



Fostering the active engagement and civic participation of young people - community foundation exchange report

1. Introduction

On 4th and 5th July 2023 5 members of the [Sibiu Community Foundation](#) (SCF) traveled to Turin, Italy for a peer exchange with [Associazione Italiana Fondazioni ed Enti Filantropici](#) (Assifero).

The purpose of the exchange was to understand how community foundations can foster young people's active engagement and civic participation within their community and in their organization. Together, we leveraged our experience to exchange ideas, examples of our work and challenges and accelerate our learning process in this area.

This exchange was not only an opportunity for our two organizations to come together and share their practice, but also for other community foundations, which specialise in this area, to join us over the two days. As a result of Assifero's great preparatory work for this exchange, we had the chance to meet three other Italy based community foundations: [Fondazione Comunità Mirafiori](#) and [Fondazione Porta Palazzo](#) from Turin, and [Fondazione Comunitaria Agrigento e Trapani](#) from Sicily, as well as several other local organisations outside the community foundations network, with similar interests in this area.

The two exchange days consisted of several workshops led by the Assifero team, through which we were able to get to know each other, share examples of our work, discuss common challenges and learn from the experience of everyone else in the room. To balance these out, we also took part in two field visits organised by Mirafiori Community Foundation and Porta Palazzo Community Foundation, where we saw other aspects of the great work that they do and took inspiration for different community led projects. The agenda was the following:

AGENDA- DAY 1	
Where: La Casa nel Parco, Fondazione Comunità di Mirafiori	
12:30-14:30	Light lunch at local social cooperative
14:30	Opening
14:30-15:00	Warm up and get to know activities
15:00-15:45	Dimension 1: Young people in the community. What role for community foundations in fostering and enabling their participation and creating alternatives. <i>Each organization will have approx. 10 minutes to share how their community foundation is fostering at the local level young people engagement and active participation. NB: Share of failures is highly recommended 😊</i>
15:45-17:00	Discussions in smaller groups and in the whole group
17:00-18:30	Visit at Mirafiori Community Foundations (orti sociali and other projects)
19:00-22:00	Dinner together
AGENDA- DAY 2	
Where: Fondazione Comunità Porta Palazzo	
09:00	Opening - Dimension 2: Young people engagement in the community foundation
9:00-9:15	Presentation from Assifero on Future Chair
9:15-10:00	How community foundations are involving young people in their organizations: opportunity and challenges. <i>Each organization will have approx. 10 minutes to share how their community foundation is working towards involving young people within their organizations at all levels. NB: Share of failures is highly recommended 😊</i>
10:00-10:30	Experience from outside the field: why and how to bring young people in leadership position and drive change in the organizations (potential speaker from YEPP association / Ashoka / Officine italia)
10:30-12:00	Discussion in smaller groups and bigger one moderated by Assifero
12:00-12:45	Closing discussion - Learning sharing and step forward
12:45-13:45	Lunch
13:45-15:15	Visit Porta Palazzo Community Foundation

2. Youth Involvement in Community Foundations

Here are a few examples of youth engagement activities the participants to the exchange have been conducting:

- **Future Chair by Assifero:** a international campaign aimed at foundations, philanthropic organizations and social impact investors which encourages these organizations to create a suitable climate for young people to get involved and have a say in the decision making process. The campaign asks those philanthropic organisations who want to make a priority out of youth engagement to sign the Future Chair pledge and implement 6 key principles in their day to day work.
As a step forward, philanthropic organisations are being asked to leave an empty chair during their board meeting in acknowledgement of the fact that young people are not yet present at the table.
<https://assifero.org/future-chair-impegno-generazionale/>
- **MIRACHALLENGE by Fondazione Comunità Mirafiori:** Part of a two years programme, MIRACHALLENGE encouraged young people to come together around three areas they felt most passionate about (sports, cultural events and reclaiming spaces) and organise a series of 10 events or “challenges” in different parts of the neighbourhoods over a school year period. The young people were supported by mentors and received an award if they managed to successfully complete the challenge
Putting young people in the driver seat ensured they feel a sense of ownership over the activities as well as a sense of responsibility and motivation to reach the finish line and claim their prize.
https://fondazionemirafiori.it/protagonismo_giovanile
- **Urban Leadership Academy by Sibiu Community Foundation:** a programme for young people aged 21 to 32 based in Sibiu who wish to leave a mark on the city they call home. The programme spans 6 months in which the selected young people go through an intensive learning experience across 5 different areas: self awareness, productivity and self discipline, financial literacy, the management of complex systems and cultural changes. These 5 areas were selected out of the belief that in order for a leader to have the desired impact in their community, they need to be a well rounded person and spend equal amounts of time on developing themselves and their practice.

