

# The Cross Cultures Concept

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Cross Cultures is a Danish NGO that has specialized in using grassroots sport and especially the Open Fun Football School program (OFFS) as tool in humanitarian actions to facilitate

- **Reconciliation and coexistence** – i.e. stimulate friendship and cooperation between children and adults living in communities affected by war and conflicts through playing games and grassroots sport;
- **Grassroots democracy** - i.e. stimulation of the formation of community sport clubs and other associations which are characterized by keywords as voluntarism, equality, community participation, bottom-up civil society, and active citizenship
- **Gender equality** – i.e. promote female participation on all levels in the world of football, e.g. leaders, coaches and players
- **Cross-sector Juvenile Crime Prevention** (School + Sport + Police) – i.e. the formation of a cross sector juvenile crime prevention network in local communities in accordance with Scandinavian models.

## Open Fun Football Schools: Bringing people together

Cross Cultures use the Open Fun Football Schools as a point of entry to local communities in politically uncertain and conflict sensitive areas. The program was introduced first time to war-torn Bosnia Herzegovina in 1998. It is building on the experience of how wars and ethnic conflicts affect people and their possibilities of returning to a peaceful everyday life. Our experience tells us that moving away from the hatred and mistrust between people affected by civil war is not easily accomplished. Trust rarely comes from discussing the conflict or the problems. Rather, we believe it can be nurtured through the lived experience of having something in common with the people we would otherwise see as 'others'.

It is within this framework that Cross Cultures is using the Open Fun Football Schools as tool for **peace education** facilitating intra- and inter-community communication and collaboration in order to provide alternative stories and positions to the ones of conflict: to help the population include rather than exclude each other, to fight exceptional thinking, and to stimulate peaceful coexistence. Thus it is a fundamental principle to Cross Culture's concept that we wish all our activities to challenge the seemingly natural division of people into ethnic, political, or religious affiliations, and provide an alternative.

The Open Fun Football Schools are about gathering people who in their everyday life are positioned opposed to each other in order to provide them with new categories for thinking about each other such as coaches, parents and football enthusiasts. Or to put it differently: At each Open Fun Football School, Cross Cultures invite 100 children from one side of ethnic, religious, political or social divides to play and make fun together with 100 children from the other side of the divide. The children from different population groups are always mixed so the children from different groups are playing with each other and not against each other. Further, across the same divides, Cross Cultures recruit and train 30 voluntary leaders, coaches, and coach assistants per Open Fun Football School.



Our approach to conflict resolution and social integration is easy to understand but at the same time also unique. It has the child in the center, and passion, fun and playfulness at its core. We focus on **child protection** in the sense that we offer children in conflict-ridden areas a safe haven to do what children do best: Play, make friends and learn new things. The Open Fun Football Schools are designed to use the best of human nature as its driving force. Neither the children, nor the adults who train them, are ever asked to do anything, which is not motivating, engaging and meaningful. Further, the specific “Head-Heart-Action-approach”, which is developed and applied to all Open Fun Football School activities, provides a holistic approach to motivation by turning knowledge, passion and desire into tools for action and change.



### Beyond sport: A grassroots platform for engagement and participation

The Open Fun Football Schools program has developed a unique and efficient bottom-up approach to the local communities, which Cross Cultures consider a key element to ensure sustainability and long-term impact of the program.

In Cross Cultures approach to Children’s Football, the Open Fun Football Schools do much more than building relations among children, coaches and sports clubs. It also builds a local structure for cooperation and community engagement. The program gathers a number of stakeholders and actors around a common purpose, and always seeks actively to involve parents, municipalities, primary school teachers, community police, local sponsors, national and regional football associations, the local and national media, ministries of youth and sports, etc. Hence, Cross Cultures has demonstrated capacity to mobilize a high level of community engagement and voluntarism in the program in all the partner countries, and has proved successful in stimulating social entrepreneurship and building local networks.<sup>1</sup>



It is in this sense that our approach to children’s football constitutes an important grassroots platform for civil society, where people of different backgrounds can meet and bond while discussing a common purpose: **children – welfare – future**. The long-term strategy of the approach is to include communities, parents, schools, sport clubs, police and local government in a united effort to promote child protection, peace education, social inclusion and community participation.

