

**Micropolis**

**The power of strong local communities**

**Results of the survey „Micropolis – The Power Of Strong Local Communities” run among member organizations of the International Federation of Settlements and Neighborhood Centers” (IFS) in February-March 2024. IFS is currently hosted by the Finnish Federation of Settlement Houses that is partner of the “Micropolis…” project.**

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This Survey has been developed in the context of the 16 months Erasmus+ small-scale partnerships

(Key Action 2, Adult education) entitled “Micropolis - the power of strong, inclusive identity and local relations”, May 2023 – September 2024, where the applicant and coordinator organisation is Wawerskie Centrum Kultury from Poland.

For more information, see the project portal: [**https://micropolis.club/**](https://micropolis.club/)

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# Methodological approach

### Objectives of the survey

The aim of this Survey Summary Report is to present the Survey Results and to make conclu- sions showing the needs, obstacles and solutions of organizations focused on community work in different parts of the world. This serves as a starting point for the next project step – that is naming the “Micropolis Guidelines” for how local communities can make a positive change that will make the local bonds and local identity stronger.

The name “Micropolis” is used to describe a city district or a town that has successfully created a strong, inclusive local identity and an active participation and cooperation of inhabitants, so that they can function as the ancient „polis” – the fully democratic, local community where everybody is in- volved.

The Finnish Federation of Settlements has decided to run a survey among IFS member organizations with a purpose:

* 1. To know better how community centers from different parts of the world **meet the needs of local residents** and get to know innovative or just effective tools to promote social cohesion and inclusion and active citizenship.
  2. To **find the guidelines for local communities** that can be tested and can bring the change.

From the survey we intended to learn:

* + 1. What are the basic needs that these organizations are trying to meet?
    2. What are the main tools they are using to meet those needs?
    3. Examples of effective methods for fostering active citizenship, social cohesion/local identity, increase local participation and local bonds and networks.
    4. How local community organizations are funded.
    5. Which main challenges community work organizations are facing.

### The respondent organizations

The survey was sent out to all full members of International Federation of Settlements and Neighborhood Centers (IFS) that is hosted by the Finnish Federation of Settlements. IFS is an organization that organizes community centers all over the world. We received 25 answers from the following countries;

Australia (1), Canada (2), Denmark (3), Finland (2), France (3), Morocco (1), Nigeria (1), Poland (2), Sweden (8), USA (1), Unknown (1).

### The questionnaire

The questionnaire was thoroughly discussed with the Polish and Finnish Micropolis Team and also with the IFS team in order to collect as relevant data as possible.

Here is the questionnaire together with the instruction:

**Micropolis – The Power Of Strong Local Communities**

Welcome to this survey that aims to serve as one of several sources to produce a hand-book for local community centers as part of the EU-project "Micropolis - The Power Of Strong Local Communities".

Our intentions are to find innovative or just effective solutions used for creating strong local identity among local residents, fostering social bonds and networks and increasing citizens participation in your activities but also in the society. If you want to know more about the project, we invite you to the project website: https://micropolis.club/   
This survey has been sent to you since we know that you are doing a good and important job as community workers and we will disseminate the results with you when we are ready the coming fall.   
Thank you very much for participating!  
  
Guidelines for filling-in the questionnaire:

* As you will see , the survey has both closed and open questions. Just follow the instructions.
* If there are questions you cannot  answer, then proceed to the next question.
* Answering the questions takes about 30 minutes,
* Your answers are treated anonymously, and your IP address will not be saved.
* You can save your responses after submitting the survey and find it in your personal Microsoft Forms. See instructions at the end.
* Mail staffan.lindqvist@setlementti.fi if you have questions!

