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Survey on the promotion of sustainable development and global citizenship (Agenda 2030, SDG 4.7) in Finnish and Norwegian folk high schools



Hosted by:
Anni Henricson, Suomen Kansanopistoyhdistys – Finlands Folkhögskolförening,
Brita Phuthi, Folkehøgskolerådet,
Rilli Lappalainen, Bridge 47

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Building Bridges for Sustainable Development is an Erasmus+ project bringing together Finnish and Norwegian folk high schools and the international Bridge 47 network to promote sustainable development. The project aims to explore how the United Nations Agenda 2030 Target 4.7 – sustainability skills, human rights, gender equality, global citizenship, and cultural diversity – is implemented in folk high schools in Finland and Norway, and to strengthen expertise and networks in the field.

During the project:
- **Map the current situation** in Finland and Norway through surveys, document reviews, and expert discussions.
- **Organise study visits** to both countries to share good practices and learn from each other.
- **Host a workshop** during the Finnish Folk High School Association's 120th anniversary celebration in November 2025.
- **Hold three webinars** to present results to Finnish, Norwegian, and international audiences.
- **Communicate and disseminate results** widely at national and international forums.

Participating organisations:
Finnish Folk High School Association (coordinator)
Norwegian Folkehøgskolerådet
Bridge 47 network
Project duration: 1 September 2025 – 30 September 2026
Funding: Erasmus+ Programme, KA210-ADU, Small-scale Partnership in Adult Education



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Workshop agenda

Tuesday 14.4.2026 at 9.15-10.45

1. Short introduction of the project and partners
2. Short discussion: What is sustainability in your school/organisation?
3. Presentation of the results
4. Walk and talk in a small group:
   - Share & steel a good pedagogical practice. 20 min
   - Presentations of good practices. 20 min
5. Wrap up and next steps



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Presentation of the results



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Folk high schools promote social stability, equality and active citizenship through lifelong learning. Their work emphasises self-directed learning, community, inclusion and the holistic development of individuals. These aims align closely with the UN's 2030 Agenda, which seeks sustainable development that equally considers ecological, social, cultural and economic dimensions.

Sustainable development means meeting present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs. It is based on living within the limits of the planet and strengthening harmony between people and nature. Within the Agenda, **SDG 4.7** highlights the role of education in promoting sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, peace, global citizenship and the value of cultural diversity.

To understand how these themes are realised in practice, a survey was conducted among Finnish and Norwegian folk high schools. **52.9 per cent of Finnish folk high schools** (n=36/68) and **50 per cent of Norwegian folk high schools** (n=40/80) responded to it. In Finland, the study draws partly on a 2025 national review commissioned by the Ministry of Education and Culture. The report examines how different dimensions of sustainability appear in teaching, everyday practices and institutional development, and how changes in the operating environment shape this work.

This analysis is part of the **Building Bridges** project (Erasmus+), carried out jointly by the Finnish and Norwegian folk high school associations and the international organisation Bridge 47, which coordinated this report.

