

COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS IN SERBIA:

Bottom-Up Empowerment
The role, challenges, and
prospects for the development

Bojana Radovanović and Jelena Vasiljević



**Trag Foundation
Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory**

Belgrade, 2022

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Preface

The publication before you was developed under the Trag Foundation programme “Our Local Foundation – Community Has a Say!” which supports the establishment of community foundations in the Western Balkans.

Trag Foundation has been contributing to the development of community foundations since 1999, by supporting the associated citizens to bring about positive changes in their local environment by implementing initiatives in various areas. The long experience of working in the field has shown that every community - be it at the level of an apartment building, neighbourhood, or municipality - harbours some kind of local activism that contributes to building trust within the community and restores the feeling of collective and individual power to bring about changes in the immediate surroundings and ensure its progress.

With the number of formal and informal citizen associations applying to the Trag Foundation programmes rising by the year, it became clear it was necessary to ensure knowledge, space (physical, discourse, or digital), and resources to additionally support civic organising at the local level. Given the limited funding capacities of national and regional foundations as well as of international donors, Trag resorted to new models of supporting civic activism. Based on the research and the experiences of other countries, community foundations proved to be the most effective model of fundraising from individuals and businesses at the local level. Using the funds raised to support neighbourhood initiatives in their surroundings, they opened up the space for cooperation and engaged citizens in their work, thus enhancing their feeling of belonging, ownership, and accountability for the wellbeing of the community. The results achieved have motivated us to adapt the above mentioned model to our circumstances and transfer it to the communities in our region. This publication emerged from the hitherto work of the existing community foundations in Serbia and thanks to the engagement of people who have been working on the establishment of new community foundations with the support of Trag Foundation.

Aiming to bring the relevance of community foundations closer to academia and other relevant communities in Serbia, we established strategic cooperation with the Solid Care Lab at the very onset of the programme, to monitor the

development of local philanthropy in our region. The publication before you is the result of the research of broader and more specific operating contexts of the already established and the emerging community foundations, their basic characteristics, similarities and differences. Our work in the future will be guided mostly by the respondents' perceptions and the lessons learned which will significantly shape the next phases of the programme implementation in Serbia and in the Western Balkans.

These phases will be the subject of new research. Until then, I would like to use this opportunity to thank the authors, Bojana Radovanović and Jelena Vasiljević, and the entire team of the University of Belgrade, Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory Solid Care Lab and my colleagues, Aleksandar Weisner and Vjekoslav Vuković whose guidelines and comments have considerably contributed to the successful finalisation of the study. I would particularly wish to thank the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation whose unconditional support helped us build the movement of community foundations and thus contribute to the communities we are working in actually having a say in all those things that greatly concern them.

Marija Mitrović

Director for Philanthropy and Partnerships, Trag Foundation

Executive Summary

- A community foundation is an independent legal entity implementing local community development activities through provision of financial and other types of support to citizens' initiatives. There are seven such organisations operating in Serbia today - three of them have already been established and four in the process of establishment.
- The research project "Community Foundations in Serbia" was implemented in the period 1 June - 30 November 2021 to analyse and describe the operation of community foundations in Serbia, understand their role in empowering citizens to actively engage in shaping their immediate surroundings, and to present the challenges they face in their work, the problems beleaguering the communities which they operate in, as well as the prospects for further development of this form of social engagement.
- The research was based on different methods: 1) Desk research included the analysis of relevant literature on community foundations, the context relevant for the operation of community foundations in Serbia, and the secondary data on the seven currently active community foundations; 2) Field research included a survey conducted to gather data on the basic features of community foundations, and semi-structured group interviews conducted to gain a more in-depth understanding of the purpose and the role of community foundations, and of the views and opinions of the key people engaged in the foundations' work. The field research encompassed six foundations, two of which already established and four emerging ones.
- The COVID-19 pandemic will surely be remembered as the event in recent history that brought major challenges to individuals, families, communities, and the entire societies, and whose far-reaching consequences cannot be fully grasped as yet. The study shows the significant impact of the pandemic on the work of community foundations since it limits the opportunities for in-person meetings of community foundations' representatives with the citizens and their two-way communication. These circumstances have particularly hampered the operation of the emerging foundations, established amid the pandemic.

- Community foundations have been facing multiple challenges brought about by the present socio-political context in Serbia including degraded human development, growing social inequalities and high poverty rates. Our society is characterised by a general lack of trust of the citizens in, *inter alia*, the civil society organisations, as well as by the feeling of powerlessness to influence the situation in the society. However, a slight increase in the number of protests and civic initiatives observed following the extended period of stagnation in the domain of progressive civic activism in the past decade is encouraging. This trend showcases the desire of the citizens to get more actively involved in the social and political lives of their communities.
- The research shows that the total number of staff engaged in such foundations is proportionate to the small number of community foundations currently operating in Serbia. In 2021, 77 persons in total participated in the work of community foundations, including their staff, permanent and occasional volunteers. Community foundations predominantly rely on the work of volunteers (96.11% of persons engaged in the work of community foundations), those engaged on a permanent basis, as well as those occasionally engaging in the work of community foundations.
- In most cases, young men aged between 31 and 40 are the managers of community foundations, the majority holding a college or a university degree.
- Strategic decisions are made by permanent volunteers and/or foundation managers in the majority of cases, with the operational decisions being delegated to the persons coordinating specific activities.
- All the community foundations participating in this research have a defined mission, main orientation, and framework for action, and are successful in delivering most of their activities in line with this framework. When it comes to their area of action, all the foundations listed culture and arts; the majority of them stated the environment, education, and science; around half of them are active in the area of sports and recreation and infrastructure; one third in the domain of gender equality. Only one of the six analysed foundations stated one of the following areas: human rights, healthcare, and humanitarian activities. Based on the action areas of community foundations, it follows that they are more oriented towards development than humanitarian work.
- Most of the direct beneficiaries of the community foundations' funds are informal citizens' groups – civil society organizations for the majority of responding foundations. Almost one third of community foundations also directly support individual citizens. One foundation mentioned public institutions as direct beneficiaries of their funds. All the foundations cited all the citizens as potential end beneficiaries of the initiatives they support.
- One third of community foundations generated no income in the first six months of 2021, one third generated income ranging between EUR 1,001 and 5,000, whereas the budget of one third of them ranged between EUR 5,001 and 20,000. The sources of funding for most of the community foundations are corporate sector and national donor organisations, followed by citizens and international donor organisations. With respect to the funding challenges they face, the majority of the community foundations mentioned that they lack experience in fundraising, as well as scarcity of funds of the central and local governments allocated to financing of the civil society organizations.
- The founders and the representatives of community foundations believe in the proactive power of citizens provided they are secured framework, support, and the initial incentive, which they perceive to be their fundamental mission. Being strongly motivated to do something in and for their local communities, they devote their free time (these are mainly volunteers) to building community foundations.
- Asked about their own perception of the burning local issues, the respondents' answers pointed in two directions. On the one hand, they outlined specific infrastructure and other deficiencies affecting the poor quality of life in their local communities. On the other, and more often, they stressed the problem of apathy and lack of citizens' will to join forces and take action, sometimes pointing out the problem of their disunity and division on political or other grounds.
- Although lack of trust and apathy are seen as important barriers to association and action, the representatives of community foundations perceive their organisations as actors holding the power to restore the trust, of primarily citizens, in their own capacities and the power of joint action. The role of foundations that they are motivated to advocate for is to encourage

and empower people. This implies raising awareness among the citizens that they ought to learn to use their own resources, build accountability towards the community in which they live, and thus release the local civil sector of obligations they would otherwise have towards major donors, in case they were to be the only source of support to civic initiatives.

- Community foundations face challenges and obstacles. The key problem they are faced with is the lack of time and reconciling the work at the foundation with other responsibilities and jobs they have. One of the major challenges is related to the planning of sustainability of their development.
- The experiences of the community foundations' representatives testify about the strong transformational effect that mobilisation and joint work for the common good have on the citizens themselves. Once hope is awakened and results are achieved - irrespective of whether this "only" concerns reconstruction of a park or a public gathering space - an opportunity emerges for the snowball effect and the consequent conviction of citizens in their power to change their living and working environment.

1 Introduction

Local communities need support to address certain problems or achieve the desired goal. To a certain extent, they could get this support through government institutions. However, in order to bring about the desired changes, the initiative of the citizens and reliance on different sources of funding are often required. Community foundations have the power to mobilise and empower citizens to gather and shape their immediate surroundings pursuant to their joint visions and values. They are the link between the donors at the local level, and they channel funds towards the initiatives that make tangible changes in local communities possible.

The study "COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS IN SERBIA: Bottom-Up Empowerment - the role, challenges and prospects for the development" is the outcome of the research project "Community Foundations in Serbia". The project was implemented by the Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory via their Solid Care Lab, in partnership with Trag Foundation.

Trag Foundation is an organisation that supports community foundations in Serbia and in the region. The foundation launched the programme "Our Local Foundation – Community Has a Say!" in 2019 with the support of the C. S. Mott Foundation. The programme aims to support the establishment of community foundations in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Under this programme, Trag Foundation is looking for informal groups of minimum three people belonging to the same community. The selected groups of citizens are supported with mentorship and capacity building and tasked to raise an amount of EUR 15,000 from individual and corporate donors in their surroundings, which is then doubled by the foundation to ensure the initial budget for the provision of support to local initiatives. Trag first launched this programme in Serbia. Based on 28 applications from 17 communities, in early 2020, four groups were selected initially: from Niš, Pančevo, Stara Pazova, and Šabac (now forming the emerging community foundations). In addition, Trag Foundation has been supporting the existing community foundations for years.

Commissioned by the Trag Foundation to gain better insight about the outcomes of their efforts in developing community foundations and with the view to establishing a network of such organisations, this study offers the analysis

of immediate and broader contexts for their development, and seeks to identify their purpose and missions, capacities to reconcile numerous roles, and their ability and readiness to be the agents of civic activism and social change in their local communities.

Based on the survey, the study offers an insight into the basic characteristics of community foundations with respect to their structure and the number of people engaged, the budgets available, management and decision-making methods, on areas of activity, beneficiaries, sources of funding, and key challenges and problems. The specificity of the community foundations' work stems from their organic focus on local communities and their human and material resources. The founders and implementers of all the programmatic activities of community foundations are the citizens of the communities who often have extensive experience of engagement at the local level. This experience enables them to have a thorough understanding of the problems faced by their communities, the potential challenges and obstacles to a more active mobilisation and engagement of a broader group of citizens, as well as the vision about the ways to overcome such challenges and obstacles. This is why their voice is precious in understanding the conditions in which community foundations operate, and reflecting about the support strategies that would contribute to their more efficient role in strengthening civic activism at the local level in Serbia. Therefore, one of the important objectives of this study is to present the views and opinions of the founders and associates of community foundations in Serbia, as to gain direct insight into the projects and initiatives they have supported and/or implemented, the challenges they have been facing, either personally or with respect to their engagement in their local communities. In addition, we aimed to understand their personal motivation, values and views about life that made them opt for local civic engagement.

The study facilitates understanding community foundations active in Serbia, their role in empowering citizens to actively engage in shaping their immediate surroundings, and to present the challenges they face in their work, the problems beleaguering the communities which they operate in, as well as the prospects for further development of this form of social engagement. The conclusions it offers may be of relevance to the experts, academics and the general public.

2 What is a Community Foundation?

A community foundation is a foundation active in a specific geographic area such as a city, a part of it, a municipality, several municipalities, a district, or a region. A community foundation is an independent legal entity implementing activities focused on the development of a local community, through the provision of financial and other types of support to citizen initiatives.¹

Generally speaking, there are four basic purposes of community foundations:

1. Advocating for the needs and preferences of local communities.
2. Fundraising from a larger number of individual and corporate donors, mainly at the local level.
3. Management and distribution of funding for community needs.
4. Networking and building bridges among different groups within a community (Harrow, Jung & Phillips 2016).

The common features of community foundations are evidenced by their focus on:

- geographic areas;
- broadly defined missions;
- independence;
- relationship with people in the community in their governance and work;
- intention to generate and utilise a range of financial and other resources;
- provision of financial and other support (Bollhoff & Magowan 2021).

The first community foundation was established by Frederick Harris Goff, a lawyer-turned banker in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1914. (Harrow, Jung, and Phillips 2016). The underlying idea was for the foundation to emerge by pooling

¹ The literature in this area does not consider community foundations as foundations active in a specific geographic territory solely. In other words, community foundations are not exclusively defined by the territory. They may include a specific group sharing the same goals, interests, values, etc. In that sense, we can speak about the community of women, scientific community, etc, and about foundations focusing on the communities thus defined, also sometimes called community foundations. However, for the purpose of this study, the term "community foundation" refers solely to foundations operating in a particular geographic territory.

resources of a diversity of donors, and not only one or a few of them. It would be under the control of citizens' boards and managed by the appointed citizens' committees. Therefore, while financial experts at banks would continue to manage the trust, the appointed citizens' committees were to decide on their distribution (Daly 2008, Graddy & Morgan 2006, Harrow, Jung & Phillips 2016, Ostrower 2007, Thompson 2012).

The specificity of community foundations lies in their aspiration to reflect the will of the community and serve the needs of its members (Radovanović 2021). They provide the citizens with an opportunity to shape their immediate surroundings in line with their own ideas and visions, thus stimulating civic engagement (ibid.). This model quickly spread across the US. By late 1920s community foundations existed in most major American cities, and soon thereafter they emerged in Canada (Harrow, Jung & Phillips 2016).

Community foundations need to strike a balance between their own different roles (ibid.). On the one hand, they need to be donor-focused and guarantee that donors are well served, ensuring at the same time proper alignment of the donor interests with community needs. On the other hand, they need to be community-oriented and act as vehicles of, and for, community cohesion and empowerment, and a catalyst of positive social change. Empirical studies in the US have shown that the focus on donors, as a sustainability aspect and expression of orientation to servicing donors, represents a central concern in the majority of community foundations in this country (Gradi & Morgan 2006). Generally speaking, community foundations in developed countries rarely assume the leadership role in initiating political and societal changes (Harrow, Jung & Phillips 2016). However, for a "new generation" of community foundations, as demonstrated by the studies in Egypt, the story is quite different (Hodgson et al., 2012). As the majority of them operate in contexts implying reshaping the relationship between the citizens and the state, the focus of community foundations is actually on the community empowerment, support, and leadership on the road of societal changes.