1. **Name of your organization?**
   * ……………………
2. **Which type of organization do you represent?**
   * Member-based association
   * Foundation
   * Self-owned institution
   * Public organization
   * Informal citizen group
   * Private enterprise/ Other
3. **Which level is your organization working on?**

- Local

- Regional

- National

1. **In which areas is your organization mainly active?**
   * Migrant integration
   * Social inclusion
   * Environmental sustainability
   * Local identity and Social cohesion
   * Active citizenship and participation
   * Health and well-being
   * Education
   * Advocacy
   * Other
2. **Which groups of audience are your organization mainly addressing?**
   * Children
   * Youth
   * Adults
   * Seniors
   * Local residents in general
   * Vulnerable citizen groups and people with varied linguistic/cultural background
   * Other
3. **Who is doing the main work in your organization?**
   * Paid staff
   * Volunteers
4. **How does your organization work in order to fulfill needs of the target group?**
   * Cultural activities
   * Sport activities
   * Local common events open for all
   * Counseling
   * An open meeting place with affordable café/restaurant
   * All activities are for free/almost free
   * Language training
   * Exclusive activities for vulnerable groups, such as LGBTQI+ persons
   * Coordinating self-help groups
   * Close connection to the local employment agency and health clinic
5. **What does your organization need in order to fulfill the needs of the residents? (rank your answer)**
   * Staff with different educational backgrounds
   * A mixed staff regarding age, gender and cultural background
   * Big and well equipped premises
   * Many volunteers
   * A café/restaurant
   * Good and strong local networks
   * A positive outlook on mankind
   * Clear democratic structure in the organisation
6. **What are the biggest challenges that your organization face?**
   * ………………..
7. **Can you please describe a successful method(s) you are using for creating local social cohesion/local identity? Feel free to include links for further information.**
   * ……………………………………
8. **Can you please describe a successful method(s) you are using for fostering local bonds and networks? Feel free to include links for further information.**
   * …………………………………..
9. **Can you please share a successful method(s) to increase local residents participation? Feel free to include links for further information.**
   * ……………………………………

**Thanks for participating in the survey!**

1. **Survey results** **Profile of the respondents**

**Which type of organisation do you represent?**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Member-based association | 15 |
|  | Foundation | 2 |
|  | Self-owned institution | 1 |
|  | Public organisation | 6 |
|  | Informal citizen group | 0 |
|  | Private enterprise | 0 |
|  | Other | 2 |

**Which level is your organisation working on?**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Local | 13 |
|  | Regional | 3 |
|  | National | 9 |

**In which areas is your organisation mainly active?**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Migrant integration | 8 |
|  | Social inclusion | 22 |
|  | Environmental sustainability | 9 |
|  | Local identity and Social cohesion | 20 |
|  | Active citizenship and participation | 22 |
|  | Health and well-being | 12 |
|  | Education | 15 |
|  | Advocacy | 9 |
|  | Other | 4 |

**Which groups of audience are your organisation mainly addressing?**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Children | 11 |
|  | Youth | 16 |
|  | Adults | 14 |
|  | Seniors | 11 |
|  | Local residents in general | 17 |
|  | Vulnerable citizen groups and people with varied linguistic/cultural background | 9 |
|  | Other | 2 |

**Who is doing the main work in your organisation?**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Paid staff | 21 |
|  | Volunteers | 10 |

**How does your organisation work in order to fulfill needs of the target group?**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Cultural activities | 23 |
|  | Sport activities | 11 |
|  | Local common events open for all | 21 |
|  | Counceling | 10 |
|  | An open meeting place with affordable café/restaurant | 9 |
|  | All activities are for free/almost free | 17 |
|  | Language training | 7 |
|  | Exclusive activities for vulnerable groups, such as LGBTQI+ persons | 10 |
|  | Coordinating self-help groups | 6 |
|  | Close connection to the local employment agency and health clinic | 4 |
|  | Annat | 4 |

**What does your organisations need in order to fulfill the needs of the residents? (rank your answer)**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 1 | Staff with different educational backgrounds |
| 2 | A mixed staff regarding age, gender, cultural background and |
| 3 | Good and strong local networks |
| 4 | Clear democratic structure in the organisation |
| 5 | A positive outlook on mankind |
| 6 | Big and well equipped premises |
| 7 | Many volunteers |
| 8 | A café/restaurant |