<sup>1</sup> So far over 74,000 leaders, coaches and coach assistants have volunteered the Open Fun Football Schools program, which is an impressive accomplishment in the cultural context. Further, more than 2,500 local community football clubs have been formed as direct spin-off from the Open Fun Football Schools program. The fact that the majority of these clubs are still operational and implementing activities in accordance with the Cross Cultures/ Open Fun Football Schools pedagogical principles is an indication of sustainability and long-term impact.

In short, departing from the Open Fun Football Schools, and not least the concept for the content and organization, Cross Cultures use sports and play to facilitate and consolidate local networks based on collaboration, community engagement and voluntarism. Hence, while we initiate our program activities by focusing on providing children with the opportunity to participate in fun and games, the long-term potential of the Open Fun Football Schools is much wider in scope. Below are given two concrete examples of how Cross Cultures has so far succeeded in utilizing the grassroots platform to facilitate more overall activities and processes that go beyond sport, and hold the potential to shape and transform social and political circumstances and structures from below.

### **Self-Organization: Promoting resilience in conflict sensitive areas**

Cross Cultures' combination of the Open Fun Football Schools as a point of entry to conflict sensitive areas, and our approach to **self-organization** as a spin-off activity, has the intended effect of enhancing resilience among children, youth and women by making them capable of engaging themselves in various community processes and contributing to the rebuilding of social systems and institutions.

The OECD defines resilience as the ability of households, communities and nations to absorb and recover from civil wars, whilst adapting and transforming their structures and means for living in the face of long-term stresses, change and uncertainty.<sup>2</sup> The Israeli-American professor and researcher in Medical Sociology Aaron Antonovsky links resilience – people's ability to cope and handle long-term stressors – to what he terms a "sense of coherence", defined as:

"A global orientation that expresses the extent to which one has a pervasive, enduring though dynamic feeling of confidence that (1) the stimuli deriving from one's internal and external environments in the course of living are structured, predictable, and explicable; (2) the resources are available to one to meet the demands posed by these stimuli; and (3) these demands are challenges, worthy of investment and engagement"<sup>3</sup>

Antonovsky links these characteristics to the concepts of 1) comprehensibility, 2) manageability, and 3) meaningfulness, and argues that the stronger an individual's "sense of coherence" the more resilient he or she is likely to be when facing stressors, demands and challenges. Within Antonovsky's framework, one factor contributing positively to such a "sense of coherence" is that of being tied to a meaningful social network of legitimate others.<sup>4</sup>

Naturally, the contexts Cross Cultures work in provide a very poor foundation for such a "sense of coherence."

- 1) Conflict and post-conflict situations are often volatile, uncertain, and unpredictable, and hence the external environment and one's individual place within it is not easily explained, foreseen or comprehended.
- 2) Resources (human, material and financial) for coping with adversities are scarce, making it difficult to believe in the manageability of the daily and long term challenges one faces.
- 3) The unpredictability and volatility of ones surroundings combined with the lack of resources to address the demands and challenges posed by these, cause a general lack of meaningfulness and motivation to engage in and care about these surroundings.

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<sup>2</sup> OECD (2014). Guidelines for resilience Systems Analysis – How to analyse risk and build a roadmap to resilience.

<sup>3</sup> Antonovsky, Aaron (1987). *Unravelling the mystery of health*. Josey Bass Publishers. p. 19

<sup>4</sup> Antonovsky, Aaron (1984). The sense of coherence as a determinant of health. In J. D Matarazzo et. al. (eds.), *Behavioral health: A handbook of health enhancement*. NY: Wiley.



Within this theoretical framework, one approach to enhancing resilience, then, is to increase individual and communities' "sense of coherence", and operationalizing the concepts of comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness in the given context, serves as a valuable tool for doing so.

