

**DANISH
FOLK
HIGH
SCHOOL**

Højskolerne

THE DANISH FOLK HIGH SCHOOL

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Introduction

What you are about to read is an introduction to what some call folk high schools, while others call it folk schools, people's colleges, residential schooling, or people's high schools. Despite the variety of names, they all refer to the special type of non-formal adult education that has its origin in Denmark in the mid 1800s with the educational ideas of folk high school pioneer N.F.S. Grundtvig.

In this brochure we will be talking mainly about the folk high school tradition in Denmark, and about modern-day Danish folk high schools. But we also hope to introduce the origins of the Danish folk high school movement and its underlying core ideas and pedagogy that have now spread to all parts of the world in varying forms.



Today there are about 70 independent folk high schools located all over Denmark, all with the same purpose: to provide life enlightenment, public enlightenment and democratic education. Or in other words, the folk high schools aim at an education that enables the individual not just to make a living, but to live a life.

Chapter 1 introduces the folk high school today and the pedagogical ideas that make the folk high school a unique educational environment. Chapter 2 sketches out the educational roots and ideas of the founding father N.F.S. Grundtvig and the historical context that prompted the folk high school movement in the first place. Chapter 3 outlines the legal and organizational framework of folk high schools in Denmark. Chapter 4 addresses the justification of folk high schools as non-formal adult education, and the impact they have. Chapter 5 offers an insight into the global footprints of the folk high school idea all around the globe.



Folk high schools are residential schools for everybody who is 17 ½ years or older – there is no upper age limit. You don't need specific qualifications to attend a folk high school. There is no fixed curriculum, no exams and no grades.

Happy reading.

Students can freely choose from a wide variety of different subjects and classes. In this way, they can broadly challenge themselves and try new things in a supportive environment thus clarifying important personal questions such as: What am I good at? What makes me happy? What could be my future path in life? The teaching is based on positive motivation, dialogue and the equal and friendly relations between students and teachers.



Over the past years an average of 40,000 people have attended a folk high school in courses of different lengths every year in Denmark.

Praxis and pedagogy

The folk high schools are homes for a pedagogical practice where teaching, togetherness, and everyday life all bring about an environment that challenges both students and teachers to put their lives into perspective. Thus, the folk high school as an educational place forms a framework for a common educational life.

BETWEEN LIFE AND EDUCATION

The main aim of the folk high schools is life enlightenment, public education, and democratic education. However, such a task requires quite a different educational environment and approach than most other types of schools. Therefore, a very distinctive feature of folk high schools is their freedom. There are no fixed curriculum, grades, or exams. The folk high schools are free to design their educational practice and to plan the content of courses and activities based on the individual school's core values and the main aim of the folk high schools.

The teachers teach what they want, and according to the law they can freely choose how to do that, in order to pursue the main aim. Hence, the pedagogical and educational practices of the folk high schools are based on the human existence: concrete, lived, and experienced life. The pedagogical practice of the folk high school takes its offspring in the concrete, lived and experienced life. The teacher is therefore always confronted with the question: what is the purpose of the pedagogical praxis with these students?

While the content of classes at a folk high school is elective according to the law, it is also stated

that courses should be of a broad, general nature. This means that, while students of course should acquire knowledge and skills in certain subjects, the main purpose of the teaching is not to acquire a particular skill set, but to open the eyes, minds and hearts of students and teachers alike to aspects of the human existence and to shed light on the lives they are living, both individually and collectively.

No formal qualifications are required for teachers at a folk high school. Some have a formal teaching degree, but most are academics or practitioners who are passionate about and dedicated to a field. Subjects often reflect the personal interests of each teacher whose task is to make the subject relevant for the students, and involvement of the students becomes a driving pedagogical factor.

The student makes a deliberate choice picking a school and certain subjects – not to get a degree or a good mark, but out of pure interest and joy. This interaction between passionate teachers and engaged students creates a unique educational environment.

A TYPICAL WEEK

There is no such thing as a typical day or week at a folk high school, but then again, there are some common features across folk high schools. At many schools the day begins with a morning assembly as a common starting point, very often with communal singing. And at most schools, teachers and students have regular meetings to plan activities, to generate ideas and to carry them out.

Many folk high schools structure the educational activities by main subjects, electives and plenary sessions, to make sure that the students are both divided into smaller groups, but also have common activities.

All students have a minimum of 28 class hours per week, so they attend many classes. And besides the 28 classes, most often there will be activities outside of class, initiated by teachers or students. These could include open workshops, conversation cafés, or watching and discussing a movie. When planned by the teachers, these are called “pedagogically planned activities”. However, most often the students are engaged in both planning and executing the activities. Even though these activities do not count as classes, they are still part of the educational life of the folk high school.

