Community Foundations as Agents of Transformational Change:

Lessons for Fondazione Caterina Dallara (Italy)

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Abstract

Research and practice show that community foundations are well positioned to address controversial issues and take risks. Fondazione Caterina Dallara is a newborn community foundation in the Ceno valley of Italy with the mission to promote the social and cultural growth of the territory and its community. This paper addresses some of the challenges in the region and how they can be resolved by leveraging existing resources. In working in the area, Fondazione Caterina Dallara has carried out a community needs analysis, started the design of its headquarters, supported several civil society organizations through small grants, and sponsored a student exchange program. Using a mix of case studies illustrating the importance of strengthening civil society organizations, increasing youth participation, and utilizing the role of the space as community builder, this study draws from a wide geographic spread including Mexico, Brazil, Uganda, Northern Ireland, Canada, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Switzerland, India, and Ukraine. The research presented in this piece points to new, creative, and flexible ways to solve social problems in relation to one another and through a participatory approach along with the community. Recommendations for community foundations include taking on a knowledge-driven approach, inhabiting the role of communicators, bridge builders, and advocates, as well as prioritizing networking with other community foundations.
I. Introduction and Context

Established on the 18th October 2021 in Varano de’ Melegari (Parma, Italy), Fondazione Caterina Dallara is a newborn community foundation with the mission to promote the social and cultural growth of the territory and its community, with a specific focus on the most vulnerable people and younger generations.

Varano de’ Melegari is a municipality of 2,645 inhabitants in the province of Parma, located in the Ceno valley. The valley, which holds its name from a beautiful river (Ceno River), includes four municipalities - Bardi, Bore, Pellegrino Parmense and Varano de’ Melegari - and counts about 15,000 residents.

The valley is classified among the “inner areas,” which are defined by the Italian government as territories substantially far from the centers/hubs offering essential services (education, health and mobility). According to the latest census, inner areas make up 53% of Italian municipalities (4,261), are home to 23% of the Italian population (13,540,000 inhabitants) and cover 60% of the national territory.

A significant portion of the inner areas have become steadily marginalized since the end of World War II, through: population decline, now below the critical threshold; job cuts and falling land use; a decline in local provision of public and private services; hydro-geological instability; degradation of the cultural and landscape heritage. Equally, there are some inner areas where good policies and practices have been adopted, the upshots of which have been: a steady or growing population; municipal cooperation in the provision of essential services; environmental and cultural resources safeguarded and valued. This shows that the general process of marginalization is not unavoidable and that these areas are capable of following through on growth and cohesion projects.¹

In particular, Ceno valley is presently characterized by a continuous demographic decline, an aging population and a consequent rarefaction of the youth component. The territorial and administrative fragmentation, the hydrogeological instability and the lack of essential services in the upper valley complicate the picture.

Moreover, in the course of a relatively short period marked by the COVID-19 pandemic, the social as well as the cultural context has significantly changed, having a negative impact on the social tissue of the territory. As a consequence, the community suffers a condition of ‘disorientation’ and finds itself without the social infrastructures, relationships and networks on which the quality of daily life essentially depends. The issue, however, is not only recovering what has been damaged but rather creating new social infrastructures – capable of adapting to contemporary and/or emerging demands – that meet the local needs, strengthen the community and promote a culture of giving and participation.

Despite the problems highlighted above, the valley is rich in resources such as (but not limited to):

- several companies in the area that attract specialized professionals and their families from all over the world;

• increased tourism in the past few years;
• a good number of civil society organizations active in the area;
• a retirement home for dependent elderly;
• a kindergarten, elementary school, middle school and high school in the lower valley;
• environmental resources (river, high-quality agricultural products, forests, natural and human landscapes);
• cultural assets (castles, ancient villages, old churches, small museums).

Aware of both the challenges and the resources, the time has come to respond to the needs – courageously and creatively – by leveraging the existing resources. And that is where Fondazione Caterina Dallara comes in.

Research and practice show that community foundations can be important leadership organizations in the community because they can take a long-term perspective and neither depend on annual fundraising campaigns nor must they give in to political pressure. Thanks to their independence, they are well positioned to address controversial issues and take risks.² In other words, they have the freedom to agitate and irritate.³

Fondazione Caterina Dallara is willing to play a leading role in the community - agitating and irritating, if needed - and become an agent of transformational change capable of promoting human development, of fruitfully correlating the productive, cultural, welfare and educational systems, along with research and development, with the goal of strengthening the community. The question is immediate yet complex: how do you do that?

In its first few months of work, Fondazione Caterina Dallara has:

• Carried out a community needs analysis [see, annex I] to understand the issues and ideas of local people, to build trust and a solid and open relationship with the community (participatory approach). At the same time, it initiated a partnership with the University of Parma⁴ to take a scientific and objective look at the valley, with the aim of better understanding its historical, social, economic and demographic evolution and future prospects. The community needs analysis coupled with the research results will be the basis of the multi-year strategic planning of the Foundation.

• Started a participatory process towards the design for the construction of its headquarters together with K-City (a group of urban planners with expertise in urban regeneration).⁵

In July 2022, a public assembly was held in Varano de’ Melegari entitled “Let’s build community places together”, promoted by Fondazione Caterina Dallara [see, annex II]. It was the start of the participatory process curated by K-City aimed at defining the design and uses of the new headquarters of the Foundation itself, a space (indoor and outdoor) conceived to promote projects with social impact that are able to improve the quality of life and build - around the nature and cultural heritage of the valley - a widespread artistic, cultural and environmental programming that is accessible to all.

³ Kevin, Murphy “The freedom to agitate and irritate is a unique joy and challenge for community foundations”, paper shared with Berks County Community Foundation Board.
⁴ CIRS – Centro interdipartimentale di ricerca sociale dell’Università degli Studi di Parma. For more information: https://www.cirs.unipr.it
⁵ For more information: https://www.kcity.it/
With the purchase of a property in the center of the town, Fondazione Caterina Dallara wants to make sure that its new headquarters becomes a place open to the community, where individuals and civil society organizations can meet and feel at home: for this reason, it considered it necessary that the architectural project for the recovery and transformation of the space was preceded and oriented by the construction of a “social vision”, that is, an idea of how it will and should function, the types of activities it will be able to host, and of the synergies and connections with the territory within which it will be a driving force. K-City is therefore curating, together with the Foundation, the process of building such a social vision, according to a tried-and-tested model of a "social building site" to be placed alongside the “physical building site”, in order to nourish and enrich it. This participatory process (ongoing) is generating a high level of ownership on the part of the community, which has been visible from the first months of operation.

- Supported the **strategic and operational growth** of several civil society organizations active in the area and made small grants.
- Sponsored a **student exchange program**. Every year, 20 young people between the ages of 15 and 17 residing in the municipality of Varano de’ Melegari and in the town of Speedway (Indiana, USA) get a scholarship - 10 in Italy and 10 in the United States - for a two-week intercultural exchange program: a unique experience to get to know a different culture and make new friends, a journey to set out to discover a new country and grow as a citizen of the world. This program has been going on for several years in the community and, with the establishment of the Foundation, was incorporated into it.

However, this is just the beginning and much more is to be done.

### II. Research Focus

Fondazione Caterina Dallara is a newborn community foundation with ambitious long-term goals: playing a leading role in the community, becoming an agent of transformational change in the valley and revitalizing the local area. The path to get there will be challenging but nevertheless (or precisely because of that) extremely stimulating. The question is: how to face this path in an innovative, efficient and participatory way?

Community foundations around the globe have adopted diverse models, which they have adapted to suit the local contexts of the communities they serve and the vision of the institutions that contributed to their establishment. In this paper, I explore and compare different strategies and practices adopted by community foundations around the world, with the aim of identifying those which are applicable to Fondazione Caterina Dallara, keeping in mind the context in which it operates (inner areas) and the features of the community it serves. The research findings, action points and research recommendations will be gradually implemented by Fondazione Caterina Dallara, with the aim of reaching its long-term goals and becoming a model for other community foundations.