## Open questions

### Biggest challenges for the organisations

* Lack of core funding to sustain ourselves. A rapidly growing group of folx struggling with affordability. A lot of systemic bureaucracy.
* Funding, and that the participants have more and more severe challenges.
* Financial challenge
* lack of funding and resources.
* Money and political support
* Economy
* Funding and Resources: Ensuring a consistent and sustainable flow of funding and resources to support the various programs and initiatives aimed at improving the situation of children and youth in Morocco.
* Structural racism and lack of funding
* Not being able to fully offer activities to the local citizen to the extent that is wanted/needed due to financial restraints.
* 1) Reaching youth, young adults and families in a long lasting manner. Our target groups atm are mainly either children/ adults or seniors. 2) Securing an enduring funding that also covers all administrative expenses. 3) Drastic and uninformed changes in public services in the region pose surprising challenges. The public service does not consider us strong enough as a partner to negotiate and communicate its plans.
* One of the biggest challenges is funding that fully pays for the actual cost of the work and understands and respects that staff need cost of living adjustments on a regular basis. Also, most of our funding opportunities are for supporting work that provides basic social services - it is hard to get money to support purely community work or community engagement work.
* Łąck of founds
* We have challenges find staff in the north part of Sweden. In general no unemployd people.
* We need a paradigm shift and to rethink our ways to engage our (vulnerable) people MORE!
* Long term secure funding (that corresponds in relation to financial inflation)
* lack of voluteers/members
* A conflict between need and funding. So much more should be done.
* Lack of subvention to provide activities and maintain our propositions
* To reach the target group
* Outside - little involvement of citizens in social life. Inside - hyperproduction with a shortage of staff.
* The biggest challenge was keeping young people away from criminality, it is still a problem but not as much as it used to be 2-3 years back.
* We could do a lot more if we had employees
* The need to get funding to implement and complete our project activities.

#### 

#### Successful methods for creating social cohesion/local identity

* Reframing South Vancouver: https://www.vancouverisawesome.com/local-news/south-vancouver-residents-flood-council-chamber-demand-lack-of-services-be-addressed-7216571 Our work in decolonizing our approach and practices in everything we do.
* Free activities, SoMe
* Sports, recreation, educational and health programs
* A. Online meeting spaces save travelling costs to meet our members when the NSW is vast. B. Holding regular conferences for members face-to-face is a good opportunity to meet people and network. C. Using relevant social media platforms to share pertinent information within the specified timeframe. D. Looking at diverse ways of potential funding areas and building up partnerships (e.g., Public Health, Multicultural NSW, Service NSW, Disaster Management, and so on) E. Build up relationships with local politicians.
* We use social network to built community
* We organize flea markets, We have open activities for senior citizens without charge. Every year we organize a Carnival. <http://www.ormingekarneval.se>
* Community Workshops and Meetings: Conducting regular workshops and community meetings to provide a platform for open dialogue, idea sharing, and collaborative decision-making. These sessions may focus on identifying local needs, discussing potential solutions, and promoting a sense of shared responsibility. Community Projects: Implementing and supporting projects initiated by community members that address specific local challenges or opportunities. This could include infrastructure improvements, educational initiatives, or cultural events that enhance the overall quality of life in the community. Youth Involvement: Actively involving young people in community initiatives, empowering them to contribute to positive change. This could include youth-led projects, mentorship programs, and leadership development activities to cultivate a sense of ownership and responsibility among the younger generation. Civic Education Programs: Providing educational programs that focus on civic awareness, emphasizing the importance of active citizenship, democratic values, and social responsibility. These programs may include workshops, seminars, and awareness campaigns to inform and inspire community members. Cultural Activation Events: Organizing cultural events, festivals, and activities that celebrate the diversity and heritage of the local community. This helps strengthen the local identity and fosters a sense of pride among residents.

- We teach our youngster to organise and lead their own project in the area they live. We use cultural methods and tools as Devising and Theatre of the oppress translated to podcasts, shortfilms and project leading.

