

SUPPORT ORGANISATIONS FOR COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS IN EUROPE.



Prof Burkhard Küstermann, LL.M.

The community foundation system has grown considerably in many European countries over the past 20 years. Usually it has proven beneficial for the development of this sector to have a national point of contact to which initiatives and already established community foundations can turn with their questions and support requests.

Such points of contact may have a variety of responsibilities: they may promote the establishment of community foundations, support initiatives in their effort to establish a community foundation, pass on experience they have collected, link the existing foundations with one another to form a network and accompany them in their effort at raising their work to a professional level, find programmes to be implemented by the civic foundations, and do lobbying work for the civic foundation movement.

To get an overview of the existing support organisations, the European Community Foundation Initiative (ECFI) conducted a survey about the structure and work of the umbrella organisations. The results of this survey are presented below. Fifteen organisations participated. In this context, it should be pointed out that the community foundation sector is very much alive and keeps developing. Hence, the participating organisations and the results should be regarded as a snapshot in time, which is in continuous development.

I. Organisation of the support organisations

The organisations that are committed to supporting the community foundations are extremely diverse. If we want to make out a structure in this diversity, we can distinguish between three basic types of organisation:

- ∴ There are organisations whose task it is to help shape civic engagement in all its diversity and which regard the community foundations as one of several forms of civic engagement (e.g. the Association for Community Relations in Romania or the Centrum pre filantropiu in Slovakia).
- ∴ Then there are countries with umbrella associations for all forms of donating that wish to support the community foundations as a special branch of the donation system in a special way (e.g. the Association for Funding the Common Good in Austria or the Centre français des Fonds et Fondations in France, or the Community Foundations Initiative in Germany as part of the Association of German Foundations).
- ∴ Finally, there are those organisations whose mission is strictly focused on community foundations (e.g. the Community Foundation Movement in Latvia or the UK Community Foundations).

Since the community foundation system is still a relatively young branch of civic engagement in Europe, it follows that the support organisations of the community foundations are fairly young as well. The oldest support organisation is the UK Community Foundations (UKCF), which was established in 1991. Most of the organisations that try to support the community foundation system were not founded until after the turn of the millennium. They include,

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e.g., the Fundación Maimona in Spain (2000), the Workshop for Civic Initiatives in Bulgaria (2001), the Centrum pre filantropiu in Slovakia (2002) and ASSIFERO in Italy (2003). However, new support organisations for community foundations have also been established in most recent years, such as Lokale Fondsen in the Netherlands (2013) or the Roots and Wings Foundation in Hungary (2014).

The most frequent legal form of the support organisations is clearly that of a membership-based association. Nine of 15 survey participants stated that they were organised as an association. This makes perfect sense, as no other form of organisation can similarly guarantee that the concerns of the target group are in fact the focus of the work of the organisation. Associations are an expression of active cooperation among the members who joined ranks in them. Apart from being organised as an association, they can also receive support from foundations (e.g., from the Fundación Maimona in Spain, the Workshop for Civic Initiatives Foundation in Bulgaria, The Centre for Strategic Research and Development of Georgia or the Roots and Wings Foundation in Hungary) and there is collaboration in informal networks (e.g. the Community Foundation Movement in Latvia).

Support by foundations contains the hope that it may be continuous and long-term for the community foundation system. At the same time, this support implies the danger that the focus on community foundations might be replaced by another field of activity if a shift in the foundation's mission occurs. Due to their simple structure, informal networks tend to provide easy access and allow for a lively dialogue among the actors involved. Frequently the challenge is to establish clearly allocated responsibility for the network and develop a sense of togetherness among the network partners.

Associations are typically funded by membership contributions. In this context, it is interesting to note that not all support organisations for community foundations, which are legally established as associations, are in fact funded like associations. Of the nine participating associations, only six stated they were funded by membership fees.

By comparison, of much greater significance for the support organisations is raising subsidies (12 of 15 organisations) and conducting programmes that have been solicited (eight of 15 organisations). More extensive business activities are only of minor significance for the support organisations at the present time. The Fundación Maimona (Spain) and the Centrum pre filantropiu (Slovakia), for instance, charge fees for services.

It would be interesting to examine in a more extensive study the proportion of the different sources of income. The fact that many community foundations only have limited resources of their own suggests that even where membership fees are charged, these only make up a small portion of the entire funds of the support organisation.

Due to their limited funds, the vast majority of support organisations have only one or two staff members who can devote their time to community foundations. The organisations, which are large in terms of staff size, include the Fundación Maimona in Spain (4 staff members), the Community Foundations Initiative in Germany (20 staff members, 14 of whom

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work on a volunteer basis), the UK Community Foundations (10 staff members) and the Roots and Wings Foundation in Hungary (12 staff members, 7 of whom are volunteers).

II. Mission of the support organisations

The diversity of focuses of support organisations is also reflected in the different missions they pursue. Therefore, only three paradigmatic mission statements are cited below. In this context it seems worthy of note that even in the case of UK Community Foundations - an organisation that works exclusively for community foundations - the main emphasis of the mission is not on the community foundation as a form of organisation but on the desired impact, specifically the strengthening of communities.