3 Community Foundations in Europe

According to the data of the European Community Foundation Initiative-ECFI, there are 30 organisations today in Europe providing support to community foundations (Böllhoff & Magowan 2021). The results of the survey of European organisations supporting community foundations show that there are 875 active community foundations in 23 European countries, with at least 28 foundations emerging across Europe (ibid.).

Table 1. Community foundations in Europe

| | Year of the first community foundation establishment | Number of community foundations 2018 | Number of community foundations 2020 | Number of emerging community foundations |
|------------------------|--|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|
| Belgium | 2001 | 3 | 4 | 1 |
| Bosnia and Herzegovina | 2003 | 2 | 2 | 0 |
| Bulgaria | 2002 | 13 | 13 | 0 |
| Croatia | 2000 | 6 | 5 | 0 |
| Czech Republic | 1997 | 4 | 5 | 0 |
| France | 1997 | 57 | 57 | 0 |
| Germany | 1996 | 408 | 410 | 0 |
| Hungary | 2011 | 4 | 2 | 0 |
| Ireland | 2000 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Italy | 1999 | 37 | 44 | 8 |
| Latvia | 2003 | 9 | 8 | 0 |
| Lithuania | 2002 | 2 | 2 | 0 |
| The Netherlands | 2004 | 35 | 105 | 4 |
| North Macedonia | 2008 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Poland | 1997 | 27 | 22 | 0 |
| Romania | 2008 | 16 | 19 | 3 |
| Russia | 1998 | 70 | 80 | 5 |
| Serbia | 2013 | 3 | 3 | 4 |
| Slovakia | 1994 | 8 | 8 | 0 |
| Spain | 2000 | 8 | 8 | 0 |
| Turkey | 2003 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Ukraine | 1995 | 33 | 29 | 3 |
| United Kingdom | 1975 | 46 | 46 | 0 |

Source: Böllhoff A. & Magowan J. 2021. *State of the Community Foundation Field in Europe 2020*, European Community Foundation Initiative.

Table 1 shows the data on the year of establishment of the first community foundation in each of the European countries, their total number in 2018 and 2020, as well as the number of emerging foundations. It should be noted that the first community foundation in Europe was established in the United Kingdom back in 1975, while they started developing in the continental part of Europe in the 1920s and the year 2000 (Bollhoff & Magowan 2021). With over 400 community foundations, Germany is the country with the highest number of such organisations in Europe, while the lowest number of them is found in Ireland, North Macedonia, and Turkey - one in each. Despite not being presented in the Table, local philanthropic organisations exist in Denmark, Portugal, and Norway. However, their exact number remains unknown, given the ongoing discussions regarding their characteristics and criteria (ibid.).

The phenomenon of community foundations is quite new in Serbia. Compared to the European countries observed, Serbia was the last to get a community foundation - the first such organisation emerged in 2013 (ibid.). Still, this sector registered growth in Serbia in the past year, unlike the majority of the countries observed - in 2020, the emerging foundations were registered in only 8 out of 23 countries, most of them in Italy (8), in Russia (5), followed by Serbia and the Netherlands (4).

There are currently three community foundations in Serbia: “Step Forward Foundation” from Zaječar, “Obrenovac Youth Foundation”, and “Front Foundation” from Novi Pazar. In 2020, Trag Foundation supported four groups of citizens (from Niš, Šabac, Pančevo, and Stara Pazova) in their effort to establish foundations in their local communities under the programme “Our Local Foundation – Community Has a Say!”. Today they represent the emerging community foundations. The community foundation from Šabac dropped out of the programme during its implementation. However, it has been included in the analysis given that the thoughts about the reasons to opt-out may bring important insights about the operations of community foundations, the problems and the challenges they face.

4 Research Methodology

The project “Community Foundations in Serbia” was implemented in the period 1 June - 30 November 2021. The aim of the research was to understand the purposes and missions of community foundations, both the emerging ones and those already active in Serbia, their capacities to align their multifaceted roles, their ability and readiness to be the agents of civic engagement and social change in their local communities.

The specific objectives of this research are:

1. Understanding the context - the analysis of social, economic, political and historical context relevant for the establishment and work of community foundations in Serbia, as well as the analysis of the specificities of the local context these foundations operate in.
2. Understanding the *modus operandi* of community foundations by collecting and analysing data on the number of employees, the number of permanent and occasional volunteers, management, decision-making process, income levels, methods and sources of funding, areas of activity direct and indirect beneficiaries, etc.
3. Understanding the mission, purpose and role of community foundations: What are the missions and purposes of community foundations in Serbia?; Are they humanitarian or development-oriented?; How do they strike balance between serving the donors and the community?; What are the main obstacles they face?; Do they ensure alignment of the foundation purpose and the needs and visions of the local community citizens and how?; How do they define a community?; Do they seek to empower citizens to take a more active role in the life of their local community and how?; Are they the agents of social change? etc.
4. Understanding the motives, values and perceptions of key persons involved in the work of community foundations: What motivates people to establish/join a community foundation?; What are their values, perceptions and attitudes?; How were they affected by their engagement in the foundation? etc.

Different methods were used in this research:

1. Desk research included the analysis of relevant literature on community foundations; the analysis of socio-economic, political, and historical contexts relevant for the work of community foundations in Serbia; the analysis of secondary data on the seven currently active community foundations, based on their available statutes and websites.

2. Field research

The research aimed to cover the entire population of community foundations - all the seven foundations: those that were already established (three foundations) and the emerging ones (four groups of citizens) during the project implementation period. All of them were invited to participate. Six foundations took part in the field research (of which, two existing and four emerging ones), thus accounting for 85, or 71% of the population, respectively.

- **A survey** was conducted to gather data on the basic characteristics of community foundations. The questionnaire used for data collection included 22 questions, covering several thematic areas: *Basic data; Governance and decision-making; Areas of action and beneficiaries; Funding.* Data collection *via* an online survey was conducted in the period 1 August - 15 September 2021. These questionnaires were completed by the community foundations' representatives - managers or permanent volunteers.
- **Semi-structured group interviews** were conducted to ensure a more in-depth understanding of the purposes and roles of community foundations, as well as to bring the views and opinions of key people engaged within foundations to light. The interviews were structured to cover seven different thematic sections: *Organisation and structure of foundations; Goals and mission of foundations; Perception about the local community problems; Personal motivation; Cooperation; Perception of challenges and issues; Vision for future action.* Applying the methodological procedure of semi-structured interviews, we interviewed twelve representatives of six community foundations: three representatives from Obrenovac and Stara Pazova, two from Pančevo and Niš each, and one interviewee from Šabac and Novi Pazar each. The interviews were held with the people who participated in the establishment of foundations, and continue to play a key role in designing their programmes. Due to the epidemiological situation, all the interviews were held online, *via*

Zoom platform. The interviews, lasting between 60 and 90 minutes, were conducted in the period 29 September - 13 October 2021. Prior to the analysis, all interviews were transcribed making up the material totalling 101 pages (56,513 words).

5 Context for the Development of Community Foundations in Serbia

5.1. Broader socio-economic context

Following moderate growth, the annual real GDP growth in Serbia accelerated to 4.3% in 2018, and sustained a solid pace in 2019 (4.3%). Despite the growth, the pay gap relative to the EU remained mostly unchanged throughout the last decade, while GDP per capita in terms of purchasing power amounted to 41% of the EU average in 2019 (CEVEAS 2018).

Serbia's human development collapsed in the 1990s only to never fully recover, despite registered growth of the Human Development Index. Serbia's Human Development Index (HDI) amounted to 0.81 in 2019, categorising it among the countries with a rather high human development: Serbia positioned 64th out of 189 countries and territories (HDR, 2020). In the period 1990 - 2019, HDI in Serbia increased from 0.7222 to 0.806 (11.6%). In the past decade, Serbia ranked between 64th and 67th place globally in terms of human development - which is lower than any European Union Member State.

Table 2. Basic socio-economic indicators

| | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 |
|---|------|------|-------|------|
| GDP real growth rate (%) | 2.0 | 4.3 | 4.5 | -0.9 |
| GDP per capita (% EU-28 in PPS) | 38.0 | 39.0 | 41.0 | N/A |
| Human Development Index (HDI) | 0.80 | 0.80 | 0, 81 | N/A |
| At- poverty risk rate (%) | 25.7 | 24.3 | 23.2 | 21.7 |
| At-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion rate (%) | 36.7 | 34.3 | 31.7 | 29.8 |
| Gini coefficient (income based) SILC | 37.8 | 35.6 | 33.3 | N/A |
| Quintile ratio (income based) | 9.4 | 8.58 | 6.5 | N/A |

A slight drop in the at-risk and social exclusion rate was noticed in the past several years. Still, relative poverty in Serbia is among the most pronounced in Europe - as many as 25% of people in Serbia earn less than 60% of an average wage. According to the estimates, as many as 7.3% of the population lives in absolute poverty, meaning that around half a million people were below the conservatively set poverty line in 2016 (CEVES, 2018).

The pay gap in the Republic of Serbia is rather high, both based on the quintile ratio indicator (S80/S20)² and Gini coefficient.³ Gini coefficient for Serbia amounted to 33.3 points in 2019 and was one of the highest in the EU (CEVES, 2021). For instance, the income quintile ratio in Serbia is around 6.5 (5 in the EU), indicating that the wealthiest quintile receives a 6.5 times higher income than the poorest quintile (ibid.). According to this data, Serbia is in the group of countries with the highest inequality in Europe.

The main reasons for high poverty and inequality rates are the low employment rate in decent jobs and the low effect of fiscal policies in redistribution (CEVES, 2018). The employment rate of the working-age population (15-64) in Serbia is only 55% compared to 67% in EU28, with a large number of jobs in Serbia being of low quality - almost one fourth of the total number of the employed (ibid.). When it comes to fiscal policy, the progressivity of taxes is low, and social transfers reduce inequality less than in the European Union - social welfare and child allowances account for 0.6% GDP only against the European average of 1.1% GDP (ibid.).

With the political and economic changes since 2000, the socialist, inclusive social protection system has turned towards the liberal model, transferring social responsibility to responsibility of individuals and their families (Vuković & Perišić 2011, Žarković Rakić et al. 2017). A mixed social protection system was built, including both private and non-profit sectors in the provision of these services (Vuković & Perišić 2011). Broad market use was introduced in pension, healthcare and educational services, where non-governmental organisations, mainly financed from international sources, became active in the provision of

² Quintile ratio is the ratio of the total income of 20% of the wealthiest population and the total of 20% of the poorest population.

³ Gini coefficient measures inequality in the entire population; it takes values from 0 to 1 (0–100%), whereby 0 indicates total (income) equality of all individuals, and value 1 total concentration to one individual only.

social services (Žarković Rakić et al. 2017). Public services gravitate towards the available low-quality services, while quality services are rendered only to those who can afford them, which is particularly true of healthcare services (Vuković 2010). The introduction of private sector in the healthcare and education sectors, and the introduction of voluntary pension funds are pushing the citizens of Serbia towards the market as a place for getting quality services that are unattainable to a large portion of citizens (Radovanović 2021a).

5.2. COVID-19 pandemic as a specific context

The pandemic of COVID-19 will certainly be remembered as the event in recent history that brought major challenges to individuals, families, communities, and the entire societies, with far-reaching consequences that cannot be fully understood as yet. The emerging community foundations - groups of citizens gathered in mid-2020, did not have an opportunity to act in a context other than the pandemic.

From the outbreak of the pandemic until the moment of writing this text (early November 2021), the total number of people infected by coronavirus in Serbia exceeded 1,100,000, with more than 10,000 deaths. The healthcare system was faced with deficient equipment and insufficient capacities to identify, isolate, test, and treat all the COVID-19 cases while at the same time continuing to provide regular health services (UNDP 2020).

In 2020, the Serbian economy registered a decline of approximately 1%. The effect of the pandemic was mitigated by economic growth in the period preceding the pandemic, fiscal and monetary support measures, and low dependency on the affected economic sectors (EC, 2021). Still, the survey of companies and entrepreneurs shows that the crisis struck hard - 30% of entities could do almost no business at all, while 45% operated at a reduced capacity. This resulted in companies losing an average of 35 – 40% of their income in the period March - May 2020 (CEVES & Government of the Republic of Serbia Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit, 2021). Although economic activity and corporate operations declined, the overall employment drop was mainly short-term and mild (ibid). Formal employment was relatively stable, but informal employment dropped significantly (ibid.). As indicated in the study conducted by the United Nations Team on Human Rights and Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit of the Serbian Government (2020), the major di-

rect consequences of the crisis were suffered by social groups traditionally facing the highest risk of discrimination, poverty or social exclusion.

However, as seen in the past, people tend to demonstrate solidarity, empathy and understanding for the most vulnerable ones more often in times of crisis. It has been documented that natural disasters and complex humanitarian emergencies mobilise people to offer support (Musick & Wilson 2008, Sitrin & Sembrar 2020). In Serbia, just as all over the world, different ways of provision of symbolic and rather tangible support were evidenced since the outbreak of the pandemic: neighbours singing from their balconies to keep the morale high during the lockdown; students buying groceries for their elderly neighbours; donations being collected for purchase of medical equipment, to name but a few. Empirical data also points to the increased giving for the common good in 2020. According to the report “Giving Serbia 2020” (Catalyst Balkans 2020), 2020 saw a 2.7% increase in the volume of donations compared to the previous year. As registered, just over EUR 50 million in donations were raised for the common good through 4,319 campaigns (ibid.). Even the non-pandemic related donations registered a rise compared to 2019 (ibid.).

