

STUDY VISIT 2017.



Karoline Friebe, Community Foundation Halle/Germany

interviewed by Anja Böllhoff/Coordinating Director ECFI



Photo credit: Boris Strecansky

1. Which aspects of the four-day study visit to the UK did you like best and were most productive for your work?

Meeting people in other countries - whether in the neighbouring Czech Republic, far away in Georgia or in the British Isles - who work on similar issues as we, who want to enhance cooperation within society and who are driven to turn these wishes into facts - that is always inspiring and simply a great gift.

What I have found most productive for our work is more a kind of 'community foundation energy' that imbues my work than a specific recommendation for action. Generally speaking, I once again realized: we are going in the right direction with what we are doing...

2. How did you perceive the group in the way its 15 members with their very different backgrounds interacted with each other?

As very open-minded, appreciative, curious and approachable.

We are all from different countries, belong to different generations and are involved at different levels of community foundation work (whether as fundraiser or founder, project

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leader, person in charge of umbrella organizations or scientist). And every community foundation, in turn, is marked by its cultural, political, economic and social environment as well as the people who shape the community foundation.

So there are a great many differences, really - and still, we are driven by numerous similar issues, and all of a sudden we find ourselves immersed (in a positive sense) in discussions about the role of community foundations in society - for example. And then it simply feels good when everybody taps their wealth of experience and contributes their ideas and experiences to the discussion. How can community foundations create spaces where people can talk to each other (again)? The community foundations as places for discussion and exchange. Not the black-and-white or good-evil discussion we are currently witnessing. And it goes without saying that the experiences of the colleague from Hungary concerning the general framework offered by the civil society in which the Hungarian community foundations move are very different to ours here in Germany. Still, you always find some common ground and can formulate wishes and ideas which others find useful, too. Or which get them to think.

3. Are there ideas/suggestions from you which other German community foundations might wish to implement?

Once a year, the community foundation colleagues in Hungary invite people to a donation evening, a live crowdfunding event (n.b.: A giving circle concept disseminated through [The Funding Network, U.K.](#) and is already implemented in 12 countries outside the U.K.).

This requires some preparation: first they look for local organizations with projects from which the community benefits. The projects are in different areas: culture, social affairs, ecology, etc. After an application and preparation phase, the projects (maybe four) are presented to a larger audience one evening. The audience consists of supporters of both the community foundation and the projects themselves. I envision the atmosphere as open, interested and approachable. About 100 people attend the event. Everybody has been personally invited and prepared for donations being quite welcome that evening. Each organization presents its project and answers questions from the audience. The people then donate money right then and there for the project that seems worthiest to them.

This sounds exciting: awareness of the projects is generated, and the attendants can see for themselves what they are about and do good together. Everything is more direct. Plus, new supporters of the individual projects are recruited.

I do not know whether community foundations in Germany have already tried this or something similar to this. If yes, I would be interested in hearing about the experiences made at the events.

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4. With what ideas/approaches were you able to excite other participants or local actors during your trip?

Last year there was a study visit in Germany - one stop was the Halle Community Foundation. At the very beginning of this year's visit in Oxford, a colleague from Tuzla (Bosnia-Herzegovina) told me that they were inspired by our singing on the 'Würfelwiese' meadow, and starting in September, along with the local music school they will invite people to come singing together. And a Latvian colleague told me that they will try to carry out our 'Good intentions' sponsoring method in Latvia. This is absolutely wonderful, of course, and we are pleased that our ideas are picked up, adapted and carried out in other countries, too.

(Singing on the 'Würfelwiese' meadow: during the summer months we invite people to this park in Halle every Wednesday to sing *Volkslieder* together. By now people are also invited to join open-air singing events in Brunswick, Leipzig and Stuttgart.)

(In the 'Good intentions' project we use a simple method at the beginning of every year to subsidize good intentions which bring some improvement to living together in the street, the district or the town.)

5. What is the inspiration that you are taking home to Halle from this study visit for your local work / your colleagues?

I have already mentioned the community foundation energy. Obviously, that our ideas are travelling through Europe is fantastic. This pleases not only the colleagues but also our board of directors, the sponsors of 'Good intentions' as well as the group of 'Würfelwiese' meadow singers.

Another issue I encountered everywhere in the UK is fundraising. It is ever-present there and embedded as well as necessary in a different way in that culture. There seems to be no park bench without a plaque that tells you who paid for it. The museums thank the friends who have made the exhibitions possible, and the streets are full of charity shops, e.g. of the Red Cross or the Cancer Society (in Germany we are mostly familiar with the Oxfam shops), that make money for the respective organizations. In addition, fundraising was a major topic in all the organizations we visited. This is very different to the way things are in Germany, where it takes a lot of effort to convince people that it might make sense to deal with fundraising for a change. But what is my inspiration from the UK in this regard? Fundraising is a great and important job, especially of course if you manage to win people over for a good idea. And I believe people like doing good or enabling good ideas to become reality. But they have to know about them first. So we must keep at it and approach people and convince them that you can do good things together with community foundations.

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6. What can ECFI do better / change to strengthen the local community foundation work with the tool of the international know-how transfer?

Bringing people together and having them talk to one another ... I believe that personal encounters are the most effective means. Whether they take place at a regional, Germany-wide or European level. Leave your own turf and meet others with open eyes and ears...

