

ECFI Peer to Peer Exchange Report Fundatia Comunitara Timisoara and Fondazione di Comunita Porta Palazzo

November 2023

Below are extracts from a report following bilateral exchanges that took place between Fondazione di Comunita Porta Palazzo, Italy, and Timisoara Community Foundation.



Main objectives of the Peer to Peer Exchange

1. The Fondazione di Comunita Porta Palazzo (FdCPP) was interested in learning more about **community building and engagement strategies** in a different community foundation framework, such as that in Timisoara.
2. Fundatia Comunitara Timisoara (FCTM) was particularly interested in better understanding the **advocacy, lobbying and network building approaches** that Fondazione di Comunita Porta Palazzo has been able to achieve in the first three years of its activity. Another area of interest was the **use of public space and the cooperation schemes adopted with local authorities and other bodies** active in the area.

Shared thoughts and lessons learned

Lessons for Fondazione di Comunità Porta Palazzo

In Timișoara, the meeting with the Community Foundation was a very rich experience. We had the opportunity to get to know how they organise their work, to understand their strategy towards donors, to get in touch with the network of associations they work with, to learn about their activities and to appreciate how their volunteers are actively involved. All of this is still a work in progress for us, and the opportunity to analyse FCTM's concrete experience was a powerful insight and inspiration.

Of course, Romania and Timișoara have a very different political, social and economic situation: the country is still benefiting from EU funds, many large companies have relocated their factories to the Timișoara region, the population is still struggling with poverty and lack of services, but most people are really interested in helping others and solidarity is still a shared value.

We would really like to rebuild this deep sense of community in the area we are working with.

Organisation and donors

It was very interesting to meet the founders and understand the model they wanted to create: FCTM was originally created by two philanthropists who created very effective tools for fundraising and financing community initiatives. One of the most interesting aspects is the way they engage with major sponsors and donors, which is a complex issue for us at the moment. At FCTM they manage to keep these relationships alive and they are able to involve major donors in strategic decision making in a nice human way that is good for the community. They have also found creative ways to encourage donations, such as allowing small projects to be funded through a playful mechanism similar to auctions. They have also been able to recognise the contribution of donors in a very nice way during the events they organise at the end of the projects: people would be able to appreciate the contribution of these companies to the community during leisure moments.

We would like to involve donors more and experiment with how to get staff and board to work together on specific issues.

Volunteers

As we said, we at the Fondazione di Comunità Porta Palazzo are trying to build a significant community of volunteers, but we still have a long way to go. Lobbying on public and social policies, housing, community infrastructure, etc. certainly has a concrete impact on our community, but it requires technical knowledge, dedication and expertise that are not always easy to find and maintain. FCTM has a completely different approach in this area: one experience that really impressed us was that of a pool of 30 volunteers who meet twice a year to go to nearby villages in the region and work together to renovate poor houses: a concrete, amazing and touching contribution to improving the living conditions of the community.

We felt that the volunteers were really involved and happy to see that their practical, tangible action is useful to other people and that they really meet each other, which makes a big difference. We find it challenging to really involve and motivate volunteers for the kind of activities and strategies that the foundation has decided to implement and that we are thinking about.

Events

We talked to Bianca about the organisation of Timotion, the city marathon that, over the years, has involved more and more people, sponsors and local authorities. Timișoara is of course a smaller city than Turin (and in fact we already have major sporting events and it is hard to imagine another event like this), but the idea of a major manifestation to promote and spread the message of the foundation was a very exciting prospect. In Timișoara, the marathon has become a regular event for the city and we appreciated the amazing ability of FCTM to create wonderful and useful gadgets to spread their message on a daily basis

We would like to do the same!

Social enterprises

The other aspect that we really appreciated is the idea of creating social enterprises that can have an immediate impact on the community: we visited the headquarters of a tiny, wonderful laboratory that upcycles used cooking oil to make very homely candles. This is just one example.

It would be a huge step forward for the foundation itself to think in these terms and actively promoting concrete opportunities and allowing very interesting social enterprises to flourish. This was a huge stimulus for us!

We felt at home with FCTM. It is a small organisation with three part-time staff who are very committed to community development, who care deeply about relationships and who put their energy into social work, not just processes or products. They are the face of the message they are trying to spread and we are trying to be the same: transparency, coherence, sense of community. Thank you Fundația Comunitară Timișoara!

Lessons for Timișoara Community Foundation

It was very interesting for us to see, for the first time, a community foundation that concentrates its actions only at the level of a neighbourhood, a very dense one, with very diverse people - a melting pot. We work at the level of the whole city or even the whole region.

After seeing the FdCPP's approach, we appreciated the level of detail and connections that this way of working with the community can bring, and the approach to public space as a common good that needs to be constantly negotiated and redefined through small community actions.

In Timișoara, we also have good communication with certain departments in the City Hall, but I think we are still a bit far from the examples of cooperation we saw in Turin. Good examples in Turin for us were CP Mirafiori, Cecchi Point & the reuse of the city kiosk for the benefit of a large community (Portineria di Quartiere). These spaces are offered by the municipality to be activated and coordinated by organisations and volunteers to be used by the people.

We also appreciated the way the municipality listens and offers solutions to different groups that need its help.

We had the opportunity to compare Via Baltea from Turin and FABER from Timișoara, which we consider to be similar spaces (with many functionalities), while we noticed that Via Baltea is more accessible to the general public in terms of prices, and more inviting to non-profit organisations in terms of accessibility from the same point of view. The community meeting in Giardino Pellegrino and the story of how this space was returned to community use was inspiring. We also have certain spaces in Timișoara that look abandoned. Places that are illegally occupied or simply forgotten by the administration. During one of our programmes we encouraged the grantees to reactivate public spaces in the city for the use of the local community, but only during the programme. These spaces were populated and animated with different events and activities and it was a success. In the Orti Generali (community gardens) we were inspired by their entrepreneurial approach to managing the space. The space operates on the border between public space and educational space, with very clear rules that serve the sustainability of the initiative.