* Activities are offered for all citizens, in all ages and whole families, in the local

area. It is possible to join an activity, start your own activity or wish for a new activity. The organizational structure has is basis in the local area where the local citizen not only is a participant but a co funder which helps develops the organization. Our placement within the schools makes our offices a natural part of the neighborhood and a crossborader meeting place. It also provides a certain safety aspect though guardians feel safe because the schools conceptualized as a safe place. Young adults, adults, guardians and families can have activities in the school facilities during afternoons, evenings and weekends.

* We have had a four year project together with other NGOs in the local region fostering voluntary work and active citizenship and maintaining a network of civil society actors. <https://www.lietsulentsu.fi/tule-hanke-2020-2023.html>
* Our adult literacy program, which teachers English to 400 immigrant New Yorkers a year, incorporates civics into each of it's levels. One major part of this is teaching students (who may come from a country that actively discourages civic participation) that they not only have the right but the responsibility of community with their elected officials to share their opinions. Two ways that we do this is by teaching a class on how to call your elected official and having them practice in class and having them participate in the local budget process when it makes sense to show their support for their own budget priorities.
* Cooperation with local institutions, local networking, involving diffrent commuities and autorietes in our projects
* We working together in the municipality with other organisation in the civil soceity. A lot of meeting places open for all kind of activites and people.
* The local center called EVS (Social Space Life) I work for is litteraly led by moms who decide what needs to be done. They share their experiences, fear and hope for their family and others. Our program focuses on starting from their skills in various field of competenecs. The following link shows how a mom's creative qualities can encourage other parents to learn how to decorate their home for joyful occasions. This transmission of know-how allows our members to improve their daily life at a lower cost. <http://www.mourad-chalal.com/project/atelier-arche-deco/>
* Many event’s i collaborations with local cultural associations based on local needs
* The community based work always starts from the the idea of workin with people, not for them. Meeting with people, listening to their ideas, encouring them to take their place in the community, organising events, panel discussions, world cafes, demanding local authorities to listen what people are saying and making sure that also small voices and signals and meaningfull.
* We make occasional event where people and citizens can meet and discuss. Discussion groups and outdoor activities about nature.
* To mix young people from different backgrounds and from different social parts of the area through different thematic groups. As well as through local recurring events.
* We support all local initiatives, educate about our identity, and create promotional events that build the local community and its identity. For example, the Świdermajer festival or the large outdoor event Urzecze Dizajn - the theme of both is the specific and original culture of the microregion.
* We listen to our members and try to fulfill there needs
* Overall, important to be involved in at to create networks

