

# Folk Enlightenment Ukraine 2024

*By Henrik H. Brandt, journalist,  
and moderator of the conference*



## A look to the future

In which mood did people leave two days of intense presentations and discussions on the role of folk enlightenment for Ukrainians in the Scandinavian countries as well as in Ukraine?

Well, it is hard to conclude precisely on the conference and workshop Folk Enlightenment Ukraine 2024, organised in Dokk'1 in Aarhus by Kompetencehuset Aarhus and Göteborgs Folk High School

On the one hand, during two days of discussions and meetings with a wide range of extremely committed people and organisations, you could not help getting both inspired and encouraged. Many small and large civil society-oriented initiatives are performing small wonders. After a decade of conflict and war there is still a lot of vitality in the Ukrainian society.

On the other hand, in spite of the optimistic and friendly tone at the event, you had to always remind yourself about the heavy shadow hanging over Ukraine and Ukrainians: It is certainly not up to people from the Nordic countries to fully understand or advise the Ukrainians on how to live under constant existential threats of death and extinction by an imperialistic enemy who wants to take over or destroy their society and national identity.

Before moving to the folk enlightenment agenda of the conference, which was supported by the Erasmus+ Program of the European Union,

you therefore have to acknowledge the fact that military, political and financial assistance to the Ukrainian society still has to be top of the agenda for a long time to come. Ukrainians are living under enormous stress and anxiety, but their struggle would be even more somber without a vision of the future society, Ukrainians are fighting for.

This is where the concept of folk enlightenment comes in. Potentially folk enlightenment has a huge role to play, and the aim of the conference was to develop future initiatives and co-operation between Ukrainian stakeholders and stakeholders from the longstanding Nordic culture and tradition of folk enlightenment.

The conference left a clear picture of the many important roles of folk enlightenment and non-formal education in the Ukrainian society during and after the war.





The whole idea of folk enlightenment and the institutions and associations connected to it in the Scandinavian countries is to empower people, to build societies based on mutual trust and responsibility, and to assist societies in tackling contemporary challenges and take their destiny into their own hands through lifelong learning, democratic discussions and awareness, and concrete actions.

Folk enlightenment contributes to building resilient societies. The conference showed how this resilience has exactly been enhanced by the meaningless Russian attack on Ukraine.

As Nataliia Popovych, chairwoman of Ukraine House in Copenhagen argued in her presentation to the conference, more than 20.000 civil society organisations – big and small – have been established in Ukraine since the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014.

According to the World Values Studies, the trust among Ukrainians in a corruption riddled society has grown from 112 to 30 % between 2011 and 2021, and trust levels to co-citizens have even tripled since the Russian full-scale invasion in February 2022. The number of charities, voluntary initiatives, and public associations has soared since February 2022.

If Vladimir Putin sought to “de-ukrainize” Ukrainian identity, the opposite has been the result of his actions.

Ukrainian identity and society are reforming itself in many areas under the shadow of the war. This tendency was repeatedly confirmed and underlined by the two days of discussions.

This leads to a third careful conclusion after the conference and the workshop on the 8-9<sup>th</sup> October:

If Ukraine manages to get through the war and build a somewhat stable society, help will be pouring in from many countries. The virtues of folk enlightenment in non-formal education and building trust and democratic structures will be an extremely important building block of the Ukrainian society of the future.

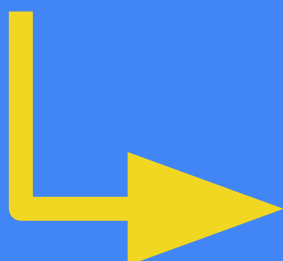


*Nataliia Popovych, chairwoman of Ukraine House in Copenhagen, online from Warsaw*



But what exactly do we mean by folk enlightenment and cooperation between the Scandinavian tradition and Ukrainians?

# RA



The conference highlighted a wide range of networks, concrete actions and initiatives conducted already by individual idealists or non-governmental associations.



*Morten Stensig Sørensen, KFUM/KFUK Aarhus*

Morten Stensig Sørensen, chairman of the Aarhus for Ukraine committee gave concrete examples of the development of the co-operation between YMCA/YNWA in Aarhus and Lviv/Lutsk over the last 10 years. When the full-scale invasion came in 2022, the YMCA department in Lviv was very quickly able to organize and distribute emergency aid and conduct a wide range of activities for internally displaced people or children or families affected by the war. The existence of a well-organised NGO in Lviv and the existence of personal networks and connections meant that YMCA was quickly able to initiate concrete actions in fields of society where the authorities were too challenged with other burdens to act.

