



Micropolis project: Re WP2: Local case studies

Case studies from the civil society area

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Case studies from the civil society area

By Hans Jørgen Vodsgaard, chief executive for Interfolk

Presentation of Interfolk

Interfolk, Institute for Civil Society is a Danish non-profit and non-governmental association and private research institute, founded in 2008.

Interfolk is a member of the Baltic Sea NGO Network; the International Platform for Civic Participation (IPCP); the European Network for Active Participation in Cultural Activities (AMATEO); and the FIRST Network – supporting first-time international project leaders.

The mission is to strengthen lifelong learning activities characterized by personal autonomy, active citizenship, social inclusion and cultural cohesion in liberal adult education and participatory culture.

The activities include research, development projects, courses, seminars, and other lifelong learning and cultural activities – in the context of the Danish, Nordic, and European civil societies.

Interfolk has been involved as coordinator or partner in more than 30 international projects related to informal and non-formal lifelong learning in the areas of liberal adult education, participatory culture and heritage, and many have been close to the subject of the Micropolis Project, like "Bridging social capital by participatory culture", "Culture Guides for social marginalised", "Co-creative cooperation in the field of culture and heritage", "Voluntary culture as leverage of cultural activities in sparsely populated areas", "Art-based learning and active ageing", "Develop online tools to assess the added community values of participatory culture", and many more.

Methodology

The three societal sectors

The partnership circle at the Micropolis project represents in varied ways the three main societal sectors and their networking and cooperation:

- The civil society, including associations and citizen groups from the social, educational, and cultural fields.
- The public sector, including local public social, educational, and cultural institutions as well as departments from the municipal Authorities.
- The market sector, including local businesses, tourist services, entrepreneurs, local trade associations, etc.

Interfolk represents in the Micropolis project the perspectives of the civil society associations, especially from the sector of culture and adult education, which together with the public actors and market actors can support the aim of developing a city district or a town to gain:

*"a strong, inclusive local identity and an active participation and cooperation of inhabitants, so that they can function as ancient „polis" – the fully democratic, local community where everybody is involved."*¹

¹ A Quote from the Micropolis' Erasmus+ application, defining the concept of "Micropolis".

The civil society area of culture and lifelong learning

The civil societies in the European member states represent a free area of lifelong learning, active citizenship, and community work, where citizen groups and member-based associations beyond public control and market pricing organise a myriad of civic activities with strong added values for personal responsibility, democratic values, mutual trust and social cohesion between different social groups, and social inclusion and empowerment of vulnerable groups. Furthermore, green values have been still more important in all sectors of our civil societies.

The largest civil society sector in all the Nordic countries and probably also in all other EU member states is the cross-cultural sector of amateur arts, voluntary culture, and heritage,² and it has in the last decades been the civil society area with the highest rate of expansion in staffs, members, and new associations.

As illustration: Denmark has today more than 100.000 civil society organisations,³ and more than 80 pct are member based democratic associations. In 1979 a Dane were in average member of 2.9 associations, and today in average member of 4 associations.

In 1993, in average 25 pct. of the population were volunteers, while today more than 33 pct is volunteering as much as 17 hours per month as NGOs. Maybe more surprising: 20 pct of the member-based associations and self-governing institution have been formed within the last 15 years, and 50 pct of all existing organizations and institutions have been formed after 1975; and the total numbers of associations and active members and volunteers has increased with more than 25 pct since 1975. The degree of civil society activities has - contrary to many pessimistic predictions - never been as high as now.

Furthermore, in Denmark approx. 30 pct of all civil society associations are active in the area of amateur arts, voluntary culture, hobby and heritage; 25 pct are in the area of sport and dance; while the social, humanitarian, health and educational associations represent 15 pct, and the NGOs active in legal, religious, international and environmental areas represent 10 pct of all the associations. The remaining 20 pct refers to self-own institutions, foundations, housing and trade associations, home guard associations, parish councils, etc.