The programme is facilitated by Sibiu Community Foundation with help from experts across the 5 different learning areas, in order to ensure the quality of the content being taught.

<https://alu.fundatiacomunitarasibiu.ro/>

3. Key learnings

We had valuable conversations over the two days. The workshop format allowed us to share examples of our work and come together over common challenges, but also form connections with multiple Community Foundations based in Italy. We found it very insightful to understand how Italian community foundations are structured and funded and how they activate in their community. We were particularly inspired by the Community Hubs the Turin Community Foundations have their offices in. Learning more about how the Community Hubs have come to be set up, how they are managed and how their business model functions was very insightful for our team. Moreover, on the topic of the exchange, youth engagement and civil participation, the lengthy conversations we had left us with a few key learnings:

- **What we talk about, when we talk about young people**

Due to the variety of organizations present,

it was striking to see the wide range of age groups each of us was working with under the umbrella of “youth engagement”. Some of those present were working with children under 12 and teenagers, while in our case some of the youth engagement work we conduct covers the 21 to 32 age group. Through our conversations, it quickly became clear that despite the wide age spectrum we work with, the challenges young people encounter are very similar: lack of education and professional opportunities,

lack of access to decision making process and representation, the brain drain from less advantaged areas to more developed cities, etc. We found it particularly valuable to have this conversation and collectively challenge the limits of what is traditionally believed to be youth work, while spotlighting the fact that the barriers young people face are applicable to a much wider age range.



- **The ever present challenge of youth brain drain**

A common and persistent challenge across all the organizations present was that of youth brain drain. All organizations struggle with a significant percentage of the young people in their community choosing to move on to different cities/ countries. This is particularly difficult for organisations who invest in long term educational programmes only at the end for the young people who participated to leave their communities and take their knowledge, experience and network with them. An important realisation from these conversations was that this is not the problem that needs addressing, as it is only a symptom of the root cause. Young people will always leave their community and this level of exploration and development should be encouraged.

It was insightful for us to come to the realisation that instead, we should work on making our communities both attractive for those young people to come back and inviting enough for other young people who are looking for new opportunities to move there.

- **Object or protection vs. active participants**

Another valuable lesson that stayed with our team after the exchange was the need to change the way in which the community tends to view young people. The shift from viewing young people as *objects of protection* who have no agency and are passively existing in our communities and instead perceiving them as *active participants* who have valuable insights based on their life experiences is essential to the development of a healthy and balanced community. This shift in perspective is even more important because it brings about a shift in the balance of power that is currently preventing young people from taking on a more present role in our community and it is something that we could definitely contribute to through our work.

- **Young people's permission to be**



Building on from my introduction, we found the Community Hubs the Turin Community Foundations are based in to be inspiring, particularly because they created an attractive space young people had ownership over and where they had the permission to gather. The way the Community Hubs were built to be used for work or activities but also turned into a gathering spot due to the restaurants/ coffee shops each

housed, turned them into real community hotspots. It was great to see that when well designed and managed, such a space can become a meeting point for all sorts of opportunities and facilitate intergenerational dialogue.

4. The exchange process

The exchange process was straightforward and we encountered no challenges. We are particularly grateful to Kamil who suggested our exchange partner. We were also impressed by the level of involvement and dedication from the Assifero team, who went above and beyond and allowed us not only to become familiar with their work, but also meet so many other organisations focused on youth work. Our collaboration with them was excellent.

The exchange itself was preceded by 2 meetings with Assifero in which we discussed the aims of the exchange, our expectations and the structure for the two exchange dates. Having a pre established topic and clear goals in mind helped us define how the visit would look fairly early in the process and have a seamless experience.

Here you can find a folder with photos from the exchange:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1qxu44f8xJlU7gZgt4jluZ12Ux4KW3ON?usp=sharing>

Here is a link to the facebook post we shared about this exchange:

https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=pfbid02nHV1xsZbHZJQEyokREpuGQbLGYAgPYiYn1Z3K5a93fQNMWPAAnVU7dpgiWK3fBnZpl&id=100069365734982