Given the broad scope of the research question and the limited time available, the paper focuses on three topics most relevant to the stage the Foundation is in now:

1. The importance of strengthening civil society organizations;
2. Youth participation, with an eye toward intergenerationality;
3. The role of the space as community builder.
III. The Importance of Strengthening Civil Society Organizations

“Just as a city’s physical infrastructure crumbles over time if it is not maintained, so it is with nonprofit infrastructures. While the signs of erosion are rarely dramatic in one year, prolonged neglect will ultimately result in their total breakdown – and in the collapse of the programs they operate. Nonprofits are essential to the well-being of our citizenry; the need to strengthen their organizational capacity cannot be ignored. Grantmakers, because of their unique relationship with nonprofits, are well-suited to help build their infrastructure.”

(Joyce Bove & Lawrence Mandell, introduction to Strengthening New York City Nonprofit Organizations: a Blueprint for Action)

In today’s rapidly changing and challenging environment, there is considerable concern that civil society organizations (CSOs) may lack the capacity and technical expertise to keep up with change and that will ensure they can contribute to an enriched and healthy quality of life. Many small, community-based groups are organizationally and strategically fragile. Many large groups are stretched to their limits. As demand for community-based services grow, as new needs are identified, and as new paradigms for exchange and interaction emerge, the nonprofit sector is continually challenged to devise ways to increase and strengthen its capacity.6

Community foundations have a vested interest in supporting efforts to improve the capacity of CSOs. If CSOs function effectively, grantmaking dollars/euros can be leveraged beyond the impact of any one grant. In a landmark article published in the Harvard Business Review, Michael Porter and Mark Kramer point out that “foundations can create still more value if they move from the role of capital provider to the role of fully engaged partner, thereby improving the grantee’s effectiveness and organization. The value created in this way extends beyond the impact of one grant. It raises the social impact of the grantee in all that it does and, to the extent that grantees are willing to learn one from another, it can increase the effectiveness of other organizations as well.” 7 Such investment, therefore, not only contributes to the sustainability of the organization - that is, its ability to operate once the grant dollars/euros are no longer available - but also enables CSOs to serve the community more effectively8.

“Some grantmakers hesitate to fund capacity building because they see it as paying for basic institutional infrastructure needs, and that’s not what they want to invest in. It’s like how people understand the need for traffic lights and roads, but they don’t want to pay for that. They want to pay for their luxury car.”


For the purpose of this paper, “capacity building” refers to activities that strengthen an organization and help it better fulfill its mission. Capacity building efforts include: referrals, publications, training, convening, peer exchanges, one-on-one consulting, new equipment and staff, facility purchase and renovation. Capacity building can occur in virtually every aspect of the organization, including programs, management, operations, technology, human resources, governance, financial management, fund development, and communication.

6 De Vita, Carol and Fleming, Cory (2001). Building capacity in nonprofit organizations, The Urban Institute, p.5.
Capacity-building activities in philanthropy are wide-ranging. For example:

- A community foundation pays for the service of a consultant to help a local CSO with board development and strategic planning;
- A CSO obtains a grant from a community foundation to support the purchase of computer software and hardware for improving its financial information systems;
- Another CSO is invited by a foundation to participate in a capacity-building grantmaking initiative through which it receives both direct financial support and technical assistance in a number of management areas – with help coordinated through an intermediary organization;
- Sometimes capacity building focuses on assisting other philanthropies, which in turn fund and serve the nonprofit community (for instance, a community foundation receives support from a private foundation to both build its asset base and improve its management structure; the community foundation then sets up and staffs its own management service program in order to offer capacity-building services to CSOs in its geographical area).
- A recent survey from Grant-makers for Effective Organizations found that 65% of foundations in the United States provide some type of capacity-building support to grantees, through investments in such areas as leadership development, fundraising capacity, evaluation capacity, communications, and technology. Some foundations, like the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation and the Deaconess Foundation, have it as a core strategy; others, like California’s Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund, either have specialized capacity-building grant initiatives or programs in-house; and still others provide funding for local management support organizations.

Three main types of capacity-building activity, each of which may be conducted either by the sponsoring community foundation directly or by a third-party provider (sometimes with assistance from - the CSO itself), are:

1. **Assessment** - Effective measurement of the organization’s current needs and assets, and its readiness to undertake the kinds of internal changes capacity building will require, is essential to designing and implementing a capacity-building effort. The nonprofit management field has produced some useful tools for initial assessment, such as the Drucker Foundation Self-Assessment Tool for Nonprofits, with its five questions all nonprofits should be able to answer. Major capacity-building initiatives such as the James Irvine Foundation Youth Development Initiative, DeWitt Wallace Readers Digest Fund Management Initiative, National Arts Stabilization Fund, and Local Initiatives Support Corporation have created assessment procedures for use with the CSOs they support.

2. **Intervention** - Capacity building typically involves one or more of the following three types of interventions:
   - management consultation, usually focused on process issues such as staff-board conflict or building a good strategic plan;

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9 Grantmakers for Effective Organizations (GEO) is a coalition of grantmakers committed to building strong and effective nonprofit organizations. Today, GEO has members representing 350 grantmaking organizations, and more than 600 foundation staff attended its last conference.
- training, usually involving small group seminars or classes, in which staff or board members learn specific skills that improve their ability to run the organization;
- technical assistance is a more hands-on, site-based process in which active support to a project, program or problem-solving process is provided to the CSO.

As Christine Letts, William Ryan and Allen Grossman set forth in *High Performance Nonprofit Organizations: Managing Upstream for Greater Impact*, the results of capacity building, coupled with the nonprofit's internal efforts, can be seen at three levels: (1) improvement in the capacity of the organization to do what it already does (program delivery capacity), (2) improvement in the organization's capacity to grow (program expansion capacity), and (3) improvement in the nonprofit's ability to sense needs for change, and respond to them with program improvements or innovations (adaptive capacity). All three are needed to produce high performance levels over time.

3. **Direct financial support** - Capacity may also be enhanced by providing CSOs with financial support in three categories:
   - core operating support, providing general funding that is not earmarked for any specific purpose but simply to enable the organization to do what it does. According to Carola Carazzone, Secretary General of Assifero and Vice President of Philea, "investing in the organizational development of grantees is essential to ensure their capacities and capabilities, strengthen their sustainability, and retain the best talent. It is key to achieving the mission. General operating costs are not the enemy. Instead, they are pivotal to attaining it. Different foundations across Europe are moving towards this approach and are collecting evidence to make a solid case."[12]
   - specific grants to fund equipment purchase, facilities construction, etc.;
   - working capital, often in the form of loans with favorable repayment terms to meet both short-term and long-term financial needs. Just as one example of the latter: Italian CSOs often struggle to stay afloat because the government agencies or other institutions that support them do not pay promptly (they usually provide grants after projects are completed), and having access to very low-cost capital sometimes can make the difference in whether or not a CSO can continue to exist.

Arts & Culture Philanthropy provides some particularly interesting examples of how direct financial assistance can build capacity. For instance, both the Pew Trusts and the James Irvine Foundation have dedicated significant grant-making resources for arts organizations judged to be exceptionally well-managed leaders in their respective fields, to provide them with increase financial stability and opportunities to grow further.[13]

Building the capacity and strengthening community-based organizations and the nonprofit sector is not a simple task. There is no magic formula that guarantees success, and little agreement exists on where to begin or what to do. However, the most effective capacity-building programs sponsored or operated by community foundations all over the world tend to be:

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• **Comprehensive** - CSOs can access a range of assessment services, technical assistance, financial aid and other kind of support.

• **Customized** - capacity-building services are custom-tailored to the type of organization, its community environment, and its place in the "organizational life cycle" (young, start-up nonprofits are likely to have very different needs than more established organizations).

• **Competence-based** - offered by well-trained providers (for example, foundation staff or external expert consultants).

• **Timely** - the most effective capacity building happens in the balanced space between "too slow to be relevant" and done too quickly to allow the flowering of an intervention in a complex context.