The Open Fun Football Schools provide an entry point to gathering people around a **meaningful purpose** and motivate the self-organization of more long-term activities and community engagement. The process of self-organization creates **comprehensible** structures for activities and visions, and builds social networks that become valuable resources for **managing** future challenges and adversities.

Activity	Outcome
Mobilizing young people and women to facilitate <b>social activities</b> for children, youth and women which they find meaningful and worth investing energy in, inside and across local communities and on a <b>voluntary</b> basis.	<b>Meaningfulness</b>
Facilitating <b>self-organization, club formation</b> and <b>association building</b> with the purpose of bringing order and structure into an initially uncertain and disordered daily life.	<b>Comprehensibility</b>
Facilitating <b>capacity building</b> of women and young volunteers to enhance their resources and enable them to adapt and transform their social structures and means for living in the face of long-term stresses, change and uncertainty.	<b>Manageability</b>

When organizing the Fun Football Schools we identify and recruit young people amongst the refugees/IDP's and the host population to serve as volunteers in our fun-sport activities. These so-called Street Masters are instructed in our specific pedagogical fun-sport and community approach in multi-ethnic seminars of three days duration. Following the OFFS implementation the Street Masters are provided with basic equipment and tools and clustered into self-organized activity-groups that will organize social activities for children, youth and women in their community on a day-to-day basis.

The Street Masters become volunteers that are working together in smaller self-organized activity groups on a day-to-day basis to improve the everyday life inside the camp/local communities and to improve the relations between the refugees/IDP's and the surrounding society. When the activity-groups are up and running on a day-to-day-basis Cross Cultures assist them in formalizing their organization and transform into a democratic club- or association structure with statutes, board, strategy etc. In this process we use the Cross Cultures manual "Strategic Planning" as a tool to facilitate discussions of shared visions, contextual limitations and opportunities, and strategic interventions for the individual clubs and associations.

Building on the positive experience from the sports field, the Street Masters become catalyzers for promoting other inter-community and after-school activities such as English classes, theatre groups, psycho-social activities for children, CV-writing, physical activities for elderly, women's and widows associations etc. Like the street sport, these activities are all organized on a voluntary basis and on the principle of self-organization adapting and transforming their means of life to the present situation. It is Cross Cultures experience that once the network of activity groups are well established they become a constructive and powerful social force within the local setting that can help the local community and the refugee camp management to resolve smaller local conflicts to the benefit of the households and communities.

The process of self-organization around meaningful subjects and activities, and the subsequent association formation assist the transformation of the program participants from passive recipients to



engaged and active agents defining their own needs and strategies for personal- and community development. In short, through the purposeful coming together through the entry point of Fun Football, and through the subsequent voluntary self-organization into units and associations with strategic goals for community engagement and change, Cross Cultures assist in providing people with a sense of coherence, which contributes to their general level of resilience.

### **School+Sport+Police: Facilitating good governance and preventing juvenile crime**

In East and Central Europe the Open Fun Football Schools are also used as an entry point to facilitate good governance and to develop cross sector cooperation between Schools + Sport + Police (SSP) in the field of juvenile crime prevention. The basic idea is based upon a unique approach, developed in the Open Fun Football Schools program and formed in cooperation with the SSP-Secretariat of Copenhagen. The approach has proved very efficient.

The Cross Cultures SSP-approach is building on the basic perception that efficient crime prevention measures are not a matter for the police alone. It requires coordinated and joint efforts by key personnel from the sectors who are in daily contact with children, youth and their families. Further the earlier risk behaviour is spotted and addressed; the better are the chances to prevent the situation from taking a wrong turn. Hence SSP is about building a governance structure in local communities that allows the relevant stakeholders to meet, to identify notions, to share perspectives and to agree on joint actions, coordinated cross sector efforts and solutions. The aims are to create an inclusive social environment where everybody feels accepted, confident and as a part of the community and to prevent children and youth from becoming delinquents or victims of crime.

