

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE EVALUATION
COMMISSIONED BY THE
ROOTS AND WINGS
FOUNDATION

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H O L O .



INTRODUCTION

Commissioned by the Roots and Wings Foundation (R&WF), Gábor Héra, sociologist and researcher at [HOLO](#), has conducted an evaluation of the Foundation's Community Foundation Support Programme. This study summarizes - as an abstract of a longer report - the main lessons learned from the evaluation. The participants below supported the research work by taking part in 18 interviews and 6 group interviews:

- » Individuals and groups applying for the 2019 call titled "What Is Your Superpower?" With the call, the R&WF targeted those who wanted to work together with others for the strengthening and development of their community. The program was aimed at creating community foundations; the Roots and Wings Foundation meant to contribute to this process by providing financial and professional support.
- » During the evaluation process we visited people with whom lasting and genuine cooperation had been developed. At the same time, we also involved people who had applied for the call but with whom contact was soon lost.
- » Individuals and groups with whom the R&WF got into contact in March 2018, and with whom genuine collaboration was developed during 2019.
- » Community foundations already established; that is, the trustees and co-workers of the Ferencváros Community Foundation (FCF) and the Pécs Community Foundation (PCF).
- » Partners supporting the FCF and the PCF.
- » Organisations supported by the FCF and the PCF.

The evaluation process did not focus on the effectiveness or impact of the program as a whole. Instead, in agreement with the R&WF we wanted to find out:

- » whether the values and principles represented by the Roots and Wings Foundation have been integrated into the approach and work of the above-mentioned actors,
- » what motivating factors have facilitated working together, and what difficulties and challenges the stakeholders have identified,
- » what impact (at the individual, organisation or community level) community foundations and the collaboration with the R&WF have had according to the interviewees.

The study presents the main results by target groups.

APPLICANTS FOR THE 'WHAT IS YOUR SUPERPOWER?' CALL

With some of the applicants for the 'What Is Your Superpower?' call, no mutual commitment or the development of a common workflow has been reached in the end; mainly because of (1) aversion to the concept of community foundation, (2) lack of associates, partners, (3) lack of time and capacity.

Nevertheless, with a number of applicants genuine cooperation has been developed.¹ During the evaluation, these actors stated that the **values and principles represented by the Roots and Wings Foundation were important to them and were to be followed.** In addition, getting to know the Foundation has proven to be both reinforcing and encouraging to them, according to their feedback. This is primarily due to the fact that the stakeholders have come into contact with an organisation that identifies similar problems and sets similar goals; the feeling of 'we are not alone' has increased as a result. Their feedback confirmed that this has contributed to building a commitment to community foundations and to the strengthening of openness towards their neighbourhood and the local community.

Among the **IMPACTS OF COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS**, the following key features are to be highlighted:

- » The **sense of belonging to the community** becomes stronger. In fact, thanks to the community foundation, '*we are together and help each other,*' and through the strengthening of personal relationships, isolation and individual vulnerability are reduced.
- » An operating model **capable of responding to local needs** becomes available. According to the stakeholders, a community foundation can respond locally to problems that are perceived locally, and not defined from the outside or above. Thanks to local level organising, transparency increases and corruption and lobbying interests cannot prevail.
- » Community foundations can be **a viable alternative** to a bureaucratic and inflexible funding system and politically driven funding decisions.

The work of those collaborating with the Roots and Wings Foundation, that is, **the establishment of community foundations, has been hindered by many factors.** These are summarized below:

- » **Lack of a team.** A typical difficulty was that the establishment of the community foundation was not undertaken by a dedicated, enthusiastic, inclusive and leader-type person. Some interviewees refused to undertake the related organisational tasks due to their (perceived) inability, while in another case the withdrawal of a person already identified as a leader destroyed the initial enthusiasm. In some locations, the lack of a supportive team of people thinking together with the leader has made organising work impossible.

¹ For this brief summary, with this group we have also included those participants who came into the view of the Roots and Wings Foundation back in 2018, but with whom meaningful cooperation only began in 2019, similarly to those applying for the 'What Is Your Superpower?' call.