• **Peer-connected** – providing opportunities for peer-to-peer networking, mentoring and information sharing. Indeed, the organizations and their leaders accumulate an enormous wealth in social innovation, experience, methodologies and strategic relationship with stakeholders: sharing knowledge and experiences is vital to the sector and accelerate learning cycles.

• **Assessment-based** - begin with a thorough assessment of the needs and assets of the CSO and the community in which it operates, which in turn drives the types of capacity-building services provided.

• **Readiness-based** - occurring when the organization is ready to receive this specialized kind of service (for example, the nonprofit is not in the midst of a major crisis, and thus unable to benefit from the intervention at that time).

• **Contextualized** – occurring in the larger context of other strengthening services the organization is receiving, other activities of the sponsoring foundation, and other elements of the current community environment.¹⁴

Based on fifteen years of experience with the members of the network and conversations with nonprofit leaders, Lori Bartczak – Director of Programs at Grant-makers for Effective Organizations - believes that by taking an approach that is **contextual** (tailored to the unique needs of CSOs), **multiyear and continuous** (taking the long view, because organizational transformations will not happen overnight), and **collective** (considering how the parts add up), community foundations are well positioned to provide capacity building support in ways that effectively support CSOs to achieve lasting impact.¹⁵

Another key element is **co-creating solutions with stakeholders**, keeping in mind that they are often the experts in a particular field.¹⁶ A common criticism of capacity building is that it can feel paternalistic. And this is more likely to happen when community foundations make assumptions about what CSOs need and design services without CSO input. Capacity building should be grounded in two-way conversation between community foundations and CSOs: nonprofit leaders know best the context of their work and what types of support are likely to make the biggest difference; on the other side, community foundations should seek out these insights and engage CSOs in the design of capacity-building approaches.¹⁷

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¹⁴ De Vita, Carol and Cory Fleming (2001). *Building capacity in nonprofit organizations*, The Urban Institute, pp. 33-36.


¹⁶ Informal conversation with Vittoria Burton, Consorzio Copernico & former President of Fondazione di Comunità del Canavese, 28 October 2022.

Now that we have seen what are the features of effective capacity building programs, I illustrate some examples – coming from all over the world - that have all or most of the characteristics detailed above, and can provide insights for other community foundations.

Comunalia, Mexico
Comunalia, the Alliance of Community Foundations of Mexico, has the mission to strengthen the community foundation movement, leading Mexico towards a model of development that is sustainable, equitable and participatory. Even if not specifically directed to CSOs, the training program Comunalia offers to community foundations may provide good food for thought. Indeed, as highlighted by Minerva Zamora – project coordinator at Comunalia - “we cannot give grants if the organizations are not able to manage them and make the best of it.”

Comunalia, before building a training program, carries out a diagnostic evaluation of the community foundation (each program is custom-tailored). During the first few years of Comunalia’s work, the evaluation was based on an honest and transparent conversation with the community foundation; in recent years, Comunalia has developed – with the help of an expert - a small survey and a self-evaluation form, the results of which are discussed with the community foundation to define priorities and adapt the training to its needs. The objective of the training, which is very practical, is to provide participants with a ‘toolbox’ to use in their everyday activities (from communication, administration and fundraising to gender equality, climate change and sustainability).

The idea behind the training is to create a sense of community among the participating members of the Alliance. While some topics are indeed taught by outside professionals, others are taught by community foundations that are experts in that subject, giving them an active role, promoting peer to peer mentoring and embracing a non-paternalistic approach to capacity building.

Instituto Comunitário Grande Florianópolis (ICOM), Brazil
ICOM is a community foundation in southern Brazil with the mission to promote community development by mobilizing and supporting donors and CSOs.

The Foundation offers free consultancies to CSOs because, according to Mariane Maier – member of ICOM advisory board - “we recognize that both people who want to make a difference, as well as ethical and transparent institutions, need to be encouraged, known, and strengthened”.

The objective is to help CSOs in strengthening their organizational identity, management, governance, impact results, partnerships and sustainability through free and online sessions with experienced professionals (both staff of the community foundation and external consultants). In 2021, ICOM provided 52 consultancies, for a total of about 55 hours. The most explored themes were project development, legal consulting and fundraising.

In addition to one-on-one consultancies, ICOM organizes Café Sociais, online workshops that seek to address latent themes relevant to CSOs. In September 2021, for example, the Café Social – coordinated by a psychotherapist - focused on the responsibility of CSOs’ leaders to dialogue with empathy and build psychologically safe environments.

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19 Informal conversation with Minerva Zamora Domínguez, Project coordinator, Comunalia, 27 October 2022.
20 Informal conversation with Mariane Maier Nunes, ICOM Advisory Board, 28 October 2022.
Brooklyn’s Community Foundation, USA
Brooklyn Community Foundation is dedicated to the borough’s community, with a specific focus on racial justice and community-led change. Throughout the year, the community foundation provides free trainings, support, and other opportunities for CSOs across Brooklyn.

It is worth mentioning the Incubator Project: over an 18-month period, the Foundation helps build the capacity of three-to-six emerging, innovative organizations working in Brooklyn. Those selected receive: a seed grant of $5,000 to for legal fees, web development, meeting and travel costs, and other start-up costs; rent-free co-working space, use of conference room; fiscal sponsorship support by the Foundation; participation in peer support and a learning community with fellow Incubator cohort members; access to convenings and opportunities to connect with grantees and connections to interested donors and potential funders; workshops and customized capacity building opportunities.23

Corporativa de Fundaciones, Mexico
Corporativa de Fundaciones, a community foundation active in Jalisco, supports CSOs in improving their effectiveness, efficiency, professionalism and transparency through FORTA, Programa de fortalecimiento institucional. As underlined by Franco Paco Gabriel - project coordinator at Corporativa de Fundaciones - “having strong CSOs allows us to generate a greater impact on the population, and thus address and solve different social problems.”24

The community foundation provides an assessment-based, comprehensive and continuous training to CSOs active in the territory focused both on basic topics (such as strategic planning, fundraising, communication, administration) and innovative topics (such as sustainability, gender and inclusion, community development). The community foundation has created a database of consultants, who are expert in different subjects and provide training to CSOs.

Before starting with the training, the community foundation establishes a transparent and open dialogue with CSOs to understand their ‘state of health’ and areas of improvement. To this aim, they have adopted a diagnostic tool: the organizational capacity assessment (OCA). OCA is a structured tool – developed by USAID and then adapted to the local context - for a facilitated self-assessment of an organization’s capacity, followed by action planning for capacity improvements. The OCA addresses seven areas of organizational capacity: governance and legal structure; financial management and internal control systems; administration and procurement systems; human resources systems; program management; project performance management; organizational management and sustainability. The OCA format helps the organization reflect on its processes and functions, and score itself against benchmarks, which are measured again after the end of the training and monitored over time. Based on discussions with the community foundation and the scoring, the organization shapes and sets priorities for actions it can take to strengthen its capacity.25

CivSource, Uganda
CivSource-Africa is an independent advisory organization that seeks to refine the practice and footprint of philanthropy in Africa, for authentic civic engagement. CivSource supports local CSOs through the following activities:

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24 Informal conversation with Franco Paco Gabriel, Project Coordinator, Corporativa de Fundaciones, 21 October 2022.
• Connect them with organizational development experts and/or coaches who support and strengthen their effectiveness;
• Conduct organizational capacity assessments to understand organizational health and support the process of identifying capacity areas and required interventions;
• Provide opportunities for CSOs to learn from each other through processes that facilitate peer learning and mutual support.\textsuperscript{26}

BrazilFoundation, USA (with a small office in Brazil)
BrazilFoundation mobilizes resources for ideas and actions that transform Brazil, working with local leaders, organizations and a global network of supporters to promote equality, social justice and economic opportunity for all Brazilians.

BrazilFoundation, acknowledging that most CSOs require more than financial resources to carry out their proposals effectively, carries out a capacity building program. The Foundation offers workshops tailored to CSOs’ profiles in strategic planning, financial management, fundraising, communication, leadership development and collaboration. Many CSOs report how the workshops led to improvement in staff morale, greater confidence in conducting programs, development and outreach efforts.