5.3. Civil sector⁴ in Serbia – basic characteristics

According to the 2018 Statistical Yearbook, there were 45,353 registered citizen associations (of which 13,864 in the area of sports) and 812 foundations and endowments (SORS, 2018). Though associations are often the focus of research, and are frequently considered the civil society sector in a more specific sense, a comprehensive empirical study of the civil society as a whole is lacking, as are the studies particularly focusing on foundations and endowments (Radovanović 2021a).

The most recent survey on associations *Civil Society Sector in Serbia 2019: Assessment of the situation in the civil society organisation sector in Serbia* (IPSOS Strategic Marketing & Velat 2019), shows that two thirds of associations were established after 2010 (65%) following the adoption and entry into force of

⁴ In this text, the terms non-profits and civil society organisations will be used interchangeably, referring to organisations providing services free of charge or at the price below the market price, not established by the Government. They can take the following legal forms: associations, foundations and endowments, but they can also include organisations of informal character such as ad hoc citizen initiatives, social movements, etc. These organisations, both formal and informal, make up the non-governmental, non-profit or civil society sector.

the Law on Associations. In the period 1990 - 2000 only a few of them (7%) were established. Approximately one fifth of organisations were established in the period 2000- 2009 (19%), and one tenth before 1990 (9%). The majority (52%) have no income, while only 1% has a budget exceeding EUR 20,001. One half of organisations (50%) engage in culture, media and recreation, with a somewhat lower percentage dealing with education and research (32%), the environment (24%), and provision of social services (23%), etc. The most frequent target groups of the surveyed organisations are: all citizens (58%), youth (31%) and children (19%), followed by women (13%) and senior citizens (12%). The activities listed by the surveyed organisations are: local community actions (55%), non-formal education (34%), networking and cooperation (31%), organisation of conferences, meetings and roundtables (27%), etc. Most organisations (57%) did not submit any project proposals to donors. The key obstacle when it comes to applying for funding is the lack of knowledge/information about the calls and opportunities to apply, followed by rather complex donor requirements organisations are unable to meet, and lack of experience in project writing. The projects of the majority of organisations are short, lasting for one year or less (in even 89% of the cases), which can hardly contribute to resolving problems they seek to address and ensure sustainability. The level of cooperation with the citizens and their engagement in the work of organisations is low. In 2018, the majority of organisations (58%) did not organise a single activity where citizens were invited. Among those that did so, the majority (71%) involved citizens in public events, while a much lower level of citizen participation referred to humanitarian activities (28%), voluntary cleaning and maintenance of public spaces (20%) and humanitarian donations (12%).

A recent study of Trag Foundation (2021) completed for the *Resource Center for Civil Society Organisations* and conducted among the civil society organisations in the early stages of operation, yielded a series of interesting insights. The largest portion of organisations have no income (43%), while 18% have EUR 1,000 *per annum*, 22% up to EUR 5,000 *per annum*, and 16% of organisations have between EUR 5,000 and 10,000 *per annum*. This is one of the most reliable indicators that the organisations participating in the survey were in the early development phase. Funding is one of the major challenges they face. Many organisations stated they were actively searching for sources of funding. Almost 40% said they had a fundraising plan and different sources of funding. Nevertheless, these budgets are insufficient to cover the desired activities. The majority of organisations at this development stage (over 80%) communicate

with and include the community in their work verbally - through personal contacts or social media. In addition, most of the organisations (90%) undertake needs assessments of the people in their communities regularly, and rely on them when designing their programmes and activities. At the same time, many organisations confirmed that they use the feedback received from the members of their communities to improve their programmes. Still, less than one third of organisations have stated they share their results and the impact of their activities with the local government. This may point to lack of trust between the civil society organisations and local governments, as well as to lack of adequate channels for dialogue between the two sectors.

5.4. Recent historical context for the development of philanthropic organisations

The civil society in Serbia of the 1990s was developing in a contradictory environment (Spasić 2003). While the formal political pluralisation gave momentum for the civil sector, the political regime was extremely hostile towards the civil society organisations since some of them were strongly opposing the regime (ibid.). Despite the unfavourable circumstances, a large number of citizen groups and associations were formed during the 1990s. They openly confronted hate speech and war operations, helping the victims and fighting for human and social rights (Milivojević 2006). The role these organisations played was crucial in initiating civic activism that finally resulted in the collapse of the Milošević regime.

International assistance was vital for the survival and work of these organisations (Fagan & Ostojić 2008, Kolin 2005). Western governments, assistance agencies and foundations played an important role in the establishment and operation of Serbian non-profit organisations of that time, since their programmes focused on the development of civil society and democracy (ibid.). Although the international donor community is still present, only 15% of associations are currently funded from these sources. Self-financing was reported by 63% of organisations; local government is the source of funding for 33%, and citizens' funding for 23% of organisations (IPSOS Strategic Marketing & Velat 2019). When it comes to international donors, notably some of the most important programmes supporting philanthropy development in Serbia are funded by international foundations/development agencies. In this context, two relevant projects need to be particularly underlined. One of them is *the Framework for Giving project* aimed at enhancing the philanthropic ecosystem and increasing giving, implemented by

the Coalition for Giving⁵, and funded by the United States Agency for International Development – USAID. The second is the Trag Foundation project, “Our Local Foundation –Community Has a Say!” focusing on the establishment of community foundations in Serbia, and supported by the C. S. Mott Foundation. This speaks of the continuous relevance of the impact of international donors on the civil sector and philanthropy development in Serbia (Radovanović 2021a).

After the democratic changes in 2000, a period of affirmation of civil society organisations commenced when social and economic reforms created new conditions for the unimpeded development of the third sector (Kolm 2009, Radovanović 2021a). The legal framework for the non-profit sector operation, in line with the highest European standards, was passed in the period 2001- 2012 (Popović et al, 2018). The efforts of the civil society organisations were particularly important for building the rule of law, citizen education on the democratic political system, as well as in the area of human rights and an improved position of the marginalized groups (ibid.). The conditions for civil society engagement have become more difficult since 2012, as reflected in the proposed more restrictive measures for the operation of civil society organisations, and in the reduced responsiveness of the authorities to the requests of organisations and activists (Popović et al, 2018). Moreover, the so-called non-governmental organisations organised by the Government (GONGO) and political non-governmental organisations (PONGO) emerged with the sole purpose to support and give legitimacy to governmental decisions and get subsidies from the state budget (Ćeriman & Fiket 2019). The Global Alliance of Civil Society Organisations - CIVICUS placed Serbia on the surveillance list due to the increasingly restricted civic freedoms. Serbia’s rating in 2019 was lowered from the shrinking to obstructed space for the civil society activities, which illustrates the situation in which “the state imposes a set of legal and non- legal restrictions on the civil society” (CISCO, 2019).

5.5. Civic activism, solidarity and philanthropy as a response to democracy and inequality crisis

Following a protracted period of stagnation in the domain of progressive civic activism, Serbia and other Western Balkans countries registered a slight

⁵ The Coalition for Giving is led by the Ana and Vlade Divac Foundation, with the financial support of the US Agency for International Development- USAID. The members of the Coalition for Giving are Trag Foundation, Catalyst Balkans, SMART Kolektiv, Serbian Philanthropy Forum, Responsible Business Forum, and Serbian Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

increase in the protest and civic initiatives during the past decade. Although these sporadic events are still failing to mobilise the population in the way that the existing governing, increasingly autocratic structures do, the change in the social climate is evident and protests have become more frequent (Fagan & Sircar 2017).⁶ The reasons vary: from corruption scandals, usurpation of urban spaces to the destruction of the environment (Bieber & Brentin 2018; Vasiljević 2018). This trend illustrates the existing civic dissatisfaction with the lack of political accountability, unsatisfactory living standards, and the desire of the citizens to engage more actively in the social and political life of their communities. On the one hand, this is an echo of the rising global calls for a more accountable and inclusive democracy - reflected in a whole range of protest initiatives, starting from the *Occupy* movement, *via* mass protests against the austerity measures, to the global movement for environmental justice. On the other hand, this civic engagement must be understood in the context of failed expectations of the post-Socialist transition in the Western Balkans. Instead of approaching the EU membership, reaching the rule of law and higher economic standard, three decades of economic liberalization and political transformation from the one-party system into political pluralism have brought a widely spread abuse of political and economic power, greater growth of socio-economic inequality and, as of recently, a rising trend of autocratic government and “captured” institutions to the Western Balkans societies (Bieber 2018, Castaldo 2020, Lemstra 2020).

In addition to the mass anti-regime protests - from “Bosnian plenary” in 2014, to “Colourful Revolution” in Macedonia which resulted in the change of government in 2017, to the protest “1 of 5 million” in Belgrade in late 2018 and in 2019 - the entire region has been the centre of numerous local civic struggles over the last few years - mainly for the preservation of urban heritage/ against investors’ interventions in urban spaces, and for the preservation of the environment. The largest, post 5 October 2000 protest in Belgrade was

⁶ Naturally, it must be mentioned that, in the sphere of civic organising, there is also a rise in conservative, often extremely right-wing initiatives, gathering citizens around goals of questionable value, like the support to convicted war criminals, using war-mongering language or protests against the so-called illegal migrants, etc. (Džombić, 2014). A rise in the so-called GONGO (governmental “non-governmental” organisations) was also observed, since they simulate the principles of work in an independent, civil sector to, in fact, deliver the objectives of ruling parties while using the instruments typical for the third sector actions (Popović, Stojanović and Selaković 2018). However, the context of our interest here refers to the progressive citizens’ actions, based on the democratic values of inclusion, equality and social justice. In this segment we therefore wish to map the recent dynamic of civic activism development understood in this value frame.

held in May 2016 against the illegal demolition in the part of the city called “Savamala” to clear up the space for the controversial Belgrade Waterfront project. “The Right to the City”, “For the Roof Over Our Heads” and “Solidarity Kitchen” were but a few of the initiatives addressing social (in)justice that attracted considerable media attention. In the past years, eco-activism started gathering an increasing number of participants mobilised around various topics from neighbourhood defense of green spaces, to protests for the defense of rivers and against the construction of small hydro-power plants, to mass protests like the “Ecological Uprising” in Belgrade in April 2021 supported by 70 environmental organisations from Serbia and the region.⁷ The most recent active protests and local struggles across the region concern the fight against the construction of small hydro-power plants on fast mountain rivers.⁸ In August 2020, the inhabitants of the small village of Rakita, supported by activists from the whole of Serbia, organised manual removal of pipes for the small hydro-power plant, previously illegally installed on the riverbed bottom. Local populations of Serbian and Albanian origin in the Kosovo town of Štrpce, jointly protected their local river - their only source of potable water. In addition to these, there is a whole range of local, more or less formalised initiatives of active citizens and organisations, striving to bring about social change (Pudar Draško, Fiket and Vasiljević 2020). The range of topics that mobilise citizens is rather broad, starting from the initiatives for the protection of urban heritage and space, to fights for the protection of natural resources, anti-government protests, anti-corruption protests, usurpation of democratic institutions, and social injustice (Vasiljević 2019; Vasiljević 2021).

However, only a small number of citizens take part in such actions. In 2018, only 7% participated in a public gathering or a protest in the previous two to three years (CRTA, 2018). Asked whether they had participated in at least one

⁷ At the time of finalization of this study, mass protests and road blocks were taking place in Serbia. These were spurred by civic dissatisfaction due to the announced amendments to the Law on Referendum and Law on Expropriation. These legislative amendments were interpreted as a scene-setter for a long-announced project of lithium exploitation in the Jadar valley, to be implemented by the Rio Tinto multinational company. This project has been most severely criticized by numerous civil society organisations, notably those focused on ecology and environmental protection.

⁸ The construction of small hydro-power plants has been in focus of debate for quite some time. Initially praised for their ability to generate clean energy, small hydro-power plants soon became the focus of criticism of many experts, as it became clear that their detrimental effects exceed their potential benefits by far. Using the power of small, fast mountain streams, the construction of SHPs significantly impacts the entire ecosystem, by stopping river flows and fish migration, inducing morphological changes in the ground, and by affecting the surrounding flora and fauna, see: <https://biepag.eu/environmental-activism-in-the-balkans-from-direct-action-to-political-subjectivity/>.

action addressing the politics and decision-making including political debates, signing petitions, participation in public gatherings, demonstrations, protests, reporting issues to the media or the police, etc, only 39% of the respondents stated they had (ibid.). Still, if political discussions with others are excluded, only 26% of citizens participated in at least one action referring to politics and decision-making (ibid.). Moreover, citizens are generally not overly confident that their personal engagement, namely involvement in a democratic process, will enable them to influence changes in their own country (CRTA 2021, Radovanović 2021a). The finding that the Serbian citizens do not believe they have the power to influence the situation in their own country has been repeated across studies. So, in their study about the political orientation of the Serbian citizens, Fiket et al. (2017) ascertained that the citizens have low levels of confidence in being able and competent to understand socio-political issues, and the low level of confidence that their contribution would be appreciated. These constitute a potential obstacle to civic engagement and development of local philanthropy.

The involvement of citizens in the work of civil society organisations is also very low. As demonstrated by findings of a study conducted on a national representative sample, a considerable majority of the surveyed citizens (79%) consider themselves insufficiently informed about the work of the civil society organisations (IPSOS Strategic Marketing & Velat 2019). The majority of citizens (95%) do not participate in the work of organisations in any way. Some citizens have stated they were members (3%), some they were volunteers or members, and others that they were volunteers only (1% each).

When it comes to citizens' participation in charity campaigns, almost two fifths of the surveyed citizens did not respond to a charity campaign. Over the past three years, this is reported by approximately one half of respondents (Trag Foundation, 2020). Among those who took part in philanthropic actions in the past three years, the most frequent form of assistance is monetary donation (83%), followed by the provision of material resources (49%), and a combination of fiduciary and in-kind donations (38%). In addition, one in three citizens involved in a philanthropic action did so through volunteering. Approximately the same percentage provided psychological and moral assistance to vulnerable categories of the population. The most common purpose of individuals' philanthropic actions (53%) was the treatment of sick children. One in five respondents (20%) got involved wishing to contribute to “treat-

ment of sick people”, and 17% stated they participated in different campaigns to “help the poor”.