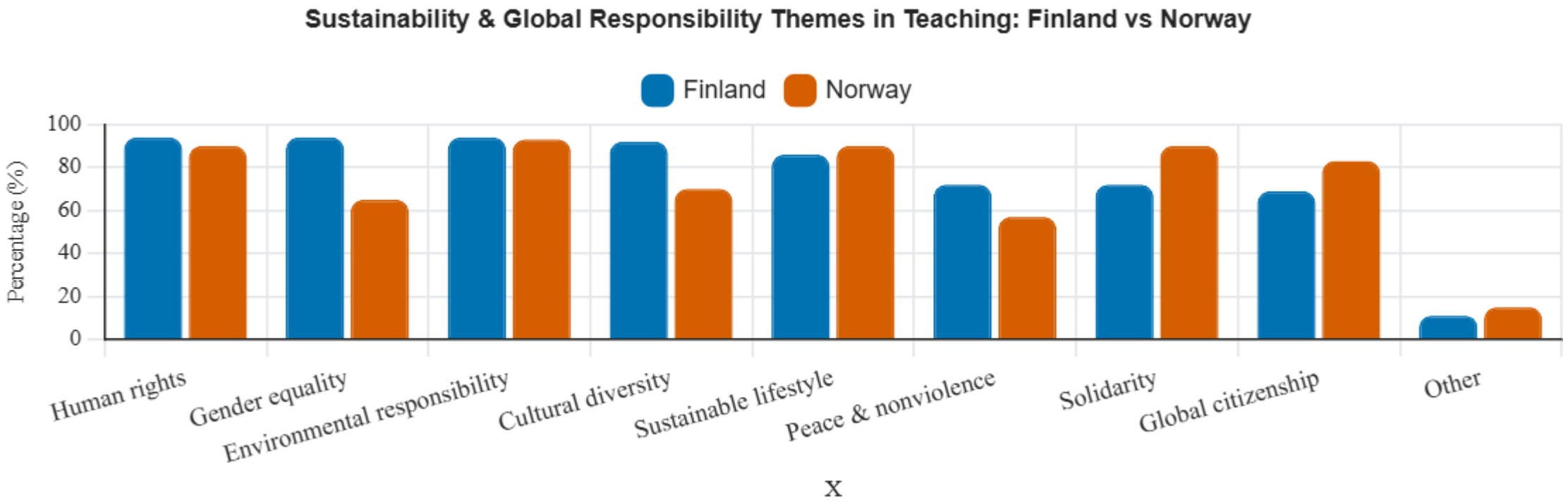
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Which of the following themes are included in the teaching at your folk high school?



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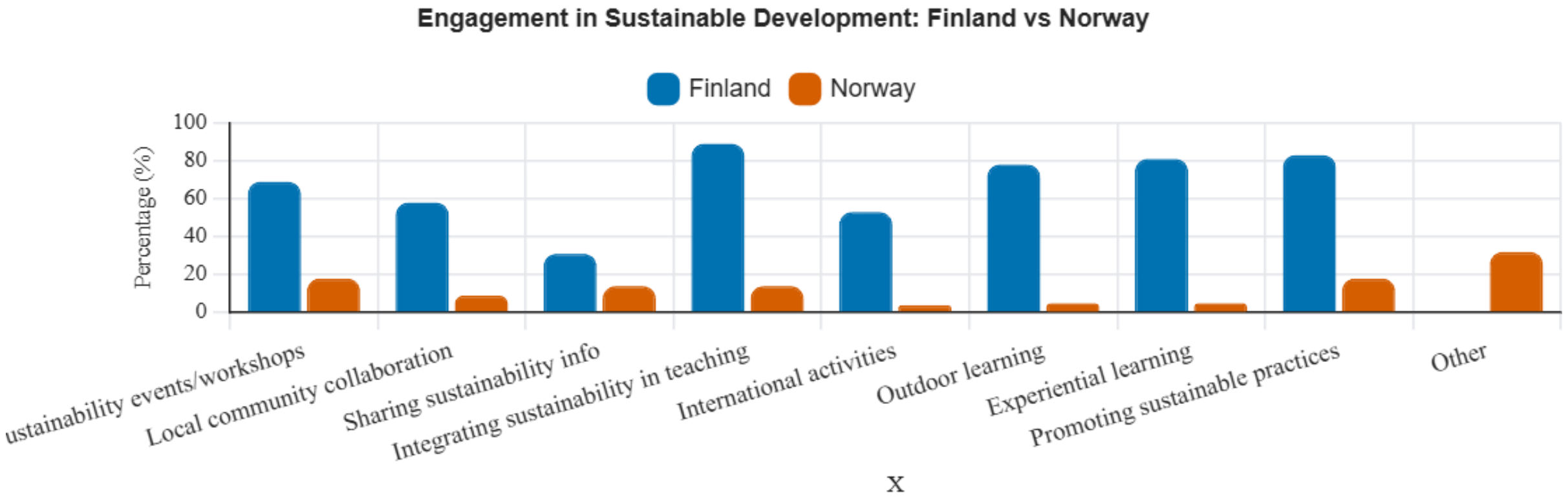
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NB. Experimental learning has been understood in different ways.