And the activities in this huge cross-cultural sector in our civil societies do not only provide joy, friendship, meaning and lifelong learning for the participants, but they also have many potentials to promote societal benefits, like empowerment and Bildung, social inclusion & cohesion, active citizenship & democratic values, and environmental sustainability.

However, these potential for fostering added community values can be improved by a more conscious development work by the learning providers in the civil society sector and by a strengthened co-creative cooperation with public cultural and educational institutions and departments of the municipal authorities as well as with local local businesses, tourist services, etc.

We assume that the mutual recognition and engagement of actors from the three main sector and their cross-sector networking and co-creative cooperation are the most important condition for promoting a sustainable Micropolis. The following three case studies can help to substantiate this assumption.

² Here is used a tripartite division of the sector, including "heritage", "amateur arts" and "voluntary culture" (where volunteers organise arts activities and events provided by professionals, like arts exhibitions, heritage events, guest concerts, touring theatres, film festivals, etc.)

³ A central study of Danish associational life took place in 2003-2005, as part of the large International Johns Hopkins Comparative Non-profit Sector Project, where about 50 countries. took part. See also "Foreningsidrætten anno 2015 - status og udviklingstendenser". Center for forskning i Idræt, Sundhed og Civilsamfund Syddansk Universitet. 2015.

Case study I: Culture Guides and the Open School – focus on social inclusion and local identity.

Interfolk was coordinator for a GRUNDTVIG Multilateral project, entitled: “Culture Guides for marginalised social groups”, in the period Oct 2013 – Dec 2015. The partnership circle included 6 partners from 5 countries: The National Association of Cultural Councils (DK); Interfolk, Institute for Civil Society (DK); National Centre of Expertise for Cultural Education and Amateur Arts (NL); Republic of Slovenia Public Fund for Cultural Activities (SI); The Hungarian Folk High School Society (HU); and Voluntary Arts Network (UK).

The overall aim was to develop new culture guide services in the European sector of voluntary arts and culture targeting current low- or non-users of art and culture among marginalised social groups. The main activities included pilot works in each partner country, testing of EU pilot courses for culture guides, publication of a handbook for Culture Guides, concluding national conferences as well as a European conference in Budapest, and other forms of dissemination.

The idea of the open School project in KØGE

The Danish partner, the National Association of Cultural Councils implemented a pilot work, entitled “The Open School Project in KØge”. Here the Cultural Council KØge was encouraged to make a joint project with the cultural administration in KØge Municipality and selected primary schools with reference to the new educational reforms entitled “Open Schools”.

The idea of the project was to give children, who were not normally users of the local cultural possibilities, a better access to culture and art in a more active and inclusive learning environment. Another of the project's ideas was that the associations could expand their activities and create interest in a wider target group, which could help to ensure cultural sustainability, where citizens help citizens to promote social inclusion and cohesion in the local communities.

Methods and activities

Even though the target groups were the children and their families, who did not use the arts and culture opportunities, it would be difficult and could be seen as discriminating to separate the children from a grade level into two groups, one for those who are not usually users of cultural offerings and one for those who are. Therefore, the Cultural Council in KØge chose to target the activities to whole classes.

The activities were based on the competence areas of the involved civil society associations, or on topics where they have special prerequisites; and the activities took place both in the schools, where cultural NGOs came as guest teachers, or in places outside the school selected by the associations and teachers.

The pilot activities provided by the member associations of the cultural council KØge during the spring 2014 included:

- Skovbo Art Society provided art exhibitions with a guided tour adapted to children, where artists became guest teachers and exhibition tour guides and ran projects with several school classes.
- Apollonaris Teater association provided a theatre performance on bullying with a debate, as part of school integration/inclusion work.
- KØge School Orchestra provided a lecture on school orchestra and its many and exciting activities, including how it is to play in the orchestra and how it develops interpersonal skills and camaraderie.