Two observations are important to understand the mobilisation potential of civic engagement over the past several years. First, civil society organisations are being less perceived as drivers of change. On the one hand, campaigns portraying civil society organisations as “foreign mercenaries” for several decades, and on the other, abuses and embezzlement of certain organisations and campaigns, have destroyed the citizens’ trust. Additionally, the project-oriented work, guided by big donors, focused on partial institutional reforms instead of on identifying systemic solutions, and frequent cooperation with local and central authorities, have contributed to the declining trust in “traditional” non-governmental organisations and lack of trust in their capacities to adequately channel and articulate citizens’ dissatisfaction and problems. Negative perceptions of a considerable share of citizens about civil society organisations have been confirmed by numerous empirical studies (IPSOS Strategic Marketing & Velat 2019, SIGN Network 2019, Trag Foundation 2021).

Second, despite the undisputed rise in civic activism in the entire region, this type of engagement still happens on an ad hoc basis, often with high intensity but short duration, with weak organisation and questionable success. Keeping in mind the expressed will of the citizens to get engaged in their local communities around the issues of direct importance for their everyday lives, a particularly important question arises regarding the future effects of this type of mobilisation on empowering the feeling of political efficiency in citizens and on the democratisation of broader society.

The listed examples testify about the vital need of the citizens in the entire region to engage and associate, defend their rights, demand institutional accountability and the rule of law. However, the extent of this mobilisation potential and its effects on democratisation of the broader society are difficult to assess: How many people do actually get involved? What is their perception of political and social changes and stakeholders able to bring them about? Can local civic engagement revive democracy in the region?

Local civic initiatives, focused on tangible and concrete everyday issues of the citizens, carry a certain mobilization potential. As demonstrated, they have the capacity to bridge the ethnic and other divisions, thus strengthening the

citizens’ sense of civic duty and power to act. Even when they are rapidly dismantled or when they achieve limited results, they still change the public discourse and imprint on collective imagination, opening the space to new associations and engagements in the future. One of the questions we sought to answer through our field research is whether the community foundations present an opportunity for local civic initiatives.

5.6. Characteristics of a more specific context

Community foundations emerge in four regions in the Republic of Serbia: in the region of Belgrade, there is one active foundation in the city municipality of Obrenovac; in the region of Vojvodina, there are two active foundations – one in the town of Pančevo and the other in the municipality of Stara Pazova; in the region of Šumadija and Western Serbia, there are two active foundations – one in Šabac⁹, and the other in Novi Pazar; the region of Eastern and Southern Serbia also hosts two foundations – one in Zaječar and the other one in Niš.

Local communities in which community foundations operate are heterogeneous from the aspect of their size, measured by the number of inhabitants. The largest city is Niš with over 250,000 inhabitants; Novi Pazar, Šabac and Pančevo are of the approximately the same size - 100,000 inhabitants; Obrenovac and Stara Pazova have more than 70,000 and 65,000 inhabitants respectively, while Zaječar registers the smallest population – just under 60,000.

Table 3. Population by nationality, according to the 2011 Census

| | Obrenovac | Pančevo | Stara Pazova | Šabac | Novi Pazar | Zaječar | Niš |
|------------|-----------|---------|--------------|---------|------------|---------|---------|
| TOTAL | 72,085 | 123,414 | 65,792 | 115,884 | 100,410 | 59,461 | 260,237 |
| Serbs | 67,185 | 97,499 | 54,516 | 110,642 | 16,234 | 52,292 | 243,381 |
| Albanians | 17 | 68 | 9 | 7 | 202 | 40 | 97 |
| Bosniaks | 14 | 102 | 17 | 23 | 77,443 | 4 | 44 |
| Bulgarians | 26 | 501 | 12 | 9 | 5 | 181 | 927 |

⁹ As already mentioned, the foundation from Šabac opted out of the programme. Since it was active at the time of this study implementation, a contextual overview in regard to this foundation will also be presented.

| | | | | | | | |
|----------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Bunjevacs | 7 | 13 | 4 | 1 | 1 | - | 10 |
| Vlachs | 1 | 10 | 2 | 4 | - | 2,856 | 15 |
| Gorani | 5 | 84 | 21 | 49 | 246 | 28 | 202 |
| Yugoslavs | 99 | 586 | 206 | 123 | 67 | 89 | 416 |
| Hungarians | 37 | 3,422 | 131 | 60 | 6 | 14 | 68 |
| Macedonians | 138 | 4,558 | 179 | 80 | 7 | 148 | 823 |
| Muslims | 73 | 414 | 83 | 393 | 4,102 | 28 | 58 |
| Germans | 11 | 196 | 27 | 11 | 2 | 6 | 28 |
| Roma | 1,574 | 2,118 | 1,193 | 1,902 | 566 | 753 | 6,996 |
| Romanians | 43 | 3,173 | 8 | 48 | - | 204 | 26 |
| Russians | 31 | 90 | 52 | 35 | 13 | 7 | 62 |
| Rusyns | 2 | 14 | 9 | 6 | - | - | 4 |
| Slovaks | 18 | 1,411 | 5,212 | 15 | - | 5 | 38 |
| Slovenians | 14 | 120 | 27 | 18 | 4 | 23 | 104 |
| Ukrainians | 8 | 38 | 47 | 20 | 4 | 2 | 20 |
| Croats | 106 | 880 | 1,336 | 165 | 20 | 71 | 398 |
| Montenegrins | 200 | 529 | 122 | 70 | 44 | 98 | 659 |
| Others | 131 | 450 | 78 | 161 | 312 | 150 | 420 |
| Undeclared | 1,021 | 4,278 | 1,838 | 1,256 | 216 | 1,400 | 3,018 |
| Regional affiliation | 6 | 1,185 | 180 | 28 | 70 | 29 | 61 |
| n/a | 1,757 | 1,675 | 483 | 758 | 846 | 1,033 | 2,362 |

Source: Municipalities and regions in the Republic of Serbia, 2020, SORS

Tables 3 and 4 present the data on the population of local communities according to nationality and religion. As shown above, the majority population is of Serbian nationality and orthodox religion, except in Novi Pazar where the majority population is of Bosniak nationality and Islamic religion.

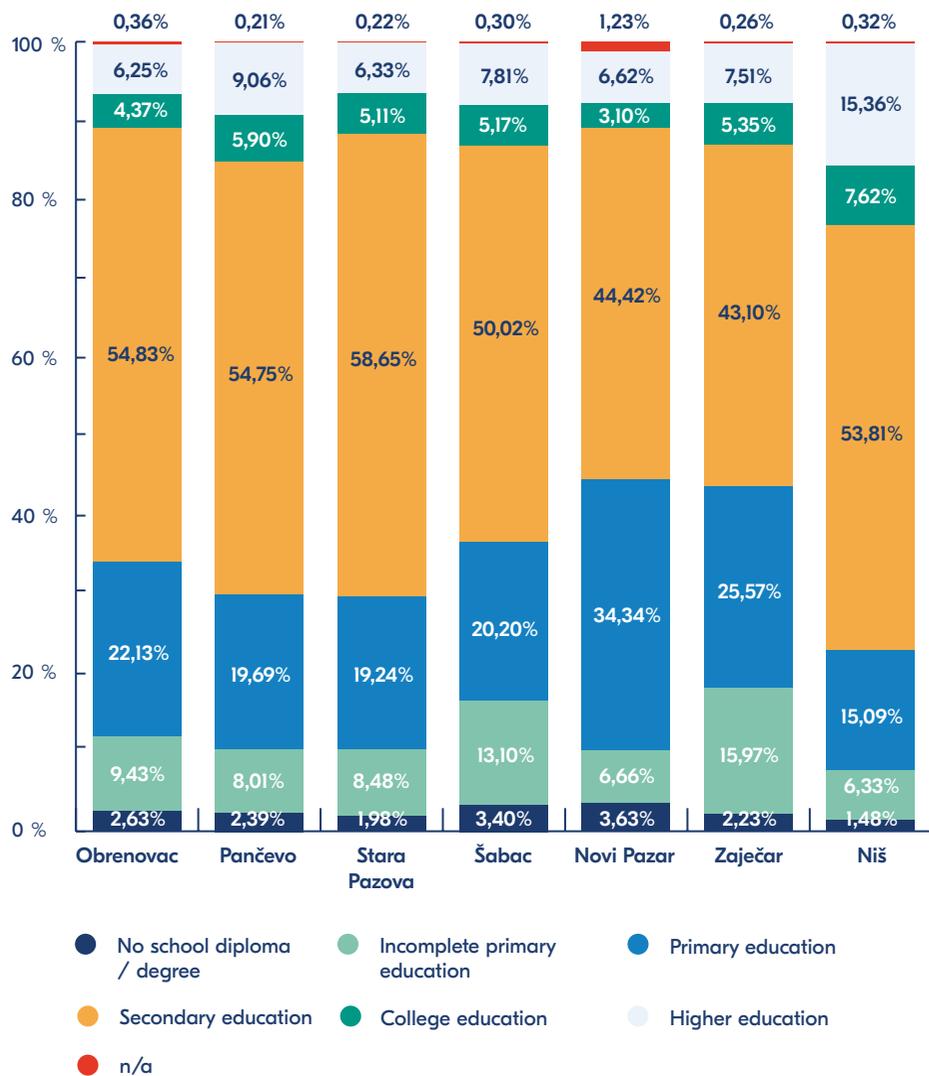
Table 4. Population by religion, according to the 2011 Census

| | Obrenovac | Pančevo | Stara Pazova | Šabac | Novi Pazar | Zaječar | Niš |
|-------------------|-----------|---------|--------------|--------|------------|---------|--------|
| Orthodox | 67999 | 105546 | 55486 | 111054 | 16051 | 54738 | 240765 |
| Catholic | 229 | 3930 | 1724 | 291 | 51 | 192 | 809 |
| Protestant | 30 | 2759 | 4940 | 68 | 3 | 36 | 258 |
| Other Christian | 34 | 52 | 56 | 28 | 4 | 27 | 117 |
| Islamic | 190 | 769 | 126 | 760 | 82710 | 164 | 2486 |
| Judaist | 1 | 31 | 3 | 2 | - | - | 12 |
| Eastern religions | 10 | 47 | 8 | 8 | 1 | 19 | 80 |
| Other religions | 19 | 82 | 7 | 12 | - | 18 | 50 |
| Agnostics | 15 | 102 | 17 | 28 | 3 | 12 | 109 |
| Atheists | 441 | 1826 | 431 | 478 | 71 | 376 | 2656 |
| Undeclared | 1248 | 5548 | 2334 | 1592 | 360 | 1947 | 6578 |
| n/a | 1856 | 2171 | 541 | 982 | 860 | 1400 | 3568 |

Source: Municipalities and regions in the Republic of Serbia, 2020, SORS

Chart 1 presents the data on population aged 15+ by education level. The highest number (almost 45%) of residents without education, with incomplete primary or only completed primary education live in the territories of Novi Pazar and Zaječar. Out of the communities observed, Niš has the biggest share of residents with college and higher education (23%).

Chart 1. Population aged 15+, by education level, 2011 Census



Source: Municipalities and regions in the Republic of Serbia, 2020, SORS

Analysing the number of the formally employed, there are discrepancies between the towns and municipalities observed. In Novi Pazar and Zaječar, the number of registered employed persons to 1000 inhabitants is below the national average. The number of registered unemployed persons per 1000 inhabitants is higher than the national average in these two towns, and in Niš. With respect to the average salaries in the observed towns and municipalities, only Obrenovac registers an average salary per employee which is above the national average.

Table 5. Employment and salaries

| | Number of the employed persons | No. of the employed per 1000 inhabitants* | Number of the unemployed persons | No. of the unemployed per 1000 inhabitants** | Average salaries excluding taxes and benefits, per employee*** |
|--------------|--------------------------------|---|----------------------------------|--|--|
| Obrenovac | 24,606 | 341 | 3,679 | 51 | 55,680 |
| Pančevo | 37,990 | 318 | 6,635 | 56 | 54,134 |
| Stara Pazova | 21,378 | 330 | 1,419 | 22 | 49,044 |
| Šabac | 34,980 | 318 | 6,306 | 57 | 48,586 |
| Novi Pazar | 19,770 | 185 | 20,223 | 189 | 41,302 |
| Zaječar | 13,199 | 247 | 4,752 | 89 | 48,144 |
| Niš | 83,728 | 327 | 23,358 | 91 | 51,009 |

Source: Municipalities and regions in the Republic of Serbia, 2020, SORS

* national average in 2019 amounted to 313

** national average in 2019 amounted to 70

***national average in 2019 amounted to 54,919

Table 6 presents the data on the registered employment by activity sectors. The biggest share of the employed is in the manufacturing sector. In the majority of observed towns and municipalities. The only exception is Zaječar, where the largest share is found in the wholesale and retail and repair of motor vehicle sector. In Novi Pazar, the share of the employed is approximately the same in these two sectors. If the shares of registered employment are compared in the local communities concerned, it can be noted that the highest share of registered employment is in the manufacturing sector in Stara Pazova (34.1%), and the lowest in Zaječar (14.1%). Notably, relative to other towns and municipalities, Obrenovac has a significantly higher share of registered employment in the sector of administrative and support services (18.3%), Novi Pazar in the education sector (12.0%), Zaječar in the sector of health care and social protection (11.3%), while Šabac registered a higher share of registered individual agricultural producers (8.8%) than the other towns and municipalities observed.