EXAMPLE: WEEKLY SCHEDULE

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast	Brunch	Brunch
Morning assembly	Morning assembly	Morning assembly	Morning assembly	Common meeting		
Main Subject	Main Subject	A-Subject	Teacher's lecture B-Subject	Main Subject		
Cleaning	Cleaning	Cleaning	Cleaning	Cleaning	Cleaning	Cleaning
Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch		Fleemarket
Main Subject	Democracy meeting	A-Subject	B-Subject	A-Subject		
	Vaccinations					
	Bicycle tour					
Dinner	Dinner	Dinner	Dinner	Dinner	Dinner	Dinner
Cultural Evening	Political café: European Parliament election debate	Choir	Yoga	Party		Fireplace



Learning at the ping-pong table

“Personally, I have learned the most from my teacher in Journalism. Not because I have taken notes on everything he said, or because I listened extra carefully. I learned a lot from his teaching, but just as much from the personal conversations we shared outside of class. He paid attention to me, my opinion mattered, he wanted to discuss things with me. That has been really cool, and I have learned a great deal from that. One of the places where it occurred most often was around the ping-pong table. At least a few times a week we had intense duels that produced sweat, yelling and discussions. And there was something particularly special about the discussions. We talked about the most important news of the week, discussed ethical press rules, assessed the specific situations that he, or I, had been in, and talked about linguistic tools. If I expressed myself inaccurately, or if I said something decidedly wrong, he caught me out immediately. I always had to be sharp – at the table, as well as verbally. It was a brilliant exercise of the power of concentration and one of the most fun and rewarding learning situations I have ever experienced.”

Thomas, folk high school student

LIVING AND LEARNING TOGETHER

A pivotal part of the folk high school idea is the term “fellowship” or “togetherness”. By law the folk high school must provide both teaching and fellowship – the two are equated.

As folk high schools are boarding schools, the students live together, attend classes together, dine together, clean together, create events and projects together, and are roommates. They experience friendships, romances and break-ups, parties and midnight discussions. Spending time at a folk high school challenges not only the mind, but also social and emotional skills of the students.

Also, teachers and students spend time together outside of classes doing anything from cooking to drinking tea to playing ping-pong. En route they talk about anything and everything, all benefitting from this reciprocal and equal relationship and learning from each other as equals. Some of the teachers live on school grounds, making use of the tied accommodations provided by the school. Generally, students and teachers develop a close relationship during a folk high school semester. In that way teaching and togetherness are intertwined.

Still inspired by Grundtvig’s ideas, teaching at folk high schools is based on the living word and the living interaction. The educational practice, the pedagogically planned togetherness outside of class, the equal, informal relationship between teachers and students and the boarding school environment all helps to generate the atmosphere and the educational life so distinctive of the folk high school.



Educational roots

While each folk high school is totally free to develop its own pedagogical approach, the educational ideas of folk high school pioneer N.S.F. Grundtvig lays a foundation for the educational practice at most Danish folk high schools still today.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The core idea and original purpose of the Danish folk high school originates from and is inextricably linked with the ideas of its founding father, Nikolaj Frederik Severin Grundtvig (1783-1872) – the Danish clergyman, hymn-writer, historian, lecturer, linguist, educationist and in the days of the first Danish constitution also an active politician.

Although the fairytale writer H.C. Andersen and the existentialist philosopher Søren Kierkegaard are the most famous Danes, Grundtvig may be the one who had the most wide-ranging influence on Danish society. He headed what we now call the Romantic movement in Denmark that came in the wake of the broader European national consciousness.

Before Denmark adopted a democratic constitution in 1849, society functioned along hierarchical and mostly patriarchal lines. People were considered as being naturally subordinate to their superiors. Everybody belonged to a family dominated by a master, while he, in turn, paid service to his superior, a lord of the manor, a duke, or a king – with God as the supreme power. This way of thinking was shattered, however, with the revolutionary movements that swept Europe in the 18th and 19th century. Man discovered his independence, his freedom – and his alienation.

The 1848-50 war between Denmark and Schleswig-Holstein, supported by the German confederation, and the final cessation of Schleswig-Holstein in 1864, resulted in a reduction of 40 % of Denmark's area – and wealth. But Danes responded to these challenges by finding their own identity in the form of a constitution (in 1849), and by establishing a “free” primary school system and developing completely new types of institutions, the Danish folk high school being among the most significant ones.

