

## Romanian Federation - Advancing with solutions to local needs



Beatrice Manole

Having studied and worked internationally for almost ten years, Beatrice Manole recently returned to Romania to take on the role of Program Manager with the Romanian Federation of Community Foundations. Despite coming in at a difficult time she describes below a dynamic field that has the potential to grow and have even greater impact on civil society.

It's been two months since I've joined the Romanian Federation of Community Foundations (RFCF). I discovered a rich and vibrant network of community foundations, covering access to more than 52% of the country's population, with over 6m EUR worth of investments in their communities between 2008 and 2019. I stepped in during a period of major insecurity, as COVID-19 hit not only people's health and beliefs, but also field activities and civil society response. I had the chance to become immersed in the community foundations' endeavor to adapt their programs and events during these times, and am still witnessing, as we speak, impressive results and efforts to respond to a twofold vulnerability - that of the health system, and of the communities mostly hit by the health crisis across Romania.

Prior to these two months as Program Manager of the National Support for Community Foundations (NSCF) program, I saw the community foundation movement as something complementary to local authorities' work. Developing and managing funds to answer local needs sounded to me like a sort of town hall responsibility. And I was not mistaken, because there is now an increase in collaboration between them, and community foundations here have indeed a great role to play in responding to local problems - from social and urban infrastructure, to education, environmental issues, and health. However, the NSCF program, planned for 2020-2022, and supported by the Romanian American Foundation, is also a confirmation of the fact that community foundations need further support to properly map, answer and provide tailored solutions to local issues. This support program features working groups with high priorities on sustainability, the continuation and development of the flagship Științescu educational program, grant making and endowment practices, strategic

partnerships, or developing the capacity of RFCF's team to offer better support, amongst others. And we've also embarked in a fruitful conversation with the Association for Community Relations in Romania (ARC) to harmonise our common working areas, particularly when it comes to partnerships, organisational wellbeing and risk management, community mapping or strategic thinking. When I joined this position, I did not think of community foundations as the sole end beneficiaries of our support organisation's programs, but I've placed the whole local civil society, which at its end benefits communities served by our member beneficiaries, at the heart of our work.

I play my part to ensure that further programs, activities, and funds will be developed for community foundations, and that our role in Romanian communities is well seen and valued. I've always been a great supporter of social, economic and environmental justice myself, so my mission on this planet continues - by advocating for more responsible investments, stronger and fairer relationships between civil society, the private and public sectors, and by providing sustainable and transparent conditions to live in a more giving society, all for the common good.

### **About the Romanian Federation of Community Foundations**

RFCF has the role of representing and supporting all its members, for social change. The Federation contributes to the development of social collective responsibility and local philanthropy in Romania, promotes civil society space and dialogue, engaging in a respectful and balanced collaboration between not-for-profit organisations, the private sector, and public authorities.

This support organisation provides mechanisms for attracting funds, developing communities of practice, generating and disseminating community ideas, monitoring and evaluating activities in support of partner foundations. The Federation also provides a space for dialogue for defining and monitoring the standards for the operations of community foundations and enables sharing experiences and expertise on joint programs developed by multiple foundations around the country. As part of its long-term strategy, RFCF with its 16 (soon to be 19) members, has committed to building a stronger network with common values that enables thinking, sharing know-how, learning and collaboration in order to support a vibrant movement of community foundations.

In order to do so, during 2019-2021 RFCF focused on developing the organisation's Capacity Building program, with support from the Romanian American Foundation, and has launched in 2020 a new one "A Better future in the community" (pilot in six communities), in partnership with Lidl Romania, that includes an important component of local grant making in education and environment. To this adds the above-mentioned program of National Support for Community Foundations.