

VOLUNTARY CULTURE AS LEVERAGE  
OF ACTIVITIES IN  
WITH ADDED **LEVER**  
VALUE FOR DEMOCRATIC SPARSELY POPULATED  
PARTICIPATION AREAS



## Summary of the Multilateral Need Survey Voluntary culture in sparsely populated areas

English edition

## **Summary of the Multilateral Need Survey. Voluntary Culture in sparsely populated areas**

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This summary of the Multilateral Survey Report has been developed in the framework of the NGO project, entitled: LEVER - Voluntary culture as leverage of cross-cultural activities in sparsely populated areas with added value for democratic participation and community bonding.

See the project website: <http://www.culture-lever.net/>

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## Introduction to the surveys

By Hans Jørgen Vodsgaard, Head of Institute  
Interfolk, Institute for Civil Society

Here we present the summaries of the Need Surveys that has been completed as part of the 3-year NGO development project, Jan 2016 – Dec 2018, entitled “LEVER – Voluntary culture as leverage of cross-cultural activities in sparsely populated areas with an added value for democratic participation and community bonding”.

The project has been supported by the Nordic Council of Ministers’ NGO programme for the Baltic Sea Region. The partnership circle consists of six NGO organisations from the Baltic Sea Region working in the area of voluntary culture, liberal adult education and civil society development. The partners are:

- The National Association of Voluntary Cultural Councils in Denmark,
- The Finnish Swedish Youth Association,
- The Polish Foundation of Alternative Educational Initiatives,
- The Belarusian Republican Non-Governmental Organization, "United Way",
- The Association of Lithuanian Castles and Manors, and
- Interfolk, Institute for Civil Society from Denmark.

During the last years, we have seen more political and public interest for reviving the rural and sparsely populated areas and to counter the current trend, where especially young and well-skilled citizens are moving from rural to urban areas. One of more ways to counter this trend is to promote better culture and leisure time opportunities in the rural areas, and the partnership circle shares the view that new initiatives in the third sector by voluntary culture associations and culture volunteers can make a difference.

In this project, we therefore intend to develop new methods and approaches to revive the areas and secure sustainability by applying the “citizen help citizen” approach, where civil society associations and their volunteers from the cross-cultural sector of amateur arts, voluntary culture, and heritage are engaged to provide involving arts and culture activities with an added value for civic participation, community bonding and local identity.

The first main step in the project has been, during Feb – May 2016, to complete a series of need surveys in the participating countries. The results of the surveys have been presented in the English “Multilateral Need Survey. Voluntary Culture in sparsely populated areas”. The full Report can be downloaded at the project website: [www.culture-lever.net](http://www.culture-lever.net)

The common aim of the surveys has been to clarify the needs and current state of art and to present the results with recommendations for the subsequent series of 1-2 pilot works in each partner country, which will start in the autumn 2016 and be completed at the end of 2017. During the last project year in 2018, we will publish a Handbook on methods and best practise as well as a Curricula Compendium for culture volunteers.

We hope this summary of the Multilateral Survey Report can provide new knowledge and give inspiration for other stakeholders to involve the voluntary culture in reviving the local communities in the sparsely populated areas.

## Summary of need survey in Poland

By Rafał Dadak, project manager

Foundation of Alternative Educational Initiatives

The sparsely populated areas in Poland are mostly the rural areas, as defined in the Polish Rural Areas Development Programme, inhabited by less than 20 000 citizens. Cultural activities may be realized in Poland by all non-governmental organisations (NGOs), if only culture/artistic activities – related goals are described in the statute of the organisation. The scope of possible activities of NGOs is described in the Public Benefit and Volunteer Work Act. The other documents relevant for current culture policy, sparsely populated areas development and NGOs functioning in Poland are: The Organisation and Conducting Cultural Policy Act, the Minister of Culture Programmes, the Local Development Strategies and the NGOs Cooperation Programmes at the local levels.

Examples of good practices presented in the survey are: The Crafts Track in Małopolska and ETNOMANIA Festival in Wygiełzów, FOLKOWISKO Festival in Gorajec and The "Kultura na Granicy" Association and "CINEMA AT THE BORDER" Festival in Cieszyn; all located in the South/ South-East Poland.