- A guided tour at an art trail in the Køge area, where different types of arts, artefacts and architecture were disclosed.
- The Denmark-Society provided a lecture on Dannebrog (the Danish flag, the world's oldest).
- The Ejby Choir provided examples of classic song and opera, including information on being a soloist and working with choirs.
- Ejby Cultural Center provided a session on genealogy, where the children interviewed parents, grandparents and great-grandparents and found information on archives and the Internet.
- Culture Society of Skovbo provided a session on 'Peter and the Wolf', where trained flutist told the story and used recordings of the different instruments to describe the characters in the story. In the absence of an end to the story, the children themselves made poems and drew a conclusion, while the music played.



Apollonaris Theatre Association provided a theatre performance on bullying with a debate.

The learning outcome

These activities were intended to have a range of benefits for the children, including developing their mental abilities and cultural intelligence, creating shared experiences and common wonder, touching the emotions, challenging, provoking, creating awareness and self-understanding, developing opportunities to verbalise feelings, experiences and actions, creating understanding between the children and their different cultural backgrounds, and developing tolerance in a social inclusive environment.

They also became more aware of the many cultural associations in their community and the possibility to gain new free time activities; and they became more aware of the local heritage and cultural activities in their neighbourhood, and not least it helped them to experience a common identity not only with their classmates but with grown-ups and other inhabitants in their local communities.

Case study II: Time Travel in Lithuania – focus on cultural cohesion and historical identity.

Interfolk was coordinator for a Nordplus Adult development project, entitled: “Culture guides for Active Ageing”, in the period: August 2013 – July 2015. The partnership circle included 5 partners from 4 countries: Musisk Oplysnings Forbund (DK); Interfolk, Institute for Civil Society (DK); Rite Folk High School (LV); Tartu Folk High School (EE); and RMDA - Estate Academy of Museum Rumsiskes (LT).

The background was that the Nordic/Baltic countries have as a main cultural policy goal to promote art and culture to the entire population but are confronted with the recurring problem of large residual groups of non-users, especially among social marginalised and vulnerable seniors.

The overall aim was to develop and test new “culture guide services”, where volunteers can act as guides by introducing and helping marginalised social seniors to participate in local art and culture activities. The main activities included to complete pilot works in each partner country, to provide a handbook on culture guide services, and to complete national conferences and other forms of dissemination.

The background

The Lithuanian partner, the Estate Academy of Museum Rumsiskes had since 2002 been working with the role play, Time Travel as a cultural heritage learning method in the Lithuanian Open-Air Museum, which is one of the largest ethnographic open-air museums in Europe.

It was established on the picturesque shores of Kaunas Lagoon in Rumšiškės in 1966 and opened for visitors in 1974. The museum displays the heritage of Lithuanian rural life in a vast collection of authentic resurrected buildings where the Lithuanian people lived and worked. The exhibitions present the buildings, work and traditions of peasants and townspeople of the varied ethnographic regions of Lithuania, as they looked at the end of the 18th century and the first half of the 20th century with flower gardens, gardens and gardens, chapels and crosses, technical objects - mills, millet vinegar, forge, oil. Examples of household appliances, crafting, trading, agricultural machinery, and ethno-botany are presented inside the buildings.

The territory of the museum is a very popular place, where ethnographic festivals are celebrated, and folk song and dance concerts are held. There are entertainments according to the ancient traditions of Lithuanian Rumsiskes all year round. The guided tours, educational programs, calendar feasts, folk group concerts are being organized in the museum.

Methodological approach

Before the project, the time travel sessions at the Open-Air Museum were from the start in 2002 primarily offered to school classes for children and young people, and later elaborated to reach out to adult and older people as well. During the Nordplus Adult development project, the time travel method was elaborated in 2014 to focus on inter-generational learning sessions.

The innovative part of the pilot work by the Lithuanian partner was to transfer the time travel methodology to engage older people with the aim to create bonding between generations and varied social groups. The focus was on promoting cultural cohesion and historical identity.

The time travelling method includes role plays based on local events and things from the past, where the group learning about historical facts is combined with involvement of values, feelings, attitudes, and capacity to reflect. In principle the method strengthens the historical reflection and consciousness and bridges the past and present in a multiple learning approach. The intention is to help the participants to travel back in time and experience the changes from the past to now.