In addition, the Foundation runs a leadership exchange program to fund visits between project leaders, promote peer to peer mentoring and knowledge exchange.\textsuperscript{27} The reach of their small grants is magnified by targeting replicable projects.

Conclusion
Community foundations want to support local CSOs in having the greatest impact possible; and capacity building – in whatever form – is a key means of achieving that end.

Capacity building, to have an impact, must be comprehensive, customized, competence-based, timely, peer-connected and assessment-based. The only way to build capacity building programs with these characteristics is through an open, transparent, non-paternalistic and trust-based relationship with CSOs. CSOs and communities need to be more actively involved in setting the agenda for capacity building and in evaluating its outcomes: capacity-building programs, indeed, provide real opportunity for community foundations-CSOs partnerships and for sharing of power.

\textsuperscript{26} https://www.civsourceafrica.com/whatwedo, last accessed 31 October 2022.
\textsuperscript{27} https://www.brazilfoundation.org/programs-supported/#menu-technical-support, last accessed 7 November 2022.
IV. Youth Participation

The right of the child to be heard
Article 12, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

1. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child. 2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.

It is now more than 30 years since the right to be heard was introduced in the almost universally ratified UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Article 12 of the Convention – the right of the child to be heard – is a fundamental value and a unique provision in a human rights treaty: it addresses the legal and social status of children, who, on one hand, lack the full autonomy of adults, but, on the other, are subjects of rights. Paragraph 1 assures, to every child capable of forming his or her own views, the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting him or her, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with age and maturity.

Since the adoption of the Convention in 1989, considerable progress has been achieved at local, national, regional and global levels in the development of legislation, policies and methodologies to promote the implementation of Article 12. A widespread practice has emerged in recent years, which has been broadly conceptualized as “participation” (although this term itself does not appear in the text of Article 12). According to the Committee on the Rights of the Child’s General Comment n. 12, “this term has evolved and is now widely used to describe ongoing processes, which include information-sharing and dialogue between children and adults based on mutual respect, and in which children can learn how their views and those of adults are taken into account and shape the outcome of such process.”

However, according to Gerison Lansdwn – a well-known international children’s rights specialist – “there is still a long way to go before attitudes change sufficiently to acknowledge that children not only have the right to have their voices heard, but they have a serious, substantial and essential contribution to make in understanding the nature of their lives, the challenges they face and potential solution.”

Alison Body – Senior Lecturer in Philanthropic Studies & Social Policy at the University of Kent – in a recent Philea report on child and youth participation in philanthropy argues that: “philanthropy plays a fundamental role in civil society, with children and young people globally being one of the most common beneficiaries of philanthropic gifts. Yet children’s voices are all too often absent from

28 Committee on the Rights of the Child (2009). General Comment n.12, The right of the child to be heard (CRC/C/GC/12), p. 3.
philanthropic conversations and decision-making: we frequently ignore their role as current social actors and, importantly, as active members of the philanthropic ecosystem”.

Prof. Body identifies three main arguments – interconnected and overlapping – for engaging children in philanthropic decision-making and actively cultivating their philanthropic citizenship:

1. **Not involving children and young people in philanthropic decision-making is counter-intuitive to cultivating their philanthropic citizenship.**
   Indeed, children and young people across the globe regularly display a multitude of formal and informal philanthropic behaviors. As well as providing vital support for many worthy causes, the hope is that engaging children in philanthropic acts helps develop “habits” of giving that stay with them throughout their lives.

2. **Traditional, non-participative engagement of children and young people in philanthropic activities can perpetuate the very inequalities and inequity we seek to address as a sector.**
   It is not possible to solve social issues and build a just society without drawing together all parts of the philanthropic ecosystem to help change the system itself. As experts of their own lives and own experiences, children are an important part of this ecosystem, as active beneficiaries, donors, advocates, volunteers and social actors, and thus need to be invited to be part of the problem solving, along with other marginalized communities.

3. **The active and meaningful participation of children and young people in philanthropic decision-making does not just benefit those children and young people who participate, and of course the outputs of philanthropy, it benefits philanthropy itself.**
   Research consistently highlights the benefits of children and young people’s active participation in philanthropic decision-making, including: increased volunteering and giving; heightened awareness of social problems; greater commitment to ideas of social justice and equality; strengthened philanthropic knowledge and skills; increased leadership skills, empathy, teamwork and public presentation skills; and greater community engagement. A small handful of studies have shown the longer-term effects on children and young people who have participated in student philanthropy and participation programs, including volunteering up to two-and-a-half times the rate of the general population and serving on non-profit boards at three times the rate of the general population. More generally, this benefits the community as a whole.
   In the eastern Europe and post-soviet countries context it is also a means of changing the experience of society writ large: indeed, the rejection of the old system in 1989 supported the paradigm of individualism and this resulted, unintentionally, in a suppressed concern among people for the community or common good. Involving young people in philanthropy, therefore, is a way to bridge this gap.30

“Working with youth will be like a stone thrown into a pond; the ripples keep expanding far beyond or time and place, far beyond our ability to measure or perhaps even envision...”

(Russell G. Mawby, former CEO, W.K. Kellogg Foundation)

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Youth philanthropy is a growing movement and initiatives can be found worldwide *inter alia* in schools, churches, nonprofit organizations, local government and community foundations. Traditionally, most of these initiatives – shaped by the local context, history and traditions – provide opportunities for young people and adults to work together, gain mutual knowledge and skills, promote volunteerism and philanthropy. For the purpose of this paper, I will examine youth engagement initiatives established and/or hosted by community foundations.

Among community foundations all over the world, it has been popular to promote youth philanthropy through **grantmaking practices**. However, it is important to stress that the full positive impact of these initiatives go beyond being a mechanism to distribute financial support: they can influence peace building, increase cultural sensitivity and understanding, nurture citizenship and philanthropy, encourage entrepreneurship and reinforce personal development.

The terms **Youth Advisory Committee (YAC) and Youth Bank (YB)** are used interchangeably, the former more commonly used in the North America, the latter in Europe and elsewhere. A YAC/YB is a group of young people, typically aged 14 – 25, who encourage positive community-based activity amongst their peers by awarding grants to groups of youth (to enable them to fund their ideas and initiatives) or to local charities/CSOs. The size of the grants is typically in the range of $100 to $5,000. The young grant-makers work as a committee taking all decisions collectively. They determine which issues are most pressing locally by establishing the focus, themes and priorities of the grant-making programs they manage. Equally, it is the youth grant-makers who decide which projects gain their support, having themselves managed all publicity, assessment and administrative aspects of a transparent selection process.

To enable this grant making process to take place, in addition to a group of young grant-makers, the following is required:

1. A local host organization, such as a community foundation, interested in nurturing youth participation. This organization has the role of providing practical support to a YAC/YB committee for administrative and logistical matters;
2. Suitably experienced personnel from an organization or an adult advisor – such as community foundation staff, teachers, CSO staff – with the necessary insight, knowledge and understanding of youth-led grant-making to provide young grant-makers with capacity building and personal development training and offering information, advice and guidance;
3. A donor or donors (usually the community foundation) to provide the initial grant allocation funds and the infrastructure support costs (such as travel, printing, training) associated with running a YB/YAC;
4. Willingness to let young grant-makers take the lead (supporting, but not directing them).31

There are many good examples of YACs/YBs all over the world. It is worth mentioning:

- The **YB initiative**, led by the **Community Foundation for Northern Ireland**, established in 1999. Northern Ireland underwent a prolonged period of violent internal conflict lasting over three decades. The Community Foundation for Northern Ireland has sought to play a part in the process of peace building necessary to forge a just, stable, and prosperous future for all the people of the region. Through YBs, young people from different sides of the conflict

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engage with each and deepen their knowledge of the aspirations, culture and perspectives of peers from communities other than their own through the grant making process.  