Throughout his life, Grundtvig changed his view on Christianity and human existence. From considering human life on earth as something temporary, and the essential human task therefore being to focus on ‘the eternal life’ beyond death, he changed his perspective entirely. He no longer saw the task of Christianity to be to release people from the trials and tribulations of earthly existence, but on the contrary to set people free and enable them to embrace life on earth to its fullest. This change of perspective, along with a number of geopolitical and culture-historical changes in Danish society shaped Grundtvig's ideas on education. At the same time, if all people should take part in running society, he felt it was necessary that people should be educated and know about their history, language and society.

GRUNDTVIG'S SCHOOL FOR LIFE

One of the major turning points for Grundtvig was his trips to England, namely his stay at Trinity College in Cambridge. He felt very much at ease there, and he was immensely inspired by the collegial atmosphere between the teachers and the students. They lived as a community even outside classes and lectures. They dined together, played football, and debated while drinking afternoon tea. Grundtvig was very inspired by the mutual respect and the non-authoritarian relationship between the teachers and the students, which was very unlike his own experience of the Danish educational system of his time.

During the 1830s, Grundtvig began working on his plans for a school for adults based on his experiences in England. Grundtvig was highly critical of the nation's schools, because, in his opinion, those schools taught children primarily “dead knowledge”, such as Bible studies, rather than having people's actual lives as the underlying basis. Furthermore, if democracy was to work, Grundtvig argued, people had to be enlightened about life, about the world they lived in, and about what it meant to live together and to understand and accept other ways of thinking. It ought to be lifelong.

This emphasis on understanding and acceptance resonated with a majority of the population. As a result, Denmark introduced a unique dual system whereby state education and “free” school education came to be regarded as equal partners, not competitors. To this day, free schools and state schools function as complementary and often mutually supportive systems.



The “free” school system in Denmark

Danish legislation prescribes compulsory education, but not compulsory school attendance. This means that any parent has the right of home-schooling their children, but there is also a strong tradition for groups of people to start up so-called “free schools” as an alternative to the established educational system. These free schools still have to live up to certain legislations, but they are free to appoint staff with no central or formal qualifications, and to deploy their financial resources as they see fit, determining school fees, but also receiving a state grant. They are also free to arrange their own curricula, placing emphasis on subject disciplines as they choose, free to adopt their own teaching methods and to carry out assessment without using tests and examinations.

The free schools in Denmark include:

- The primary- and secondary free school
- The efterskole (15-16 years)
- The folk high school (17,5 ->)
- The Independent Academy for Free School Teaching (teacher training)



“Life comes before enlightenment.”

Grundtvig

CENTRAL EDUCATIONAL CONCEPTS

Even though Grundtvig never practiced his own ideas, he was the ideological father of the folk high school. His educational ideas have been practiced through time and evolved by a number of educationists, e.g. Christen Kold (1816-1870).

The following concepts reflect essential aspects of Grundtvig's educational ideas:

Teaching must be life enlightening

The whole intention of teaching is to make the students aware of what the meaning of their lives is. Through enlightenment of the individual, the mystery of human life will slowly be solved, Grundtvig said. School is both enlightening and enlivening; learning is also learning to live and to love.

Teaching must be people's enlightenment.

The educational aim of the folk high school, is not solely for the individual benefit, but also learning to be part of something bigger – to be part of society. As Grundtvig framed it: education of the people, by the people and for the people.

Teaching must aim at educating the whole human

In Grundtvig's time, classes were characterized by rote learning. Students had to learn things by heart and repeat them word by word in front of the teacher. This method, along with the curriculum- and exam-focused teaching only took the intellect into account. Grundtvig wanted to create a school that would attach as much importance to imagination and emotions as to the intellect. One that would attach importance both to the body and the spirit.

The school has to enlighten and enliven

The school must, of course, provide knowledge and skills, but this must be done in a way so that students are enlivened. To Grundtvig this meant that the students had to enjoy their lives

in the present and in that way find the courage to change what has to be changed. Grundtvig also said: in order to learn anything about something, one has to first love it. By relating the education to the student's own life, the student would naturally develop interest and passion for the matter.

Teaching at a folk high school must attach importance to the living word

This literally means that dialogue must be given the highest priority. In the time of Grundtvig, and still today, books were the main tools in class. Grundtvig wanted to replace books with the spoken word and experience. Only the experienced can gain true knowledge. “Life comes before enlightenment,” Grundtvig said.

The school's teaching must be historical-poetical

In short this means that through teaching we become aware of the history we share as a people with others (the historical) and through the poetical (from poesis=to create) we animate to discover the dreams and hopes we harbor for our future lives and society. Especially the myths and poetry can help to aspire this.

The school has to be a living interaction

This is perhaps one of Grundtvig's key pedagogical concepts. The living interaction must manifest itself in the togetherness between teacher and student. Teacher and student must learn from each other. They are equal when it comes to learning about life, based on mutual respect. The teacher is in that sense not only a professional, but also an individual person in relation to the students.