Successful methods for fostering local bonds and networks

* Reframing South Vancouver: <https://www.vancouverisawesome.com/local-news/south-vancouver-residents-flood-council-chamber-demand-lack-of-services-be-addressed-7216571>
* Strong partnerships between other similar organizations, muniscipality and state
* Sports, recreation, educational and health programs
* Encourage members to engage with local politicians. Form a Parliamentary Friendship Group and regularly update reports or review policies.
* We organize safety walks with seniors in the area.
* Local Representation: Each branch council represents the interests and concerns of the local community. Members may be selected from diverse backgrounds to ensure a broad representation of perspectives within the council. Regular Meetings and Communication: The branch councils likely hold regular meetings to discuss local issues, assess the impact of ongoing programs, and plan new initiatives. Effective communication channels, both within the council and with the broader community, are essential for fostering transparency and inclusivity. Collaborative Decision-Making: Involving community members in the decision-making process, especially regarding the planning and execution of projects. This collaborative approach empowers the community and strengthens their sense of ownership over initiatives. Networking Events: Organizing events, forums, or gatherings that bring together community members, local leaders, and organization representatives. These events create opportunities for networking, sharing experiences, and building social bonds.
* We teach our youngster to arrange events for other young people in the area. Thru the podcast we interview grown up to exchange information. We also organise meetings with politicians. That creates a seance of success and strengthens the network
* High level of participation and communication. Focus on building relationships and cooperation with local citizen, housing owners, housing companies, local businesses, and the civil society.
* We have had a four year project together with other NGOs in the local region fostering voluntary work and active citizenship and maintaining a network of civil society actors. We are still continuing the network activities by organizing neighbourhood events together and networking for applying for bigger fundings together as well as negotiating with public services as a group of NGOs. <https://www.lietsulentsu.fi/tule-hanke-2020-2023.html>
* Active solidarity remains the best space for individual contributions to a collective project which creates sincere bounds nourishing friendship and local family ties. As you can see in the following video and article, we managed recently to fight Covid engaging kids and parents, youth and NGOs in a very effective and powerfull aciton! <http://www.mourad-chalal.com/soiree-en-famille-2-0/>
* Active membership in local national and regional umbrella organisations
* Face to face meetings with other networks
* Well, in this country we have a tradition of being funded by the state or munincipalities. But it´s changing now. We have a big need to find more and new ways to get resources. One idea is to ask local businesses and companies to strenghten local civil activities saying that they need to pay back to people who are generating income to these local businesses.
* We organise each month a breakfast whith all the actor of local life of Bavans and the cities around to creat links and common activities.
* Cooperation groups between us and local businesses and the school managements in the area's schools.
* We invite people, who create local bonds and networks to our events to promote them. We create a holiday to celebrate their efforts. During cultural events, such as film screenings, we create space for being together and talking, so that bonds are created and strengthened... For example: <https://wck-wawer.pl/strefakultury/aktualnosci/kopia-archiwum-2024/dokumentalny-kwiecien-w-klubie-filmowym-wck-i-swieto-wawerskiej-wspolnoty-spotkanie-z-ewa-ewart-oraz-projekcja-jej-filmu-do-ostatniej-kropli-21.04-ndz-godz.-1600>
* Every summer we arrange cultural and sports activities for all ages. We create opportunities for families to meet and do something fun together with other families. Every term, we organize a democracy day where the young people meet local politicians and share their views.
* In my role as schairman of the swedish settlementfoundation I see that my main task is to listen to the members, in my profession with area work it is relationships. Creating, developing, and maintaining relationships is the key to success
* You need to create win-win situations for the involved.

Successful methods to increase local residents participation

* Reframing South Vancouver: <https://www.vancouverisawesome.com/local-news/south-vancouver-residents-flood-council-chamber-demand-lack-of-services-be-addressed-7216571>
* Peer-to-peer-activities <https://askovfondenssocialpsykiatri.dk/events/weekendfaellesskabet/>
* Sports, recreation, educational and health programs
* Utilizing diverse communication channels such as Facebook, TikTok, Twitter, LinkedIn, email, local newspapers, word-of-mouth through existing clients and pamphlets.
* We are a house that is open to citizens. Many of our activities - such as the carnival - involve a great many volunteers.
* Community Needs Assessment: Begin with a comprehensive assessment to identify the specific needs, challenges, and aspirations of the local community. This can be done through surveys, focus groups, and interviews to gather diverse perspectives. Establish Community Committees: Create committees or working groups comprising local residents, including representatives from different demographics, socioeconomic backgrounds, and areas of interest. These committees become key drivers in decisionmaking processes. Regular Community Meetings: Organize regular community meetings to provide updates on ongoing projects, discuss potential initiatives, and seek input from residents. Open and transparent communication fosters a sense of involvement and shared responsibility. Capacity Building Workshops: Conduct workshops to build the skills and knowledge of local residents, enabling them to actively contribute to planning and decision-making processes. This may include training on project management, communication, and leadership.
* Strongly based on democratc values, childrens rights and high levels of inclusion and participation. Creating equal oppertunities to participate in activities but also to participate within decision making. The organization is built on flexibility, we rethink and replan quickly which makes participation possible. All activities are free of cost and offered every day. Activities are only started based on the local citizens needs and wants. Activities are our tool to build relationships. By providing tools and knowledge about democratic values we help promote social inclusion and an active citizenship.
* We have committees of volunteers and local residents/ seniors/ youth, who plan our activities, neighbourhood events and volunteer events for their target groups.
* Given them rights to decicide and start actions.
* People before project! 1 highlight everyone’s identities 2 starting from the desires and needs expressed 3 identify means and resources The EVS manages to establish ground rules and clearcut definition of the role, duties and responsabilities in order to express each individual values.
* DIY methods of eg expression through street art and contact with neighbours and kids, collaboration with many cultural associations
* Unfortunately I can't because that's our biggest shortfall.
* To recruit participants to the municipality's recurring youth councils through the schools.
* We openly invite all residents to cooperate, we listen to all their ideas, we try to implement them, we support in realization... We create opportunities to meet and talk...
* We work together with other local actors and support associations and clubs of all forms, these are the best methods for organising a community. Associations and clubs create a sense of togetherness.
* It is important to work continuously, to allow people to build sustainable networks