Table 6. Registered employment by activity sectors

| | Obrenovac | Pančevo | Stara Pazova | Šabac | Novi Pazar | Zaječar | Niš |
|---|-----------|---------|--------------|-------|------------|---------|------|
| Agriculture, forestry and fisheries | 0.1 | 2.3 | 1.2 | 0.6 | 0.3 | 2.0 | 0.2 |
| Mining | 0.1 | 0.8 | 0.1 | 0.1 | 0.3 | 3.9 | 0.2 |
| Manufacturing industry | 21.5 | 22.6 | 34.1 | 29.4 | 18.5 | 14.1 | 25.6 |
| Power, gas and steam supply | 9.9 | 1.3 | 0.4 | 0.7 | 0.7 | 1.8 | 1.0 |
| Water supply and waste water management | 2.0 | 2.3 | 1.2 | 1.7 | 2.2 | 2.0 | 2.4 |
| Construction | 4.0 | 4.5 | 4.2 | 4.8 | 9.7 | 3.7 | 3.9 |
| Wholesale and retail and motor vehicle repair | 13.1 | 19.4 | 23.4 | 17.7 | 18.3 | 16.9 | 16.5 |
| Transport and storage | 5.8 | 6.2 | 10.2 | 6.0 | 6.9 | 5.0 | 6.6 |
| Accommodation and food services | 2.2 | 3.5 | 2.5 | 2.5 | 4.0 | 3.5 | 4.3 |
| Information and communication | 1.0 | 1.7 | 0.9 | 1.1 | 1.2 | 1.4 | 3.7 |
| Financial services and insurance services | 1.2 | 1.7 | 0.6 | 1.6 | 1.0 | 1.6 | 1.8 |
| Real estates | 0.2 | 0.2 | 0.2 | 0.2 | 0.0 | 0.2 | 0.2 |
| Expert, scientific, Innovation and technical activities | 2.1 | 4.4 | 2.5 | 3.1 | 2.6 | 2.9 | 4.3 |
| Administrative and support services activities | 18.3 | 2.8 | 5.0 | 1.9 | 1.3 | 3.4 | 2.6 |
| Public administration and mandatory social insurance | 3.0 | 5.6 | 2.3 | 4.2 | 6.4 | 9.5 | 5.0 |
| Education | 5.1 | 6.3 | 3.4 | 6.3 | 12.0 | 8.2 | 8.8 |
| Health care and social protection | 5.2 | 9.2 | 3.3 | 6.3 | 7.5 | 11.3 | 9.2 |
| Art, entertainment and recreation | 1.1 | 1.5 | 1.2 | 1.2 | 1.3 | 1.5 | 1.5 |
| Other services | 1.3 | 2.1 | 1.5 | 1.8 | 3.0 | 2.0 | 2.0 |
| Registered individual agricultural producers | 2.9 | 1.7 | 1.6 | 8.8 | 2.8 | 5.1 | 0.1 |

Source: *Municipalities and regions in the Republic of Serbia, 2020, SORS*

5.7. Community foundations in Serbia at a glance

Before we present the findings of the field survey, we will showcase the key data on community foundations based on their statutes and Internet presentations.

Step Forward Foundation, Zaječar

Step Forward Foundation was the first community foundation in Serbia, established in Zaječar in 2013. This foundation was established by the citizen association “Zaječar Initiative” to contribute to the development of the community in the Timok region, with a focus on the town of Zaječar. The Step Forward Foundation works on their community development by implementing four broad activities: mobilisation and use of local resources; fundraising outside the community for different needs in the community; giving grants to citizens’ associations and informal groups for their activities that contribute to the development of communities in the Timok region and address the specific challenges faced by the citizens. In exceptional cases, and most often when humanitarian campaigns are concerned, the grant beneficiaries may be individuals; strengthening social capital - trust and relationship among the inhabitants in those communities. The foundation website enables fundraising for different initiatives of citizens’ associations or informal groups, based on the assessment of the foundation Advisory Committee.

Obrenovac Youth Foundation

Obrenovac Youth Foundation was established by a group of young activists in June 2014 in an endeavour to contribute to the fastest possible recovery of Obrenovac from the consequences of major floods. The Foundation aims to provide support and assistance to children and youth in shaping their local community in line with their own needs. The Foundation supports civil society organisations, informal groups, institutions and individuals to change their own environment, influence decision-making at the local level and constantly improve their position. The core activity of the Foundation is delivered by implementing their own programme activities and/or providing support to projects and activities of other citizen associations, informal groups, professional organisations, institutions and individuals.

The activities of the Foundation focus on: providing support to children and youth from devastated areas and areas hit by natural disasters; empowering children and youth to become agents of change in their local community and get actively involved in the decision-making processes, enhancing infrastructure development in the local community and infrastructure for children and youth; supporting the implementation of the objectives set forth in the local youth action plan and local children action plan; affirmation of values such as humanity, solidarity, activism, accountability, creativity/ innovation, critical thinking, and other civil society values; supporting and stimulating civil society development; development and promotion of philanthropy and culture of giving; identifying and activating different fundraising sources in the local community and outside of it; promoting the concept of community foundations as a model for the development of active and sustainable local communities. The Foundation established two funds used to directly support local initiatives initiated by the citizens of Obrenovac: Youth Fund and Neighbourhood Initiatives Fund.

Front Foundation, Novi Pazar

Front Foundation was established in Novi Pazar in 2015. Its mission is to provide support and assistance to citizens in shaping their local communities in line with their needs, by supporting civil society organisations, informal groups, individuals and institutions and by implementing their own activities. The objectives of the Foundation include providing support and fostering the development of civil society; affirming values of humanity, solidarity, activism, accountability, creativity, innovation and critical thinking; development and promotion of philanthropy and culture of giving; empowering youth to become the agents of change in their local communities and get involved in the decision-making processes. The Foundation fundraises from different sources, focusing on local resources primarily. It uses these resources for grant-making programmes in the community, to fund its own community programmes, and to cover its own expenses.

Community Foundation Stara Pazova

The objective of the Community Foundation Stara Pazova is to support its neighbours, active citizens coming from across the territory of the Municipality of Stara Pazova who want to make their street or neighbourhood a more beautiful, wealthier and comfortable place for living. The Foundation advo-

cates for additional education of youth, development, and improvement of public spaces, support to artists and culture, healthy and ecologically sound environment, and development of sports. The role of the Foundation is to be the link - to connect people with ideas and initiatives with socially responsible companies and individuals holding funds, time and knowledge to help them jointly implement these ideas. The areas of the Foundation's action include investing in youth education, support to culture and artists, development of public spaces, development of sports, environment and health.

Community Foundation Pančevo

The Community Foundation Pančevo is a development-oriented foundation working to lastingly contribute to the long-term development of the community by strengthening trust within the community so as to make it more homogeneous, more connected, more capable, and prepared to face challenges independently, respond to these challenges and address them in a proactive manner in the broadest possible interest of the citizens and for the common good.

Community Foundation Niš

The Community Foundation Niš aims to support the citizens of Niš who are ready to initiate positive changes in their street, district and the city. They foster the development of sports in Niš by investing in education, supporting culture and artists and developing public spaces. The mission of the Foundation is to connect people with different interests and professions, to ensure the citizens of Niš have space for active association and support them in addressing issues they cannot resolve by themselves.

Community Foundation Šabac

The Community Foundation from Šabac stated their main objective was to provide support to the development of social capital and transition towards solidarity in the town of Šabac, by ensuring permanent funding for the community; supporting broad interests of the citizens of Šabac and advocating for the interests of citizens regarding important issues in the community. The core values of the Foundation are solidarity, commitment, independence, honesty, appreciating diversity and tolerance, accountability, integrity, capacity building, openness, entrepreneurial spirit.

6 Key Characteristics of Community Foundations - Survey Findings

6.1. Staff

Three categories of persons are engaged in community foundations: staff (including permanently employed and service- contract engaged staff), permanent volunteers (the persons regularly, actively, and directly involved in the work of the foundation, but are not employed by it), and occasional volunteers (the persons involved in the work of the Foundation or specific activities once or occasionally).

Having in mind the small number of community foundations in the Republic of Serbia, the number of people engaged in their work is negligible. In 2021, 77 persons in total participated in the work of community foundations (the highest number involved in the period concerned), including the staff, permanent and occasional volunteers. By way of comparison, only 9 persons were engaged in 2015. Having in mind that the number of community foundations changed, we are talking about maximum 13 and minimum 5 people per foundation on the average.

When it comes to the structure of staff, community foundations predominantly rely on the work of their volunteers. The share of staff in the total number of active persons in community foundations in the period concerned varied from 3.90% in 2021 to 44.44% in 2015.

Table 7. Community foundations' staff- their number and structure

| | 2021 | | 2020 | | 2019 | | 2018 | | 2017 | | 2016 | | 2015 | | 2014 | |
|-----------------------|------|--------|------|--------|------|--------|------|--------|------|--------|------|--------|------|--------|------|--------|
| Staff | 3 | 3.90% | 3 | 6.00% | 3 | 25.00% | 51 | 13.51% | 4 | 12.12% | 10 | 14.49% | 4 | 44.44% | 4 | 28.57% |
| Permanent volunteers | 33 | 42.86% | 28 | 56.00% | 7 | 58.33% | 56 | 24.32% | 9 | 27.27% | 9 | 13.04% | 5 | 55.56% | 10 | 71.43% |
| Occasional volunteers | 41 | 53.25% | 19 | 38.00% | 2 | 16.67% | 22 | 62.16% | 20 | 60.61% | 50 | 72.46% | 0 | 0.00% | 0 | 0.00% |
| Total | 77 | 100% | 50 | 100% | 12 | 100% | 57 | 100% | 33 | 100% | 69 | 100% | 9 | 100% | 14 | 100% |

Since they have not been formally established yet, the emerging community foundations have no staff. In the first year of their existence, this group of citizens predominantly relied on the engagement of permanent volunteers. A somewhat higher number of occasional volunteers got involved in the work of the foundation compared to the number of permanently engaged in the second year.

Table 8. Emerging community foundations' staff- their number and structure

| | 2021 | | 2020 | |
|-----------------------|------|--------|------|--------|
| Staff | 0 | 0.00% | 0 | 0.00% |
| Permanent volunteers | 23 | 39.66% | 21 | 72.41% |
| Occasional volunteers | 35 | 60.34% | 8 | 27.59% |
| Total | 58 | 100% | 29 | 100% |

In the past two years, the number of staff in the already established foundations was in the realm of 15%. In 2020, these foundations relied mostly on the work of occasional volunteers who accounted for approximately 50% of the total staff number, while in 2021 the share of permanent volunteers accounted for half of all staff.

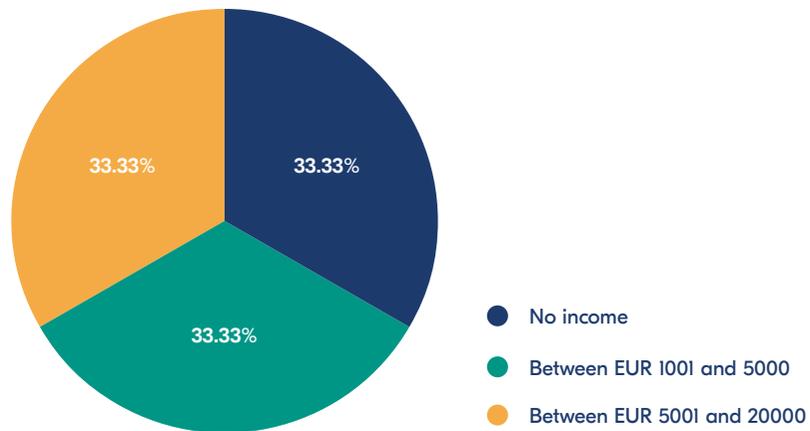
Table 9. Established community foundations' staff- their number and structure

| | 2021 | | 2020 | |
|-----------------------|------|---------|------|---------|
| Staff | 3 | 15.79% | 3 | 14.29% |
| Permanent volunteers | 10 | 52.63% | 7 | 33.33% |
| Occasional volunteers | 6 | 31.58% | 11 | 52.38% |
| Total | 19 | 100.00% | 21 | 100.00% |

6.2. Budget

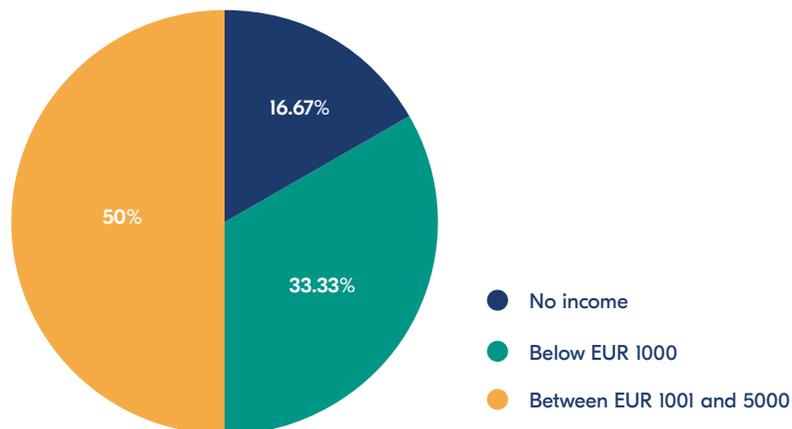
In the first six months of 2021, one third of community foundations generated no income, one third generated incomes ranging from EUR 1,001 and 5,000, whereas the budget of one third of them varied between EUR 5,001 and 20,000.

Chart 2. Community foundations' income- first semester of 2021



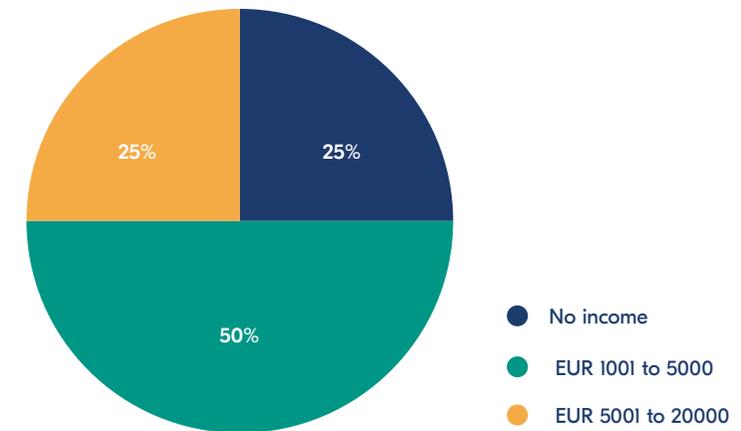
In 2020, the budget of half of the community foundations ranged between EUR 1,001 and 5,000, one third had less than EUR 1,000, whereas 16.67% of foundations had no income.

