

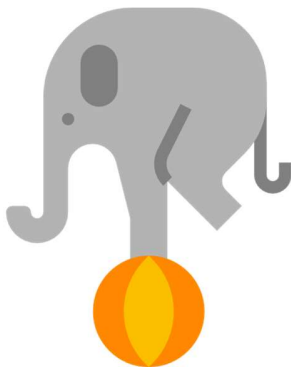
## The Elephant in the Porcelain Factory



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*Andreea Alexandrov, Federation of Romanian Community Foundations, was among the ECFI Delegates and a session speaker at the UKCF conference in Manchester in October.*

*Nominated as one of the best presenters for the conference she always offers thoughtful insight, articulated in memorable ways. Below are her succinct reflections on the main conference theme 'Foundations for the Future: Acting now to Shape Tomorrow'.*



What if the elephant in the "philanthropy factory" is a crisis of imagination in which we activate solutions that replicate the very patterns that generated the problems in the first place? Taking place in the heart of the city that was the epicenter of British industrialization, "the UK's largest gathering of professionals involved in local giving and philanthropy"<sup>1</sup>, felt like a reunion of friends who have waited a long time to reconnect. And as friends, we shared, we questioned, we celebrated, and we imagined. "Imagination is connected to a sense of abundance and needs diversity to feed it"<sup>2</sup>. From all the abundance and diversity encountered at the UKCF Conference here are some of the ideas and questions grouped in two areas of tension.

### 1. The tension of the immediate and the "business as usual" vs. the alternatives

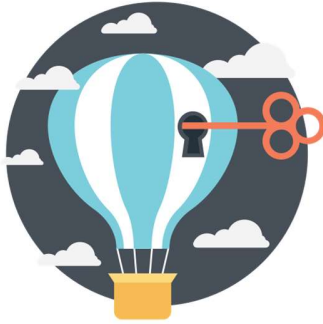
*"To be truly visionary we have to root our imagination in our concrete reality while simultaneously imagining possibilities beyond that reality." (Bell Hooks)<sup>4</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> [Homepage - UK Community Foundations Conference](#)

<sup>2</sup> Rob Hopkins, Twitter

<sup>4</sup> Bell Hooks (2014). "Feminism Is for Everybody: Passionate Politics", p.110, Routledge



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1. a.) We live in times of multiple challenges, unpredictability and collapsing structures. In times like these, we might choose to invest ourselves in **relief interventions** and quick resource mobilization. As praiseworthy and necessary as these actions might be, it is important that they do not completely divert our attention from the **alternatives**. Speakers like Cassie Robinson, Imandeep Kaur, Rachel Coldicutt and others emphasized on the ideas that our communities also need spaces for experimentation and collective imagination, need curators of new narratives and the "dismantling of what no longer works to make room for the new"<sup>5</sup>. These are important needs, perhaps less obvious than what is seen as urgent and pressing, but which if addressed, could contribute to resilient and thriving communities.

1. b.) Traditionally, community foundations are **grant givers**. Yet our communities need us to complement the grant giving mandate with more nuanced perspectives. Such **new perspectives** could mean seeing ourselves as wealth creators for the community not just grant givers, being stewards who build more sustainably and first line investors in community-owned initiatives.

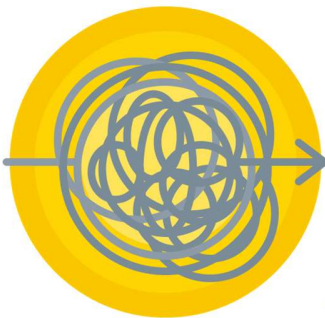
*How can we create capacities for resilience and transformation, not just responsiveness? What are the alternatives that we are not paying attention to? How can we invite the new at this time?*

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<sup>3</sup> [Inspiration icon created by Wichai.wi - Flaticon](#)

<sup>5</sup> Cassie Robinson, UKCF Conference 2022

## 2. The tension of plurality vs. building on that which is in common



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*"Alternatives are there if we pay attention in different ways but we will not discover them with the same kind of questions that we usually ask." (Cassie Robinson)<sup>7</sup>*

We have a **shared identity** as much as we have **individual local** rooted ones. We need to put things in context (different places require different approaches), but sometimes we tend to generalize or contextualize excessively. Community foundations are part of a fantastic network (we reconfirmed that at the *UKCF Conference of 2020*) and our communities, no matter where we are, have incredible resources that we can build upon. Creativity is one of them (an essential one in relation to the future). It is important to think about the future so that we can fast forward to who we want to be. In order to build on the creativity of our communities we need to create the spaces, the capacities and the **infrastructures where complexity and collaboration thrives**. This invites us to new questions such as:

*What can we do together that we cannot do separately?<sup>8</sup> What are the transformations that we need to think about together and root locally? What does it mean to build the capacity to shape tomorrow for your community?*

Andreea Alexandrov, Federation of Romanian Community Foundations  
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<sup>6</sup> [Mess icons created by Freepik - Flaticon](#)

<sup>7</sup> Cassie Robinson, UKCF Conference 2022

<sup>8</sup> Idem 7