- Our main activities are to "teach the teachers", so our contact to local residents are not in focus

## Summary of survey results

**The survey disclosed that:**

Almost all respondents are mainly active in fostering Social inclusion, Active citizenship/participation and Local identity/Social cohesion. The most common tools in order to fulfill the needs of their target groups are cultural activities, local common events open for all and that all activities are for free.

Most important for fulfilling the needs is to have staff with diversed educational background and also regarding age, gender and cultural background. Good and strong local networks is another important prerequisite aswell as clear democratic structures in the organization.

The most obvious challenge for almost all of the respondents is lack of funding. Other things that are mentioned is that there is a rapidly growing group of residents that are struggling with affordability, lack of political support and recognition, structural racism, difficulties of reaching vulnerable groups and to keep young people away from criminality.

**Most successful ways to foster social cohesion and local identity are:**

* Creating online meeting spaces
* Organize local events such as flea markets, carnivals and activities that celebrates the diversity and heritage of the local community,
* Using the local school as an “activity center” for all,
* Arrange community workshops and meetings for open dialogue and idea sharing,
* Implement and support projects implemented by community members,
* Leadership and mentor programs, especially focused on empowering youth,
* Involve residents in local budget processes,
* Cooperate with other local actors in programs,
* Fostering local networks like “moms” network,
* Create meeting spaces where local people with different backgrounds can meet,
* To work **with** the residents, **not for** them….

**Most successful ways to foster local bonds and networks are:**

* Focus on building relationships and cooperation with local citizens, house owners, housing companies, local business and the civil society,
* Organising monthly breakfasts with all local actors,
* Create a holiday to celebrate all local actors efforts,
* Active membership in local, regional and national umbrella organisations,
* Collective projects for solidarity can serve as a platform also for further cooperation,
* Organizing common local events,
* Create win-win situations for all involved.

**Most successful ways to foster participation and active citizenship:**

* Involve as many as possible in arranging local events,
* Utilizing diverse communication channels for reaching people,
* Establish Community committees comprising local residents and make it a key driver in decision making processes in the community,
* Regular community meetings,
* Capacity building workshops to build skills and knowledge, enabling people to actively contribute to planning and decision making processes,
* Planning committees with representation of as many “groups” from the community as possible (ages, interests, gender with more so on),
* Promote DIY culture,
* Organise meetings between residents and politicians.

**Conclusions**

The survey pointed out the following main success factors when doing local community work aiming at fostering social cohesion/local identity and active citizenship:

* Have a diversed staff regarding education, gender, cultural background and age,
* Focus on cultural activities and local common events open for all,
* All activities should be for free/almost free,
* Arrange leadership and mentor programs,
* Involve as many people as possible in deciding and carry through all arrangements and activities,
* Arrange community workshops, committees and meetings for open dialogues and idea sharing and involve all kinds of residents in them,
* Capacity building workshops to build skills and knowledge, enabling people to actively contribute to planning and decision making processes,
* Focus on building relationships and cooperation with local citizens, house owners, housing companies, local business and the civil society and make surevthere will be a win-win situation for all,
* Utilizing diverse communication channels for reaching people,
* Meet all local residents as subjects, not objects. Always work **with** the residents, **not for** them…