

Happy villages

learning communities for sustainable change

Different cultures, common challenges of small villages
Inspirations, new ideas, good practices – Czech, Polish and Galician examples

LOCAL HERITAGE

Local heritage plays a very important role in building local identity. Unfortunately, the globalized, digitalized and largely online reality of today does not create much space for working with heritage or passing on knowledge about it in the way it used to be passed on - around family tables. That is why initiatives that help us to better understand the place where we live are so important. They help us to appreciate who we are and they help bring people together.

CULTURAL HERITAGE – OLD & NEW TRADITIONS

connecting neighbours while working together, involving all generations, making inhabitants proud of the place where they live

Masopust (Veselá, Czech Republic)

After a break of 71 years, Association “Vesela vesnice o.s.” brought back to life the tradition of Carnival in a small village in central Bohemia. Roles of masks and dramaturgy of a colorful event happening some weeks before Easter is based on stories of eyewitnesses, available literature and good practices observed in other local communities.



Celebration of Saint Barbara (Poboado Mineiro de Fontao, Galicia)

The neighbours association “A.A.V.V. Minas da Brea” renewed a traditional festival of miners in Santa Bárbara after 40 years. This was the most important festival in “wolfram times” and it is currently spreading Fontao history and offering an opportunity for neighbours to interact in the community.



Kaczawskie Warsztaty Artystyczne (Dobków, Poland)

Lower Silesia, where Dobków is situated, is a region of mixed cultures and identities. Hardly any of its inhabitants have their roots there as many families have only lived there since 1945. That is why, instead of renewing traditions, “Stowarzyszenie Dobków” created a new tradition – a tradition of regional festivals promoting local products, crafts and stories.



NATURAL HERITAGE – ENVIRONMENT & NATURE

better understanding of our local reality, rebuilding our connection with nature, understanding our environment

Educational path (Dobków, Poland)

Dobków is situated in a place with a unique geological and environmental character, which makes it a perfect place for learning geology. This strength was used for the development of an “educational path”. The path is important for visitors as well as inhabitants because it helps them to develop their understanding of the area where they live.



Common revitalization of public spaces (Veselá, Czech Republic)

In recent times, the individualistic approach, where everyone cares about his or her own “playground”, has become much more common. Simple community activities such as very basic revitalization of a small park, or placing a duck house (saving wild ducks from cats and foxes that attacked them around the village lake) are perfect examples of activities that make us care more about our common space.



HISTORICAL HERITAGE – ORAL HISTORY

the houses, benches and trees that we see all around us today, plus those in old photos, all have “their own stories” and the best way of uncovering these stories is by asking our neighbours

Oral history archive (Poboado Mineiro de Fontao, Galicia)

New neighbours interviewed our old neighbours. The enthusiasts who carried out the interviews had the help of a script full of important facts about the history of Fontao. Those audio interviews, together with interviews which were recorded before, have now created an “Oral history archive of Fontao”.



Historical role game (Poboado Mineiro de Fontao, Galicia)

This is an interactive walk through “wolfram’s times” that helps children and adults to better understand the history of Fontao. Experiencing it directly helps you understand history much more than reading it from books.



Living memory - educational path (Veselá, Czech Republic)

Walk through a village and through stories of different places, houses etc. This is a walk during which information panels shaped like decorated windows share with us these stories. Recorded audio, with stories of eyewitnesses, can also be heard on mp3 - borrowed from a local shop or through online application.



Reconstruction of monuments, creation of public spaces (Veselá, Czech Republic)

Old, destroyed sculptures, monuments etc. were important for previous generations because of specific reasons. Even if their original meaning is not as relevant today, their story can help us to improve our understanding of our local community and they can become places where neighbours meet and talk.



Power of family photos (Dobków, Poland)

Small activities with big meanings: an exhibition of old photos, when neighbours can meet, talk, recall memories, tell stories, or calendar in a form of “family album” with pictures and stories from the local community.



SELF ORGANISATION AND LEADERSHIP

Meetings, discussions, facing challenges and celebrating successes - how can we support the community development process? What is participative leadership? What is crucial for a community to develop?

- Regular meetings – and regular “reasons” to meet, for instance according to the yearly cycle of traditions and celebrations
- Cooperation and communication across generations
- Importance of impulse, leader, person who empowers others
- Role of leader: to find potential in others and to help them build on their strengths
- Crucial for self organization within a local community is a well organized public space, which creates opportunities for neighbours to meet – for instance benches (see **partnership benches**)
- Methods which can support self organisation and effective participative leadership: Open space, Appreciative enquiry, Technology of participation

IDEAS AND GOOD PRACTICES

Flea market

Not the market for people who buy and sell antiques professionally but the one for neighbours, where people sell things found in attics, cellars etc. Things that are no longer needed can be sold for a symbolic price, or exchanged for something useful. This is a place where people can get rid of things they don't need and find things that might be useful, but most of all it's a place for neighbours to meet and talk.

Time bank

Each of us knows “something” and each one can teach someone else. An older neighbour might teach us how to bake delicious apple pies and we could return the favour by teaching her/him, for example, how to use email. “Banks of time” allow us to learn new things “for free”, or rather through the investment of time where we agree to teach someone something new. Most of all, time banks allows us to get to know our neighbours.

Public piano and public chess

What if you could listen to someone playing piano while waiting at the bus stop, or even play yourself for others? What about playing chess with neighbours in the local park? Public pianos and public chess sets are starting to appear in bigger and smaller town and cities all over the World. They do not only make our reality more colourful, but most of all they are the first step towards interaction with neighbours.