- » **Knowledge and skills.** The (perceived) lack of fundraising skills has also proved to be a hindrance.
- » **Livelihood constrains.** Many people simply could not afford to be involved in setting up community foundations, taking away time and energy from their money-making activities.
- » The above difficulties have been exacerbated by some characteristics that are specific to the domestic **social and political context**. On the one hand, it is necessary to mention the unknown nature and novelty of the community foundation concept. On the other hand, it is important to stress the view that existence as a community foundation corresponds to a kind of oppositional attitude. This oppositional position is created, on the one hand, by the hostility towards civil society manifesting at the level of national politics. On the other hand, at the local level it is also reinforced by the attitude of local councils and other political actors that hinder and prevent bottom-up initiatives. It is believed that community foundations are hindered in their operation primarily because they can generate independent financial resources.

It is also important to report **ON THE MOTIVATING FACTORS** when it comes to working with the Roots and Wings Foundation. Among these are the following:

- » **The R&WF's organisational culture**, especially the way it cooperates with partners and the characteristics of mentoring. According to the feedback received, the foundation was able to provide personalized, understanding, responsive and effective support: working together was based on partnership and was inspiring.
- » **New innovative fundraising methods** made available to interested parties by the R&WF.
- » **Positive examples** such as the Live Crowdfunding and Swimathon events. Almost everyone reported the inspirational effect of these events, participating in which clearly reinforced the commitment of those involved. This could be inferred from the interviewees' vocabulary, as the stakeholders described their experiences using positive expressions such as *'I was sucked in by the story', 'I was astonished by what was happening there', 'I was enchanted by what was happening there', 'I was left from one admiration to another'* and *'It's important to be involved in this and you can do it with great satisfaction.'*

In this section, it is worth highlighting the two organising groups that have expressed their commitment through a letter of intent submitted to the R&WF (with one of them also applying to the court for registering a community foundation). In these locations, the organising groups were initially successful, with the person committed to the issue and the supportive/collaborative team sharing common values jointly deciding to establish a community foundation. Later, however, the initial momentum was lost due to the leader dropping out and the resulting acute lack of capacity. Thus, it was more difficult, or even impossible, for the groups to overcome newly emerging challenges, which ultimately prevented the establishment of community foundations in these locations.

FEEDBACK FROM COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS

The staff members of the Pécs and Ferencváros community foundations² gave a very detailed description of the values and principles associated with the R&WF. The list highlights the principles of work culture and collaboration that have become visible to the stakeholders through collaborative work. Staff members pointed to the existence of these values as the reason why a work culture of acceptance and support, a sincere atmosphere of trust, and a workplace of communal nature has been established in their case as well.

Based on the feedback, it can be said that **community foundations share the values and principles associated with the R&WF**. The discussions clearly have shown that, **in the work with the groups they support, community foundations follow the same pattern the R&WF represents**.

Regarding the **POSITIVE EFFECTS OF COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS**, the group identified two levels:

- » Regarding **the individual level**, there was most talk of the possibility of a change in attitude. After all, among other things community foundations have the potential to focus on activity in the face of apathy, helplessness and indifference. In doing so, they are capable of reinforcing the attitude of action, that is, *'If you don't like something, you shouldn't whine about it, you should change it.'* Some thought that the pursuit of independence and self-sufficiency also conveyed a message. According to this basic attitude, *'you don't have to connect to an existing system and accept its framework.'* Instead, you can create your own frameworks that give you autonomy, freedom and a sense of achievement brought about by creating those frameworks. Finally, it is worth mentioning the feedback that those who support the work of community foundations have an increasing commitment to their local community.
- » Regarding **the organisational level**, community foundation staff primarily drew attention to how the life of the supported organisations changes. Thanks to support being tailored to individual needs, their operation becomes more stable, their independence increases and their vulnerability is reduced. In addition, the model of community foundations can provide an organisational framework for actors who want to make a difference locally.