The most important learning period is the youth

Grundtvig reasoned that education as such should not be confined to the childhood years. His emphasis was on adult education, and child education didn't interest him that much. To him the most important learning period in a human's life is adulthood. Because in this time of your life your attention is directed towards the external, and you still have the ability to dream.

Legal and organizational frame

Even though the folk high schools are independent institutions, they have a close relationship to the state. On one hand receiving state funding and on the other gaining protection of the special school setting through the Act on Folk High Schools.

THE FOLK HIGH SCHOOL AND THE DANISH STATE

A very important feature of the Danish folk high school is that it has its own law protecting this special type of institution. The law is enforced by the state and today the “folk high school” is placed under the Ministry of Culture.

A new folk high school in Denmark must live up to certain criteria to be authorized and attain the right to receive subsidies from the state. The size of the subsidy depends on the number of students at a given time.

Everybody has the opportunity to establish a folk high school. In practice, though, it is not easy as there are a lot of requirements in the law, which one needs to fulfill. It is the Ministry of Culture which supervises proper compliance of the law.

The state requires:

- School buildings must be approved for folk high school use by the Ministry of Culture and other public authorities.
- Schools must be residential. Only up to 15 % must be day-students.
- Schools must offer at least 32 weeks of approved courses annually and the longer courses must have a duration of at least 4 weeks. At least one of the courses must have a duration of 12 weeks or more.

- Schools’ regulations and statutes must be approved of by the Ministry of Culture.
- Students must be at least 17 ½ years old at the beginning of the course.
- Schools must have had an average number of at least 24 one-year students (1 one-year student equals 1 student for 40 weeks) during the three previous fiscal years preceding.
- Education may not be so specialized in one particular direction that it cannot fairly be termed generally broadening.
- No examinations may be held.
- The schools are obligated to offer guidance and counseling.
- The courses must be open to all interested, but it’s a requirement that at least 50 % of the students in each course are Danish citizens.

Some schools are exempted from some of these regulations, e.g.:

- At the two youth folk high schools, students are allowed to have a minimum age of 16 ½ when they commence their stay, and they can be no older than 19.
- A few senior folk high schools are exempted from the obligation to offer long-term courses – those schools offer short-term courses only.
- One school is exempted from the obligation to make sure that 50 % of the students in each course are Danish citizens. It is thus an entirely international school.
- One school is allowed not to offer boarding.

The state provides:

- In 2015 government funding for folk high schools totaled over DKK 550 million/ EURO 74 million. The state subsidy covers only about half of the average school’s total budget (taxes, building maintenance, heating, wages of teaching and other staff, provision of meals etc.). The rest comes from student fees and the schools’ own revenue from hiring out their facilities.
- The subsidies from the state in relation to the courses is for a long course (12 weeks or longer) 2,600 DKK/350 EURO per week, and for a short course 980 DKK/130 EURO for a week. The price for the students for long courses is around 1,500 DKK/200 EURO per week. The short courses cost around 4.500 DKK/600 EURO for one-week courses. The prices cover classes, board and lodging.
- The government has also established special financial incentives in order to support young people without formal education and young people with special needs in attending folk high schools.
- The schools receive the same amount in subsidies for international students, or people with immigrant or refugee status, as they do for a Danish citizen.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

Behind each folk high school is a group of people who form the school’s democratic base. They elect the school’s board, its supreme unpaid governing body. The board is responsible for the general policy of the school; it determines the basic values of the school and takes major financial decisions (for example on new buildings). To lead the school the board appoints a principal, who has the pedagogical and economical responsibility. Together with the staff, the principal is responsible for the pedagogical organizing of courses, the day to day administration, and the daily life at the school.