In the SSP program the Open Fun Football Schools and our unique community approach is used as a means to gain access to local communities, mobilize volunteers, and engage parents, schools, sport clubs, police and local government in a united effort to promote social inclusion and build a three-level cross-sectorial structure:

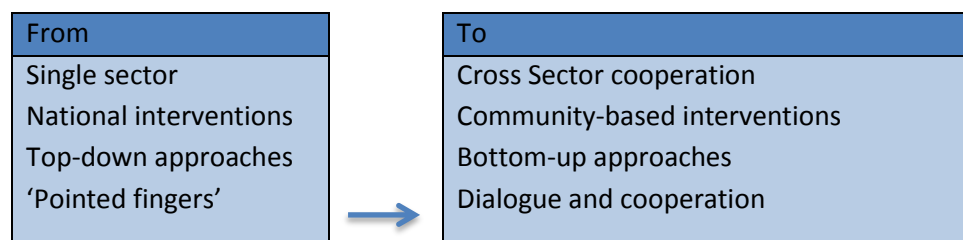
- 1) **A national strategic board** consisting of municipality representatives, and representatives from the national police, the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Youth and Sports. The national board will meet semi-annually and be responsible for making an overall strategy for the SSP initiative
- 2) **Coordinating leaders groups** at the municipal level consisting of a representative from the social-, school-, sports club-, and police sector respectively. The coordinating groups meet monthly and are responsible for the daily SSP operations in the municipalities. Their task is to share notions and perceptions of the problems faced within the respective municipalities and to secure a constructive, efficient and coordinated cross sector response to it. Based on the network seminars the coordinating groups prepare a local strategy and action plan and facilitate a joint and coordinated approach to a given problem
- 3) **Operational SSP teams** at the local level within the focus areas of Sport-Home, School-Home, Street-Home. Thus the SSP-teams act as operational units in local communities organizing everyday sports activities for the children, theme classes in the schools as well as parents meetings, home visits etc.

When organizing the SSP-Open Fun Football Schools local coaches are recruited cross sector from the community police, the school sector and the sport clubs and we facilitate a process in five phases:



1. **Network building:** First we bring the SSP coaches at an Open Fun Football School seminar to learn to know each other and get acquainted with our SSP initiative through dialogue workshops and our specific Fun Football games
2. **Building trust and confidence:** The SSP coaches organize an Open Fun Football School with 200 kids to build confidence and learn the kids and their parents to know in an unconfident, trustful and positive environment
3. **SSP capacity building:** The Open Fun Football School activities are followed up by cross-sector SSP-capacity building seminars (e.g. seminars in social exaggerations, school yard mediation, identifying risk behavior, lecture plans etc.), and the teams draft joint action plans with shared goals, interventions and guidelines.
4. **SSP in operation:** After the SSP-Network seminars, the SSP-Teams will return to their local community and start the implementation of their respective action plans.
5. **Lesson learned:** Finally we facilitate SSP knowledge sharing and lesson learned between the different SSP groups

In this way the Open Fun Football School program provide basis for mobilizing and facilitating a cross sector SSP-network in local communities that goes beyond the sport activities; which fits to a East European context where new police and justice reforms has been adopted as part of the integration negotiations with EU – but not yet implemented. And an SSP approach that are built and developed on same fundamental principles and perceptions as the community based approach in the Open Fun Football School:



### Long-term potentials: Peaceful Coexistence and Resilience through Participatory citizenship, Grassroots democracy and Good Governance

To sum up, strategically using the Open Fun Football Schools as a point of entry to local communities in politically uncertain and conflict sensitive areas has a number of positive effects, which carry long-term potentials for promoting long-term peace, political transformation and good governance.