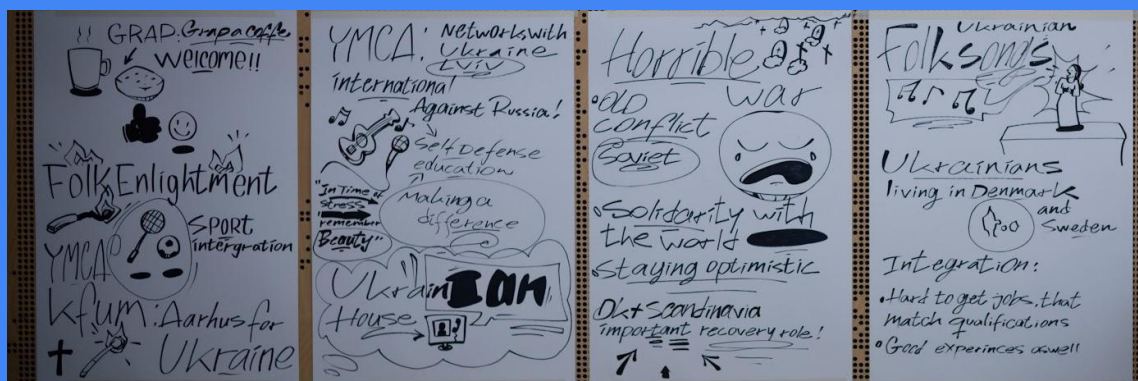


*Adrian Storgaard of the Danish-Ukrainian Youth House*

Another concrete example is the Ukrainian-Danish Youth House as supported by the Danish Cultural Institute and the Danish Youth Council. This initiative is present with Danish and Ukrainian staff and physical locations in Copenhagen, Kyiv, and Mykolaiv, providing local youth with room and support to conduct cultural and practical activities of their own initiative. The fact that personal connections and well-organised structures already exists, mean that other NGO's and initiatives will quickly be able to follow once the war is over. Nordic stakeholders will be able to move in quite quickly to support local initiatives and the further development of Ukrainian civil society. The more personal connections and legal and practical structures and networks established during the war, the more effectively the rehabilitation and regeneration process of the Ukrainian society will be after the war.







Project officer Adrian Storgaard of the Danish-Ukrainian Youth House underlined in his presentation that a wide range of organisations were already present in and around Mykolaiv, which has been adopted by the Danish government as a region where Denmark and Danish stakeholders will take extra responsibility in the regeneration efforts after the war.

The third example highlighted during the workshop on future initiatives was delivered by the Folk High School Vovchok, established by Serhii Shumachenko, who has simply bought a rural property near Chernihiv to establish his own folk high school in Ukraine. Serhii is inspired by his connection with Ukrainian born Principal of the Multicultural Folk High School in Gothenburg, Irina Maister Bergman. The values and methodology of the high school are built on the Swedish model and the ambition is to build a future network of folk high schools in Ukraine to support and strengthen Ukrainian democracy. However, when the full-scale invasion broke out, the institution adapted quickly to new societal needs and has been effectively providing training for a large number of firefighters, first aid rescuers and emergency workers ever since. This rapid conversion was enhanced by the already existing connections to Swedish institutions. The Swedish emergency authorities were able to assist Serhii Shumachenko in educating a large number of trainers for the activities of the Vovchok Folk High School in Ukraine.

The principles of folk enlightenment have also been adapted to local conditions by the libraries in Lviv under the project management of Victoria Furhalo. The libraries have developed a range of non-formal courses for local citizens using the libraries as venues. The target groups of the app. 300 courses are people on low income, veterans, displaced people etc. The libraries validate the range and quality of the training offered. From having a rather passive role in the local society, the libraries of Lviv have moved into a proactive role in non-formal adult education. The shadow of the war hangs over the topics of many of the courses: Psychology, mental health, stress, and anxiety are among the in-demand courses.

The courses as well as the connections and networks created between the participants are doing a lot of good for the local communities in Lviv in tough times



*Irina Bergman Maister, Principal of the Multicultural Folk High School in Gothenburg*



The initial aim of the Folk Enlightenment Ukraine conference was to analyse the need for folk enlightenment courses for the app. 105.000 Ukrainian refugees and migrants living in Denmark and Sweden alone.

During the conference It turned out that some of the young Ukrainians who involuntarily has had to give up their homeland in order to live in Denmark and Sweden as refugees where more than capable of taking action themselves and building impressive activities aimed at assisting less privileged countrymen arriving to the Nordic countries as refugees.

Khrystyna Hrevchuk of 23 has founded the association RefugeeHope which address concrete practical needs of Ukrainians in Sweden and assist them with practical tasks and adaptation to a new life in Sweden. In true entrepreneurial style Khrystyna Hrevchuk has managed not only to establish the association but also to create internal networks with other Ukrainian associations and networks in Sweden. These networks have been able to influence Swedish authorities and put the needs and life conditions of the Ukrainians in Sweden on the agenda.

