



Lessons form an exchange: Austria - Romania

This exchange involved the Austrian cohort of initiative groups and members of the board and staff team of Verband für gemeinnütziges Stiften (VgS) and the Association for the Practice of Transformation (APT) and three Romanian community foundations. The goal was to learn from successful community foundation practitioners how to start and operate a new community foundation and experience their impact. Gaining knowledge first hand about the organisational concept, impact, and daily business of community foundations, has helped accelerate the community foundation field development process in Austria.

Lessons learned, observations and insights

The programme was shaped for initiative groups in Austria at the very beginning of their journey. We learned that many Romanian community foundations started with an incredible spirit of innovation and entrepreneurship and began with modest financial resources and experience. Despite legal and demographic differences and different overall donation volumes in the counties, the starting situation seems to be very similar. CEOs and teams from the community foundations in Sibiu, Țara Făgărașului and Brasov explained their beginnings and developments, the ways to find funding for their projects as well as their grantmaking schemes. Hearing about the beginnings, achievements and lessons learned was very helpful and inspiring for Austrian 'initiative groups' who were encouraged to start gathering a group, and not let the aim for perfection hold them back.

The study visit had a very practical impact on different levels

a) Shaping the Austrian community foundation programme

Starting with a field study conducted by the NPO Institute at Vienna University of Economics and business and an intense stakeholder analysis, we had to find the best community foundation model to fit into the very lively Austrian civil society. Learning about the Romanian support organisation approach to the development of the national movement is an important part on the way to form the Austrian model, for the board and management who are responsible for implementing the strategy.

b) Capacity Building Programme

Verband für gemeinnütziges Stiften launched its first Capacity Building programme in 2022. The study visit was part of this programme. While we had not only theoretical input but also best practice presentation, face-to-face meetings and experiencing organisations and protagonists in their natural sphere of influence helps enormously in understanding the nature, role and impact of a community foundation, the context of its role as a grant maker. We understand the study visit as the Capacity Building programme's most important step from theoretical input to understanding - ownership - realisation. The relationships with our Romanian colleagues and the lessons learned helped us - in addition to other learning experiences and the evaluation of the first



round - to create the Capacity Building programme for the 2nd cohort. CF Fagaras' Founder Stefan Cibian will design and teach a "listen to the Community tool" with cohort 2, to be applied in small and new initiatives. We do hope to hear best practice from community foundations as well as to learn about strategic and practical approaches at support organisation level.

c) The Community Foundation Initiative

Experiencing the people behind a community foundation, learning about their personal development from very different professions and educational backgrounds carriers, truly encouraged the Austrian initiators to go out to walk the talk. Being encouraged by experienced community foundation activists accelerated the initiatives next steps on developing their concepts, organisational structure, and functions of their future community foundation. The visit was a significant call to action.

d) Peer-learning and networking

The return visit, framed as a workshop, gave us the unique chance to connect the European community foundation movement, represented by Alina Porumb as an outstanding representative, with potential new participants for the 2nd Capacity Building cohort and advisory board members. The study visit thus had an impact not only on the first cohort, but also on the upcoming second cohort of the capacity building programme. By knowing each other's organisations and contexts, VgS as a CFSO, the first cohort of community foundation initiatives groups and possible initiative groups from the second cohort are fortunate to benefit even more from APT and Inspire Change's materials and online trainings or the Thinkfracture conference on an ongoing basis. Relationships between Romanian Community Foundations and Austrian initiative will be maintained in various forums, from ECFI thematic meetings and Climate Crisis Learning journey alumni group to Inspire webinars and other European exchange forums.

"We experienced that connecting with CF activists directly working in the field as the best way to gain a comprehensive understanding of set up, governance, management, topics, and funding for Community Foundations. We strongly believe in best practices as the best way for Initiative Groups as well as our board members, Management, and staff to learn and get inspiration. Background information and knowledge transfer from the almost 20 years of the Romanian movement by Alina Porumb are a big step forward in building the first community foundations in Austria. Alina Porumb's extraordinary leading role in turning Romania into and European flagship community foundation country and APTs as internationally most renowned for community foundation activists' trainings gave the Austrian CF activists the chance to learn from the best."

