The Greater Manchester Take-aways

This report collates reflections from European delegates to the UKCF conference 2022 'Foundations for the Future: Acting now to shape tomorrow' and associated study visit to the community foundation 'Forever Manchester'.

Key take-aways in a box

Global issues / crises impact at local level where community foundations are critical players.

'There are challenging times ahead and our communities around the world are relying on us to be forward thinking so they can thrive, not just survive'
Rosemary Macdonald CEO, UK Community Foundations

Community foundations stand at the intersection of knowledge, financial, human, and community assets.

Community foundations can build purpose from constraints and help their communities to take responsibility of their future. They can embrace complexity and combine humbleness and boldness that gives power to make things happen, not power as a position'
Carola Carazzone, Secretary General, Assifero.

Don't think about the needs of a place, what it is or was, but what it could be.

You can want to live in a world already built, or you can choose to build the world you want to live in.
Lord Dr Michael Hastings of Scarisbrick CBE – President of UK Community Foundations

In re-imaging the future, be prepared to re-imagine your own organisation.

In addressing the local impact of global transformations, community foundations need to re-imagine themselves, develop their capacity to understand global issues and rely on the European (ECFI) and global movement of community foundations as a critical resource for learning and inspiration.
Stefan Cibian, Romanian Federation of Community Foundations

Put citizens first – make community the cause.

Choose to be relevant and transformative, rather than transactional. Change will be from the bottom up.
Andy Burnham, Mayor of Greater Manchester, UK

Adopt an asset-based rather than deficit approach to development

In the heart of our communities lie all the energies, all the tools, all the solutions.
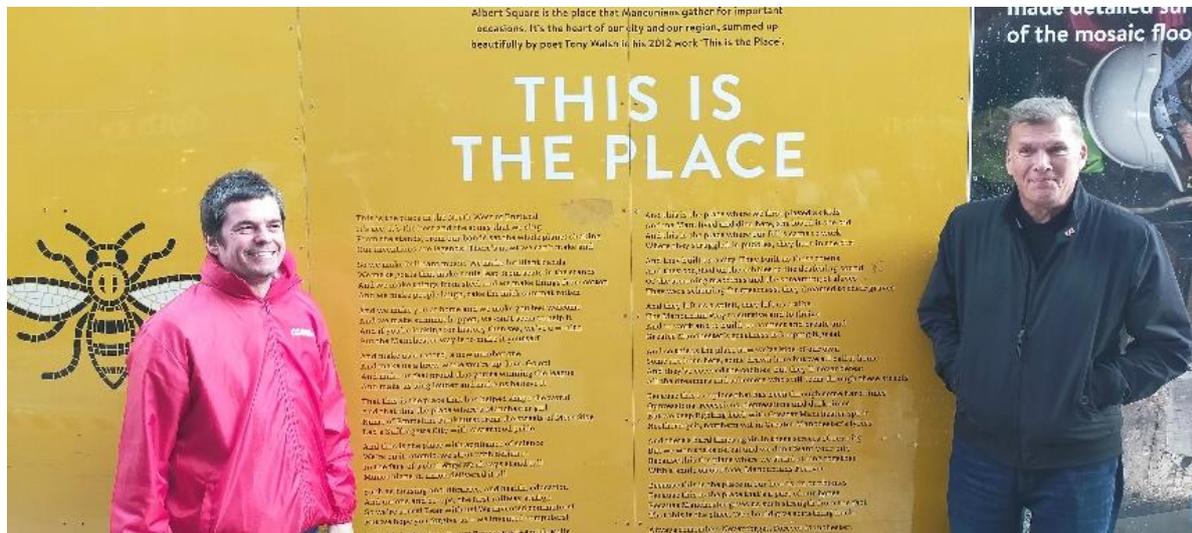Imandeep Kaur – Co-Founder at Civic Square, UK

Expand thinking about leadership and ensure continuity

'We need to expand our view of what leadership looks like. We need to be cultivating leadership at all levels'
Sufina Ahmad, CEO, John Ellerman Foundation, UK

The passion for Place

One thing that stood out in many reflections was the passion for place observed in the study visit in particular, but also from the conference discussions. Nick Massey, CEO, Forever Manchester, desribed Greater Manchester with its population of 2.8m as 'a village' and encapsulated their total commitment to the place, saying 'we're mad for it'.