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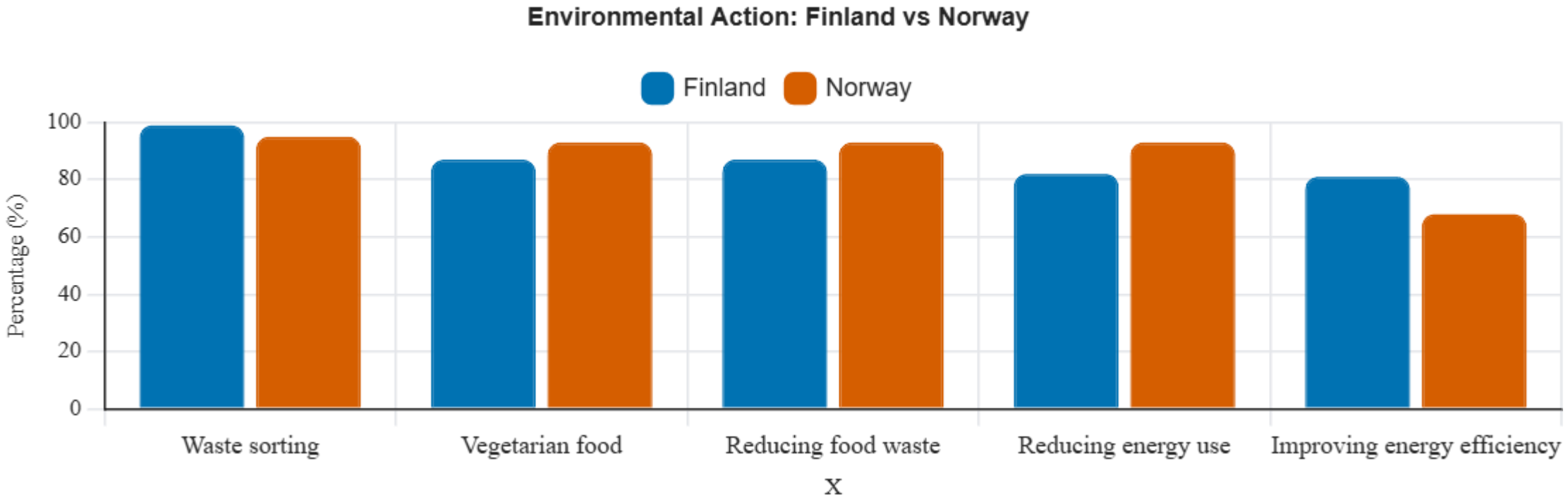
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NB: For technical reasons Norwegian answer options were limited

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An example of successful SDG 4.7 action (Finland)

Building a heritage traditional fence in Valamo College course combines nature work, landscape management, the promotion of biodiversity and the transfer of traditional construction skills. The course supports SDG 4.7 goals as follows:

- promote ecological education (influencing the environment through concrete actions)
- strengthen knowledge of cultural heritage
- supports sustainable land use and biodiversity
- provides participants with experiential learning about environmental responsibility

The activities bring together ecological, cultural and social sustainability – exactly in the spirit of SDG 4.7.

