

From a swinging focus to an intentional commitment: Novara Community Foundation climate Journey



Andrea Cognata, Culture and Environment Officer - Novara Community Foundation

Interview with Andrea Cognata Culture and Environment Officer at Novara Community Foundation

Even though climate, in particular the environment, has always been a focus for the Fondazione Comunità Novarese (Novara Community Foundation), the organisation stepped up its commitment in the past few years. In this interview, Andrea Cognata, Culture and Environment Officer at Novara Community Foundation, shares in this interview what were the turning points in this journey, the challenges faced and the opportunities lying ahead.

Can you briefly outline the Novara Community Foundation's climate journey for us?

The community foundation has always been somehow involved in the climate space, specifically concentrating on environmental issues. However, it has never been a priority. To give some numbers: between 2012 and 2022, my organisation launched six calls for proposals, making available over €410,000. In the past year, with the dedicated line of funding called Climate Chan(ce)ge-Opportunità Clima, we provided €100,000 and levered a further €14,000 from Cariplo Foundation, one of the community foundation's main supporters. We also intersected the issue with some existing grantmaking tools that would bring the total community foundations efforts up to €170,000. In one year, we made available 50% of the amount we granted over the previous ten years.

Why and how did this shift happen?

It was a combination of contextual local and national factors. First and foremost, we explicitly committed to climate action by signing the Italian Commitment on Climate Change and being part of the global philanthropy for climate movement. It was an essential first step that gently forced us to take a moment to think strategically about how to integrate the climate lens into the organisation, guided by the principles. Being part of a broader movement also gives us the strength and the reassurance that we are not alone on this journey. Secondly, the community itself nudged us to move in this direction.

In 2022, we took some concrete steps at the local level that helped us progress. In particular, we joined a formal pact, [Lago di Cusio contract](#), comprising 130 private, public, and nonprofit organisations, to protect and safeguard a vast lake area in our community. Funnily enough, we have come full circle: indeed, this coalition resulted from a project we financed in 2014. Later in the year, we also applied for the [Energy Community Repository](#) developed by the EU to support local actors in building energy communities.

How do you feel about the journey so far and what were the factors that helped you?

I believe the impact and the progress made so far are very positive. I recognise we have yet to advance on all six pillars of the Climate Commitment and have focused with different intensity on specific areas of work. Still, I also know that we have evolved and are working in the right direction. One of the things I have valued the most is the possibility of building and consolidating my knowledge on integrating the climate lens into my foundation, thanks to the ECFI Climate and Philanthropy Learning Journey. It also made me part of a community of peers I could rely on, learn from, and exchange with. The climate journey is uncharted territory for almost everyone: it is a relief to move forward, step by step, along with community foundation practitioners who can understand the challenges you are going through.

Furthermore, as of today, we have forged new relationships with local, national, and international actors around the topic and strengthened existing ones. We also brought out a new side of the Novarese Community Foundation by presenting ourselves as a reliable and interested interlocutor, open to collaboration on these topics.

But finally, for me, the important thing is that we opened a new realm of possibilities and ambitions for the organisation in the future: maybe we will not be able to achieve everything, but we dare to dream.

What is then your hope for the immediate future?

To keep being committed intentionally to the climate issue, fully acknowledging its intersectionality, and further expanding our work in different areas. To become an increasingly important point of reference for the community, enhancing the local understanding of the topic among our partners, developing the other tools to support them, and catalysing collective action around the topic. From the organisation's point of view, I wish to bring together formal and informal internal knowledge from the staff and the board and make climate explicit in our organisational culture.

Francesca Mereta, ECFI
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More info on the [Novara Community Foundation website](#)