'To be relevant in the future we need to put our citizens first'
Nick Massey, CEO, Forever Manchester, UK

A number of participants commented on the approach taken by Forever Manchester, taking note in particular of their commitment to ABCD (Asset Based Community Development). The value of learning from different contexts was also highlighted, along with the observation that many challenges were common.

'The ability of a community foundation to connect in more profound ways to local communities they serve is essential for seeing community assets, understanding community needs and achieving impact.'
Stefan Cibian, Romanian Federation of Community Foundations

'One of the key take-aways for me was how the fact how different the contexts are and how flexible and capable the community foundation format is. It was particularly inspiring to see community foundations working together as a network to successfully tackle various natural, economic and even social crises'
György Hámori, Roots and Wings Foundation, Hungary.

'I was thrilled to see many similarities between the Forever Manchester bottom-up approach and the German Community Foundation model.'
Ulrike Reichart, Alliance of German Community Foundations

'The need to take risks but be humble & close to the grassroots at the same time was a recurring them. This idea of creating and holding multiple visions at once in the current uncertainty was quite compelling'.
Helen Lenda, Via Foundation, Czechia

Playing the long game

A real challenge for community foundations is to think about the future while being immersed (almost submerged) in the present. Andreea Alexandrov, Federation of Romanian Community Foundations, suggests that *'Our communities need spaces for experimentation and collective imagination, need curators, new narratives and the dismantling of what no longer works'.*

The importance of leadership arose in numerous sessions and an insightful observation was made on this by Tomas Krejci, Chairman of the Czech Association of Community Foundations, who proposed that *'if the purpose of an endowment is to ensure the long-term sustainability and perpetuity of the foundation, then a strong, persistent foundation leadership can also fill this role in the absence of an endowment.'* However, he noted in cases where there has been sustained strong (and in particular, individual) leadership, that there is a challenge to facilitate transition and continuity of that leadership.

The role that UKCF played in helping community foundations across the UK acquire dormant trusts was noted, as was the work in relation to legacy giving. This highlighted the need to play a 'long game' which involves awareness raising and building relationships with professional advisers (lawyers, accountants, estate planners), the product from which may not be realised for some time. This relationship building also extended to connecting with people and organisations that you may need to work with to ensure a 'whole society' response to emergencies.

Broader lessons for the community foundation field

Cristian Olivares Buitrago, Novessendes Community Foundation, Spain expressed learning in relation to a desirable scenario for community foundations based on participation, sustainability and networks.

Local participation: community foundations should give voice to communities and make an effort to strengthen links among individuals in urban and rural areas. Therefore, local philanthropy and volunteering should be considered as cornerstones to foster resilient communities; this means neighbours should be aware about their own resources in villages and cities and they should be able to identify their opportunities to improve quality of life and their environment.

Sustainability: social, economic and environmental sustainability will determine the development of our communities in the future.

a) Social sustainability implies that certain principles such equality, participation, tolerance and inclusion are beheld and kept in communities. Community foundations could contribute to this way of sustainability by raising awareness on these issues and including these principles in their criteria for granting projects;

b) Economic sustainability is influenced by the capacity of mobilizing resources in the community and finding a good engagement of neighbours and stakeholders in projects. Community foundations could facilitate fundraising and giving circles in communities for local projects to become more independent and autonomous;

c) Environmental sustainability is guaranteed when our natural heritage and surrounding is well preserved for future generations. This means we should respect life conditions related to nature in the future. Community foundations could raise awareness on the SDGs in local communities and include them in their criteria for granting local projects.

Networks: We should never walk alone as community foundations. This conference has shown us that many of us are working to tackle the same challenges in many different ways; that is why working groups or clusters are being created together with ECFI and several foundations to put our efforts and visions side by side to address common problems. Some examples of this are the environmental and participation clusters on which we are already working or the movement we have proposed to take the community foundations proposals and results to the UN, above all regarding the achievement of the SDGs.

Four dimensions of community foundation work relating to the conference theme were identified by Andrea Cognata, Novarese Community Foundation, Italy.

Knowledge

The ability of community foundations to read the local consequences of global issues - instability, insecurity, inequality, often caused by external factors.

Choice

About how to face and prepare for complex challenges - rethink and redesign using convening power to involve people in decisions that affect them, to consent to a decision-making devolution, to unite forces and to achieve big goals.

Desire

The willingness to imagine alternative futures and the ways to reach them - only by defining a clear image of the desirable future, it is possible to work on the present, to improve things or make them change.