The planning took place during meetings in the winter and spring 2014, where representatives from Kaisiadorys municipality, the 3rdAge University in Kaunas, the Lithuanian Association of Adult Education, and the Lithuanian Open-Air Museum participated.

The pilot activities

The first inter-generational pilot event took place during the Assumption Day, 15th of August in the one of the homestead of the Aukstaiciai village in the Museum. The title of the time travelling programme was: „Holiday in the countryside of Lithuania in the 30s - 40s of the 20th century.



Time travellers at the Lithuanian Open-Air Museum, August 2014

The four completed events at the Museum involved inter-generational groups of participants of approx. 40. The teams did meet on 14th of August, the day before to prepare the time travelling, including to get some information from Museum curators, to learn more about main topics for this time, to clarify their own roles and costumes and equipment's' to play a character on a Sunday at the countryside.

The next day during the time travelling all participants used specific stories, artefacts, and activities to create alive scenes and narratives. The topic chosen should also allow for nowadays problems and questions, for example questions about emigration, business depression, patriotism, fatherland defence in the 30's -40's of 20 century, etc. Here young people also acted for the elder with dancing, acting etc. The end-users were in this case the museums visitors of different age this day (around 3000) including elderly families with more generations.

The learning outcome

The evaluation reports from the event organisers clearly indicated that such a learning approach also could be a privileged way to organise an inter-generational bonding and increased mutual understanding. The activities were developed in a free, civic context by volunteers, where different citizen groups worked and created together. It helped according to the evaluation to promote social capital, mutual trust, and recognition as being part of the same bigger history.

Furthermore, the time travel pilot work presented innovative learning approaches to strengthen the local identity and sense of belonging; as well as to strengthen the community bonding and social cohesion through understanding, healing, and reconciliation in the former divided communities. Likewise, the pilot work indicated that such a form of participatory culture and heritage learning could help to strengthen the recognition and understanding between the generations, from children, young people, adult and senior citizens; and to build bridges between the life experience in the past and nowadays.

Therefore, the Lithuanian Open-Air Museum also gave such inter-generational time travel sessions a new priority in the planning of subsequent and current culture events at the museum.

Case study III: A new community centre in Ejby – focus on mutual trust and active citizenship.

Interfolk was coordinator for the Erasmus+ Strategic Partnerships for adult education, development of innovation project, entitled: “Bridging social capital by participatory and co-creative culture” in the period: September 2017 – August 2019.

The partnership circle included 8 partners from 7 countries: The National Association of Cultural Councils (DK); Interfolk, Institute for Civil Society (DK); Voluntary Arts Network (UK); The Foundation of Alternative Educational Initiatives (PL); EDUCULT – Institute of Cultural Policy and Cultural Management (AT); Lithuanian Association of Castles and Manors (LT); Republic of Slovenia Public Fund for Cultural Activities (SI); and the National Centre of Expertise for Cultural Education and Amateur Arts (NL).

The background for the project was the decline of trust the last decade in our societies. Several surveys by UN, OECD, EU, and others indicate that the declining trust refers not only to the usual suspects as governments, companies, and mainstream media, but also to NGOs and even more concerning to an increased distrust of other people.

Background and objectives

Trust is the fundamental element of social capital in a country, and the World Development Report (2013) shows that countries, where people are more likely to trust others, are also countries where there is less violence and more political stability, accountability, and stronger economic growth. Furthermore, trustful social relations are essential for happiness. The World Happiness Report (2012) indicates trust as one of the major reasons that some countries are happier than others.

Trust among fellow citizens is also essential for the subjective well-being or Quality of Life. Accordingly, the Eurostat Report: Quality of life in Europe – facts and views (2016) could conclude - contrary to one of the overarching aims of all EU learning and culture programmes - that the Quality of Life for the EU citizens is declining.

Without trust, institutions don't work, societies falter, and people lose faith in each other. Here, we thought, the European sector of participatory culture (amateur arts, voluntary culture, and heritage) could and can make a difference.