- The Winnipeg Foundation’s Youth in Philanthropy (YiP) program (Canada) – launched in 1999 – is a leadership development initiative for local high school students. The program gives high school students first-hand experience with philanthropy and community development; it also brings new and valuable perspectives to the Foundation, while empowering youth as decision makers and leaders. Each participating high school forms a student-led committee that oversees the allocation of $5,000 in grants to local charitable organizations. Committee decide how to allocate grants, keeping in mind that no grant can be more than $1,000 and grants must be made to registered charities that primarily benefit the citizens of Winnipeg. The program is run in Winnipeg high schools and each takes its own unique approach to grantmaking with a distinct set of values and priorities. The school-based model allows the program to reach youth from a variety of socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, regardless of their academic achievement.

According to a YiP participant, “YiP has opened up doors that many of us have never thought about walking through. It opened up our minds and or hearts to do something that will put a smile on another person’s face. This program teaches students not only a lesson of charity, but one of compromise, empathy and determination”.  

From 1999 to 2004, approximately 1,000 Winnipeg high school students have participated in the program, making 450 grants to a broad spectrum of local charitable organizations and distributing approximately $335,000 in grants.  

According to a YiP grant recipient, “I am aware of the profound impact that exposure to the philanthropic sector is having on the hundreds of young people involved. The true value of the program will unfold years from now as many of these young people take on leadership roles in their communities in the future”.

- Similar programs are also run by Ripley County Community Foundation (Indiana) and Berks County Community Foundation (Pennsylvania).

- According to the most recent data from the Council of Michigan Foundations, more than 1,500 young people across Michigan serve on 86 YACs. Each YAC is a subcommittee of a community foundation with a permanently endowed youth fund. They are composed of youth members aged 12-21 who engage in leadership development and community service, and review and allocate grant dollars to local nonprofits’ efforts affecting youth. In total, Michigan YACs’ endowment fund assets exceed $62 million. More than $40 million in total grant dollars have been given by YACs in Michigan since 1989. The top three reported issue areas for YACs include: depression, mental health and suicide; stress, anxiety and pressure to succeed; bullying.

- The YB in Armenia is hosted by the Eurasia Foundation. The program arose from the awareness that there were limited opportunities for youth in Armenia to gain the skills

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32 For more information: [https://www.youthbankinternational.org/about](https://www.youthbankinternational.org/about).
35 For example, the Garden City Collegiate, in 2005, has allocated grants to the following charities: Alzheimer Society of Manitoba, Canadian Cancer Society, Canadian Diabetes Association, Pregnancy Crisis Centre, Mothers Against Drunk Driving, Winnipeg Pet Rescue Shelter.
38 For more information on the YAC of Berks County Community Foundation: [https://bccf.org/yac-grants/](https://bccf.org/yac-grants/).
39 [https://www.michiganfoundations.org/people/youth-philanthropy](https://www.michiganfoundations.org/people/youth-philanthropy), last accessed 8 November 2022.
needed to become active members in their own communities. Poor education, high unemployment rates and a lack of extra-curricular opportunities have made it difficult for youth to exercise their potential to work, study and participate as active citizens in their communities. In 2006, grant-making took place and 28 youth-led projects received funding (such as a youth café, carpet making training, a young people’s newspaper, computer and English language courses for young people with disabilities). These examples demonstrate the quality of the ideas and applications received and their valuable impact on the local community.

“If you are driving through Dilijan and see the painted and ‘happy’ trash-bins with ‘smile’ signs, or if you are visiting Armavir’s little zoological garden and see the space cleaned, with rocky trash-bins and painted benches, or if you notice a little nice playground in Byureghavan village of Kotayq, hidden among dusty neighborhoods, you will know these are a few examples of hundreds of small projects that YB committees have supported in the villages of Armenia with the help of thousands of volunteers”.

- **Brooklyn Community Foundation** is giving some of the borough’s youth the power to decide how it donates its money. In 2022, sixteen YAC members (ranging in age from 16 to 22) helped select the dozens of nonprofits that received a share of $2,5 million in grants from the Foundation. These nonprofits serve young people in Brooklyn, promoting youth leadership and youth justice, and most of them are led by people of color. The process gives a greater voice and power to the young people who have lived the issues that these nonprofits are trying to address.

- **The Foundation Mozaik’s YB program** (Bosnia and Herzegovina) was modeled on the Northern Ireland YB. Through the implementation of projects worth up to KM 1,500 (€ 750) and concrete work on improving their communities, young people acquire leadership and practical skills while each step forward builds their self-confidence and enthusiasm for new work endeavors. The Foundation has an ongoing relationship with over 300 youth, who work as coaches and provide support to other young people in the process of applying for and implementing projects and microbusiness.

In addition to the more traditional models of YACs and YBs, we find **teen giving circles**.

A giving circle – which can be hosted (or not) by community foundations – is a form of collective giving that brings a group of people with shared values together to collectively discuss and decide where to make a pooled gift. Giving circles support with their dollars, but they also build awareness and create a sense of belonging to the local community.

A group of teenagers in Tucson, for example, is making the difference in their community by running **100+Teens Who Care**, a giving circle (192 young members) on a mission to donate $2,500 to a local charity every three months. “One reason we started this group is that if you donate $25 to a nonprofit by yourself, it doesn’t seem very meaningful because there isn’t much a charity can do

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40 [https://epfarmenia.am/project/youthbank](https://epfarmenia.am/project/youthbank), last accessed 8 November 2022.
42 [https://mozaik.ba/programs/?lang=en#youth-bank](https://mozaik.ba/programs/?lang=en#youth-bank), last accessed 9 November 2022.
43 For more information and examples: [https://philanthropytogether.org/directory/?q=teen](https://philanthropytogether.org/directory/?q=teen).
44 [https://whatisagivingcircle.com/?__hstc=149378729.37ea63ced76a4d9aa36b90c33b31e3a0.1667928047047.1667928047047.1667946548189.2&__hssc=149378729.2.1667946548439&__hsfp=16920353](https://whatisagivingcircle.com/?__hstc=149378729.37ea63ced76a4d9aa36b90c33b31e3a0.1667928047047.1667928047047.1667946548189.2&__hssc=149378729.2.1667946548439&__hsfp=16920353), last accessed 8 November 2022.
with just $25. If you pool it with $25 each from a group of like-minded teens, you can make meaningful change,” said Lily Messing, 16, founder of the group.

Every teen member donates $100 annually ($25 for each quarterly meeting) and 100% of the donations are given to a selected charity. At each meeting, three vetted local charities are randomly selected for consideration. During the quarterly meetings, the member who nominated the charity makes a brief presentation about why it should be chosen; after the presentation, members get the chance to ask any questions. Then, anonymous voting is held and the charity with the most votes receives the combined $25 from each member ($2,500 from 100 teens). The selected charity is invited back to a follow-up meeting to share the impact of the donation received.45

According to Sara Lomelin, founding CEO of Philanthropy Together, “giving circles are civic engagement incubators”.46 In a giving circle, people are eager to learn about the cause, they create a community with each other and engage beyond the dollar. Moreover, according to research of the University of Nebraska at Omaha, the University of Indiana and the Forum of Regional Associations of Grantmakers, giving circles’ members are highly engaged in their communities, they increase their knowledge of community needs and gain a better understanding of the nonprofits that operate locally, as well as the issues these organizations face.47

In my personal opinion, these features — combined with the adaptability of giving circles to a wide variety of contexts48 — make this grass-root model of youth engagement particularly interesting for community foundations (no matter what their size) all over the world.

