

# A Fresh Perspective on Volunteering, Coaching & Club Development - a Study Trip to Denmark



**By Gina Rogers - Sports Development Officer, Active Sussex**

Between May and June 2015, a team of sports development professionals from across the UK went on an eight day study trip to Denmark.

The team of UK delegates were representatives from the CSPN, Dame Kelly Holmes Trust, Join In, Association of Colleges & Dudley College.

This particular trip was organised to learn fresh approaches to volunteering, coaching & club development and it certainly delivered.

The team were based in two locations Vejle (central Denmark) and Copenhagen (East Denmark) hosted by the DGI (Danish Gymnastics and Sport Federation) who support the development of Danish grass roots sport.

We met with many different sporting and non-sporting organisations in Denmark, from community sports clubs, schools, leisure centres, DGI and ISCA (International Sport and Culture Organisation).

I felt as though this trip would hold the key to sports development! That it would answer all my questions and I would come back with some sort of sports development holy grail. Surely they do everything better over in Denmark, the standard of living is higher and they pride themselves on being the happiest nation in the world.

Around 10% of Denmark's population is declared obese as opposed to over 20% in the UK. But then we have around 58 million more people living in the UK as opposed to 5.5 million in Denmark.

What's so good about Denmark then?

What they really nail is sports clubs. Their friendly, open, community based culture allows clubs to flourish, offering a central venue for a community of all ages to come together, get active and to volunteer. Sports clubs are made up of multiple sports and often have better facilities than we could ever dream of. Fancy a coffee while you're waiting for your family to finish up their gymnastic session? No problem. You might even be offered a cold beer! But be careful as the club chairman lurks nearby waiting to ask you if you'll help at the

next event or bake a cake for a fundraising drive and you'll probably agree!

The great part about our trip is that we got to experience rural and inner city life. Rural is picturesque, plenty of space, large sports fields and clubs becoming the go to place in the evenings. City life is different, people are harder to engage, scattered, and private gyms dominate the landscape.

Danish sport has a simpler structure with three organisations making up the sporting landscape – DGI Danish Gymnastics and Sport Federation, DIF Danish Sports Federation and Olympic Committee and DFIF the Danish Federation of Company Sports. DGI can be likened to the CSPN here in England focusing on grass roots sport, and the DIF is the Olympic Committee made up of National Governing Bodies of Sport who focus on elite sport. Clubs register with both organisations to receive different benefits. Their structure is enviably simpler but they acknowledge even with a straightforward structure, partnership working is a new concept for them. They are working hard to bridge this gap between organisations rather than be in competition with one another.

Essentially they still have the same problems as we do, they still need more volunteers, they experience drop off between the aged of 16-19, and are desperately trying to increase the amount of physical education in schools.

However they know how many volunteers and clubs operate because clubs are encouraged to register with the DGI centrally and also register with their own NGB. Stats are arguably more accurate in Denmark which means they can find the gaps and tackle them.

Different initiatives come and go, some will be more effective than others and there will always be another campaign on the horizon to get more people active or to encourage more people to volunteer. Our sport structures are very different but our challenges are the same.

The visit was funded by the European Union's Erasmus Plus programme which enables individuals and organisations to develop their education and understanding of practice in identified work strands within the European Union.