When listing **the CHALLENGES related to the operation and development of community foundations**, the actors involved in the evaluation talked about broadening their social base and donor base. In other words, many felt that the awareness of community foundations was still relatively limited. The circle of supporters often only covers the informal network of members in a given community foundation. At one venue, it was difficult for staff to participate in the Foundation's work

² The Térerő Community Foundation for Our City in Miskolc, also supported by the Roots and Wings Foundation, terminated its work in the first half of 2019 after several years of successful operation. At the time of the evaluation, Térerő was no longer operational, so they were not involved in the evaluation.

because of their other responsibilities. Due to the low number of paid staff and volunteers, the staff there has to face capacity problems. In this local community, the challenges of raising funds were also mentioned; experience has shown that it is difficult to reach and persuade donors. In addition, fundraising requires skills that members of the community foundation do not necessarily possess. At the other venue, the responsibility and workload entailed by the status 'first domestic community foundation' were also discussed. Another thing mentioned was the long-term impact of having a close relationship with the R&WF on sustainability and self-sufficiency.

Several **MOTIVATING FACTORS** were identified regarding the cooperation with the R&WF. In one local community, the characteristics of collaboration and mentoring have proved to be reinforcing. According to the feedback, the R&WF sought to establish a relationship based on partnership and trust, while the support it provided was tailored to the organisation's characteristics. In addition, stakeholders also found learning about efficient and innovative methods of fundraising to be motivating, all the more so because successful programs have been built on them. At the other venue, common values and a sense of collegiality were what proved to be decisive. The commitment to co-operation has been reinforced by the R&WF's courage and optimism. The material, professional and human support provided by the R&WF was an important motivating factor in both locations, since all this was essential for the operation and sustenance of the local community foundations.

FEEDBACK ON COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS

The evaluation also provided feedback from grantees, funders and other partners associated with community foundations. These actors typically attributed to community foundations the **same values and principles that the community foundations associated with the Roots and Wings Foundation. Thus, the R&WF was able to multiply and amplify its influence thanks to the community foundations involved.**

Individuals in this group mentioned a number **OF CHALLENGES in working with community foundations.** The most important ones were the following:

- » The grantees of the community foundations have undertaken fundraising tasks, making an effort to raise awareness of the issue/cause represented by the given organisation and increase the number of donations. Fundraising, however, was considered by many organisational staff as an **unfamiliar and unpleasant task.**
- » In addition, fundraising has often been done through so-called 'ambassadors'; that is, committed people who are familiar with, and close to, the organisation and are asked to campaign on its behalf by representing their cause. However, the **involvement of ambassadors** has held **difficulties** for several organisations.
- » Many reported on the **low awareness** of community foundations and their weak social base.
- » Due to this low level of awareness, there was a strong opinion that it was important

to reach out to actors who were not yet familiar with community foundations, yet could support initiatives in a variety of ways (financially, professionally, through volunteering, etc.). The need to reach younger age groups was raised several times during the interviews. From the aspect of the poor social base, an important observation made was that visibility of one of the community foundations should be increased through more frequent, targeted and professional marketing-based communication on online surfaces.

The participants of the evaluation identified a number of factors that had a **MOTIVATING** effect when it came to during working together:

- » First and foremost, **the personal and direct attitude of community foundation staff, their encouraging and sincere support**, and their commitment to **cooperation based on partnership** are worth mentioning.
- » In the circle of donors, meeting different **social issues and disadvantaged social groups** has typically reinforced their commitment to the community foundation model.
- » According to feedback, the **Swimathon** and **Live Crowdfunding** events are undoubtedly **successful**. They have been organised by community foundations professionally, and aversion to fundraising has ceased in the circle of the organisations supported. These actors described the programs as innovative, good-spirited and inspiring, which has increased organisational autonomy, reinforced a sense of belonging to a network, and strengthened the commitment and motivation of staff members.

As the evaluation has shown, there is a great deal of interest in setting up and running community foundations. Typically, those interested are motivated by an initiative that utilizes local resources, responds to local needs, is grassroots in nature, and propagates the power and activity of the community. However, the number of community foundations in Hungary is still low. For this reason, I consider it extremely important to present (while maintaining the existing support model) the model and the successful initiatives that are already in place, and to facilitate dialogue between those who are planning to set up community foundations and those who already run them. At the same time, it is important to involve and mobilise individuals and groups who understand and support the objectives of the R&WF but cannot (yet) assume the administrative and organisational tasks related to establishing a community foundation. In my opinion, this - as well as increasing the social base of existing community foundations - could guarantee the development of a community foundation network in Hungary in the years to come.