Among the risks & challenges faced by voluntary culture associations in Poland were mentioned, among others: Low level of cooperation between the NGO's and culture, education, science and business sectors; insufficient use of cultural potential for development processes; low activity of artists in the economic life; difficulties in the development of the cultural industry and relatively low level of social communication.

Among the recommendations on how to improve providing cultural activities by voluntary culture associations in Poland were mentioned, among others: Better adapting the cultural offer for different audiences; increasing recognition of the heritage sites as tourist attractions in rural areas; increasing the number of grass-roots initiatives; building social capital through a sense of community, mutual trust and the ability to use common cultural heritage; NGOs networking to promote cultural activities and to build social cohesion and encourage volunteering and strengthening local leaders.

## Summary of need survey in Lithuania

By Regina Žirgulevičienė, project manager  
Association of Lithuanian Castles and Manors

Manors and castles began to settle in Lithuanian territory the 13<sup>th</sup> century. They were formed as cultural centres from the very beginning. In the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century there were approx. 3000 in Lithuania.

Villages formed around the manors. Historically, there were not many cities and towns. Lithuania was a rural region, where the majority of the population lived in rural areas. The manor was a centre for most villages and small towns. In 1941 Lithuania was incorporated into the Soviet Union. The Estates were nationalized immediately, and within 50 years manors were severely destroyed or demolished. Thereby villages and small towns that were located around the former manors disappeared or vegetated. Since the 90ies in the last century the rural population began to decline, the villages rapidly disappeared, and the entire territory of Lithuania, except few major cities turned into a sparsely populated area.

Today, managers or owners of the castles and manors are volunteers, and only thanks to their activities, many of the manors again slowly are revived. Our goal is not only to restore manor houses, other buildings and infrastructure, if it is possible, but also to bring back to life the heritage of cultural traditions.

As volunteers themselves, the managers or owners invite others to volunteer. Revival of sparsely populated areas is much more successful, when the activities band together workers and cultural volunteers. Close integration of residents and people who arrive create a community bonding, where people wish freely to work together, express themselves and keeping a good mood. The greatest thing in such mutual activity is a willingness to stay for those who live in such sparsely populated areas and a willingness to return to this place again and again for those, who live in another places. Tourist routes and paths in the area, where there are no well-known objects, is justified only in cases when there are included some cultural activities. Examples of good practices presented in the survey are: Aikas Zado laboratory in Žeimiai manor, local communities in Sližiai, Saldutiškis and Akmena manors.

We use the cultural heritage as potential for development. Among the risks & challenges are the lack of financial resources and the expectations of users or participants from towns that look for better services and conveniences. Speaking about challenges we must also avoid the risks of possible accidents for our participants, and various forms of insurance are needed.

Among the recommendations for the pilot work, we think it must be initiated in many places at the same time. We plan to invite all volunteers at the same day for landscape documenting. It may be photography, video, painting or some another forms of documenting nature or living environment in sparsely populated areas.

## Summary of need survey in Belarus

By Alicia Shibitskaya, Executive Director

"United Way" Belarusian Republican Non-Governmental Organization

A brief overview of the state of infrastructure, production environment, education system, health protection, trade, communication, transport, and recreation, i.e. all that relates to mode of life and is connected with the settlement system in the regions of Belarus shows that rural areas, remote areas in particular, are in relatively unfavourable conditions.

Under-population, ineffective production and social infrastructures, disproportion between small and large rural settlements, poor demographic prospects, low income, etc. lead to outflow of the population from villages. Analysis shows that the main reasons of migration are economic ones (59%); every fifth countryman leaves his/her village by social reasons, every tenth – by reasons of structural nature. The population of villages has a strong need for reintegration into economic, social and cultural relation networks, which will provide an opportunity to live and develop decently.

Such situation gives the ground to make a conclusion, that from the angle of purposes of this project; sufficient are the things which have stood the test of time and can be transformed to the forms able to support life in small villages: i.e. the language, institutes which ensure interaction and communication between people, and also experience in certain crafts. Any form of activity which fails to bring any income will not be supported by the population.

We should speak about formation – on the principles of local governance – of initiative groups which, if supported externally, can implement some small programs, such as arts and crafts courses, guest sessions – master classes, patronage-mentoring, traineeships for practitioners.

