
Setting up a Community foundation for a sustainable local development strategy: insights from the **Messina community foundation in Italy**

Community Foundations showcase an organizational model having a strong potential to promote a sustainable local development strategy. Community Foundations are non-profit organizations which catalyse local and territorial resources to support practices and projects improving the life of the community on a stable and continuous basis.

In this regard, potential insights can be drawn from the experience of the **Messina Community Foundation**, which has been operating since 2010 in the Messina Municipality, in Sicily Island (Italy). This particular model of Community Foundation, in order to guarantee the sustainability of its human development policy, invests in productive economies with a constant entrepreneurial mindset in order to catalyse and promote self-sustaining systems and, therefore, multiplying its sustainability effect and social and economic impact.

The Experience

The Messina Community Foundation was born in 2010 in Messina (Italy) as a coordinating body of an already existing group of social economy actors and some of the main social, educational, institutional and scientific research networks of its territory as well as important national and international actors and networks to develop structured, socially cohesive and communitarian practices contrasting social inequalities and climate change. The objective of the Messina Community Foundation is to **deliver a permanent policy of sustainable human development** in Messina, and the broader Sicilian region (Southern Italy) which records lower income levels compared to the national average as well as a presence of rooted mafia criminal organizations and widespread corruption. The exclusive feature of this particular model of Community Foundation is that its approach goes beyond the classic function of collecting and disbursing local resources to the community's benefit. Rather, once it manages to collect resources, **the Foundation opts for strategic investments supporting local programs, projects and entrepreneurial activities providing them with the opportunities, means and funding to become self-sustainable and of generating, in turn, social and environmental impact.** Hence, the Foundation brings systemic change by generating, co-generating, re-gene-

rating and organizing territorial resources in innovative ways, enhancing the opportunities of the territory and providing new intervention models. As a non-profit organization working for the community welfare, the Foundation actively collaborates and partners with different types of actors ranging from the private sector, the public sector, the third sector and pastoral organizations: i.e., state and local public administration entities and institutions, clerical institutions, third sector organisations, cultural organizations, other financial institutions and foundations, universities and training centres, and international networks. Moreover, the Community Foundation interacts with multi-level stakeholders ranging from the local level, the municipality, up to the Italian ministerial level. It also carries out numerous technical and scientific collaborations with international universities and research centres. Indeed, the Community Foundation's role in fostering and enhancing local social and economic opportunities by favouring social cohesion and social inclusion contributes to supporting the community in acquiring social and transformative resilience.

The Messina Community Foundation acts by promoting community welfare models intertwined with sustainable development approaches aimed at the inclusion in society of those most in need, as well as to enhance and protect the environmental, historical and artistic heritage, and to promote scientific research in the interest of the community.

As such, it explicitly and concretely pursues and catalyses all SDGs through territorial and innovative solutions. However, the following SDGs are predominantly addressed and localized:



ROADMAP

Organizations interested in this model can rely on the following insights and recommendations concerning key phases, actors, resources and actions.

PHASE 0. TRIGGERING FACTORS

The experience essentially arises from a strong and shared bottom-up civil desire for redemption in relation to external events and for change of the status quo. In particular, redeeming collective and bottom-up action and a strong solidarity feeling among citizens prompted in response to the mafia criminal organisations activities in the territory. Hence, the Foundation aims at giving continuity to these social and political processes which aim at freeing the territory from distortive capitalistic logics and egotism which are also the basis of criminal organizations and reflect the dominant profit maximisation-driven economic model.

PHASE 1. ENGAGING AND CONNECTING COMMUNITY ACTORS

- Engage and connect actors and organizations in your local territory belonging to different sectors and fields of expertise which share (or have the potential to share) a common vision of sustainable human development.
- Make sure these actors and organizations have a strong common understanding of sustainable human development and shared core values and mission. Most importantly, makes sure these actors are willing to cooperate to pursue them.

PHASE 2. FORMALISING THE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

- Proceed with the formal constitution of the umbrella organization (i.e., a community foundation).
- Raise the initial funds necessary to carry out your programs and strategies to the community's benefit: search for innovative funding models in order to unlock new sources of funding (i.e., from the public sector) and/or prefer relevant external funders possibly providing more "flexible" funding, meaning not excessively restricted and allowing for a relative operational autonomy. However, in some contexts, the only available funds might be those granted by international cooperation organization (i.e., UN, World Bank). In that case, it is advisable to integrate in the Community Foundation's strategies and objectives which are also pursued by these organization so that it is more likely to obtain initial funding.

