



## Reviving and reimagining Rural Life: The Story of La Nou Community Foundation and Its Mission for Generational Renewal



*In this interview, Francesca Mereta, ECFI, explores the origins and aspirations of La Nou Community Foundation with Eva González Vargas, Secretary General. Located in a rural area with the lowest population density in Europe, La Nou Community Foundation focuses on addressing the eco-social crisis, and in particular its impact on young people, through creating opportunities for a fulfilling life in the locality.*

**Eva, La Nou Community Foundation's origins date back to the 1980s and are deeply rooted in youth protagonism. Can you share this journey with us?**

What is today known as the La Nou Community Foundation has its roots in the work of Mas De Noguera, a cooperative founded in 1982 by a group of young people who decided to develop a new paradigm for development for rural areas through environmental education, organic farming, and sustainable tourism. This ambition revolved around one main asset: a rural farmhouse located in Caudiel, Castellón. The cooperative restored the place, which became a place for gathering, discussing, and imagining new alternatives, centered in an ecological perspective, for outback life and society.

On its fortieth anniversary, some people involved in the Mas de Noguera cooperative, along with other community actors, decided to move towards a more shared and community-owned ambition: to establish a community foundation able to catalyse and channel external and internal resources and competencies to foster new ideas and promote the community philanthropy paradigm.

The process was lengthy. The people involved held consultations and meetings with a wide variety of people to assess whether it made sense to them to create a community foundation and its purpose. In parallel, the dedicated group took part in the AEF training support program for those interested in setting up community foundations in Spain.

As a result, the La Nou Community Foundation was established on August 4, 2022.



### **What are the main challenges that young people face in your community?**

The Iberian Lapland is twice the size of Belgium, with the lowest population density in Europe, with only eight inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup>. As in many other rural areas, young people see no economic opportunities and move into the biggest city centers. Once there, they often lose contact with their roots and see no point in potentially returning to these areas. This phenomenon leads to a cascade of socioeconomic challenges, including declining populations, abandoned farmland, strained local economies, and diminishing access to essential services. The identity and vitality of these rural areas are at risk without generational renewal and sustained engagement.

La Nou Community Foundation is working to reverse this current situation by encouraging young people to reflect on alternative models of rural life and on the issues they face and by fostering the development of alternatives and the future. We also focus on their emotional connections with communities and their roots and develop their agency to take up new meaningful roles to strengthen social cohesion further.

### **And how are you trying to achieve this?**

We worked on different strategic axes in the first two years of activity. First, we are building along with young people a shared understanding and a sense of belonging and pride in their cultural roots and community. We have a program called "Seed the future" (originally Sembrar Futur) where we work with education centers in the Valencian countryside, and we invite youngsters to dig deeper into their village and community, explore what they value most about living there, what needs are out there and some potential solutions. This overall process would result in a video they submit to our contest, and they receive a prize.

Another way is to raise and give value to youth voices in the community through our community publication called Ruralia, a platform for intergenerational exchange, compiling diverse perspectives into a book to bridge the gap between past and future. Finally, we highlight the work that young people are already leading in different parts of our vast territory through the program "Encounters with the Country-saje" (originally Encuentros con el País-saje). The initiative promotes environmental and climate awareness through guided routes led by locals, exploring the evolution of the landscape. It also fosters dialogues between active youth groups and intergenerational by holding open agoras at the end of the day in the municipality visited.

### **What have you learned so far, and what are your ambitions for the future?**

We have certainly faced challenges in meeting young people where they are and tailoring co-created proposals and ideas most suitable to them: we need to find new, attractive ways to do so. We are also mapping the most effective access point to connect with young people, first and foremost starting from the school system. Indeed, we plan to involve teachers more actively in developing the Seed the Future contest new edition.

Finally, we also need to be better at fostering relationships between young people in rural areas and the ones in the city to contaminate each other's through exchanges.



**As a young leader in the community foundation, what do you hope for the future of your organisation and the community?**

My hopes for the future of this organisation are centered on the community itself, which could grow in a progressive, equitable, and sustainable way. Although the community foundation is still young, we have big dreams, but we also know we need to proceed step by step and that permanent social and economic change takes time. We have solid and well-designed projects built around the actual needs of the Valencian rural community and with a broad and realistic perspective: now the key is to focus on fund development. Suppose we do so while strengthening our social capital. In that case, the foundation will be significantly reinforced and credible, generating more and more opportunities for the people and the environment we live in.

**Francesca Mereta**  
**Communications and Peer Learning Expert**  
**January 2025**