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Advancing equity and access to higher education in the Philippines

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Picture 1. BUKA project team in Marawi.

TAMK experts Marianna Leikomaa, Esa Kujansuu and Henri Annala embarked on a BUKA project trip to the Philippines in January-February 2023.

[BUKA project](#) is all about equity and access to higher education through open and distance learning. The project is funded by the European Union, and it has partners from five different countries: TAMK (Finland), Dublin City University (Ireland), Universitas Terbuka (Indonesia), Universitas Negeri Padang (Indonesia), Open University Malaysia (Malaysia), Wawasan Open University (Malaysia), University of the Philippines – Open University (the Philippines), and Mindanao State University – Iligan Institute of Technology (the Philippines). The Asian partner universities have their own development projects which they seek to promote within BUKA project, and the European partner universities support them in their endeavours. TAMK coordinates the project and helps especially in implementing inclusive online pedagogy.

The first project meeting this time took place in Iligan City, which is located on the southern island of Mindanao. As part of BUKA project, Mindanao State University – Iligan Institute of

Technology (MSU-IIT) had designed a contextualised training programme on innovative flexible learning for the staff members of the College of Education in order to improve access to quality e-learning courses. They used a peer mentoring framework to capacitate the staff members in designing inclusive course materials, and the capacity building programme will also be extended to the other six colleges of the university. A tangible output of the project is a designated BUKA learning space, which we were able to visit.



Picture 2. BUKA Learning Space.

The second part of the project trip consisted of visiting University of the Philippines – Open University (UPOU) premises in Los Baños, located on the northern island of Luzon. In the BUKA project, UPOU had focused heavily on capacity building for their teaching staff, and this was very obvious from our visit: many people mentioned attending the various BUKA trainings that had been going on over the course of the past few years.

In addition to the project meetings and visits, both universities also arranged local training sessions for their staff. At MSU-IIT, approximately 40 people came to listen to Dr. **James Brunton** (DCU) talk about accessibility in his courses as well as **Marianna Leikomaa** about Universal Design. UPOU had also organised an event, with speakers from all of the partner universities. It was very well-attended, with approximately 50 people present and further 80 taking part online. In addition, the dissemination of the project (the handbook and the final conference) were discussed in the project meetings held in both universities.



Picture 3. Marianna Leikomaa talking about microcredentials.



Picture 4. Tinago waterfalls in the Philippines.

All in all, the visit was worthwhile, and it seems the BUKA project is right on track: during this last year of the project, we should start seeing concrete results, and that is what we saw during this trip. The learning spaces are complete, and several people reached out to us

telling how they have used the materials created in the project and applied the training they have received to enhance their own teaching. The project is making a difference.

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Pictures 1, 3 and 4: Henri Annala

Picture 2: Marianna Leikomaa