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An example of successful SDG 4.7 action (Norway)

The "Matauk" project combines self-sufficiency, sustainable use of natural resources and a holistic understanding of the food system. Elements of the activity:
- harvesting, picking berries and mushrooms, hunting and preparing food from scratch
- cooperation with local farms
- learning about how climate change affects farming
- learning sustainable consumption and circular economy skills
- at the end of the project, a joint celebration of the harvest

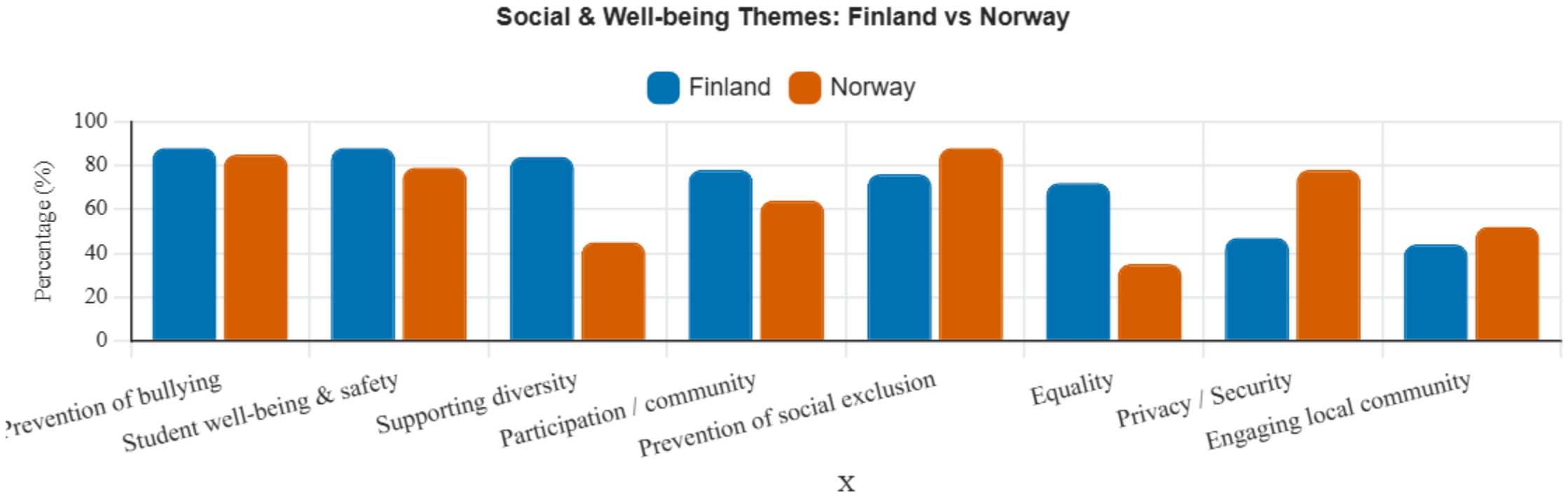
In line with SDG 4.7, this project strengthens students' understanding of ecosystems, sustainable food systems, local livelihoods and the individual's opportunities to influence the well-being of the environment.

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Example of SDG 4.7 Social Initiative (Finland)

Cultural diversity workshop day: A multicultural theme project was carried out at the folk high school, in which students prepared cultural performances and food together, discussed stereotypes and learned about each other's customs and values.

Why does this support SDG 4.7?

- strengthen intercultural understanding
- promote peaceful coexistence
- supports inclusive and empathetic interaction
- more equality and inclusion

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Example of SDG 4.7 Social Initiative (Norway)

Byttedag – a communal exchange event: The school organised a "byttedag" event, where students and staff brought items to exchange with each other. The event is both social and ecological.