Workshop for Civic Initiatives Foundation (Bulgaria):

“The mission of WCIF is to encourage different communities to take responsibility and to work actively for social development utilizing fully local resources.”

Community Foundation Movement in Latvia:

“The mission is to promote philanthropy and civic engagement in various areas throughout Latvia. The ‘Community Foundation Movement’ is the national competency center in the field of community philanthropy.”

UK Community Foundations:

“The mission is to be the leader in inspiring local philanthropy and strengthening communities UK-wide.”

Strengthening local communities and those who are engaged in this effort, which all three-mission statements express, is a characteristic shared by support organisations across all borders. This approach is going to be of crucial significance for the joint Europe-wide promotion of the idea of community foundations.

III. Actual work of support organisations

1. Support organisations as consultants

The primary work of the support organisations consists in their advisory activities. Depending on the development stage of the community foundation movement in the respective country, the main focus is on counselling foundation initiatives or already existing foundations. Already established community foundations receive support particularly in strategy development (9 of 15 support organisations) and the resolution of legal issues (7 of 15 support organisations).

In this context, it should be pointed out that more than half of the support organisations (8 of 15 organisations) also offer consulting services for individuals who want to support the work of a community foundation. This is interesting in that the support organisations can make a direct contribution to the lasting financial resources of the community foundations in this way. Therefore, it would be interesting to find out in a follow-up study how support organisations can draw even more attention to these consulting services in the future and as

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a result make an even stronger contribution to the advancement of the community foundation system.

As a country's community foundation movement grows, the consulting services become more specific, too. The Centrum pre filantropiu (Slovakia), for instance, promotes 'giving circles', a special kind of fundraising. UK Community Foundations give advice, e.g., regarding the jointly used CRM system.

The networking of existing community foundations is directly linked to the consulting activity of the support organisations. There is hardly a limit to the diversity of networking options. They range from peer learning events (Romania), to workshops (Czech Republic), meetings of CF working groups (France), summer academies (Latvia) and through to annual meetings (Latvia, Czech Republic, Bulgaria) and national conferences (Romania). Despite all the differences in formats, the basic point is always to enable mutual learning, promote the sense of togetherness among the actors and as a result strengthen the community foundation system.

2. Support organisations as organisers of programmes for community foundations

In connection with the issue of funding, we have already seen that carrying out programmes is an important source of income for the large majority of support organisations.

In terms of content, the programmes reflect the development of the community foundation movement in the respective country:

- ∴ In those countries that are still in the initial phase, the main focus of the programmes is the objective of carrying the concept of the community foundation into the public (e.g. in the Community Foundation Support Programme conducted by the Roots and Wings Foundation in Hungary). The Centre français des Fonds et Fondations organised a field trip to catch the excitement about the way Canadian community foundations work.
- ∴ Following the foundation phase of community foundations, the second step concerns the qualification of the actors. In the Netherlands, for example, the Lokale Fondsen launched a 'starter class' where the engaged members are trained in such issues as organisation, financial knowledge and asset management, communications and the creation of local support, fundraising skills and spending policy. The programmes of the Association for Community Relations in Romania are focused on the development of community foundation staff and board in areas like grant making, governance, financial practices and communication.
- ∴ The more advanced a community foundation movement is, the more specific are the needs of the organisations and, in turn, the programmes provided by the support organisations: the Bulgaria Community Foundations Development Program for example combines provision of institutional development grants and technical assistance as well as training. UKCF runs nationally funded programmes such as Community First (which provided a unique opportunity to make donations go further by offering a 50% match from the government) or New Beginnings (a special programme for refugees).

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Conducting programmes appears to be a crucial field for further developing the support organisation for community foundations. Here it turns out that support organisations can perform services for the government or other support institutions by passing on the funds provided by these organisations to specific community foundations and ensuring that the funds are properly accounted for.

3. Support organisations as research institutions

Support organisations are characterised by assisting community foundations in their day-to-day work. This task ties up most of the energy of the respective actors. For this reason, only six of the 15 survey participants go beyond these activities and dedicate themselves to the scientific research of the community foundation sector.

Support organisations that do not exclusively focus on community foundations are also typically dedicated to a fairly broad range of philanthropic issues in their research work: the Fundación Maimona in Spain, e.g., is interested in the foundation sector as a whole; the Workshop for Civic Initiatives Foundation in Bulgaria monitors trends and actors in the field of local giving; and the Centre français des Fonds et Fondations records links between foundations and stakeholders.

The support organisations are usually interested in documenting the development of the community foundation sector in their country. They want to use the insights thus gained to advertise this form of engagement to the public. In Germany, the Netherlands and Romania, for example, data is collected on an annual basis to gather information on sources of income and the distribution of grants made by community foundations. - More specific scholarly research, on the other hand, is conducted only sporadically: A.K.N. - občanske sdruzeni in the Czech Republic, for instance, has examined the communication and public relations of community foundations. UKCF has placed a thematic focus on grant making, benchmarking data (financial, etc.) and impact assessment.