Given that community philanthropy is much more than money, creative ways to empower and engage with youth beyond grantmaking are emerging all over the world. Art plays a fundamental role in this. Here are two examples, but many more can be found:

- Since 2017, the Anouk Foundation (Switzerland) has run the Art4Impact program in partnership with the Swiss Centre for Affective Sciences at the University of Geneva. The program invites children and young people – aged 6 to 16 – to submit drawings that are reproduced on the walls of a hospital by professional artists. In addition to the call for submissions directed to the youth, an essential aspect of the project is the intergenerational nature of the jury selecting the winning drawings that is composed of young people, art therapists, emotional specialists and artists. The jury selects the art pieces with the highest potential to improve the emotional well-being of hospitalized children, their families and the

45 [https://100teenswhocaretucson.org](https://100teenswhocaretucson.org), last accessed 8 November 2022.
47 Eikenberry, Angela M., Jessica Bearman, Hao Han, Melissa Brown and Courtney Jensen (2009). The impact of giving together: giving circles’ influence on members’ philanthropic and civic behaviors, knowledge and attitude, University of Nebraska at Omaha, Public Administration Faculty Publications 42, pp. 1-67.
48 Giving circles vary widely in size, structure and grantmaking operations. Smaller, informal groups often rely on a loose, unincorporated structure that utilizes volunteers to manage group’s grantmaking. As circles grow in size and ambition, some have incorporated as foundations and hired professional staff. Other have retained their structure and instead align themselves with a local community foundation (this alignment helps them obtain assistance in management and administration, among other things).
health workers involved; the drawing that gets the majority of votes is then turned into a mural with the help of the patients and the youth participating in the contest. According to Vanessa von Richter, co-director of the Anouk Foundation, “it is very impactful for the children whose drawings were selected to see them realized on the walls: they can feel just how much their creativity is being appreciated as the mural is realized; the project gives children a voice and a possibility to engage in the community”.50

• Berks Community Murals (Pennsylvania, U.S.) has the mission to design and fabricate works of public art in collaboration with the community to beautify neighborhoods and build new community relationships. Community-based art focuses on the shared encounter between an artist-coordinator and the community and, through a participatory process (from conception to realization), ultimately results in strengthening the community involved.

The mural ‘Por Que Vinimos’ (Why We Came), for example, is located in a community garden and was created with a core group of students whose migrant families work in agriculture.

49 For many children and families, indeed, the hospital is a source of fear and distress: a reassuring, and often therapeutic, mural allows children to cope and daydream, and can support more empathetic and positive interactions.
As described in the website of Berks Community Murals, “Pedro and Stacy – the youth in the murals – are brother and sister and they are posed as though they are working in the garden. Pedro takes a break from his work to look out at us, and Stacy holds up something she has just picked out of the garden (the world). The hibiscus flowers reflect tropical home countries of many of the core group of students and the garden gate is open and looks out onto Reading, their new home.”

Another exciting example is ‘Do One Thing’, a bi-national collaborative mural inspired by the theme of sustainability. Nearly 700 students from Japan and the United States participated in the project through researching and acting on the small changes individuals can make in their lives to influence more mindful use of our natural resources. The work is housed in Berks County Community Foundation’s Community Conference Center.
According to Michael K. Miller - coordinator of Berks Community Murals - “collaborative public art could transform and engage with the lives of people in local neighborhoods. Youth learn the importance of public art in the fabric of a community as they worked to design, fabricate and install projects in schools, parks and neighborhoods”.  

The added value of intergenerationality

Let’s always keep in mind, when building youth programs, the added value intergenerationality can bring. When older adults contribute to the well-being of youth, it cultivates a sense of purpose and extends benefits both ways, according to a new Stanford report. Such relationships are important for society: on one hand, they can help ensure that children and teens receive the kind of attention and mentoring they often lack, especially among the most vulnerable populations; on the other hand, they also offer older adults opportunities to learn about new technology and trends, and experience the excitement of seeing the world through a younger perspective.

Laura Carstensen, Director of the Stanford Center for Longevity, affirmed that “contrary to widespread beliefs that older populations consume resources that would otherwise go to youth, there is growing reason to think that older people may be just the resource children need.” Carstensen’s prior research has found that as people age, their brains actually improve in many ways, including in complex problem-solving and emotional skills. “It is a huge loss for society not to offer such counsel and experience to others, especially young people,” she said.

The aging population has “distinctive qualities to meet the needs of youth. […] Older adults are exceptionally suited to meet these needs in part because they welcome meaningful, productive activity and engagement. They seek – and need – purpose in their lives.” As for older adults, the report pointed out, they benefit as well, experiencing emotional satisfaction in relationships with young people. One way to achieve such contact is through volunteer service, which is associated with better physical health and cognitive performance for aging people. From a societal view, these interactions are positive, too.
“Focusing volunteer efforts on young people improve their (young people’s) chances of success in life,” Carstensen said. “These mutual benefits are perhaps the most compelling reason for programs that connect young and old.”

Conclusion

The organizational diversity and the different ways to engage with youth found in this section prove that no community foundation is too big or too small, too young or too old, to embark on the journey of youth participation. Philanthropy provides a meaningful and adequate space for children and young people to explore social, environmental and political issues in a proactive, empowering way. When serious investment is made to take youth’s views seriously and build significant opportunities – why not, together with older adults – to have a voice in their communities, the outcomes can be astonishing.

V. The Role of the Space as Community Builder

Community spaces understood in the broader sense as spaces available for the community, play a very significant role in the social life of all communities. They act as a shared resource that serves the public in organizing themselves and where shared values and experiences are created. These spaces have many benefits: offer opportunities to socialize, learn and access key services; spread awareness of and give value to various cultures; give opportunities for building bridges, meeting, exchanging ideas and interacting; support community projects; encourage creativity and culture; offer educational opportunities; provide volunteer opportunities. All these activities ultimately strengthen the community and create a sense of ownership.

In this last section of the paper, I explore the extent to which community foundations promote community spaces or other types of shared physical spaces, starting from the belief that space – if conceived and used properly - plays a crucial role in building and/or reinforcing communities all around the world. Below are some examples of community foundations that have worked and experimented with the space in this light.

Ahmedabad Community Foundation (India) – Sarkhej Roza

Sarkhej Roza comprises one of the most elegant and unique architectural complexes of the city of Ahmedabad. It is an example of the early Islamic architectural culture of the region, which fused Islamic stylistic influence from Persia with indigenous Hindu and Jain features to form a composite “Indo-Islamic” architectural site.

The Ahmedabad Community Foundation (ACF) has been working since 2001 at the Sarkhej Roza, as part of its mission to promote cultural heritage and strengthen the various and fragmented components of the community living around the area. Indeed, the people living in Roza are mainly migrants – coming from different areas, professing different religions, having diverse customs and traditions – who came and settled around the complex at different points of time, not always living in harmony.

As part of ACF’s efforts to involve the community of Ahmadabad in the development of the area, consultative meetings have been held since 2005 to get ideas from local people.\textsuperscript{54}

One of the most important achievements of ACF was to bring the monument back into public memory – indeed, it used to be sparsely attended, if not abandoned – through various cultural and inter-religious events, such as the Heritage Week, the national Mushaira (poetic symposium), the Sufi Festival and Urus celebrations (Muslim) and Janmashtami celebrations (Hindu).

\textsuperscript{54} \url{http://www.acfindia.org/community-involvement.html}, last accessed 11 November 2022.
Moreover, the banks of the lake were converted into public gardens, which are now extensively used by both the local Muslim and Hindu community. For three consecutive years in the monsoon season, the community foundation has involved the community living around the complex in planting, to create sense of ownership and strengthen the various components of the community itself. The complex also hosts a library and an educational center for children living around the Roza. A local community initiative, facilitated by the ACF, is active in the vicinity of the monument: the Sarkhej Roza Crafts and Women’s Collective is an effort to create livelihoods for women living around the monument, making souvenirs and craft products which are inspired by the design motifs found within the precincts of the monument.55

The example of Sarkhej Roza shows the crucial role played by the space in fostering inter-faith dialogue and conciliating different components of the community, as necessary steps toward reducing “otherness”. Acting together, taking care of the cultural heritage, bringing a space back to life - through *inter alia* arts, community plantation efforts, educational center, women collective, library - are endeavors which unify residents as people and as a community.