## Summary of need survey in Finland

By Tomas Järvinen, General Manager  
Finnish Swedish Youth Association

The usefulness of NGOs in Finnish municipalities has been analysed in two surveys in 2015. In June the results of an online survey were published, which asked what kinds of cooperation and potential for cooperation exists between municipalities of central Finland and NGOs. Collaboration between the municipalities and the third sector was described in the second survey, the results of which were published in October. The results of both surveys show a welcoming of collaboration between NGOs and municipalities, especially in senior citizens-, residential-, youth-, sports- and village associations, but others, such as patients' and multicultural organizations, are not listed.

Good practical examples of collaboration efforts include Fagerö folkpark (Rangby UF), Skäriteatern, UF Kamraterna, and Vänö Vänner. They organize various events, such as log dances and theatre, which are quite popular, but they face economical and logistical challenges due to the sparse population. Another constant challenge is the lack of outside influence in rural areas; eventually innovation begins to stagnate.

Among the central challenges for these organizations is the expansion of the funding base, and these efforts have been especially difficult in sparsely populated rural areas. There is a risk that they will be considered to be engaging in business activities as a result of increased efforts in service production and finding new sources of revenue. Also, the trend of urbanization poses a risk and challenge for NGOs in rural areas, but the role of NGOs here may lie in creating the feeling of being part of a community, helping to retain rural villages.

These issues could be mitigated with simpler models for seeking grants, as well as education in applying for grants, better economic management, greater collaboration, diversified activity to attract a broader audience, volunteer exchanges, sponsorships, and improved focus on certain details, such as branding.

## Summary of need survey in Denmark

By Bente von Schindel, Secretary General

The National Association of Voluntary Cultural Councils in Denmark

What we in recent years has seen in the countryside of Denmark - in rural areas, in sparsely populated areas, in the villages – is that education, cultural offerings, prices, public service, health - in many parameters are far behind. The village researcher Jørgen Møller sees the development as a clear step away from the idea, that everyone should have equal opportunities: "We have had an idea that one should be able to live a good life everywhere in Denmark, but it seems to have been somewhat difficult", he has said.

It is said that "peripheral Denmark" in many views is going in a gentle curve through the Northern, Western and Southern Jutland over the island communities in the South, Lolland-Falster and Bornholm and that the curve is known as "the rotten banana", which together with other negative words stigmatizes the areas that are less populated. And when the media today tells about life far from the big cities, it's mostly about decay, unemployment, closure of schools and shops as well as lack of traffic opportunities.

There have therefore been initiated many actions to change this. But if these actions will help, remains to be seen. Locally, some villages - often led by local enthusiasts – have tried to select a way, where they work together in self-managed communities with art and culture as the focal point. The two examples of best practice are a proof of that: *The old library in Ejby* and the *Association of the Future of Northeast Falster*.

*The old library in Ejby* selected a way, where the former library is a centre for activities within arts and culture for all the inhabitants in the city. These are e.g. art exhibitions, theatre performances, concerts, borrowing of books and lecturing. Theatre performances and concerts are often for the whole family so the children get used to visiting the house.

In Northeast Falster in the town of Horbelev the *Association of the Future of Northeast Falster* purchased a closed school and sat up 10 different interest groups: The elderly, Tourism & Business, Sport, Nature & Outdoors, Arts, Culture, Hesnæs Port & Beach, Children & Youth, Village Centre and Urban Renewal. In the village centre there was also room for the association of theatres, the associations of art clubs, exercise association, kids club, thrift store, pizzeria and much more.

But the most important in both Ejby and in Horbelev is that the citizens can engage in various activities that are mostly initiated and controlled by themselves, and they consist for most parts of artistic and cultural activities. It is also important, that the existence of the house means that arts and cultural activities in the city have grown and that the community has strengthened people's identity as citizens.



## **Summary of the Multilateral Need Survey: Voluntary Culture in sparsely populated areas**

**This summary of the Survey has been made in the framework of the 3-year LEVER project that are supported by the Nordic Council of Ministers' NGO Programme for the Baltic Sea Region.**

**The project idea is to engage volunteers to promote cross-cultural activities in rural areas with an added value for civic participation, community bonding and local identity.**



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