PHASE 3. POOLING RESOURCES TO START WITH STRATEGIC INVESTMENTS

- Manage to pool together a consistent amount of initial assets in order to start off with strategic investments.
- Invest the Community Foundation assets in revenue-generating initiatives being mindful of i) using the initial financial assets in order to carry out social economy-oriented strategic investments which, in turn, can guarantee a relatively stable and

longer-term sources of revenue; ii) opting for investments that are fully in line with the human development vision you are pursuing; opt for investments that can guarantee stable revenues over time and safeguarding your relative economic autonomy and non-overreliance on external funders/public funding/project grants.

- Draw from your partners' technical expertise and knowledge in order to design and deliver quality community development programs and activities

SUSTAINABILITY

- Continue to pursue economic and financial sustainability in all future interventions.
- Keep drawing from new multi-sector knowledge and expertise in order to maintain the capacity to structure innovative and articulated responses/interventions to solve changing and multi-dimensional territorial needs.

KEY DETERMINANTS FOR EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION AND REPLICABILITY

Actors and institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong internal heterogeneity and diversity of active and motivated local actors and networks: universities, research centres, social cooperatives, social enterprises, cultural centres,...
Social capital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong connection with the territorial community
Human capital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity to understand and govern the complex processes of change in a territory • Strong personal motivation of actors • Strong expertise and competences of actors
Economic resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic and mission-oriented financial investments: ability to transform stocks and assets into financial flows and relatively stable sources of funding guaranteeing economic, decision-making and operational independence

Value-added as a driver for sustainable human development and SDG localization

Community Foundations can represent a potential driving force for sustainable human development and SDG localization as they contribute to pursuing different purposes, such as:

1. spreading the culture of giving and responsibility towards the needs of a local context;
2. creating a participatory community institution, independent, autonomous and oriented towards concrete and locally relevant objectives, which guarantees efficiency in the collection as well as effectiveness and transparency in funding provision;
3. create a permanent common heritage destined, over time, to respond to the needs expressed by the local community.

The analysed model of the community foundation showcases, indeed, an interesting and virtuous system to implement a sustainable human development policy which goes beyond the classic function of collecting and disbursing local resources to the community's benefit. Rather, this model purposely and strategically **invests in productive economies with a constant entrepreneurial mindset in order to catalyse and promote self-sustaining systems and, therefore, multiplying its sustainability effect and social and economic impact.** Thanks to its sustainable approach, the Foundation experiments community welfare and environmental

protection models that are structurally intertwined with forms of civil and productive economy that feed on and generate social capital and opportunities for the most vulnerable social groups.

The community foundation model is, by its own nature, context-specific and its way of operating on a given territory can vary widely. For this reason, it has a high degree of replicability potential, provided that its organizational model well suits the local context and is tailored to a given community's needs. Moreover, the replication of this model in other context should build on the local presence of active and motivated local actors and networks (i.e., universities, research centres, social cooperatives, social enterprises, cultural centres) strongly motivated to set up an umbrella organization to coordinate and carry out a local policy for sustainable human development. In this regard, social capital and cohesion building as well as capacity building are key determinants for implementation. Furthermore, the model requires the existence of some legal form recognizing "community foundations" or similar models (i.e., philanthropic foundations) allowing for the collecting and managing of local assets and resources to the benefit of the local community. Hence, institution building, in terms of laws and legal frameworks development should be fostered.



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Local Action Group as a public-private partnership for rural development:
Insights from the Local Action Group Maiella Verde in Italy

Setting up a Work Integration Social Enterprise:
Insights from QUID Social Enterprise in Italy

Setting up a Consortium of Social Cooperatives:
Insights from the Consortium Sale della Terra in Italy

Institutional support to community regeneration:
Insights from the SIBaTer project in Italy

Local development strategies for inner and fragile areas:
Insights from the Milk Mountain strategy for the Emilian Apennines

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