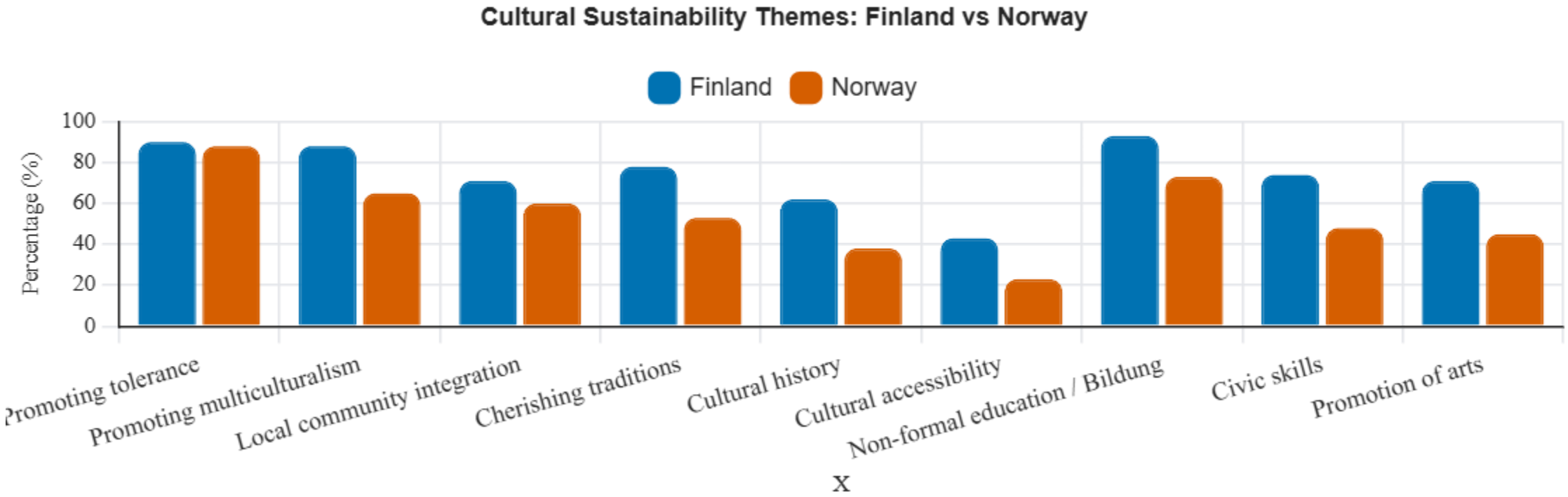
Why does this support SDG 4.7?
- build a sense of community and social cohesion
- teaches resource sharing and responsible consumption
- lowers the threshold for participation (inclusion)
- provides a safe, interactive and inclusive learning environment

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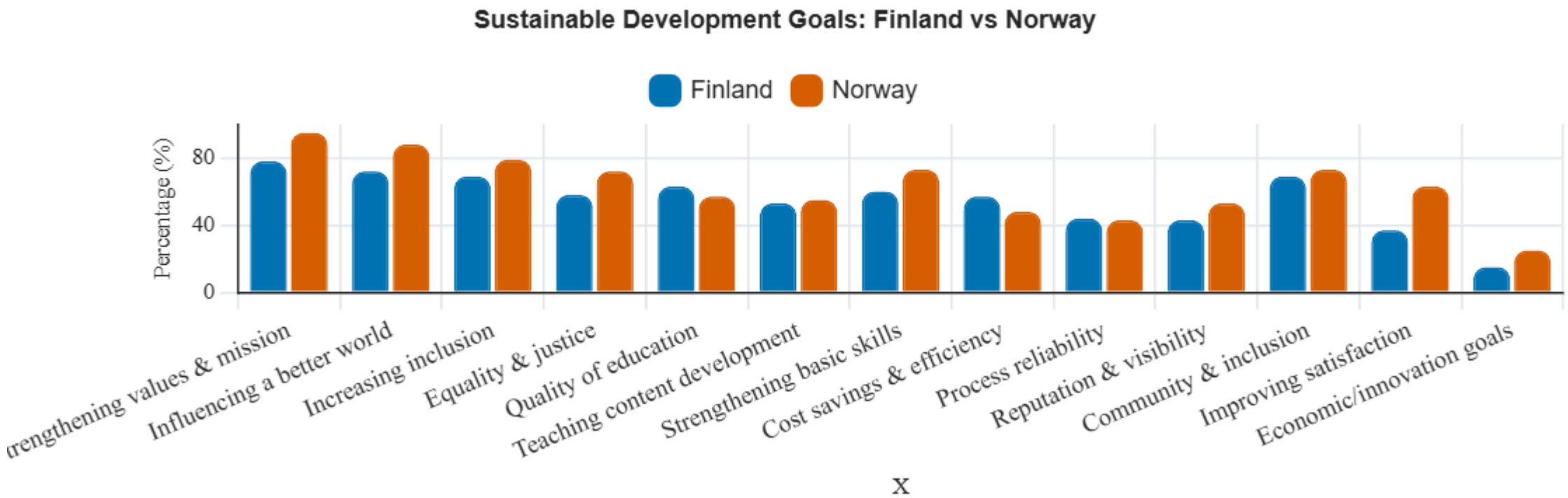
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What do Finnish and Norwegian folk high schools want to achieve with sustainable development measures?



