

Title

Photovoices in a Box

Subtitle

An art-based initiative for academic cohesion

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Bios

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Abstract

"First Impressions..." is a creative photovoice competition designed for exchange students at UiT – The Arctic University of Norway. Held annually since 2024 during the Autumn semester, the initiative is open to first-semester exchange students, who are invited to submit a single original photograph taken with their mobile phone or hand-drawn sketch that captures a positive impression of their experience. The initiative goes beyond a simple collection of images because it combines visual and narrative elements to transform personal experiences into creative expressions that can be studied. The results can inform future development of the university as a cultural and international institution.

Keywords

inter-campus activities, international students, cultural competencies, placemaking

Cover Image



Alternative text: Collage of four separate pictures showing the moment of opening of a box with photographs, texts and equipment for re-use of a photovoice exhibition traveling between four campuses. The equipment is a rope, clips and tape to hang pictures.

Creative materials

"*First Impressions...*" is a photovoice competition designed for exchange students at UiT – The Arctic University of Norway. Held annually since 2024 during the Autumn semester, the initiative is open to first-semester exchange students, who are invited to submit a single original photograph taken with their mobile phone or hand-drawn sketch that captures a positive impression of their experience. The initiative goes beyond a simple collection of images because it combines visual and narrative elements to transform personal experiences into creative expressions that can be studied. The results can inform future development of the university as a cultural and international institution.

Submissions are categorized into themes such as *Nature, City & Coast, Interactions, Details, Peace, Sketches, and Other (free theme)*. A diverse jury (diverse in terms of gender, age, background, and academic discipline) evaluates the entries based on adherence to the theme, quality, uniqueness, and relevance. To encourage participation and enhance its visibility within the university, the initiative has been structured as a competition, with awards announced during the Polar Night Celebration – an intercultural event for new employees in Tromsø. Participants are informed from the outset that their submissions will be made available in an open-access repository accessibility for future research and public engagement.

The initiative is grounded in Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb *et al.*, 2014). By encouraging exchange students to document their first impressions of Northern Norway through photography and text (a title and a short justification of up to 30 words), the project invites into active observation and reflection. The exhibition provides further a platform for participants to share their experiences and learn from others (Nada & Legutko, 2022). As a form of situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991), this practice is embedded within social and cultural contexts, facilitating integration and participation in the academic and local community (Teichler, 2017). For the institution, the impressions captured by newcomers offer valuable insights into the region's culture, values, and physical environment. These insights contribute to organizational sensemaking (Weick & Weick, 1995), helping the university understand how it is perceived by newcomers and align its practices with its intended image.

Launched in 2024, the initiative has successfully engaged participants, fostered creativity, and promoted adherence to the principles of photographic ethics and open access. Additionally, it has facilitated cultural exchange across different units (International Cooperation Section, University Chaplaincy and the Centre for Arctic Humanities) as well as UiT's four regional campuses. Owing to their geographical distance and relatively recent unification, they have benefited from this opportunity to strengthen connections and reduce academic isolation.

Data repository: <https://zenodo.org/records/17900359>

Webpage: <https://en.uit.no/project/firstimpressions>

References

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