens use outdoor art and sculpture with symbolism that brings Celtic seasonal festivals to life. Brigit’s Garden also provides hands-on environmental education, focused on habitat exploration and nature-based activities, for 2,500 primary school children, 60 secondary school students and 150 teachers per year.

Brigit’s Garden has a Board of Trustees which provides oversight and strategic decision-making on how the charity operates. It has a manager and a team of 5-15 people (depending on the season) who run the day-to-day activities of the site including a café, shop, reception area and office functions. The landscape is maintained by employees on a community development scheme funded by a local government agency, and local volunteers. The income for its activities is generated from visitor admission fees, shop and café sales, and all profits are re-invested.

Renewable energy devices are being installed at Brigit’s Garden and will provide the basis for an ‘experience-orientated’ study tour coupled to the existing eco-tours. Each device (initially a wood pellet boiler and solar PV) has interactive educational demonstrations for students and other visitors along with attractive colourful interpretation boards. Interactive, age-appropriate activities are being developed to construct a narrative around solar energy, biodiversity, bioenergy and carbon footprint.

Reasons for organizing show-how tours

• Enable young people and adult visitors to understand how different renewable energy technologies deliver usable energy.
• Engage and inspire primary and secondary school students, teachers about renewable energy and encourage students into Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics at university.
• Make the link between the development of renewable energy and the need to reduce carbon emissions to tackle climate change
• Increase the number of visitors to the site
• Provide a substantial contribution to the cost of providing energy in Brigit’s Garden

Core areas of expertise

• Outdoor education with primary (5-12 years) and secondary (12-17 years) school students
• Eco-tourism products
• Nature conservation and habitat restoration

Other programmes

• Primary and secondary school environmental programmes
• School teachers courses
**Core customers and market areas**
- Domestic and overseas tourism
- Schools

**Main partners**
- Local university research institute ([www.ryaninstitute.ie](http://www.ryaninstitute.ie))
- National science agency ([www.sfi.ie](http://www.sfi.ie))
- Regional/national agencies specializing in sustainable energy technology

**Marketing channels**
- E-newsletter to over 4000 subscribers
- Web-site ([www.brigitsgarden.ie](http://www.brigitsgarden.ie))
- Social media
- Direct targeted marketing

**Product development**
- Innovative interpretation and activities involving ‘cascade’ education where university students engage with secondary school students who then engage with primary school students
- Facts about the energy and financial savings associated with the 19kw wood pellet boiler and 3.5kw solar PV system

**Key points for the success of the study tours**
- Strong and existing links with local schools and regional university
- Availability of (competitive) state sector grants to fund the equipment, educational development and marketing costs
- Good team work between the staff of Brigit’s Garden, energy authority experts, equipment suppliers and educational consultants
- Local ‘champion’ (funded on the REMOTE project) to drive the start-up of the programme
Business Model 4: Cooperation with a local tourist office – North Karelia, Finland

North Karelia has internationally strong expertise in forestry and bioenergy and is one of the leading areas of forest energy production and utilisation in Finland. Almost 65% of energy used in North Karelia is renewable, and it is primarily wood-based. This is the result of effective research and development projects and 20 years of well-oriented work and cooperation between decision makers, municipalities, business and other stakeholders.

North Karelia also has a history of organizing show-how tours in eastern Finland to demonstrate how wood energy works. It is home to a unique network of stakeholders and well-prepared visiting sites with heating facilities of different sizes, multiple technological solutions, technology manufacturers and well-designed supply chains of forest energy.

Reasons for organizing “show-how” tours

- Support technology and knowledge transfer activities in the region
- Attract investors and new enterprises
- Support the companies providing technology and services
- Promote renewable energy solutions
- Network people, companies, researchers etc.
- Publicise North Karelia’s ‘green brand’

Core areas of expertise

- Bioenergy, forestry, forest logistics; widely research, technology providers/companies, development and education
- Energy co-operatives and business models

Other supporting knowledge or programmes

- Enabling technologies such as photonics
- Bio refinement
- Renewable energy R&D demonstration sites
- Good network of other organisations, e.g. forest organizations and regional authorities
- Visit to a recycling/composting centre collecting biogas
- Usually visitors stay several days so they can experience local hospitality: food, sauna, accommodation, nature and outdoor activities

Core customers

- Decision makers, investors
- Researchers
- Entrepreneurs and renewable energy developers
- Local authorities and policy makers

Main partners

- Regional tourist office Karelia Expert Oy, Finnish Forest Research Institute, Joensuu Science Park Ltd, Joensuu Regional Development Company, University of Eastern Finland, Karelia University of Applied Sciences
• Several options to design different kind of visit programs with companies, e.g.
  o Fortum Heat and Power Oyj, John Deere Oyj, Kesla Oy, Pentin Paja Oy, Antti Ranta Oy etc.
  o Energy Co-operatives, e.g. Enon Energiaosuuskunta
  o Regional and forest authorities, policy makers
  o Several small companies and entrepreneurs, e.g. Kuittila farm
  o R&D sites, e.g. Mekrijärvi research station

Marketing channels
• International networks and personal contacts of all organisations in the region
• Regional tourist office
• Social media, flyers, conferences

Product development
• Sites identified and content developed
• Potential hosts identified and listed
• Presentation materials and information cards of main visit sites available
• Agreed with small companies of reasonable compensation for their time
• Good network of local organisations that cooperate when needed
• Questionnaire returned at the end of the tour

Key points for the success of this study tour
• Agreed with local tourist office on cooperation
• Piloted an example show-how tour program together with the tourist office.
  o We were the specialists on the professional content, the tourist office provided expertise on other things, such as accommodation, restaurants and other cultural tourist activities
  o Contacted potential demonstration sites and made sure they were willing to be part of the study tours. Established their permissions that demonstration sites could be mentioned in program options. Agreed reasonable compensation for their time if needed, e.g. from entrepreneurs that don’t probably benefit from having visitors. Made cooperation contracts if needed.
  o Contacted other stakeholders interested in participating in the product development
  o Made sure the tour package content describes different options and made 2-3 alternative program options
  o Made a list of experts that could act as hosts or give lectures on the topic. Described their expertise and agreed their fees.
  o When the tourist operator defined prizes for different tour “package” options, they could take a small fee
• Tested the tour program carefully
  o Ensured well-prepared customer feedback information
  o Used the expertise already available in the tourist office
• Marketed the tour
  o Talked about the tour program every time we thought people could be interested
  o Encouraged the tourist operator to market the package actively, for example, on the internet, at fairs, tourist trade shows etc.