**Collaboratory (Florida) – Collaboratory**

Collaboratory, formerly the Southwest Florida Community Foundation, renovated in 2018 the old Atlantic Coast Line Railroad depot, an abandoned space, and turned it into a hub “where ideas for social and economic change can be born and developed and where the people working on them can be connected and try to solve the issues affecting our community together.”[^56] The building – which has the same name as the Foundation - hosts the headquarters of the community foundation and coworking, meeting and event spaces available for free for local CSOs, local businesses and local leaders.[^57] The space is a laboratory of collaboration created with the aim of connecting innovators and problem-solvers to one another and with the community foundation.

Collaboratory, moreover, is one of the most efficient green buildings in Florida: 99,45% of stormwater from the building runoff is retained on-side through permeable pavers and low-impact design features that allow water to filtrate (rather than flow off the site and into water systems); energy footprint and costs for operating Collaboratory are about one-half of that of a conventional office building in South Florida because of a highly efficient air conditioning system.^[58]

[^56]: Informal conversation with Jason Teeters, Nurturing Lead, Collaboratory, 4 November 2022.
Teple Misto Community Foundation (Ukraine) - Urban Space 100 & Promprylad

Teple Misto Community Foundation facilitated the development of a social restaurant in Ivano-Frankivsk. Founded by a group of Ukrainian entrepreneurs, the restaurant sought to unite a community around a common cause by reinvesting most of its profits in social projects aimed at the city’s development. To fund it, they persuaded 100 local friends and acquaintances in Ukraine to donate $1,000 each, underscoring the importance of peer-to-peer fundraising. In the process, they turned a dependency mentality into a self-supporting communal investment.

Eighty percent of the restaurant’s profits is spent exclusively on implementation of social projects for Ivano-Frankivsk. Projects supported include a training course for city staff aimed at increasing acceptance of people with disabilities, a city bike race, reproductive health classes for teenagers, a family picnic day, children’s IT education programs and much more. The idea has been replicated in Kiev.59

The community foundation also joined a broader group of donors to restore an abandoned factory, Promprylad. One of the vital issues for Promprylad was the urgent need for the innovative use of (post)industrial areas that have lost their economic role, and for the creation of a space available for the growing local communities (due to internal migration in Ukraine) and the active social categories (artists, activists, social entrepreneurs). The abandoned building now hosts a coworking space, conference rooms, craft and art workshops, exhibition hall, galleries, cafe, farmers ‘market, offices of innovative companies and partner organizations, educational and children’s spaces.60

The project of revitalizing this industrial area was the ideological continuation of the public restaurant Urban Space 100 experience, which sets a good example of strengthening the community around a space.

59 https://warm.if.ua/en/projects/urban-space-100
https://rightscolab.org/case_study/urban-space-100/


The headquarters of Berks County Community Foundation, that host a Community conference center, was the first green office building in the Greater Reading area. The building has the highest level of certification awarded by the U.S. Green Building Council. During construction, the community foundation produced a television show, blog posts, and other educational outreach to teach people about green buildings.

The community conference center – composed of two classrooms, a board room and a casual sitting room - provides free meeting space to nonprofits, which saves those organizations thousands of dollars per month in rental costs. The center is considered a neutral space where difficult
conversations can occur between people or groups who are in conflict and, at the same time, reinforces connections between the community foundation and CSOs and among CSOs themselves. Moreover, the center made it possible for the Foundation to expand its programs to include trainings for CSOs and host giving circles. The community foundation also houses and runs a Jump Start Incubator, which cultivates new small businesses and helps them to flourish.⁶¹

Even if this lies outside the parameters of the discussion, it is worth mentioning Berks Nature, a great example of a local CSO (grantee of Berks County Community Foundation) that built a nature center for the community. The space hosts the headquarter of the organization, an eco-camp, urban gardens, a nature preschool where children spend around 75% of their time outside, and classroom spaces for environmental education.⁶² As Kimberly J. Murphy – President of Berks Nature – explained, “we bring many children from the inner city of Reading to the park for field trips. In many cases these students might not have experienced a close relationship with nature. So, getting them into the creek, letting them see wild animals in the park like deer, fox etc. is life changing.”⁶³

ICOM (Brazil) – Social Innovation Support Center
The Social Innovation Support Center (CAIS) is an ICOM initiative – inspired by Canada’s Centre for Social Innovation and supported by the Inter-American Foundation - that offers space and free services to CSOs, social entrepreneurs, students, researchers and social investors.

ICOM, through CAIS, makes available spaces and infrastructures (such as internet and telephone, workspaces, meetings areas, event rooms). The reservation, made through an online form, is free of charge for activities of public interest.  

Brooklyn Community Foundation (USA) - Community room & urban gardens

Brooklyn Community Foundation’s community room is a 450-square-foot meeting space with audio-visual accommodations available to nonprofit and community organizations for one-time events at no cost. The free rental of the space also includes access to the Foundation’s kitchen and other amenities.

As for the outdoor space, Brooklyn Community Foundation and Green Guerrillas have engaged both youth and seniors to grow community gardens in underserved New York neighborhoods and they are making a big impact. Indeed, urban farming adds and preserves green space in cities, and by providing places for neighbors to come together, strengthens bonds, and builds community cohesion. Urban agriculture connects people with the earth and the source of their food, as well as with each other. Moreover, urban farms offer critical opportunities for youth leadership, intergenerational collaboration and cross-cultural learning.

66 Green Guerrillas (Brooklyn) uses a unique mix of education, organizing and advocacy to help people cultivate community gardens, sustain grassroots groups, grow food, engage youth, and address issues critical to the future of food justice and urban agriculture. For more information: https://www.greenguerillas.org
Ameropa Foundation & Kamwokya Christian Caring Community (Uganda) - Kamwokya community center
The Kamwokya community center is the result of a partnership between the local CSO Kamwokya Christian Caring Community (which runs sports, leisure, and artistic activities in Kampala) and the Ameropa Foundation (which works internationally on projects that aim to improve the lives of marginalized communities).

The project's goal is to maintain and enhance the public and free character of the site: the playground provides a more conducive space for the activities already happening on site, such as sports training and matches, spontaneous gatherings, community events, workshops, music, and dance classes. The entire project is raised on a platform - featuring an efficient drainage system to protect it from recurrent floods during heavy rains - divided into distinct areas to allow multiple activities to take place simultaneously. On the platform, two buildings house a small gym, an internet café, various multi-purpose rooms for classes and workshops, a music studio and an office. Beyond its practical function, the project aims to transform the community by becoming a source of inspiration and pride that in turn create a sense of agency and ownership.⁶⁸

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Fundación del Empresariado Yucateco A.C., FEYAC (Mexico) – Centro Cultural Comunitario Mercedes Pérez Salas

FEYAC is a community foundation working in the state of Yucatan. Between 2015 and 2016 they renovated an abandoned and unused building – often the victim of vandalism - located in one of the poorest areas of the city of Flamboyanes, and established the Centro Cultural Comunitario Mercedes Pérez Salas in partnership with the public sector, the private sector and the Jesus Presbyterian Church.

The most interesting thing about the center is that the community actively participated in the renovation of the building through volunteer work and self-build workshops: this process has created such strong sense of ownership and belonging that the center is now totally self-managed by local CSOs and grassroot groups and is no longer subject to vandalism.

The space hosts recreational, artistic and cultural activities, job training workshops in partnership with local companies, music and dance courses, and primary health care activities. \(^\text{70}\)


\(^{70}\) Informal conversation with Cristóbal Fernández Navarro, Coordinator PICIP Flamboyanes (FEYAC), 7 December 2022.
Self-build workshop: painting the exterior walls

Volunteer work
Conclusion

The above examples cannot be more diverse, but they have been selected precisely for that. They tell us about community foundations of different sizes, located on every continent, from the most developed to the poorest, and spaces created, managed and used in the most diverse ways.

So, what do the Sarkej Roza, a restaurant, a community hall, an abandoned factory and a disused train station have all in common? All these places have in common that communities have been built around them and with them. Community foundations all around the world must therefore recognize the important role that space plays in strengthening and reinforcing the community they serve, and come up with the most creative solutions to make a place much ‘more than a place’.
VI. Lesson for Fondazione Caterina Dallara (...and Beyond)

Before concluding by outlining specific lessons learnt from the paper’s focus on strengthening CSOs, youth participation, space as community builder, which can be applicable to Fondazione Caterina Dallara, I would like to make a few general remarks.

