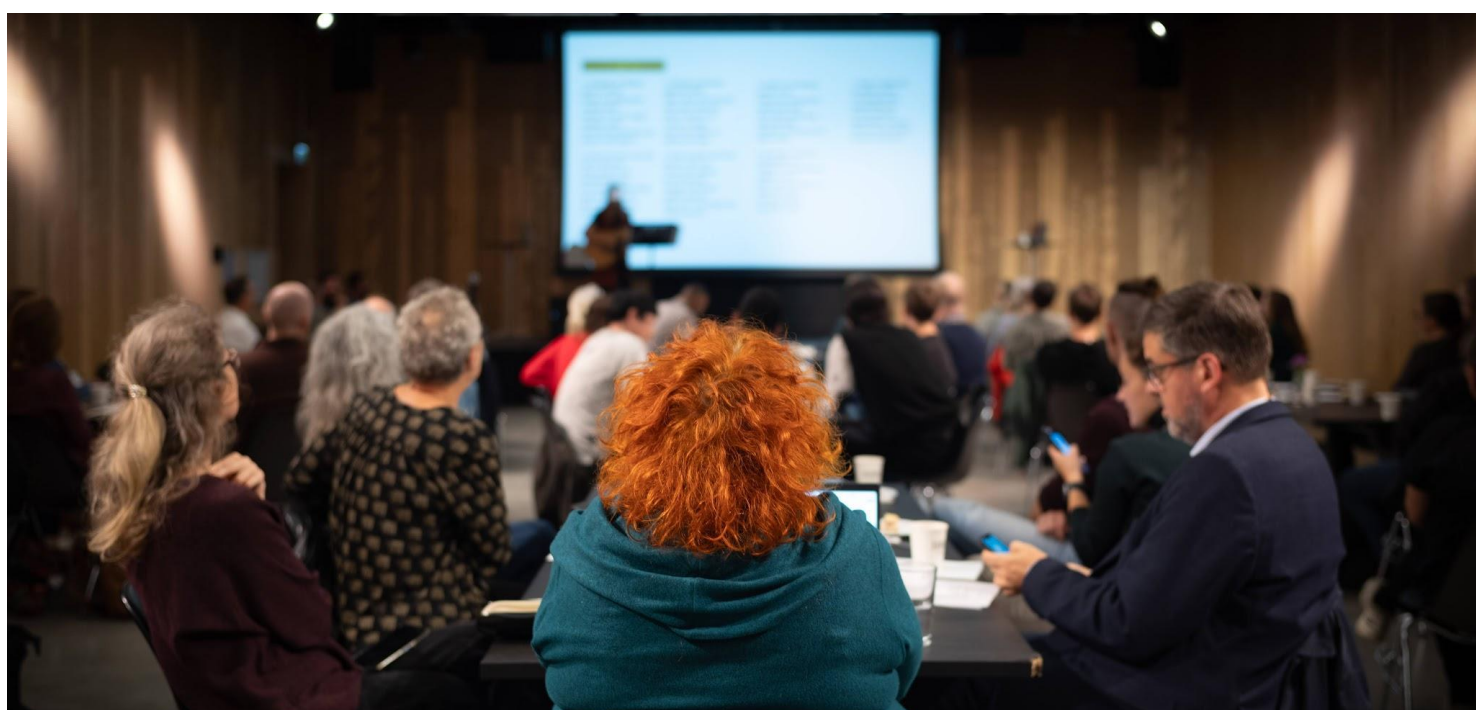


Collaborative Development of a Folk Enlightenment Tradition in Ukraine

The "Folk Enlightenment Ukraine" conference and workshops, held on the 8th and 9th of October 2024 at Aarhus Dokk1, marked a significant step towards fostering cross-cultural collaboration for the development of a folk enlightenment tradition in Ukraine. The event brought together participants from Ukraine, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, and Norway, aiming to lay the groundwork for broader educational and civic engagement efforts to support the rebuilding of Ukrainian civil society. This article synthesises key insights from the conference and workshop, highlighting the perspectives shared, outcomes achieved, and the potential for future cooperation.



NIS PETER NISSEN
Headmaster at the day folk high school Kompetencehuset

Context and Purpose

As Ukraine faces the challenges of war and civil disruption, the need for structured civic engagement through folk enlightenment has become increasingly important. The Nordic tradition of folk enlightenment, deeply rooted in democratic principles, offers a valuable model for empowering Ukrainian communities. The conference on the 8th of October set the stage by exploring how this model could be

adapted to the Ukrainian context, while the workshop on the 9th of October focused on practical implementation strategies.

The conference Folk Enlightenment Ukraine was organized by Göteborgs folkhögskola, Kompetencehuset in Aarhus and financed by Erasmus+

The outcome from the conference Folk Enlightenment Ukraine, 8th October 20224

The War Context: Nataliya Popovych's Perspective

Nataliya Popovych's presentation was a profound reflection on the ongoing war in Ukraine, placing it within a broader historical and sociopolitical context. Popovych, founder of Ukraine House in Denmark, described the war as part of Ukraine's centuries-long struggle for independence from Russian imperialism. She illustrated how Russia's aggression has devastated Ukrainian cities, displaced thousands of citizens, and destroyed critical infrastructure. Through powerful images of destruction and loss, she underscored the resilience of the Ukrainian people in maintaining their cultural identity and democratic aspirations.