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Support and guidance needed

1. Hands-on support and practical tools
Both Finnish and Norwegian institutions want simple, ready-to-use materials to support sustainability work—such as templates, youth-friendly content packages and easy monitoring tools. Current certification systems are seen as heavy; practical “ready-made packages” would make implementation easier.

2. Training and competence building
Staff and management need stronger skills and guidance. Institutions request clear overviews, help in getting started, expert visits, continuing education and concrete examples. Sustainable development is viewed as broad, and many wonder what advancing to the “next level” requires.

3. Cooperation and shared learning
Both countries highlight the need for networks, joint projects, workshops and peer exchange. Sustainability should not rely on individual institutions but be a shared process that reduces duplicate work and strengthens competence across the field.

4. Strengthening resources
Time and money are the biggest barriers. Institutions want to do more but lack capacity. Norwegian respondents especially emphasize the need for financial incentives, since sustainable choices can be more expensive.

5. Motivating students
Finnish institutions seek better ways to engage students in programmes where sustainability is not naturally integrated. In Norway, the focus is on using student democracy and community structures as drivers of change. Both stress the need for pedagogically meaningful ways to connect sustainability to students’ everyday lives.

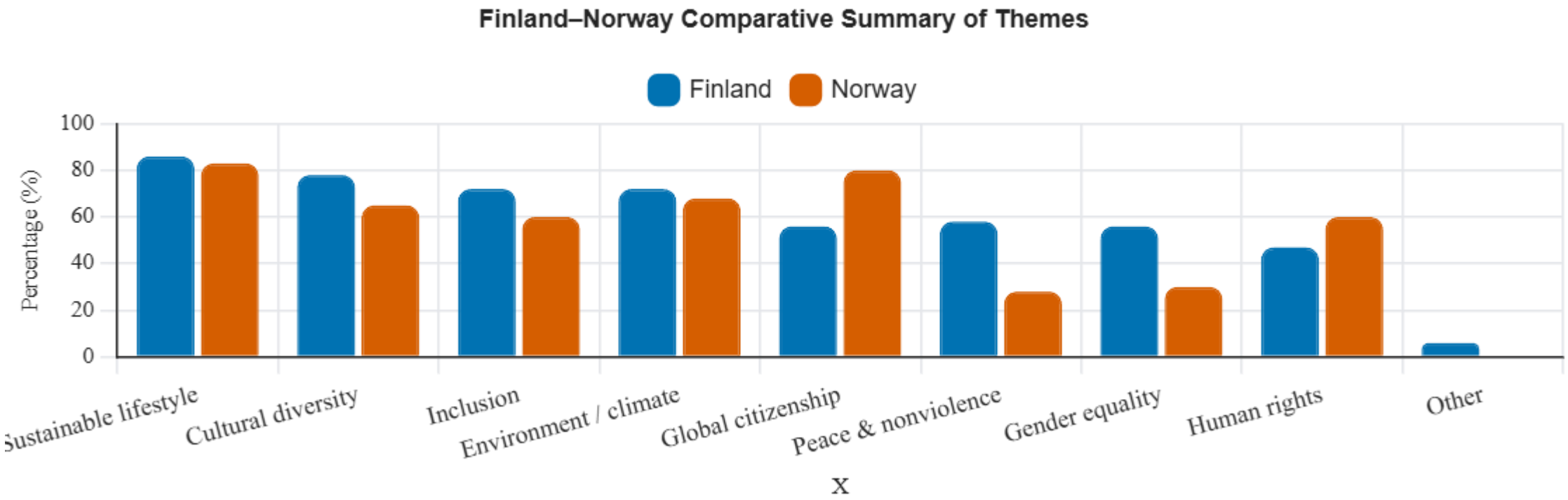
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Future challenges (the respondents' views on what issues and also what kind of challenges will increase in relation to sustainable development in the future)