Humility and courage

To accept that being part of the problem can contribute to the solution - confront with other perspectives without prejudice, reshape themselves to manage new challenges, collaborate not compete, think long-term, embrace change, resist the constant urge for results.

Some specific action points

In discussion following the study visit, participants noted the need to make time for self-reflection / re-imagination, to generate a vision / theory of change and strategy, and adapt operations accordingly, for example:

- how to foster inclusion (of minority / excluded communities and young people);
- how to shift towards an asset-based (rather than needs) approach to development;
- how to shape the image / brand, organisation resourcing and its form (board and staffing) and function.

'The conference made me look at the functioning of Streekfonds Oost-Vlaanderen from a different angle. I realised that we should not only focus on the solutions these initiatives offer, but increasingly focus on supporting and strengthening the initiators for the long term.'
Stefanie Albers, Communuity Foundation for East Flanders, Belgium

'Don't speed up. Define culture, refine preliminary concepts, identify what assets we have and what we need, consolidate the team:
LISTEN: Situation / Challenge analysis with a participatory approach;
ACTIVATE: co-create solutions through pilots/prototypes via alliances with actors in the territory,
RETURN: make sure that learnings are gathered in partnership with academy, and deliver impact results for sustainability of interventions and overall impact in local education.'
Laura Fernandez, Mariña Sostíble Community Foundation, Spain

'Having these learning opportunities allows me to have room for reflection on key issues: Who are we? What are our objectives? How do we organize ourselves to achieve them? What are we doing right? What could we do better? How can we achieve this?'
Mercè Garet Cuartero, Tot Raval Foundation, Barcelona, Spain (Catalunya)

'I think Stefan's proposal for an international joint action to create greater awareness for the local SDG activities of community foundations at the UN is something we should follow up on.'
Ulrike Reichart, Alliance of German Community Foundations

Lessons for support organisations

There were some interesting takeawys from a national support organisation perspective. Rosa Gallego, Spanish Association of Foundations highlighted:

1. *A community foundation is an evolving creature that aligns with a set of principles, characteristics and capacities, but that are reinterpreted according to place and time on an ongoing basis. Support on enriching conversations about this may be a fixed duty of a support organisation.*
2. *There is on-going tension between increasing local philanthropy and exercising community leadership in each context this needs to be managed and an appropriate balance found.*
3. *There is value and more potential to leverage resources among national associations as part of a global movement.*

Francesca Mereta, Assifero, Italy reflected:

'How, as a community foundation support organisation, can we support the overall system and single organisations in navigating such a complex and challenging space and better equip them for shaping their community and the country future?' she suggested:

1. *Gently challenge them: I very much admire UKCF's boldness in putting out such big questions to their members and gathering a pool of different realities and organisations to bring new stimulating ideas;*
2. *Raise awareness, among community foundations but also other funders, on the need to create and invest resources in spaces for reflections, for co-creation where communities can gather, imagine, and reshape its own future starting from its desires rather than solely its needs;*
3. *Being more and more flexible and adaptable organisations, ready to burst bubbles, create new connections and partnerships and invest in its staff development, letting them acquire new necessary competencies;*
4. *Younger generations must be part of the conversation.*

The value of community foundation movement connecting people and offering international learning

It was recognised that there is a pool of expertise in the community foundation field and that this should be utilised through Europe-wide gatherings (including at relevant national events) and virtual platforms for exchange of knowledge. This is particularly significant to those in the earlier stages of development.

'Without participating in these kinds of conferences/workshops/meetings, we will be not able to develop in the future. I am very grateful to have the opportunity to be a part of so wonderful giving and sharing process.'
Lubica Lachká, Nitra Community Foundation, Slovakia

'After one week I still feel energised with a big positive and creative energy that makes me feel connected to a group of inspiring people, especially the European delegates that I had the opportunity of knowing in a few and intense days of work, but also all the amazing colleagues that I met from other community foundations of UK, and from other parts of the world as Africa, Latin America, and Australia.'
Inês Gonçalves, Eugénio de Almeida Foundation, Portugal

'The study visit created an opportunity to experience the impressively open exchange in the community foundation community among themselves and to establish and strengthen networks, which helps us immensely in our positioning as community foundation support organisation and in the support of the Austrian initiative groups.'
Silvia Mayrhofer, Austrian Association of Charitable Foundations

European participants

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Andrea Alexandrov	Romanian Federation of Community Foundations	Romania
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Lubica Lachká	Nitra Community Foundation	Slovakia
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Valentina Ferrara	Spanish Association of Foundations	Spain
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