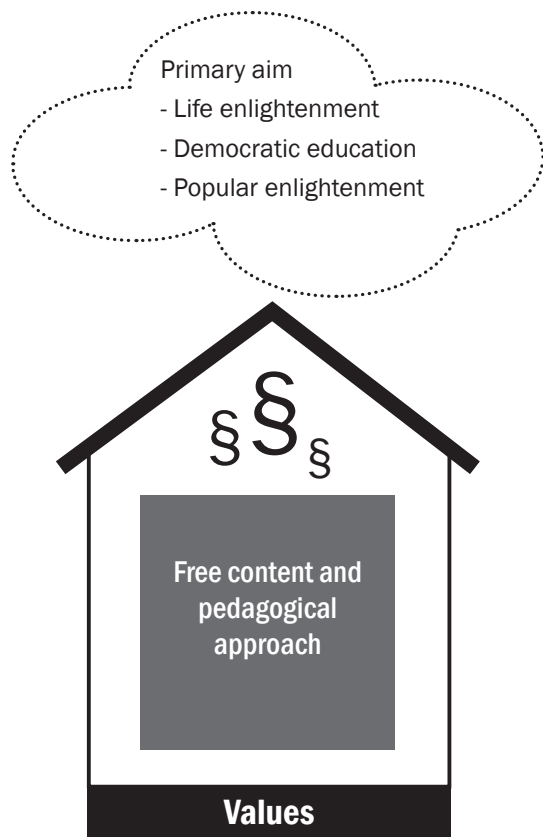
If the school in every aspect complies with the law, the public authorities have no power to set up or close down a folk high school. That can only be done by the school itself – or, more precisely, by the board, since it is the board that bears responsibility for the school’s affairs on behalf of the school’s democratic base. But in order to remain in existence a folk high school must be economically viable. If a school’s financial situation no longer allows it to continue operating, it has to close down.



The Act on Folk High Schools

The Act shall apply to folk high schools that provide teaching and fellowship in courses with the primary aim of advancing life enlightenment, popular enlightenment and democratic education and training and that have been approved by the Minister for Culture for grants. The teaching shall be of a comprehensive general nature. Individual subjects or subject groups may feature prominently, but never at the expense of generality. The activities of the school shall be organized according to their self-elected basic values.

You can read an English translation of the full act at danishfolkhighschools.com



THE ASSOCIATION OF FOLK HIGH SCHOOLS IN DENMARK

The Danish folk high schools are organized by an association known as “FFD”, seated in Copenhagen. FFD is the national organizing body of all of the 70 folk high schools in Denmark. The purpose of FFD is to work for the folk high school idea, and to create good and free conditions for the development of this type of school. The association conducts major communication campaigns for the schools, works for the development of the folk high school as such, and maintains political and professional relations with the government and partners, both at national and international levels. The highest authority of FFD is the general assembly each spring. The association is run by a chairperson and a board, the board being the supreme body. The seats of the board are open for election every second year at the general assembly. The daily work of the FFD is led by the general secretary.

The main tasks and activities of FFD are:

- Collective communication campaigns.
- Safeguard the primary aims of the folk high school.
- Secure and develop a high standard of teaching and pedagogically planned togetherness.
- Safeguard the freedom that the legislation gives the folk high schools in Denmark.
- Influence the legislation in favor of the idea of the folk high school and to promote development of schools and organizations.
- Initiate work to describe, develop, and broaden the comprehension of folk high school pedagogy and praxis.
- Support the schools in their administrative work.
- Work towards a more multifarious body of students and course participants.
- Bring community singing into play outside of the folk high school context.
- Participate in Nordic collaboration.
- To bring about comprehension of the value of a global perspective.

A Danish folk high school:

- Is surrounded by a legal frame that it needs to comply with.
- Needs to communicate its values publicly – whether it is rooted in religion, political views or other.
- And besides the primary aim, which is stated in the law, it is free to plan the education according to its own beliefs.



Relevance and impact

Why do young people choose to spend a semester at a school with no formal diploma or qualifying exams? And why does the state still fund an educational institution whose “reason for being” has changed since the inauguration of the first school 175 years ago?

RELEVANCE IN MODERN SOCIETY

When Danish pastor, theologian, teacher, writer and politician N.F.S. Grundtvig (1783-1872) was developing the concept of the folk high school, he identified a growing democratic need in Danish society – a need of enlightening the often both uneducated and poor peasantry. This large social group had neither the time nor the money to enroll at a university and needed an alternative. The aim of the folk high school was to help people qualify as active and engaged members of society. To give them an identity, a movement, and the means and courage to change the political situation from the bottom up. To give people a place to meet across social boundaries and make their voices and opinions count through dialogue.

A lot has changed since the first folk high school in Denmark opened in 1844. The Danish folk high school movement has taken part in laying the foundation of the modern Danish democracy and welfare state. Keeping that in mind, one may question the folk high school’s “reason for being” as, in principle, all Danish citizens now have the same opportunities, such as free education and free health care etc.

But enlightening and educating the individual in the broad sense of the words is as relevant today as it ever was. In modern Denmark the issue is not lack of education, but rather the op-

posite. The formal educational system emphasizes efficiency, performance and specialization towards the labor market to a degree that leaves little space for reflection. A lot of pupils choose a stay at a folk high school to have the opportunity to find their own path in life, to rediscover the joy of learning for the sake of learning, and to be a part of a binding community.