The aim was to bridge social capital and to promote inclusion, cohesion, and trust by strengthening the participatory and co-creative culture activities. Therefore, the pilot work focused on bridging social capital in five contexts of culture activities and lifelong learning: inter-social, inter-generational, inter-regional, inter-cultural, and inter-European. Thereby, we intended to strengthen new participatory culture and co-creation activities, where the learning context were changed not only from individual creativity to collective creativity, but to bridge people normally outside of

each other's direct social networks - not just bonding social capital between similar subgroups of individuals but bridging former segregated social groups in joint free artistic and cultural activities.

The main activities included to provide a state of arts survey, to compile good practice and innovative approaches and to publish five Thematic Compendia, to design and test curricula by seven national pilot courses and two European pilot courses, to provide a Curriculum Report, and to launch a Communication Portal and complete seven national conferences.

Methods and activities for the pilot work

The Danish partner, the National Association of Cultural Councils implemented a pilot work in cooperation with the local Cultural Council in Køge, entitled "A new community centre in Ejby".

The background for this pilot work was the trend with the immigration from the countryside to bigger cities, which are a challenge in most developed countries. As stated in the project concept:

"Thousands of people move every month from smaller cities to bigger cities, and it empties slowly the smaller cities for activities and citizens. At the remote areas they stand with a declining number of inhabitants, and often worse, fewer people of working age.

We get a breakdown of Denmark, where **the winners** are the big cities with their education, good job opportunities and attractive culture. **The losers** can look forward to closures of schools and other welfare institutions. They have fewer resources to maintain the level of service we know today. There are more holes in the roads, and a longer time before they are repaired" (Lea Louise Holst Laursen, Associate Professor at the Department of Architecture, Design and Media Technology at Aalborg University).

Locally, some villages - often led by local enthusiasts - have tried to select another way, by working together in self-managed communities with art and culture as the focal point. The following story from the smaller town Ejby in Køge municipality is an example of this engagement.

The disused library in Ejby

The president of Cultural Council of the Municipality of Køge lives in Ejby, a small village with 3,200 inhabitants 9 km outside the town of Køge - a city of 37,000 inhabitants. Køge is situated 45 km from Copenhagen.

It has for many years been possible for the residents of Ejby to make activities within art and culture since Denmark has a law according to which groups all over the country, who starts an association with a democratically elected board, can get local support and have designated rooms for their activities. But in March 2013, there was a big improvement for residents in Ejby, as the president of the local cultural council succeeded in acquiring the disused library and created a community centre ⁴ in cooperation with residents of the city. It became a cultural meeting and gathering place that organise cultural and educative activities with the aims to strengthen the community sense in the small town and to motivate residents to remain in the city and perhaps even attract new residents.

The municipality was interested in the idea and agreed to cover the cost both of improvements to the building, and cost of idle operation and maintenance of the alarm system. In addition, the municipality would be responsible for all exterior maintenance. The library agreed to let most

⁴ Ejby Medborgerhus: <http://www.ejby-medborgerhus.dk/>

furniture and books stand to make it possible to continue to be able to borrow books. The collection of books was also supplemented with books from a disused library nearby.

On the other hand, the local Cultural Council and related citizen groups agreed to organise the activities in the old library on a voluntary basis.



The old library in Ejby

A trusting community

The outcome was that all citizens of Ejby are welcome in the house. You draw a – cheap - membership and receive a key to the house. This means that you can use the house during business hours, but also during evenings, where the last person to leave the house is responsible for closure. By thus giving all responsibility for the house the residents themselves also feel as members of a trusting community.

As a member you could and still can engage in various activities that are mostly initiated and controlled by the members themselves, and they consisted for the most part of artistic and cultural activities such as the following:

- Changing art exhibitions, theatre performances, concerts, and lectures on a variety of topics throughout the year. Theatre performances and concerts are often for the whole family so the children get used to visiting the house.
- Courses in genealogy and IT.
- Throughout the summer workshops with theatre and music for children.
- Throughout the year you as a member can borrow all the books you want. There is no control of the loans. It is up to the members themselves to arrange for the return. This part of the function is based on mutual trust that makes everybody feel it's their house. It may also be this confidence that motivate many to leave their own books on the library shelves, so others can benefit from them.