According to the United Nations, good governance has 8 major characteristics:

“It is participatory, consensus oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive and follows the rule of law. It assures that corruption is minimized, the views of minorities are taken into account and that the voices of the most vulnerable in society are heard in decision-making. It is also responsive to the present and future needs of society.”<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> United Nations (2009). What is Good Governance? [www.unescap.org/resources/what-good-governance](http://www.unescap.org/resources/what-good-governance)

In other words, promoting good governance as a prerequisite for political transformation and stability in (post-) conflict societies requires not only the rule of law and the accountability of public institutions. If consensus orientation, participation, and inclusion are key principles, it logically also requires the engagement of society from below.

In volatile and conflict ridden political contexts, the promotion of critical civil society organizations and grassroots activism can be a sensitive and highly politicized issue. However, by entering communities and bringing them together around their children, Fun Football, games and playfulness, Cross Cultures departs from relatively neutral political ground and connect people and communities through an easily shared vision and purpose: the wellbeing and protection of our children.

Through the Open Fun Football Schools; the establishment of communication and cooperation across social, political, ethnic or religious divides; and the spin-off activities of e.g. self-organization, club-formation, juvenile crime prevention, Cross Cultures contribute to the creation and consolidation of local structures based on our key principles of equality, inclusion, commitment, and community engagement. Hence, our facilitation of a grassroots platform of local networks, organizations and associations based on voluntarism and meaningful commitments to a common vision, builds a sustainable local capacity for active and participatory citizenship. A capacity motivating and enabling individuals, associations and communities to unite around commonly shared visions, take active responsibility, and contribute to the transformation of social and political circumstances and structures from below.

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# Fact-sheet on Cross Cultures 1998-2014

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## Open Fun Football Schools in the World

Western Balkan: Bosnia Herzegovina (1998- ), FYR Macedonia (2000- ), Serbia (2001- ), Montenegro (2001-2009), Croatia (2003- ), Kosovo (2006- )

Trans Caucasus: Georgia (2003- ), Armenia (2003- ), Azerbaijan (2003- )

CEC: Moldova (2006- ), Ukraine (2010- )

MENA: Lebanon (2005- ), Jordan (2005-2007, 2013- ), Syria (2005-2007; 2009-2010), Tunisia (2013- )

Gulf: Iraq (2005- ), Qatar (2012-2013), Oman (2012- )

Asia: Afghanistan (2012- ), Tajikistan (2012-2013), Bhutan (2012-2013)

## From 1998-2014 Cross Cultures has.....

- educated over 34,000 local leaders and coaches – all volunteers . in the specific fun-football-approach on regional seminars of 60-80 hours duration
- organized 1,886 Open Fun Football Schools of 5-days duration for 371,316 boys and girls from 7-12 years old
- organized day-to-day activities for 6,673 children living in refugee camps or at the Cross Cultures Fun Football Academies
- organized Fun Football Festivals of 1-day duration for 518,531 boys and girls from 7-12 years old
- recruited 74,442 local leaders, coaches, coach assistants and parents – all volunteers – to organize Open Fun Football School activities and Fun Football Festivals
- organized workshops and parents meetings for 47,797 parents and municipal officials across cultures and conflicts
- stimulated and facilitated the formation of over 2,500 new community sport clubs/teams that are organizing grassroots football and other activities for children and youth in local communities on a day-to-day basis.

## Organizational set up

Cross Cultures has a very lean organization with head quarter in Denmark that at the moment employ 5 full time staff and 2 interns. Further in each partner country Cross Cultures operate either through a national branch office staffed by 2-3 fulltime members and 10 local instructors (part-time) or through the Grassroots Department of the National Football Association.

## Donor overview.

Since 1999 Cross Cultures has had a total turn around of approx. \$ 30.5 Mio. The most important donors are Sida/Ministry of Foreign Affairs Sweden (25%), UEFA (20%), Ministry of Foreign Affairs Norway (20 %), Ministry of Foreign Affairs Denmark (18%). Others including local authorities and CSR partners 17%. In 2014 CSR and local contributions made up 57% of Cross Cultures budget. This figure amongst other also includes local contributions made by the US Embassies to Bosnia Herzegovina, Serbia and FYR Macedonia.