IMPACT ON STUDENTS

Over the past few years an average of 40,000 people have attended a folk high school course every year in Denmark. Most of them (approx. 30,000) sign up for courses that last one or a few weeks, but about 10,000 people attend long-term courses with a duration of about five months. Most of the students attending long-term courses are in their early adulthood (20-24 years old), while the majority of the students attending short term courses are in their late adulthood (60 years old or more).

So, what are the impacts of attending a folk high school in Denmark today? There are probably as many answers to that question as there are students, and often young people find it hard to express, as one student puts it: “I do not know what I have learned, but I am sure I’ll never forget it.”

Many young people in Denmark enroll at a folk high school to get a break from the educational “highway”, and to make friends for life. Students often refer to their folk high school stay as a turning point in their life, where they met their future partner, where they discovered their future path in life.

Research also shows that individuals who attended a folk high school are more likely to complete further education than individuals who did not attend a folk high school.

OUTCOME

*** Young people feel stressed in the formal educational system and feel insecure about their own abilities and desires, while the pedagogical environment of folk high schools without grades, marks, and exams makes the students feel more secure.**

*** At a folk high school young people get time to reflect on and come to terms with choices and opportunities in their future study, career, and life in general.**

*** Students become more confident of their abilities and of themselves by making their own decisions and by getting involved in new interests and activities.**

*** Students feel inspired by their fellow students and the teachers and see themselves and their abilities in a new light.**

*** Students rediscover the joy of learning and the motivation to study further.**

*** Living together in a micro-society with people from different countries, social backgrounds, and beliefs gives students hands on experience with living in a multifarious community with everyday demands of democracy.**

IMPACT ON SOCIETY

Because of the historical importance of Grundtvig and the folk high school in Denmark, the institution is well respected and valued throughout the political landscape. The idea of the modern Danish folk high school is to be more than a school. It is to be part of and responsible for society and contribute to resolving societal issues. Some of the key areas that the Danish folk high schools are addressing in the 2017-2022 strategy are:

Diversity and democratic dialogue

In a time with populism on the rise, fake news and echo chambers created by social media, the Danish folk high school makes it a high priority to support and facilitate democratic dialogue. The schools strive to be places of constructive encounters and debate between people of all ages, social classes, ethnicities, beliefs, cultures, backgrounds, and opinions in order to strengthen the social cohesion in society.

One of the ways to achieve that is to seek to make the total body of students at each folk high school as diverse as possible. Most folk high schools in Denmark try to have a balanced mix of students by attracting students with different backgrounds and beliefs. E.g. international students from all over the world and students who have come to Denmark as refugees and for whom the folk high school is an important gateway to Danish language, culture, and society. Providing special courses with mentor support for vulnerable young people who have not yet completed an upper secondary education is another strategic focus area.

Anti-perfectionism – pedagogy based on motivation

As globalization increases, competition intensifies, and the emphasis on the individual grows, it seems as though the binding community and fellowship shaped by Danish society in the last centuries are under strain. But at the same time,



it seems like people are looking for community and fellowship. Young people are increasingly seeking out folk high schools, calling for stronger political focus on community and human interaction based on the notion that more individualization and competitive mentality is not the way to a better life.

Many young people feel that they have to live up to conceptions that make the perfect almost normal. A lot of young people impose a pressure on themselves to live up to that image, and when they don't succeed, they blame it on themselves. In this intersection the folk high school has something to offer because of the distinctive exam- and test-free learning environment and binding fellowship.

Sustainability

Sustainability is another area of high priority. Most folk high schools in Denmark constitute small communities, and they function as little exploratoriums to develop new methods and experiences of sustainable ways of life. A number of Danish folk high schools have a specific sustainability profile ranging from working with permaculture to developing activist campaigns for a more sustainable and fairer world, closely linked to UN's Sustainable Development Goals.

Local community building

The majority of the 70 folk high schools in Denmark are situated in the countryside, which gives them a unique opportunity to be in touch with parts of the country that are normally overshadowed by the cultural hubs of the big cities. The folk high schools see themselves as important cultural and social hubs in the local communities, and they often invite the communities to be a part of open events of all sorts, organized by the schools.

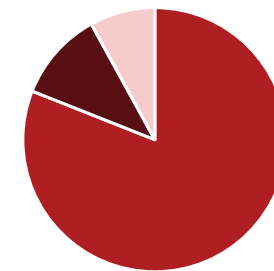
Global solidarity

The world has changed drastically since Grundtvig shaped the idea of the folk high school from a Nordic and national perspective. Yet another focus area is global citizenship education and international solidarity.

Recognizing globalization not only as a fact, but also as an opportunity to create global collaboration and peace, the folk high schools in Denmark give priority to the long haul that will hopefully create stronger relations between folk high schools globally.