Carrying out scientific research projects in the not-for-profit field has its challenges: often there is simply a lack of (time and financial) resources. In addition, sometimes it is difficult to capture the target group of one's own research activity with precision - despite frequent efforts made in this regard, e.g., the term 'community foundation' cannot be definitively and clearly defined. I have already mentioned that it is the mission of support organisations to have an impact on the local community. If and in what way this impact can be documented, let alone measured, by way of research projects is a rich topic for discussion. At the same time, it seems indispensable to perform more in-depth scientific research projects. The attention of the public - especially also of politics - sometimes greatly depends on the way the strength of an engagement that shapes society is presented.

4. Support organisations as advocates of civic engagement

Support organisations for community foundations are divided on the question of whether they are or should be advocates for civic engagement in their country. The result could hardly be narrower: while seven organisations regard this as a proper field of activity, six

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actors do not act as advocates. Two organisations that participated in the survey abstained from answering this question.

In this connection, it is interesting to note a few further statements made in the survey. They indicate that support organisations so far certainly do not regard the advocacy of civic engagement as a strategic objective. For example, this activity is characterised as “opportunity-based” (Community Foundation Movement in Latvia) or answered with “occasionally” (A.K.N. - obcanske sdruzeni in the Czech Republic). The Centrum pre filantropiu n.o. in Slovakia categorically stated: “We monitor the legal and fiscal framework for giving and for the foundation work in general. As a result we communicate with community foundations.” Moreover, even the oldest umbrella organisation for community foundations in Europe - UKCF - explains with respect to the responsibility for advocacy activities: “not personally, but UKCF’s CEO and Head of External Affairs do this.”

We may expect that with the further growth of the community foundation movement in Europe the significance of these charitable organisations for society will increase considerably. Consequently, their options for being heard and exercising critical influence at the political level will expand.

IV. Current challenges in the work of support organisations

1. Recognition of the idea of community foundations and initiating community foundations

The countries that are still at the beginning of the development of a community foundation movement are faced with the challenge of creating legitimacy for the model (France), of identifying what CFs are and of promoting the idea (Spain), and of finding the CFs’ place among other actors participating in the local development (corporations, local authorities, associations) (France).

To this challenge is added the task of launching community foundations by finding responsible people for the committees (France, Hungary, Netherlands) as well as assembling the required seed capital (France, Hungary, Netherlands).

2. Challenges in the day-to-day work

Once the first community foundations have been established, the focus is directed on raising the work of the existing organisations to a professional level. Here, too, this challenge concerns both human resources and the financial resources of the community foundations. The supreme objective must be to ensure the sustainability of the community foundations (which was specifically cited by the Workshop for Civic Initiatives Foundation in Bulgaria, A.K.N. - obcanske sdruzeni in the Czech Republic, the Community Foundation Movement in Latvia and the UK Community Foundations).

3. Mission of the community foundations

Community foundations want to help shape the local community. Therefore, the support organisations also identified those challenges in the survey, which concern the content-related work of the foundations. Here we can make out a cycle of sorts:

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- .: To begin with, community foundations must listen in order to ascertain the local needs (Lokale Fondsen Nederland, for instance).
- .: Familiarity with the situation in one's own sphere of activity allows the community foundations to deal with urgent issues, which raise a public debate (e.g. about refugees and other underprivileged groups - take the Workshop for Civic Initiatives Foundation in Bulgaria, for example).
- .: The community foundation develops philanthropy expertise based on its project work and can demonstrate its impact (the UK Community Foundation, for instance).
- .: Good content-specific work enables the community foundations to generate trust and awareness (e.g. A.K.N. - obcanske sdruzeni in the Czech Republic).
- .: At the same time, this protects community foundations from becoming inactive organisations or 'dormant funds' (Lokale Fondsen Nederland, for example).

CONCLUSION

The support organisations for community foundations are quite diverse, both in terms of the way in which they are organised and of their financial resources and content-related work. If the work of the support organisations in the different countries is to receive the assistance of the European Community Foundation Initiative (ECFI) in order to strengthen the European community foundation overall, the following three points appear to be fundamental cornerstones for the work of ECFI:

- .: To strengthen the identity in Europe, a joint own concept of the term community foundation should be developed. Despite the vast diversity of the community foundations, it is likely that 'shaping the local community' turns out to be the unifying aspect across national borders.
- .: Nearly all support organisations connect the community foundations in their respective country within a network to promote mutual learning and strengthen the idea of the community foundation system. Hence it is a positive sign if ECFI directs its focus on this task, too, and if it initiates a dialogue among community foundations across national borders (specifically through peer learning and study trips).
- .: We have seen that conducting programmes constitutes a critical part of the work of the support organisations. With respect to a higher-level European organisation, we should give some thought to the degree to which it could open the door to programmes at a European level.