Nataliya Popovych delivered her presentation online from Warsaw

Popovych also emphasised the importance of resilience, not just in surviving immediate challenges but in building long-term societal strength. Drawing on historical parallels, she highlighted how Ukraine's civil society has grown even during times of adversity. As she stated, "Ukrainian resilience is founded in defending truth based on historical facts and personal memories," underscoring the role of education and community engagement in Ukraine's future. This context framed the importance of collaborative educational efforts, such as folk enlightenment, in fostering civic resilience.

11 Years of Association Work in Ukraine: Morten Stensig Sørensen

Morten Stensig Sørensen from KFUM and KFUK Denmark shared his experiences from 11 years of collaboration between Danish and Ukrainian organisations. He described how KFUM/KFUK Aarhus and YMCA Lviv have worked closely together to build strong relationships and empower young people through exchange programmes and leadership training.

Sørensen highlighted the importance of building personal connections and working patiently to overcome the cultural differences that arise in cross-border partnerships. He concluded with a reflection on how the war has shifted the focus of many projects, which now include humanitarian aid efforts, but youth development remains a central mission.

Fostering Youth Participation: Adel Storgaard's Insights

Adel Storgaard from the Ukrainian-Danish Youth House focused on the appetite for international collaboration among Ukrainian youth. His presentation highlighted the key role that youth must play in the development of Ukraine's civil society, particularly in the post-war reconstruction period. Storgaard emphasised that Ukrainian youth are not passive recipients of aid but active participants eager to engage with international partners.

The Ukrainian-Danish Youth House has been instrumental in connecting young people from Ukraine and Denmark through youth summits, capacity-building workshops, and cultural exchanges. These programmes help foster leadership and civic engagement, enabling Ukrainian youth to become key players in rebuilding their nation. Storgaard pointed out that partnerships between Scandinavian and Ukrainian organisations have already laid a strong foundation for this engagement, but there is a need to expand these efforts further.



Victoria Furhalo lives in Lviv and works for the municipality

The Role of Non-Formal Education: Viktoria Furhalo's Contribution

Viktoria Furhalo, co-founder of the Network of Education Centers in Lviv, provided a detailed look at how non-formal education has taken root in Ukraine, particularly in libraries. Her presentation included compelling data demonstrating the success of adult education initiatives in Lviv, where libraries have been transformed into learning hubs. Since 2019, these centres have hosted over 400 courses with 15,000 participants, ranging from language learning to entrepreneurship.

Furhalo emphasised the importance of lifelong learning, especially in a society where formal adult education systems remain underdeveloped. She argued that non-formal education is a crucial tool for civic engagement and social cohesion, particularly in regions affected by war. This is evidenced by the 73% of course participants who reported becoming more active in the civic life of Lviv. The data underscores the potential for non-formal education to serve as a cornerstone of Ukraine's folk enlightenment tradition.

Interview with Young Ukrainian Leaders: Igor, Sofia, and Khrystyna

A highlight of the conference was a live interview with three young Ukrainian leaders - Igor Chernetskyi, Sofia Revenko, and Khrystyna Hevchuk - who shared their experiences of civic engagement in both Ukraine and their host countries. The discussion provided a personal and emotional insight into the challenges they face as refugees, but also the opportunities they have seized to contribute to their new communities.

Sofia Revenko spoke passionately about the importance of feeling "needed and useful" in her new country. She described how civic engagement through volunteer work had given her a sense of belonging and purpose. For Igor Chernetskyi, sports and physical activities have been essential tools in creating connections with others, breaking down language barriers, and fostering a sense of community. Khrystyna Hevchuk's experience in Sweden highlighted the systemic challenges refugees face, such as bureaucracy and lack of proper documentation, but also the resilience and entrepreneurial spirit of Ukrainian youth.

Their stories exemplified the potential for Ukrainian refugees to not only integrate into their host countries but also to play active roles in rebuilding Ukraine's civil society from abroad. The interview illustrated that young Ukrainians, whether in exile or at home, are eager to contribute to the democratic future of their country.

