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European public sphere to practice the art of co-citizenship

ACC is the European NGO. The origins of the ACC dates back to the Minority Courses organized at a Danish Folk High School, [Højskolen Østersøen](#), in 1997 and 1998. **Minority issues** have also been the theme of some of the European Community College courses arranged later on – the future of minorities in the EU and Europe and the rights of minorities. **Human Rights** have also been the guiding topic of European Community Colleges; as well as **European citizenship** and **European identity**.

Association for Community Colleges (ACC) considers the **formation of a European public sphere** a precondition for a future vivid European democracy.

In order to develop a European public sphere it is also important that the public is **aware of the political and social system** of the EU. Several European Community College courses (europæiske højskolekurser) have focused on the different aspects of and developments in the EU; such as the European constitution, European policies, EU enlargement, rural Europe, political representation in Europe and the system of European political institutions.

Since 1999 ACC has been **focused on** the **educational preconditions** for the formation of a European public sphere. The inspiration to found ACC came from [Højskolen Østersøen's](#) so-called Minority Courses 1997 and 1998 and from the philosophy of [Jürgen Habermas](#) (1929-), a [German sociologist](#) and [philosopher](#) in the tradition of [critical theory](#) and [pragmatism](#).

The main idea of ACC is that an ideal way to promote this objective would be through establishing European Community Colleges (europæiske højskoler). **European Community Colleges should become a new, decentralized, common school type for Europeans** that should preferably work under common law.

The methods and format of eventual European Community Colleges (europæiske højskoler) as imagined by the ACC are inspired by the boarding school format of the Nordic folk high schools (folkehøjskoler). They date back to the times and ideas of [N.F.S. Grundtvig](#) (1783-1872).

The ACC is European and transnational.

All the activities of ACC are per definition **transnational and involve many countries and members**. The **involvement of 'countries', however, is secondary to the direct involvement of the citizens who happen to come from (not exclusively) European countries**.

We believe that **the body of individual members illustrate how important diversity and widespread geographical representation are for the ACC**, the structure of the organization consists of the [ACC International Programme Office](#) (until 2006 incl.) and a number of [local ACC Committees](#) formed for the purpose of organizing specific European Community College Courses (europæiske højskolekurser).

The ACC International Programme Office guaranteed continuity, the ACC Committees ensured that each individual project was carried out taking into account

the very specifics of a particular region and/or topic. *ACC wishes to see the formation of a European (transnational) public sphere come true. The uniqueness of the ACC method lies in combining the formal, non-formal and informal learning aspects and placing the three of them into the framework of residential community colleges where everyone is a learner and a teacher at the same time.*

Apart from acquiring knowledge and skills that enable them to participate as active citizens both at the local, national and transnational level, the participants create a sample European public sphere where they practice the art of co-citizenship – learning and living together while being enriched rather than hindered by diversity. This way they pass the stage of stereotype and put faces on the otherwise impersonal map of Europe.

The **diversity of the participants** is a *key element* of European Community Colleges (europæiske højskoler). *There could be no cultural exchange if there was no diversity.* The ACC therefore involves as many partners from various European countries as possible in each project

Under headlines like “participatory democracy” and “citizenship in action” the ACC has attempted to point out where current programmes limit possibilities.

The ACC **opts for the opportunity to organize real European educational events** for all layers of society.

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