In addition to the things mentioned there are meeting rooms, reading rooms and kitchenette available to members, and all associations in the city can free book a place in a meeting room.

Most importantly, however, is that the existence of the house meant that arts and cultural activities in the city have grown, and that the community has strengthened people's identity as Ejby citizens.

The learning outcome

The launch of the arts and the cultural activities here described consisted of forming a democratically structured association. The associations are what we call "small democracies". There are places where people, using the rules of democracy, can develop new activities and this is where the main democratic learning takes place and where you learn together with your peers to take control over your own situation in everyday life.



Meeting in Ejby Citizen House

The case study of the Ejby Community House shows that something can be done to keep life in sparsely populated areas. It indicates that a strong participatory culture is based on and promotes civic participation that strengthen the social capital and mutual trusts in the community; and it indicates furthermore that culture volunteers in the field of arts, culture and heritage really can help to promote the community bonding and local identity in smaller cities at the countryside.

Perspectives from the case studies

In general, participatory culture in a free civic and co-creative context promotes inclusive and mutually beneficial experiences, where the involved participants contribute and benefit equally in the same act “con amore”, as neighbours and peers, without being targeted or labelled. Compared to many other existing volunteering top-down campaigns or charity culture activities, the co-creative approach can help to bring together resources from across a community in more equal horizontal networks contrary to more vertical top-down relations.

Anyhow, the transformative community learning for the participants will not just be based on participatory and co-creative activities, but also on organising co-creative and peer-to-peer relations between people from different social and cultural backgrounds.

The key point is not only to promote social capital between rather similar groups of individuals but to bridge former segregated social and cultural groups. Hereby the learning context are changed not only from individual creativity to collective creativity, but to bridge people normally outside of each other’s direct social networks - not just bonding social capital between similar subgroups of individuals but bridging former segregated social groups as a mean to promote mutual trust, social inclusion, and recognition among different groups of people in our communities.

Furthermore, the promotion of added community values implies also cross-sector cooperation between different stakeholders both from the civil society and public institutions and the municipality authorities and often also from the marked and business area. Today in Denmark, all municipalities must outline a strategy for such cross-sector co-creation (entitled “Samskabelse”).⁵

⁵ See for example (right click your mouse and select translate at the drop-down menu):

<https://vidensportal.dk/voksne/civilsamfund/samskabelse>

<https://www.altinget.dk/civilsamfundetsvidenscenter/artikel/kommuner-skal-byde-kritikken-indenfor-hvis-samskabelse-skal-flytte-noget-for-alvor>

<https://www.denoffentlige.dk/uddannelse-og-forskning/ruc-1/fem-trin-til-samskabelse>

<https://sm.dk/publikationer/2016/jan/samskabelse-i-by-og-omraadefornyelsen>

The strategies have typically focus on the synergistic benefit and the so-called 'transformative learning' for active citizenship, democratic participation, and community bonding; and they are based on an understanding of co-creation as a mean for democratic engagement and empowerment of citizens and civil society associations in the local communities. ⁶

Ideally seen, the co-creative cooperation between civil society groups and public institutions and the municipality authorities should be based on equal terms, where citizens and other civil society actors are engaged not only as co-implementers, but also with the possibilities to be engaged as co-initiators and co-designers of new welfare services. ⁷ Hereby, the civil society actors may not only be equal partners, but also in some cases have the role as initiators and governing actors to strengthen the local communities in our societies, or with reference to our current project to promote the transformative potentials of the "Micropolis".

⁶ Hans Jørgen Vodsgaard (ed.): [Nordplus Report. Good practice on co-creation in culture and heritage](#). Interfolks Forlag, June 2019.

⁷ Hans Jørgen Vodsgaard: (ed.): [Nordplus Symposium Compendium. Co-creation in the field of culture and heritage](#). Interfolks Forlag, December 2019