We think that better communication in the neighbourhood could help these meetings to grow and attract more participants.

It was very inspiring for us to see how local organisations working in a neighbourhood in Turin come together in a network when they want to apply for grants, the fact that they eliminate the idea of competition in this situation. This kind of collaboration is something we try to encourage in our programmes.

After seeing the examples from Turin, we are thinking of doing it on a larger scale, which means involving or inviting organisations with broader perspectives and different approaches to work together.

We didn't expect to feel so at home, like in a big European family, sharing the same struggles, problems and limitations, but also sharing solutions, creativity and values. The amount of energy shared by the people we met was inspiring. We learnt that even though the two community foundations are many kilometres apart, our inspiration, our motivation to work in the community, our willingness to change the world for the better is absolutely the same.

We are motivated by those we support and this motivation gives us the strength to do more, to help more and to support more people & groups.

Annex 1

The participating organisations

Fondazione di Comunità Porta Palazzo

Fondazione di Comunità Porta Palazzo (FdCPP) aims to improve the quality of life of those who live, work and visit Aurora and Porta Palazzo by promoting equality, freedom, beauty, social cohesion, solidarity and social responsibility. The organisation aims to highlight the value of the community by promoting individuals and resources as key players and encouraging support for the most vulnerable. All this is achieved through participatory and collaborative planning, from listening to the territory to identify needs and valorise resources, to involving the territory in the governance of the Foundation itself.

Community Foundation Timișoara

The mission of the Community Foundation Timișoara (FCTM) is to build trust in the community, support local initiatives and create links, thus contributing to the harmonious development of prosperous communities. FCTM mobilises resources from companies and individuals, which it channels into the community in the form of funds for projects, crisis situations, medical cases or scholarships; we connect people with the same interests and passions, thus stimulating new initiatives and partnerships in different communities. We mobilise and unite residents around issues that are important to them and the community.

Annex 2. Details of the visits

Visit of the Fundația Comunitară Timișoara to Turin June 5-8, 2023

Day 1 - Monday June 5th:

h. 20 Welcome dinner

Day 2 - Tuesday June 6th:

Visit at CivicoZero: the centre was originally created by a project of Save the Children, and it is hosted in a space provided by the municipality of Turin and offers essential reception services for unaccompanied minors, including access to washing machines, showers, and clean clothes.

Visit at Scuola Holden and Biblioteca Fronte del Borgo, which is a storytelling school with projects with public schools and scholarship especially thought for disadvantaged young people, hosted in a space owned by the municipality of Turin.

Meeting at Casa del Quartiere Cecchi Point - meeting with the president, vice president, board members and volunteers

h. 20 Dinner with FdC PP

Day 3 - Wednesday June 7th

Visit to the community gardens (Orti Generali) at Mirafiori, a formerly working class neighbourhood in the south of the city where a big area is occupied by the gardens

Meeting with Fondazione di Comunità di Mirafiori

Day 4 - Thursday June 8th

Visit to Via Baltea, which is a community space that promotes collaborative cultural practices based on participation and activism in collaboration with more than 100 local associations and organisations

Visit to Yalla Aurora, a multifunctional centre for community and youth participation. Yalla provides a space for socialising, studying, training and promoting youth leadership.

Visit to Portineria di Porta Palazzo, the hub is part of the social promotion network that develops projects to support local communities

Meeting at Giardino Pellegrino e Giovedì del perché no: Giardino Pellegrino is the only green space of the area and it was kept close for a long time. During the summer 2020 FdCPP, even before its formal constitution, took a step to promote the re-opening. Now the garden hosts a playground for children and spaces for leisure of the whole community.

Visit of the Fondazione di Comunità Porta Palazzo to Timișoara, September 26-30, 2023

Day 1 - Tuesday September 26th

Morning coffee @Ambasada and visit to UnLoc, Oneshirt, OilRight, social enterprises with a strong focus on up and recycling and inclusion of persons with special needs

Day 2 - Wednesday September 27th

Visit to LOGS, which is the biggest humanitarian support organisation from Timișoara and to Zero Waste, former beneficiary at Gradinescu community gardens coordinated by FCTM. Visit to the FCTM office.

Day 3 - Thursday September 28th

Morning coffee @ AMPM - local coffee shop run by an almost local family.

Visit to Basca theatre - an independent local theatre in Traian square, who runs social artistic projects with children and people with special needs (deaf or blind people, people with disabilities).

Meeting with Citizen of Traian, an NGO that aims to transform Traian Square into a tourist attraction and pool of interest for the citizens of the city, while keeping its historical values alive.

Visit "Ceva de Spus": the association works as a group of self-representatives, people with intellectual and physical disabilities. Self-representation means speaking their mind and telling about themselves to the community, with the aim that people will understand their problems and see that they too can lead a normal life. Their will is people to respect them for who they are, not to feel sorry for them.

Day 4 - Friday September 29th

Ro Bike Valley garden party (at la Plaja Noua)

Day 5 - Saturday September 30th

Stiintescu Science Fair a fair dedicated to STEAM education promotion for childrens and students, organised on the occasion of the European Researchers' Night. The stands were presenting more than 20 groups of grantees' work results in their community in the last year, which FCTM finances, monitorizes and supports with knowledge and peer connections.