Chart 3. Community foundations' income - 2020



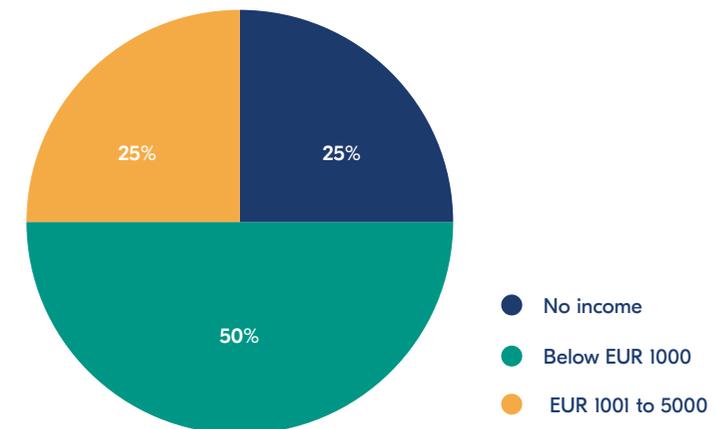
As shown, one out of four community foundations did not generate any income, one earned between EUR 5,001 and 20,000, and two between EUR 1,001 and 5,000. At the same time, one of the foundations already established failed to generate revenues, whereas the other managed to make between EUR 5,001 and 20,000.

Chart 4. Emerging community foundations' income- first semester of 2021



In 2020, one emerging community foundation operated with no income, two had less than EUR 1,000, while one managed to generate income between EUR 1,001 and 5,000. The budget of both of the already established foundations ranged between EUR 1,001 and 5,000.

Chart 5. Emerging community foundations' income - 2020



The budgets of two community foundations participating in this survey differed. In four of the eight years observed, one foundation generated no income. During the five years in the period observed, one foundation generated income of more than EUR 20,001 *per annum*.

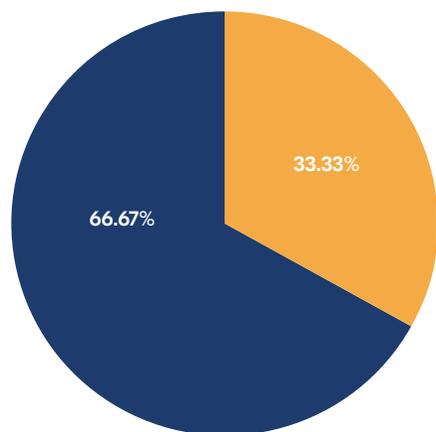
Table 10. Annual income of the established community foundations

| | 2021 | 2020 | 2019 | 2018 | 2017 | 2016 | 2015 | 2014 |
|----------------------|--------|---------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| No income | 50.00% | 0.00% | 50.00% | 50.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 50.00% | 0.00% |
| Under EUR 1,000 | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% |
| EUR 1,001 - 5,000 | 0.00% | 100.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 50.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% |
| EUR 5,001 - 20,000 | 50.00% | 0.00% | 50.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 50.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% |
| More than EUR 20,001 | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 50.00% | 50.00% | 50.00% | 50.00% | 50.00% |

6.3. Management and decision-making

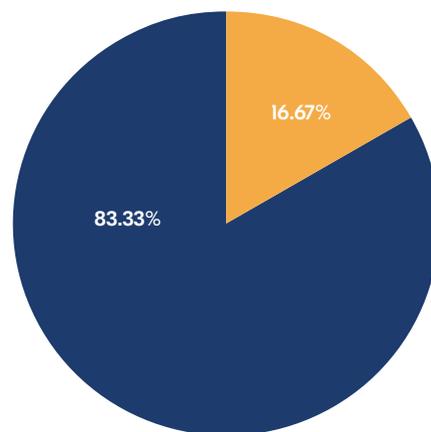
The managers of community foundations are men in 66.67 % of the cases. They are aged 31 – 40 in 83.33 % cases, and 83.33 % of them hold a college diploma or university degrees.

Chart 6. Manager - gender



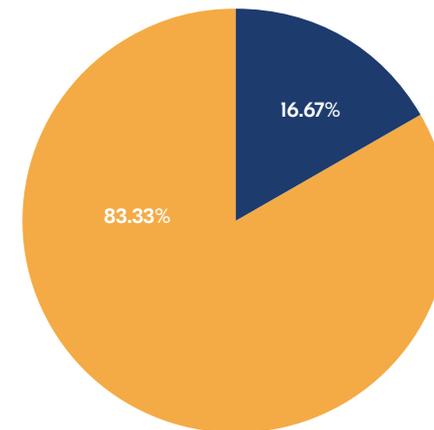
● Man
● Woman

Chart 7. Manager - age



● 31 to 40
● 41 to 50

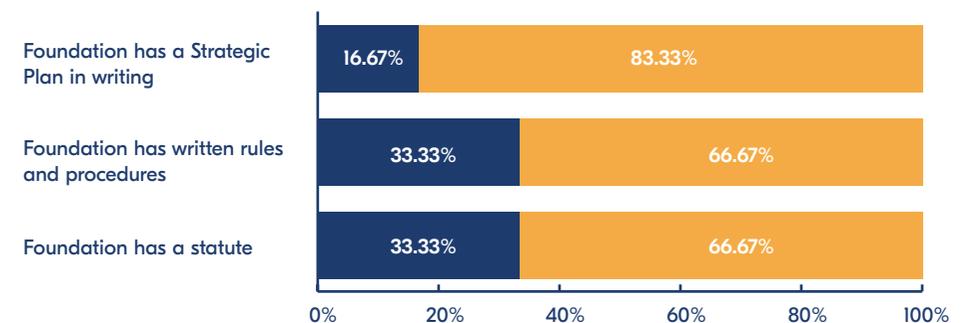
Chart 8. Manager - education level



● Secondary school
● College, university

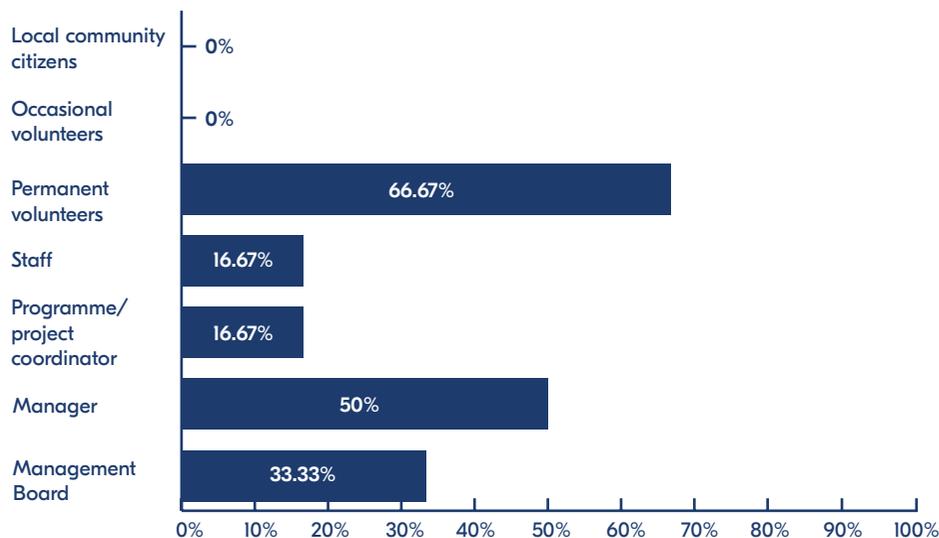
Most of the foundations do not have rules, procedures, and planning decisions in writing. Apart from the two that are legally bound to have a statute, the emerging foundations most often do not have a statute. Only one of the six community foundations concerned (the already established one) has a strategic plan in writing, and two (emerging) community foundations have written rules and decision-making procedures concerning their work.

Chart 9. Written rules and operating procedures



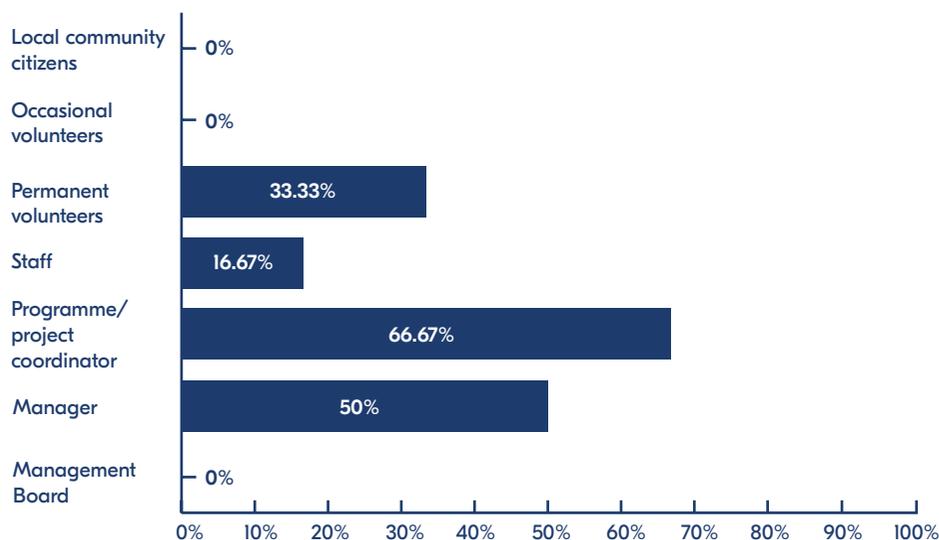
With regard to strategic decisions, in the majority of cases (66.67%) it is the permanent volunteers and/or managers who make them (in 50.00% of the cases). Two foundations (one emerging and one already established) out of the observed six stated that the Management Board takes part in strategic decision-making. In a few cases, strategic decisions are passed by activity coordinators and staff (16.67%). Occasional volunteers and the broader public are not involved in the strategic decision-making.

Chart 10. Who makes strategic decisions?



In the majority of cases (66.67%), operational decisions are delegated to the level of a person who is coordinating a specific activity and/or they are passed by the foundation manager. Permanent volunteers are also involved (in 33.33% of the cases). Management boards, occasional volunteers, and the broader public in the local community are not involved in the decision-making process related to the everyday work.

Chart 11. Who makes decisions about the everyday work of the foundation?

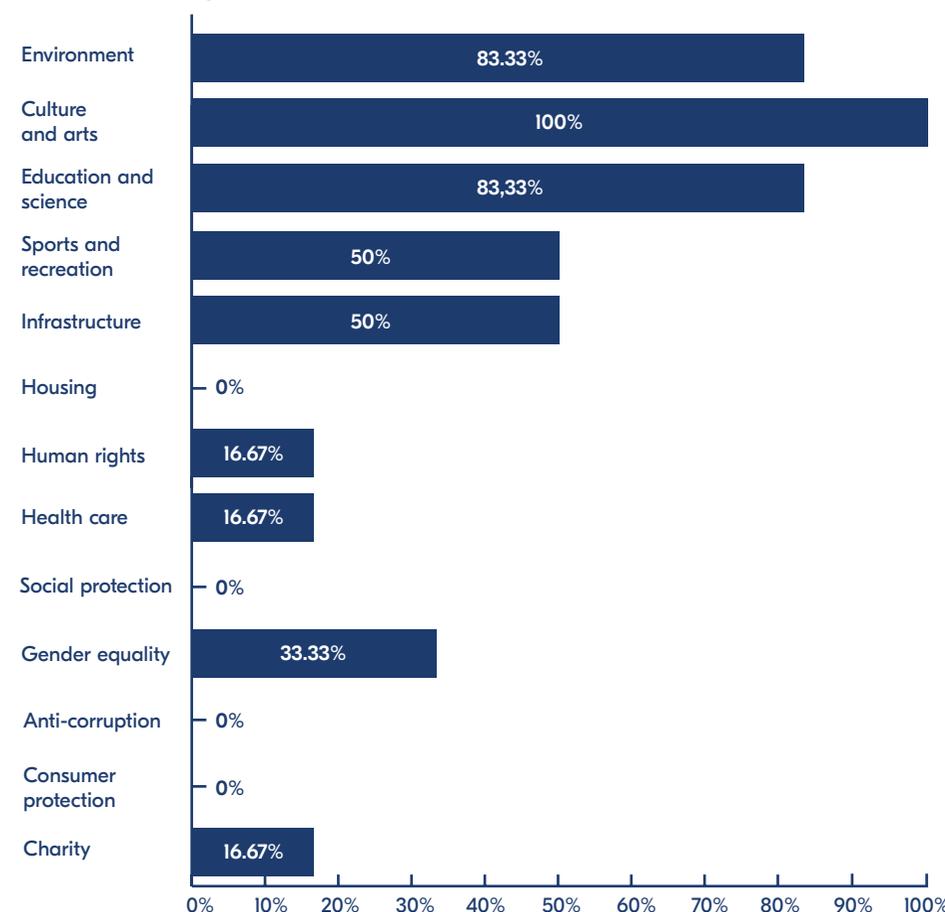


6.4. Programmatic areas and beneficiaries

All the participating community foundations have a mission, main orientation, and a framework of action, and are successful in delivering most of their activities in line with this orientation.