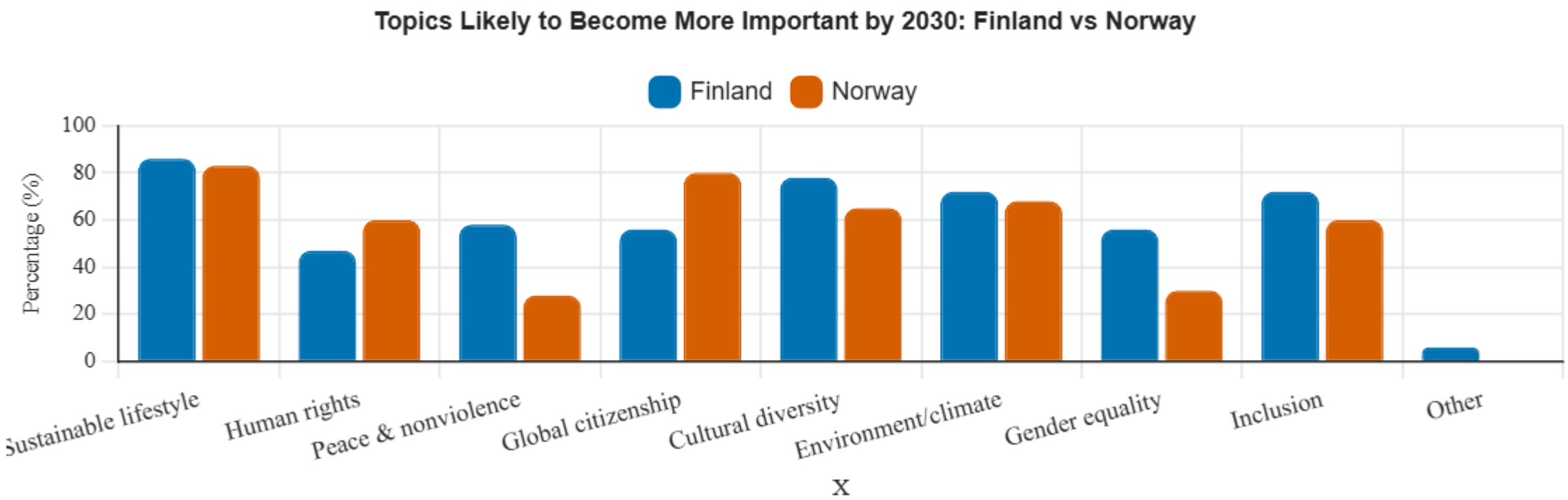
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Which topics are likely to become more important in your folk high school by 2030?



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strengths
strengths

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Key strenghts

The survey shows that both Finnish and Norwegian folk high schools are strongly committed to sustainable development, with sustainability visible in teaching, everyday culture, and community activities. However, both countries still lack systematic evaluation and adequate resourcing.

Finland integrates sustainable development especially into **education and values**, emphasizing human rights, gender equality, cultural diversity, and environmental responsibility. Its approach relies heavily on **pedagogical and community-based solutions**.