In the course of the CUNY Emerging Leaders International Fellows Program I had the opportunity to explore, reflect, compare and learn about a variety of strategies and approaches adopted by community foundations all over the world; moreover, the practitioners, academics and fellows I had the privilege to meet during this ‘journey’ stimulated, provoked and challenged me with questions and reflections which I will treasure.

Here are some of the lessons I take home with me and which I hope also can be of help – like beacons in the night – to those who will read this work:

- To solve the complex issues that typify the world we live in, community foundations have to find new ways to address them, be creative and flexible, ready to make mistakes and learn from them. Community foundations, not depending on annual fundraising campaigns, are able to take a long view of community well-being and they are well-positioned to address thorny issues and to take risks.

- For years we have tried to solve social problems (hunger, poverty, school dropout, inequalities, mental health, violence against women etc.) in silos, as if they were disconnected from one another. However, they are all connected. As highlighted in an informal conversation with Jason Teeters from Collaborator, “a great part of our work as community foundations is all about understanding the tangled webs that connect all of the problems we want to solve, recognizing that addressing all of them together is the only way we will ever solve any one of them.”71

- Community foundations can have impacts beyond those tied to their ability to make financial grants:
  - An essential contribution they can bring to a non-grantmaking role is their knowledge base. They not only bring knowledge of their local community, but also bring a knowledge base that can draw from the diversity of the sectors/groups that the foundation is in regular contact with (inter alia business, non-governmental, administrative, public). The greatest asset of a community foundation is not the size of its endowment, but its knowledge of community and the ability to use and share this knowledge for positive change (knowledge-driven approach).
  - Where there is a local infrastructure of CSOs and other agencies/institutions, the non-grantmaking role of community foundations may be simply ensuring that one organization is aware of what another is doing (role of communicator). At other times this could require helping organizations understand and reconcile differences (role of bridge builder).

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If there are issues or challenges that need to be addressed, and where no other organization is stepping forward to take that role, the community foundation may provide that type of leadership (role of advocate).

“The freedom to agitate and irritate is a unique joy and challenge for community foundations [...] Being a community foundation puts us in a good spot to serve the community. It keeps us from pursuing flights of fancy on behalf of some individual or individuals who might be influential – a disease that frequently afflicts private foundations. On the other hand, it challenges us to take on issues that are difficult as a way of proving our ongoing relevance to the community.” (Kevin Murphy)  

Other tangible resources that community foundations can bring to a non-grantmaking role include time, staff and board-member capacity, and identifying other individuals and organizations that have an interest in an issue. With its links at all level of society, a community foundation can play an important networking role. It can build bridges between individuals and organizations that might not otherwise meet, and break down negative perceptions and stereotypes.

- Working with the community - including people of all ages, colors, abilities, beliefs and imaginations - should be at the heart of our work as community foundations. The most effective foundations go beyond listening to actively sharing power in order to co-determine the best interventions with their grantees and the communities they are part of, which are closest to the sticky problems community foundations are working to address (participatory approach).

We now come to the three specific topics covered in this paper.

The role of the space as community builder – lessons learnt

Community spaces play a crucial role in building and strengthening the community. Unfortunately, we do not have many examples of community foundations that have interacted with the space in this light.

Given the above, Fondazione Caterina Dallara should document the various steps of its current ‘Let’s build community places together’ project and measure the impact of the whole participatory process, to share its experience and raise awareness among other community foundations on the role of the space as community builder.

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72 Murphy, Kevin, “The freedom to agitate and irritate is a unique joy and challenge for community foundations”, paper shared with Berks County Community Foundation Board.
The importance of strengthening CSOs – lessons learnt

- “Foundations can create more value if they move from the role of capital provider to the role of fully engaged partner, thereby improving the grantee’s effectiveness and organization. The value created in this way extends beyond the impact of one grant. It raises the social impact of the grantee in all that it does and, to the extent that grantees are willing to learn one from another, it can increase the effectiveness of other organizations as well.” (Porter, Kramer, 1999)

- Cultivate relationships based on transparency, dialogue, trust and mutual learning.

- Measure without judgment each organization’s current needs and assets, and its readiness to undertake the kinds of internal changes capacity building will require. Don’t push them to do something they are not ready for.

- Co-create capacity building programs with CSOs: don’t be paternalistic. Capacity building, indeed, should be grounded in a two-way conversation between community foundations and CSOs: nonprofit leaders know best the context of their work and what types of support are likely to make the biggest difference; on the other side, community foundations should seek out these insights and engage CSOs in the design of capacity-building approaches.

- Keep in mind that capacity building, to be effective, must be comprehensive (CSOs can access a range of assessment services, technical assistance, financial aid and other kind of support), multiyear and continuous. Taking the long view is key because organizational transformations will not happen overnight.

- Provide general funding that is not earmarked for any specific purpose but simply to enable the organization to do what it does.

- Create a database of consultants who are expert in different subjects and may provide the training to CSOs. Keep in mind that, in some cases, the organizations themselves are the experts.

- Provide opportunities for peer-to-peer networking, mentoring and information sharing. There is nothing better than creating a network of organizations that learn from each other and work together.
Youth participation – lessons learnt

- Youth are entitled to be active agents in their own lives: they are capable of expressing a view, and have a right to do so. Clearly, youth philanthropy provides an avenue for youth to express their views in a meaningful way.

- Among community foundations all over the world, it has been popular to promote youth philanthropy through grantmaking practices. The most prominent and successful examples are Youth Advisory Councils and Youth Banks. In addition to the more traditional models, we find teen giving circles.

- The impact of these grantmaking initiatives goes beyond being a mechanism to distribute financial support: they can influence peace building, increase cultural sensitivity and understanding, nurture citizenship and philanthropy, encourage entrepreneurship and reinforce personal development.

- Community foundations are much more than their grants. When engaging with youth, be creative! Collaborative public art, for example, can transform and engage with the lives of young people in local neighborhoods. Youth can learn the importance of public art in the fabric of a community as they work to design, fabricate and install projects in schools, parks and neighborhoods.

- Do not forget the added value of intergenerationality: youth can learn a lot from the elderly and vice versa.

As for Fondazione Caterina Dallara, it may be premature to think about setting a Youth Advisory Council (because of the time, expertise and human resources required), but it might be a possibility to consider for future, when the structure is more solid. A teen giving circle, on the other hand, might be a good starting point.

As for the student exchange program with the town of Speedway, Fondazione Caterina Dallara should find new ways to involve youth and their families in a participatory and meaningful way (for example, giving them an active role in the planning stage; getting kids from previous exchanges involved as mentors etc.).

Works of public art in collaboration with CSOs and the community represent a good practice that Fondazione Caterina Dallara should explore, by integrating these initiatives – which create a strong sense of ownership - in the participatory process towards the design for the construction of its headquarters.
Annex II – Let’s Build Community Places Together: The Outdoor Space
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Informal conversations

Paco Franco Gabriel, Project Coordinator, Corporativa de Fundaciones, 21 October 2022.
Amy Streator, Executive Director, Ripley County Community Foundation, 25 October 2022.
Jalil Guadarrama, Director Operativo, Fundación Comunitaria Malinalco, 26 October 2022.
Minerva Zamora Domínguez, Project coordinator, Comunalia, 27 October 2022.
Vittoria Burton, Consorzio Copernico & Fondazione di Comunità del Canavese, 28 October 2022.
Mariane Maier Nunes, ICOM Advisory Board, 28 October 2022.
Daniele Giudici, Fondazione Comunitaria Nord Milano, 31 October 2022.
Heidi Williamson, Chief Strategy Officer at Berks County Community Foundation, 2 November 2022.
Jason Teeters, Nurturing Lead, Collaboratory, 4 November 2022.
Kimberly J. Murphy, President, Berks Nature, 16 November 2022.
Cristóbal Fernández Navarro, Coordinator PICIP Flamboyanes, FEYAC, 7 December 2022.