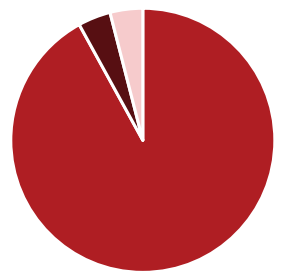
SHOULD THE STATE CONTINUE TO OFFER GRANTS TO FOLK HIGH SCHOOLS?

Grants for short courses



■ Yes - 81 %
 ■ No - 11 %
 ■ Don't know - 8 %

Grants for long courses



■ Yes - 92 %
 ■ No - 4 %
 ■ Don't know - 4 %

Folk high schools internationally

Today there are schools in different countries all over the world that draw on the distinctive Nordic folk high school tradition and recognize the educational ideas of N.F.S. Grundtvig – sharing his emphasis on life enlightenment, democratic education and popular education.

GLOBAL FOLK HIGH SCHOOL TRENDS

A widely held view is that because Grundtvig is so uniquely Danish, it is impossible to translate his ideas. And while it is true that the folk high school cannot be exported – it *can* be imported. The idea of folk high schools has crossed borders and inspired people all over the world to work with education and popular enlightenment in new ways adjusted to their specific cultural, political, and socioeconomic contexts.

Internationally Grundtvig's educational ideas are merged with other educational thinkers such as Brazilian Paulo Freire (1921-1997), Bengali Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) and Indian Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948). And even though there are great differences in how the folk high school is interpreted internationally, the movements, schools and institutions share the importance of a strong educated civil society.

As President Obama told all Nordic heads of state at The Nordic State Dinner at The White House in 2016, the inspiration from Grundtvig and the Danish folk high school “ended up having a ripple effect on the civil rights movement” in America.

Historically, the mark of the Danish folk high school movement in the world can be divided into three main phases.

The late 19th century

The first phase was the spread of the folk high school idea in the Nordic countries in the late 19th century. 20 years after the first folk high schools was founded in Denmark, the first Norwegian folk high school opened in 1864, followed by the first folk high schools in Sweden in 1868, and in Finland in 1889. Already since 1883, collaboration occurred between the Nordic countries and in 1956 the Nordic Folk High School Council was established as a formal collaboration between associations of folk high schools in the Nordic countries.

Since then the folk high school movement has taken on slightly different forms in Sweden, Norway, and Finland in terms of the relation to the formal educational system.

Alongside this Nordic development and spread, lots of people from the Danish folk high school movement emigrated to America and took their ideas of adult education with them and began to open folk high schools in their new home country, to maintain their Danish culture and language. The first folk high school created by Danish immigrants in America opened in 1878 and more followed from then on.

Around the First World War

The second phase of the expansion of the folk high school movement took place in Central and Eastern Europe and began in the pre-war years of the First World War and accelerated during the interwar period when a number of Eastern and Central European countries such as England, Poland and Hungary started focusing on the ideas of co-operatives, the farmers' movement and folk high schools. Most of those initiatives in Eastern Europe were quelled during the communist regimes, but right before and after the fall of the Berlin Wall a number of groups and people, particularly in Poland and Hungary, were seeking to revitalize the interest for the folk high school idea of the interwar period.

1960 and onwards

The third phase was urged by the termination of World War II and the decolonization of Africa and Asia. From the 1960s, the idea of folk high schools spread to countries such as Tanzania, Uganda, Kenya, Nigeria, India, and the Philippines. It was a time when the Nordic countries sought to support development and democratization processes in developing countries by supporting folk high school-like projects. In Denmark, the development cooperation 'Danida', which is an area of activity under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, subsidized folk high school initiatives in developing countries, hoping that development of rural areas would lift people out of poverty and support democratic development in these countries. Due to other priorities, Danida stopped subsidizing these initiatives in the years after 2000.

The following are all examples, but far from isolated incidents, of how the idea of folk high schools inspired initiatives all over the globe, taking Grundtvig's core idea as their point of departure, while adapting it to local contexts and needs.

EXAMPLES OF INTERNATIONAL FOLK HIGH SCHOOLS

USA: Highlander Research and Education Center

Through popular education, participatory research, and cultural work, they help create spaces — at Highlander and in local communities — where people gain knowledge, hope, and courage, expanding their ideas of what is possible. They develop leadership and help create and support strong, democratic organizations that work for justice, equality and sustainability in their own communities and that join with others to build broad movements for social, economic, and restorative environmental change.