Norway, in contrast, highlights **global citizenship, climate action, and student well-being and safety**. Norwegian schools lean more toward **technical measures**, food-system sustainability, and climate-impact reduction.

The biggest obstacle in **Finland** is a **lack of resources**—funding, staff time, and stable structures—making sustainability work uneven and project-based. In **Norway**, the main challenges relate to **motivation and competence** among students and staff, which slows down the embedding of sustainability in everyday practices.

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Key strenghts

In cultural sustainability, both countries strongly support **diversity and tolerance**, but **cultural accessibility and language awareness** remain weak points. Social sustainability differs: Finland stresses **equality, participation, and community**, while Norway prioritises **well-being, safety, and preventing exclusion**.

Financially and administratively, Finnish schools already use many **resource-wise practices**, but need improvements in logistics, supply-chain transparency, and long-term financial competence.
Both countries would welcome **closer cooperation**, practical tools, ready-made models, shared projects, and peer-learning networks. Current certification systems are seen as heavy; schools want **clearer direction and more visible recognition** for sustainability work.

Overall, sustainability work in folk high schools is strong but requires development. **Finland needs more resources and structures**, while **Norway needs stronger motivation and skills**. Shared priorities for improvement include systematic assessment, cooperation structures, cultural accessibility, and deeper student participation.

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Key needs

1. Strengthening resources and structures

In Finland, lack of funding and staff time is the biggest obstacle. Both countries need clear models, practical tools and simple templates to integrate sustainability into daily work without extra bureaucracy.

2. Improving evaluation and monitoring

Sustainability learning is rarely assessed (64% do not assess at all). A light, common assessment framework (e.g., demonstrations, open badges) is needed to make competence and impact visible.

3. Strengthening staff competence

Both Finland and Norway require continuing education, expert support and joint training to plan and implement sustainability more systematically. In Norway, motivating and committing staff is a particular challenge.

4. Motivating and engaging students

Many institutes struggle to engage students, especially where sustainability is not embedded in the curriculum. More pedagogical models, participatory projects and community-based practices are needed.

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Key needs

5. Strengthening cooperation and networks

Closer collaboration with other education providers, municipalities, organisations and companies is needed. Both countries call for joint projects, shared materials, peer networks and a clearer common strategic direction.

6. Improving materials and tools

Institutes need accessible materials, youth-friendly content, ready-made teaching modules and digital tools for planning and monitoring. Current certification systems feel heavy; lighter solutions are preferred.

7. Enhancing cultural accessibility and language awareness

This is the weakest area in both countries. Development is needed in accessibility, language-sensitive practices and participation structures to ensure equal involvement.

8. Developing financial and procurement competence

Finnish institutes especially need stronger financial skills, transparent supply chains and more efficient logistics to fully realise economic and ecological benefits.

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Summary

Agenda 2030 Target 4.7 is being implemented quite well in Finnish and Norwegian folk high schools, where it is integrated into institutional culture and pedagogy. However, there remains a need for clearer structures and evaluation methods to measure progress toward sustainability goals.

In the next phase, we aim to expand the study to Swedish folk high schools, provided that we receive project funding for the Building Bridges II project.

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Walk and talk in a small group:

- Share & steel a good pedagogical practice. 20 min
- Presentations of good practices. 20 min



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Wrap up and next steps

1. Three webinars of the outcomes of the study:

- Norway in May 8.5. at 12:00 - 13:30 (NO time)
- Finland in May 12.5. at 13-14 (Finnish time): https://www.kansanopistot.fi/tapahtumat/building-bridges-webinaari-selvityksen-tulokset-ja-hyvia-kaytanteita-kansanopistoista/
- International in May 18.5. at 15-16 (Finnish time)

2. Ppt will come to websites

Building Bridges for Sustainable Development – Strengthening Sustainability Skills in Folk High Schools | www.kansanopistot.fi

Contact: anni.henricson@kansanopistot.fi



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