VgS Board member



Annex 1

Agenda:

a) Online Lecture as part of a module of the Capacity Building Program: Romania Community Foundation Movement and Best Practice Brasov Community Foundation/Brasov Heroes

January 16, 2023

- Learning about the CF movement in Romania and Brasov Community Foundation/Brasov Heroes as Best Practice
- Getting a first impression of the Austrian Initiative Groups

Participants:

Didone Frigerio, Initiative Group Graugansstiftung
Kurt Prandstetter, Initiative Group Mühlviertel
Sebastian Reiter, Initiative Group Steyr
Christian Steiner, Initiative Group Neusiedlersee (later retired from the CF Program).
Stefan Wiltschnig, Initiative Group Ferlach
Ruth Williams (General Secretary), Verband für gemeinnütziges Stiften
Silvia Mayrhofer (Project Manager), Verband für gemeinnütziges Stiften
Friedbert Ottacher, Facilitator and Evaluator
Alina Porumb (President), APT - Inspire Change
Laura Popeea (CEO), Fundatia Comunitara Brasov

b) Study Visit March 22 -24, 2023

Hosted by: Association for the Practice of Transformation (APT)
Alina Porumb plus Brasov, Sibiu, Tara Fagarasului Community Foundations

- **Wednesday, March 22nd**
 - Introduction of the Romanian Community Foundation movement and the 3 Community Foundations on the agenda by Alina Porumb, Inspire
 - Meeting and dinner with Ana Bugneriu & team of Sibiu Community Foundation.
- **Thursday, March 23rd**
 - Reflection from Meeting with Sibiu Community Foundation
 - Travel to Cincsor (Fagaras area)
 - Meeting with Fagaras Community Foundation (incl. lunch and break)
 - Travel to Sf Gheorghe, Meeting and Dinner with a former VgS project partner
 - Reflections from Meeting with Fagaras Community Foundations with Alina Porumb
 - Travel to Brasov
- **Friday, March 24th**
 - Visiting a project supported by Brasov CF



- Meeting with the grantees of Brasov CF
- Meeting with Brasov CF team
- Debriefing with Alina Porumb: learning points, surprises, suggestions to consider and applications in practice.

Participants:

Didone Frigerio, Graugansstiftung Initiative
Sonia Kleindorfer, Graugansstiftung Initiative
Stefan Wiltschnig, Ferlach CF Initiative
Katharina Turnauer, VgS President
Franz Karl Prüller, VgS Vice President
Ruth Williams, VgS General Secretary
Silvia Mayrhofer, VgS CF Program Manager
Alina Porumb (President), Inspire Change
Ana Bugneriu (CEO) & four team members, Sibiu Community Foundation
Cristina Muntean (Grant Manager), Fundatia Comunitara Tara Fagarasului
Emilia Ciurchea (Fundraising Manager), Fagaras Community Foundation
Carmen Schuster (Cincșor based Board Member), Fagaras Community Foundation
Laura Popeea (CEO), Fundatia Comunitara Brasov
Erika Andrásí (Grants Manager), Fundatia Comunitara Brasov
3 Grantees of Fundatia Comunitara Brasov

c) Online-Gathering March 27, 2023

To provide first-hand information to the Capacity Building programme participants who could not come to Romania, we organised a zoom exchange two days after returning from the study visit and asked those who came for the study visit to share their impression, and would like to share a quote from one of our board members

d) Return Visit September 27, 2023

- **Tuesday, September 26th**
Workshop Preparation
- **Wednesday, September 27th**
Coaching opportunity for participants of the study visit or the online lecture.
Workshop for advisory board, all initiatives of cohort 1 and potential initiatives of cohort 2
Internal exchange Alina Porumb, Inspire - Silvia Mayrhofer, VgS and Gyuri Hámori, Roots & Wings (present for a workshop at the VgS Conference on September 28)