The Highlander Folk School in Tennessee, as it was named originally, was founded by Myles Horton in 1932 after spending a few years in Denmark, learning Danish and visiting different folk high schools. Highlander was initially focusing on labor relations for woodcutters, coal miners, government relief workers, textile workers, and farmers in the region. By the 1950s the school took a political stand and supported Rosa Parks and the boycott of segregated bus laws in 1955. That same year Parks attended desegregation workshops at the Highlander, which was the first time in her life she had “lived in an atmosphere of complete equality with the members of the other race,” as she stated. The Highlander was a place also visited by Martin Luther King, Jr. and other prominent civil rights advocates.

Today the school is recognized as the cradle of the American civil rights movement.

ENGLAND: Fircroft College in Birmingham

In England there are a handful of residential colleges, including Fircroft College in Birmingham. Today the students at Fircroft are typically adults between 30 and 50 years who are struggling with pivotal mental, social and vocational challenges. Most of them could not

endure going to a community college, as they do not feel safe and are incapable of taking in more than few hours of learning at a time. But the residential element and the teachers' caring relations with the students at Fircroft are the essential elements that create new motivation and positive learning experiences. The educational sessions last for only 48 hours, but most students attend the school for a long period of time and follow several different courses. The results of the inclusive and experience-based teaching create crucial changes in the students' lives.

Fircroft was founded in 1909, directly inspired by the Danish folk high school model. The local founder and chocolate factory owner and Quaker, Mr. Cadbury, financed the opening of the school, and thus the school functioned on a religious foundation and successfully attracted lots of workers from the local chocolate factory. The Danish folk high schools at that time had great difficulties attracting Danish workers from the cities, and therefore numerous teachers and principals went to Fircroft to learn from their experiences.

PHILIPPINES: Education for Life Foundation
Filipino dissident Edicio Dela Torre founded the Education for Life Foundation in The Philippines in 1992. Today the Foundation has neither a campus nor any building in which to conduct courses but is an organization that, in partnership with others, spreads the message about education for life and extends the education of grassroots leaders. And so Edicio has, and still practices today, education to bring forth understanding between people of different beliefs through dialogue.

The history of the Life Foundation begins with a visit to Denmark in 1987 where Edicio Dela Torre became acquainted with the folk high school movement. Dela Torre, who had been imprisoned for nine years because of his fight against the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos and subsequently had to seek political exile in Europe, was immensely inspired by the demo-

cratizing idea of lifelong learning for everyone at the Danish folk high schools. When he returned to the Philippines in 1992, he founded the Education for Life Foundation. Since then more than 2000 grassroots leaders have taken the six-week long courses that focus on agriculture, ecology, equal rights, women's rights, grassroots education, and then taken it back to their communities to spread the idea of popular education and involvement.

NIGERIA: Grundtvig Institute

The core idea of Grundtvig Institute is to focus on human abilities and capacities rather than grades and is highly inspired by Grundtvig's work. "The way we express it in Nigeria is that the folk high school idea, Grundtvig's educational idea, is not just educating to make a living, but to live a life. So it helps the full development of the individual and enables the individual to be aware. Cultural awareness, active citizenship, those are the values that make life worth living," Kachi A. Ozumba says, present principal and son of its founder.

Grundtvig Institute opened in Southeastern Nigeria in 1984 as a residential post-secondary school offering young people between 18 and 25 years courses between six months and three years. The core idea was to help young people, especially poor ones, who had not made it in the formal Nigerian education system which focused solely on grades and exams. The school is owned by the non-governmental organization (NGO), Grundtvig Movement of Nigeria, and expanded with the foundation of Grundtvig International Secondary School in 1998. Today the secondary school has a population of around 600 students, and both residential schools have been oversubscribed since 2016 successfully offering an "Awareness Curriculum" aiming to stimulate and develop attitudes, ideals and values within its students alongside vocational training.



Types of Folk High Schools in Denmark

Roughly speaking there are seven types of folk high schools in Denmark that offer a wide range of courses, study trips, and specialized subjects:

- **General schools**

Most of these schools focus on the importance of having a broad range of subjects.

- **Gymnastics and sports schools**

About half of the course is dedicated to sports/gymnastics/outdoor life, while the other half is dedicated to general education.

- **Christian or spiritual schools**

These are Bible schools or schools with a spiritual approach to human life.

- **Lifestyle schools**

This type of school has a specific focus on diet, exercise, and personal development.

- **Specialized schools**

Some folk high schools focus specifically on a single discipline, e.g. film, design, arts, music etc.

- **Youth folk high schools**

A few folk high schools in Denmark are for youths between 16 ½ years (at the time they commence their course) and 19 years.

- **Schools for senior citizens**

Senior folk high schools provide courses to an older audience and are allowed to offer short-term courses only.





*Education:
Not just to make
a living – but to
live a life*