In Aarhus, two other young Ukrainians Sofiia Revenko and Igor Chernetskyi, had some of the same experiences. Sofiaa (22 yrs) progressed very quickly from volunteer to a formal role as employee at the Danish Refugee Council in Aarhus.

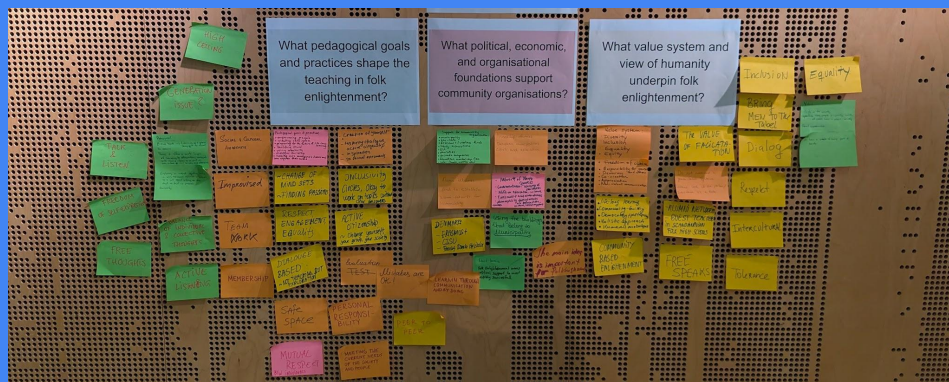


*Khrystyna Hrevchuk, Sofiia Revenko and Igor Chernetskyi*





# E



She assisted the Refugee Council in improving and adapting the program for Ukrainian arrivals, and in her spare time she takes care of Ukrainian kids in a Ukrainian gymnastics organisation. She clearly experiences the elevated level of stress and anxiety among the Ukrainian children but plays a key role in adding hope and meaningfulness to the children's life while they are in Aarhus.

Igor (36 yrs) found time to assist with children's camps etc. while he was taking care of his job and improving his language skills in Denmark. With his background in legal affairs and public administration from his hometown Odesa, Igor is now contemplating how he can help Nordic associations and organisations in establishing themselves in Ukraine and finding local partners once conditions allow. Igor points to the fact that many Ukrainians arriving in the Nordic countries have difficulties in being involved and accepted in job roles corresponding to their education level and experience from the homeland.

One of the main conclusions of the conference could be that there is a lot of human capacity to build on among Ukrainians in Sweden and Denmark already.

Another conclusion could be that Nordic stakeholders have an internal job to do themselves in networking and aligning their activities. They should also be aware of the differences between rural and urban Ukraine and the difference in conditions of working in various regions of Ukraine during and after war time.

There are no one-size fits all. Future initiatives in the area of folk enlightenment will have to address various needs and target groups.

There is still a current need to assist arriving Ukrainian refugees with basic assistance and tools to adapt to and understand Scandinavian societies. Such courses partly exist already and by involving and training Ukrainians like Khrystyna, Igor and Sofiaa such courses can be even more relevant and useful. This means there is a clear need to develop the basic courses as well as courses to create networks and build further capacity among the trainers.

In the longer run there is a need to prepare for future initiatives in Ukraine. This requires building networks and understanding Ukrainian society. As the conference showed there is already a presence and personal resources in Ukraine as well as the Nordic countries to build on and to enhance.





Furthermore, the conference contribution from Jannie Henneberg Jørgensen and Line Katja Mex-Jørgensen from the Danish Agency for Higher Education and Science (Forskningsstyrelsen) underlined that Nordic and European funds are already available to support such initiatives.

So, to informally conclude on two days of intense discussions and information, the path forward for supporting folk enlightenment in Ukraine as well as the Nordic countries initiatives will have to be designed for several levels:

- Further improving folk enlightenment initiatives for Ukrainian refugees in the Nordic countries – perhaps with even more involvement by Ukrainian trainers with an understanding of both the Ukrainian reality and the Nordic societies.
- Identifying and building capacity and networks among (Ukrainian) trainers in folk enlightenment in the Nordic countries.
- Identifying Nordic stakeholders already active in or preparing to be active in folk enlightenment initiatives in Ukraine once conditions allow.
- Preparing concrete actions in co-operation with Ukrainian stakeholders in Ukraine once conditions allow – and in this respect identifying the topics and skills most needed in folk enlightenment and non-formal education in contributing to the regeneration of Ukrainian society after the war.

The two days of conference and workshop in Aarhus on the 8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> October was a good start to future initiatives and in building future networks and initiatives.

But as it was also stressed by Nis Peter Nissen, the head of the conference organiser, Kompetencehuset, Folk Enlightenment Ukraine was only the beginning of a long journey ahead:

*"The energy and ideas shared at this conference will fuel our future collaborations. This is just the beginning of something much larger."*



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