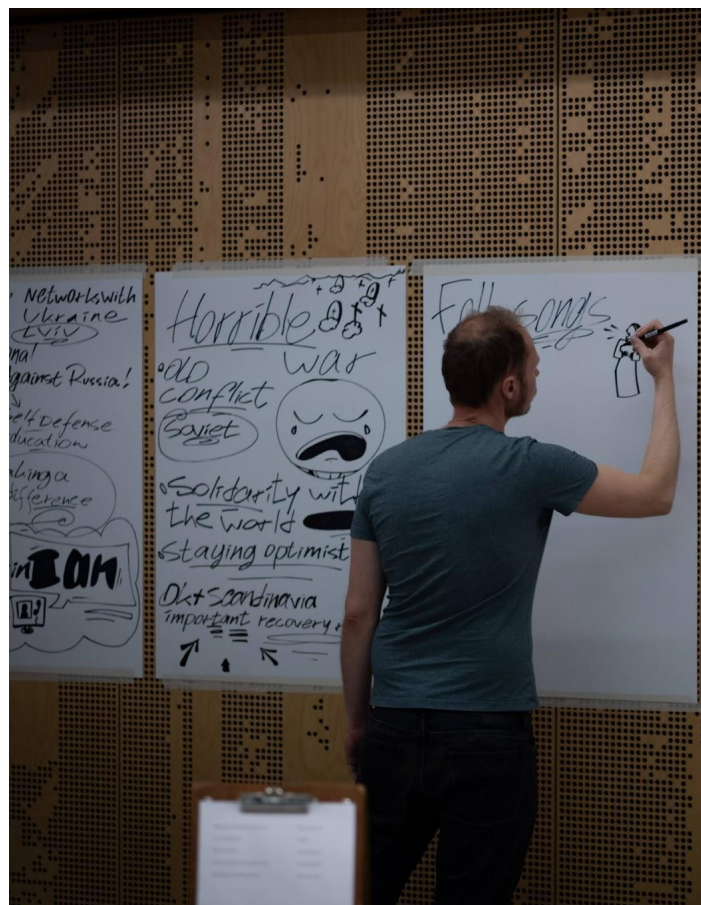


Igor Chernetskyi, Sofia Revenko, and Khrystyna Hevchuk are refugees and lives in Sweden and Denmark

Erasmus+ and Funding Opportunities

Erasmus+ is the EU's programme aimed at supporting education, training, youth, and sports across Europe. During the "Folk Enlightenment Ukraine" conference, Jannie Henneberg Jørgensen and Line Katja Mex-Jørgensen from Denmark's Ministry of Education and Research highlighted how Ukrainian organisations could benefit from Erasmus+ funding to support educational and cultural initiatives. The programme emphasises social inclusion, digital and green transitions, and fostering youth participation in democratic life.

Erasmus+ offers various funding streams, including mobility projects and cooperation partnerships, which are ideal for supporting non-formal education, youth collaboration, and civil society development. These programmes not only provide financial support but also create networks and partnerships that promote long-term collaboration between Ukrainian and Nordic organisations, crucial for sustaining future cooperative efforts.



The cartoonist Sven Bech Pedersen captures the day with lines and text

Reflections from the Workshop Folk Enlightenment Ukraine, 9th October 2024

Irina Maister Bergman from the Multicultural Folk High School in Sweden presented the potential of introducing the Nordic folk high school model in Ukraine. She discussed her experiences with Folk High School Vovchok, Ukraine's first folk high school, emphasising how this educational approach could play a crucial role in developing Ukrainian civil society. Bergman explained that many Ukrainians view the Nordic countries' strong traditions of democracy and civic engagement as a model that could inspire similar development in Ukraine. She urged ongoing exchanges between Ukrainian and Nordic institutions to promote democratic education and foster a more active, engaged citizenry.

These ideas were echoed in the workshops held on the 9th of October, where participants explored how folk enlightenment principles could be applied to the Ukrainian context. In the first part of the workshop, discussions focused on defining the core values of folk enlightenment, with consensus around the importance of community involvement, inclusivity, and democratic participation. However, participants acknowledged the challenges of adapting these principles to Ukraine's unique political and social conditions.

Participants expressed a strong desire to co-create educational programmes directly with target groups, as reflected in the comment, "Nothing for me without me." This sentiment emphasised the need for local Ukrainian communities to be fully involved in designing and implementing folk enlightenment initiatives. In the second part of the workshop, attention shifted to designing a practical folk enlightenment course. Discussions covered the balance between theory and practice, the involvement of local organisations, and strategies for reaching a wider audience. Flexibility and adaptability were identified as key factors for ensuring these programmes' success across various regions of Ukraine.

Evaluation and Feedback

The feedback from participants was overwhelmingly positive, with 81.3% of attendees stating that the conference/workshop had deepened their understanding of folk enlightenment and its potential role in Ukraine. Additionally, 75% reported that the event had strengthened their professional networks. 93.8% of participants expressed interest in continuing to work on an educational course for Ukrainian refugees, and 100% showed a desire to engage in future international collaborations.

Conclusion

The "Folk Enlightenment Ukraine" conference and workshops marked a significant step in fostering cross-cultural collaboration to support Ukraine's civil society.

Through powerful presentations from speakers like Nataliya Popovych, Adel Storgaard, Viktoriia Furhalo, and Morten Stensig Sørensen, the event showcased the resilience and creativity of Ukraine's civic leaders and youth.

Looking ahead, partnerships between Ukrainian and Scandinavian organisations will be crucial in sustaining these efforts. The spirit of folk enlightenment, grounded in democratic engagement and non-formal education, offers a valuable model for rebuilding communities and fostering a vibrant civil society in Ukraine.

The conclusion of the conference underscored the importance of maintaining the dialogue initiated at the event. As Nis Peter Nissen, a key organiser, remarked on LinkedIn: "The energy and ideas shared at this conference will fuel our future collaborations. This is just the beginning of something much larger."

Photo by Kasper Munch Lillelund