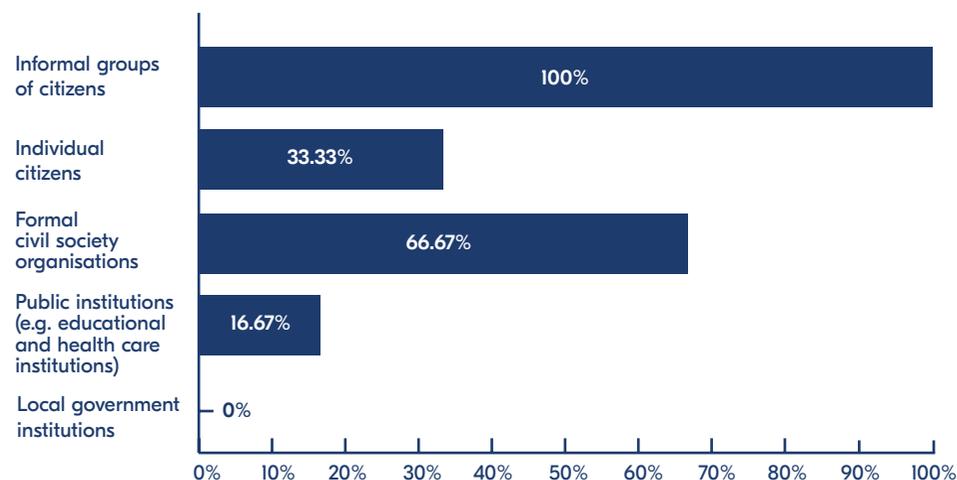
In terms of their programmatic areas, all the foundations have denoted culture and arts; the majority mentioned the environment (83.33%), education, and science; around half of them are active in the area of sports and recreation and infrastructure; one third are active in the gender equality domain. Only one of the six foundations listed one of the following areas: human rights, health-care, and humanitarian issues. Based on the action areas of community foundations, it is evident that they are more development than charity oriented.

Chart 12. Community foundations' action areas



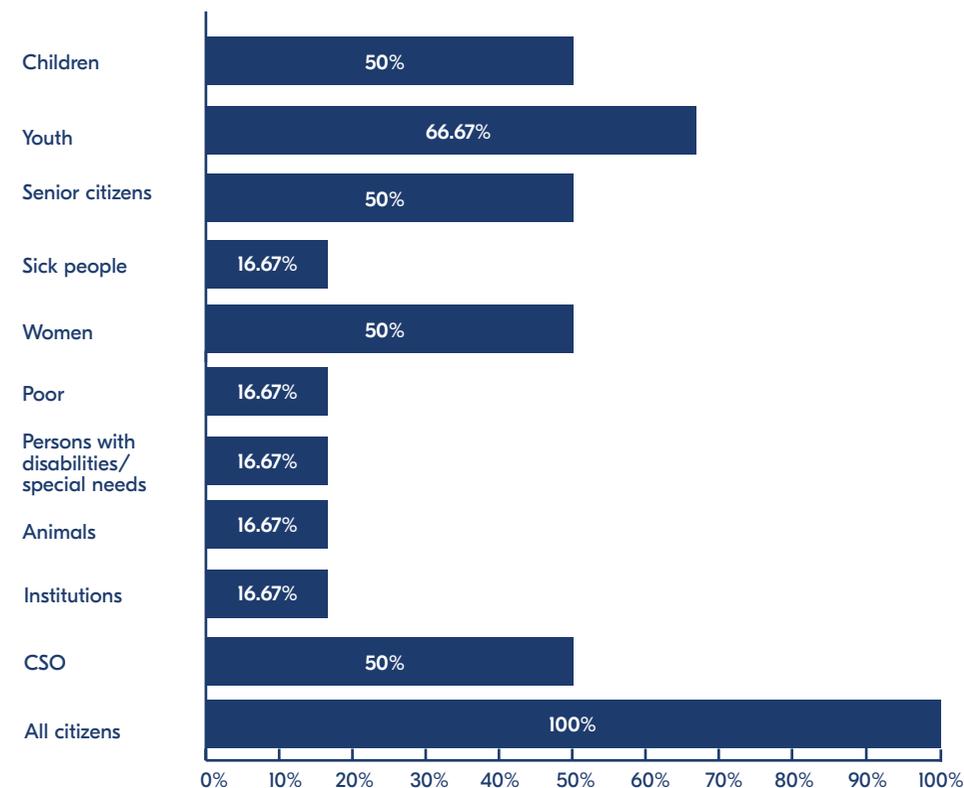
All the foundations stated that informal groups of citizens were the direct beneficiaries of their funds, and civil society organisations were mentioned by the majority (66.67%). Around one third of community foundations directly support individual citizens as well, while one foundation mentioned public institutions are direct beneficiaries of their funds.

Chart 13. Direct beneficiaries of funds



When it comes to end beneficiaries, all the foundations stated that all the citizens can enjoy the benefits of the initiatives they support. In addition, the majority of them indicated youth (66.67%), around one half children, women, and civil society organisations as end beneficiaries. All the other categories of indirect beneficiaries (the sick, the poor, persons with disabilities or special needs, animals, and institutions) are also present, but to a lesser extent.

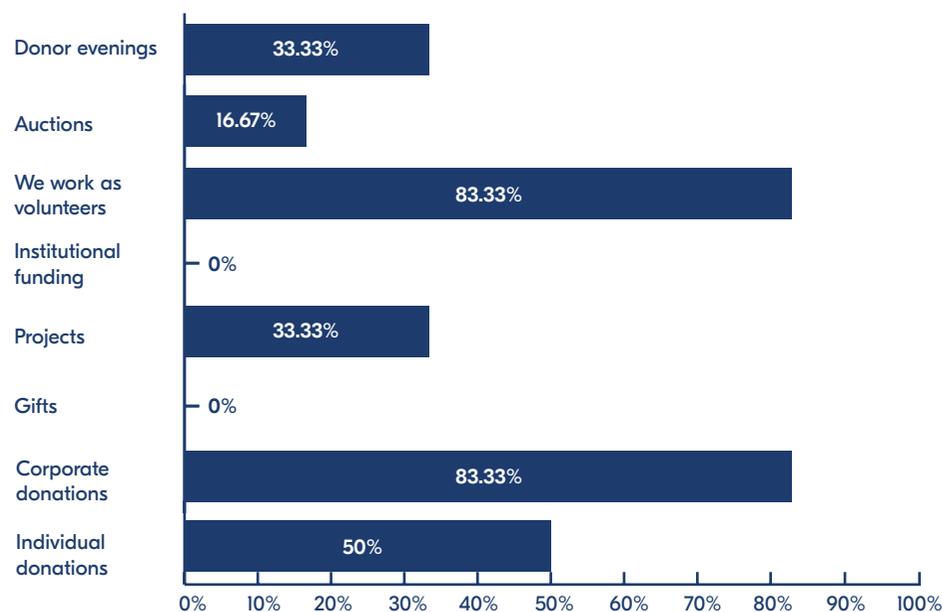
Chart 14. Final beneficiaries of the foundation funds



6.5. Financing

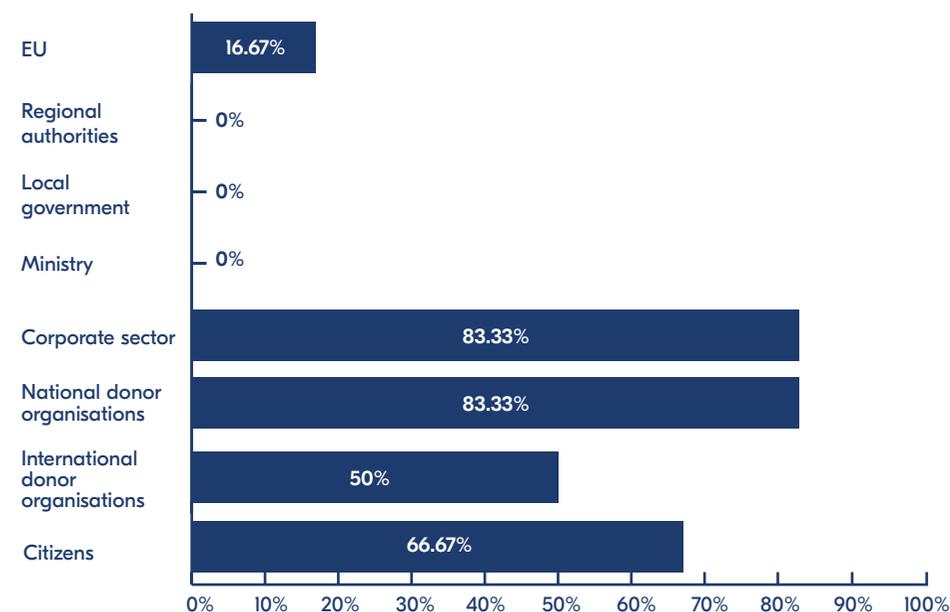
Regarding the method of foundations' funding, most of them (83.33%) indicated corporate donations and volunteering, one half individual donations of citizens, one third projects, and one foundation mentioned auctions.

Chart 15. Methods of funding



The funding of the majority of community foundations (83.33%) comes from the corporate sector and national donor organisations, followed by citizens (in 66.67% of foundations). One half mentioned international donor organisations, while only one listed the European Union as their source of funding. None of the surveyed community foundations receive funding from the ministries, regional authorities and local governments.

Chart 16. Sources of funding



The representatives of foundations were asked to rank the sources of funding according to their relevance (amount of funds from each source). Table 7 shows the ranking of different sources of funding in each of the six analysed foundations (where 1 implies the most relevant source of funding), as well as the ranking method based on the funding sources. It follows that national donor organisations are the most important source of funding for community foundations in Serbia, followed by the corporate sector, citizens, and finally international donor organisations.

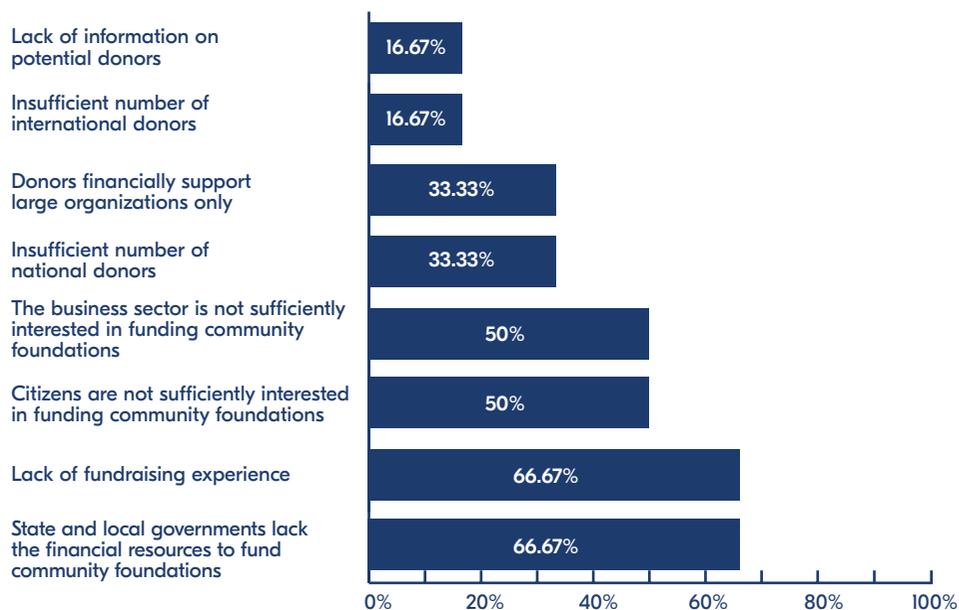
Table II. The most important sources of funding- ranking

| | Citizens | International donor organisations | National donor organisations | Corporate sector |
|--------------|----------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------|
| Foundation 1 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| Foundation 2 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| Foundation 3 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 4 |
| Foundation 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Foundation 5 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 2 |
| Foundation 6 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Mode | 3 | 0 | 1 | 2 |

All the surveyed foundations listed Trag Foundation as one of the five major donors, which corroborates the importance of this organisation for the support to community foundations.

When it comes to the funding problems they face, the majority of community foundations (66.67%) stated lack of experience in fundraising, as well as the fact that the State and local governments have scarce funds available for these purposes. A half of them said that the corporate sector is not sufficiently interested in this type of financing, and the same number stressed that the citizens are insufficiently interested in financially supporting community foundations. A small number of national donors and the fact that donors support large organisations only were identified as obstacles by one third of foundations. One of the foundations listed the lack of information on potential donors, and the other the insufficient number of international donors.

Chart 17. What are the main problems you've been facing in terms of funding?



7 “We are the Ones Empowering Others” - Results of the Analysis of Interviews with the Community Foundations’ Representatives

7.1. Organisation and structure of community foundations

Two out of six foundations whose representatives were interviewed are already established and are in partnership with Trag Foundation acting as an organisation supporting community foundations in the Western Balkans region. Four emerging foundations were supported under the programme “*Our Local Foundation – Community Has a Say!*” launched by Trag Foundation in 2019. The development path leading a group of citizens to apply to this programme differed in different locations: in some, the participants were already organised in various non-governmental organisations. For the others, this was the first entry in the civil sector. Still, all the respondents participating in the interviews knew each other, they demonstrated joint commitment to act in their community and they recognised the Trag Foundation programme as an opportunity to formally join forces to bring about positive changes in their environment. One of the respondents quoted their own experience with the concept and work of community foundations abroad:

Some ten years ago, I participated in a study visit to Hungary and Slovakia where I had an opportunity to see the way the community foundations work. Being twenty years in the civil sector, this seemed to be the fairest and most ideal way of helping the local community, and then this call was launched by Trag and we knew right away we would apply, and then I gathered together my team I believe in and share the same values with.

All the respondents, those engaged in the existing and those active in the emerging foundations alike, pointed out **commitment to their community**, recognised mutual values and previous working experience as the leading motives for establishing community foundations:

It all started with people who feel the local level as their own, who are local patriots, those having the feeling that something needs to be given back to the community and that each of us should leave their mark in as much as possible. We have all been in the civil sector for a long time...

With respect to the organisational structure and division of tasks in foundations, all the respondents stressed **fluid structure** and work processes based on horizontal set-up, agreements, and predominantly volunteer work. Only a few foundations of those already established, have a temporarily paid position in the area of accounting or promotion (including website maintenance), as well as the established bodies like the management board, but with no clear terms of reference for frequently overlapping functions. Consequently, “everyone’s doing everything”. An exception is the foundation from Niš where there is a clear division of work, with three basic tasks: fundraising, visual identity and promotion, and work with the citizens. This foundation already has management and selection committees (dealing with the selection of applications received) in place. The total number of people actively engaged in the work of the foundations rarely exceeds five.

On the one hand, all the respondents highlight the value of the mutual agreement and equal positions:

When we meet, we seek to have a majority so we can make decisions together...

The decisions are made by us practically being in everyday contact, we see each other all the time, if not every day, then several times a week for sure...

Without good communication and agreement there can be no results and this is the starting point for everything - we have to communicate, agree and then everything is much easier.

On the other hand, despite the tasks primarily being delegated based on individual skills and experiences - so “everyone is doing what they think they can

do best”- the interviewees underline that they would need a more permanent and **sustainable structure of work** division, in order to clearly define different segments of action (most often mentioned are the sectors linked to the environment, arts or management), and to overcome the problem of individual work overload and burn-out. The interviewee from Šabac said that one of the underlying reasons for the unsuccessful onset of work of their foundation was the pandemic which paralyzed them in many ways, making in-person meetings impossible as well as “the lack of time of team members and different opinions about how to fundraise, what would be the most suitable approach, and that led to a standstill”.

When it comes to ensuring donations, all the foundations follow a similar strategy with varying success. The idea of community foundations is to attract the local community and identify donors in it, ideally among the citizens themselves. Donors are also sought among local companies or prominent and successful entrepreneurs. Our respondents stressed that, although individual donations from individual citizens would suit the spirit of these organisations the most, their up scaling implied a logistic challenge, with the sums needed to finance projects being hard to raise:

We are trying to fundraise from our citizens...but we realised that (...) (this) takes up most of our time, since these are small donations and we have to raise a lot, so now we’ve been trying to shift our focus a bit more to companies (...),

(...) since the largest financial effect and structurally biggest donations were received from large companies.

In order to encourage businesspeople to invest their money, they use **personal contacts** and **public donor events**, such as mini street campaign “Be among the first 50 donors”- or other **creative methods**, like auctioning items belonging to local community celebrities. A certain advantage in this sense, enjoyed by foundations in smaller cities, is related to the fact that such events are easily advertised, allowing for a quick and efficient mobilization of personal contacts and acquaintances. The existing three strategies to ensure funding are best developed and summarised in the experience of the foundation from Niš:

First are individual donations and in that respect we have created a list of some 200 closest friends, and then the story develops in concentric circles. These are personal,

individual donations, and we are regularly asking for money. Second is the corporate sector, we write letters and pay visits to large companies donating to us (...) and third are auctions. This is something we have launched ourselves, something innovative (...). We offer items of well-known musicians, painters, athletes... from Niš. We auction their items and raise money.

The money raised is used to fund smaller, locally-oriented projects submitted by the citizens to the foundation's open calls. The foundations' representatives and volunteers are not involved in the selection process. Rather, they established a committee whose work is independent, transparent, and competent:

We are really not involved in the selection of projects or anything else. We are completely exempted from it; we trust the selection committee and have no influence on the members; the only thing we care about is for our selection committee to be adequate, to have someone from each of the categories like the media, business, civil society, and then they are the ones deciding.

With respect to the donors, both bigger and smaller ones, no pressure was imposed regarding the policy and practice in funding project activities supported by community foundations.

7.2. Objectives and mission of community foundations

Describing the key objectives of their foundations, the interviewees are considerably aligned, and understand their mission as **empowering local, informal, neighbourhood initiatives**:

Our goal was to support informal groups of citizens (...) in resolving some problems in their area, in their neighbourhood (...)

We perceive ourselves (...) as some kind of a resource provider who should support local organisations, not many of them are around (...) (which) rather rarely implement their activities and are not sustainable; they mainly do not enjoy the support of larger donors, therefore in that context, we are speaking about strengthening civil society in general...

The fundamental goals of the foundation would briefly imply mobilising local resources in the context of people, namely their talents and opportunities.

By defining the vision of their activities focused on very generalised goals such as “improving the quality of life” and “creating atmosphere to connect people”, our interviewees very specifically identify the changes that the work of their foundation at the local level could bring about. Irrespective of whether the supported activities are to be focused on culture, arts, renovating children's playgrounds or organising a public debate, they represent a part of an effort “to invest in the local community”, and are to be recognised by the citizens as relevant for the community life and development. This particular dimension of empowering citizens to take part in an active life of their community has been passionately emphasized, whereas the foundations would primarily play a supportive role in this process:

This is our goal, we want (people) to realise they can change things by themselves in their surroundings; they don't have to wait for someone to show up and say or do something for them.

Support, this is how I see it (...) we need to tell citizens to assume responsibility both for themselves and the environment they live in.

We want to move people a little, to lift them, to motivate them to get out of a certain lethargy and apathy... not to sit and say 'ohh, the city did nothing, the State did nothing, our institutions, systems are bad' and to sit and cry over some evil destiny ... we want them to be proactive and not necessarily wait for someone else to do something instead of us.

Aware of **the apathy among the citizens**, the representatives of community foundations noted, almost without exception, that the spirit of constant criticism of what's not good became rather common, without the readiness to change anything by one's own effort. Understanding that the reason underlying such mood does not lie in the people's mindset, but in the overall socio-political and political situation, our interviewees still believe in the proactive power of citizens, provided they are ensured frameworks, support, and initial motive. This is the segment where they potentially see key contributions of their foundations. Their narratives include descriptions of positive response of their fellow citizens who were not only motivated to act once they received

financial support to do so, but also got additional motivational power in realising that the foundation and the people supporting them within it, actually make **a part of the same ecosystem**:

This initial get-to-know-one another meeting (...) we took a rather informal stance (...) I think they were surprised by it and everyone was really grateful and told us similar stuff, like 'this is the first project we were approved, we have been addressing the municipality and town and whoever, but this is the first time we actually got something, thank you...' (...) these people were really thankful someone trusted them (...) recognising that what they were doing was something valuable for the community (...) and their understanding that it was not about the money coming from a fund (...) this is literally the money raised from their fellow citizens.

Our interviewee from Novi Pazar shed some light on the additional role of community foundations in areas that are particularly politically polarized and where the struggle for raising awareness on the relevance of common good goes hand in hand with the foundation's role of a **mediator**:

In small environments, everything is rather polarized (...) mostly in the political context, and then speaking about (...) national minorities and all these other things, the entire society is pretty much divided (...) It is a great challenge to unite all these opposing sides around something representing a common good (...), currently, this is our leading strength since we have managed to stay neutral for years and keep (...) good terms with everyone. This means we are taking a role of a mediator within our cooperation.

Taking into account that the majority of these foundations are just starting their operation (four out of four have only started their work at the end of 2019) and that their work was **significantly slowed down due to the outbreak of the pandemic**, the number of activities executed could not be extensive. Still, the emerging foundations consider the large number of informal groups applying to their calls as their success, which is again interpreted by their initial belief that "people are, in fact, interested if they are well motivated and provided an opportunity and resources".

Asked about the specific, successfully implemented projects they were proud of, the respondents singled out different examples: from support to refurbishment of children playgrounds, development of small public spaces, mountain-

eers' initiative to ensure marking of a popular hiking trail, to the initiative of younger residents to rearrange their village center as a venue for people gathering and cultural events. They stressed the **additional particularly valuable impact** of any launched campaign on **deepening motivation and mobilising** other citizens to join the action:

This was a group of let's say six residents, six apartments that got together wanting to change something (...), to do something with the green area, fix the playground around their building, and all neighbours were rather sceptical about it ... and then it happened that, once they got the money, when they got grants, when they started working, then around forty people joined in, and they got (...) some T-shirts they wanted to print out from somewhere and now that money will be used on top... So, people started joining and for me, this is, how should I put it, this is an indicator of a change we wish to see.

Relying on these positive experiences, the respondents assessed that the role of their foundations was **far broader than simply that of a donor**. They see their organisations as places for communication in their local communities, as stakeholders who help identify the common good and thus contribute to inter-connectedness of citizens and their liberation from the feeling of a weakened or non-existent power to act:

At the same time, we wouldn't like just to be some donors providing money for delivery of some projects (...) but we really wish to open topics with them, to register everything they are doing, to talk about what that is, why they have chosen that, how can that grow and advance further.

We also want to encourage other people, because we have noticed in some of our previous activities as well, that when someone realises that a particular activity is good, that their neighbours have done something nice, positive, then they want to do the same...

We want to contribute to establishing mutual interlinks, to help mitigate an unavoidable process of isolation and enchantment we cannot stop, but we will certainly wake some people up.

The identified, natural space for their action is their immediate local community. However, almost all the respondents wanted to empower both urban and

rural parts of their municipalities equally, and even reach some kind of regional effect through cooperation with similar organisations if possible:

I believe that our practice and small-scale experiences can be invaluable to someone starting something for the first time...

Maybe with the assistance of other foundations, we can build some kind of a network or movement addressing specific local issues.

7.3. Perception of the local community problems

Asked about their perception of the burning local issues, the respondents' answers may be categorized in two groups. On the one hand, they outlined specific infrastructure **and other deficiencies affecting the poor quality of life in their local communities**: absence of ramps for people with mobility difficulties, lack of marked cycling paths, a small number of cultural and art events, and generally low level of investments in this domain, neglected public spaces, both indoor venues and open space like playgrounds and parks. On the other hand and more frequently, they pointed out the citizens' **apathy and lack of will to associate** and act, sometimes leading to their disunity and divisions on political or other grounds.

The major problem is that people feel (...) some kind of hopelessness, and think that nothing can be done and that they feel that someone might intimidate them...

People have become quite apathetic (...) society is totally atomized, they are quite divided, they have no trust, less and less, they don't really trust anything ...

Many respondents attributed the lack of trust (being an impediment to association and action at the local level) to the unresponsiveness of local institutions and their fundamental absence of commitment to address the issues affecting the quality of citizens' lives:

They (institutions) demonstrate by their everyday practice that they are not here for this town and its citizens and this lack of trust simply stems from that fact...

Whatever the specific issue is (...) the main problem is reflected in the lack of systemic solution, I mean, whenever any action is initiated, it is of ad hoc nature...

Local government pays little attention to the actual needs of their citizens; it is simply playing the role of administration in that respect... A major problem is that citizens do not trust them, they know they have no one to turn to here...

The key problems, observed at the institutional level, are related to the lack of support from institutions to a large extent.

Our respondents consider community foundations the entities that could work on **restoring trust**, if not in the formal institutions, then at least in the citizens' own capacities and in the power of joint action. As indicated by one of our interviewees, all the other citizens can make sure that individuals actually can make a change in their surroundings through the targeted and ongoing support to specific initiatives. Apart from that, mutual trust can also be enhanced through direct insight into the jointly produced effects:

Trust needs to be built among people, to make it OK to ask your neighbour "hey, come help me do something" and for your neighbour to ask you "hey, come help me do something" (...) it is not only about changing something in your own backyard or building, but it is more about a jointly lived experience. Irrespective of how small it might be, now there is a network, namely a relationship among these people who took part, and someone they can refer to.

Through their activities and financial and infrastructure support, the community foundations could ensure sustained duration of this newly-established trust and thus raise the capacities of the community to work on making a change in their environment through joint action. They also pointed out the advantages of the experience that volunteers from community foundations have, which could be transferred via joint platforms to those walking the path of activism for the first time, as well as the existence of physical space - the one in which community foundations are active - as a place for exchanging ideas and discussing problems:

If they had already gathered together and started doing something, let us try and find a way to help this survive, particularly since we are aware of the obstacles they will encounter and how long this lasts for...

We should gather them together in one place, meaning we should create a space for them to meet, exchange opinions (...). We need to create a space for them where they

would gather together whenever they have a problem, when their neighbours have a problem they recognise the situation, come there, discuss, we can also be there as support (...) or simply to guide them how they could best reach some solutions.

Interestingly, the interviewees considered that citizens perceive them differently than they usually perceive the civil sector, since community foundations' focus is on supporting projects aimed at achieving very specific and tangible results: "You know, I'm sick and tired of those NGO worn out things. This is about solving concrete problems, and the results are achieved quickly". However, this is again linked to the earlier mentioned issue of low level of citizens' trust in formal institutions and, as indicated by our interviewees, their very weak readiness to get more actively involved in the social or political life of their community. Apart from apathy and lack of trust, the citizens are often convinced that the entire system is set in a way that makes their opinions and actions useless. Thus, as noted by one of our respondents, the common position "What can I do on my own, they are the decision-makers. Who will listen to me, what do I have to do with it?" According to the opinion of another respondent, the additional element that prevents them from being more active is the lack of information about the functioning of community foundations, who they are accountable to and the kind of policies they ought to be implementing. Moreover, the generally unfavourable and rather polarized political climate in the country additionally leads the citizens and the civil sector workers into passivity:

My impression is that the people are not sufficiently informed. Even when they are, they do not have enough information about how they could exert pressure on institutions to change, which I consider terribly important (...) They also lack information on the modus operandi and the functioning of the local government. Even when they do have information and specific knowledge, they avoid pointing to certain problems and attempting to solve them, particularly due to the highly polarized political climate. I believe that this is a general problem in the civil sector that avoids - and, I'm referring to the civil sector at the local level - certain, potentially important topics (...) and refraining from identifying anything as a political issue.

Therefore, we were interested in the opinion as to how community foundations could become credible and effective stakeholders in the community social life, thus directly contributing to increased participation and interest of citizens in active life at the local level. On the one hand, the answers focus on

how to "drag the citizens" into activism. Some of the suggestions given include "promotion of positive stories as best practice examples" or delivering trainings (on political culture or increased political engagement) by means of, for instance, thematic calls focusing on overcoming specific problems where the absence of civic knowledge or skills have been identified. There is expressed awareness that things change gradually and slowly, but also that **best practice examples are the best way to achieve a "domino effect"**. On the other hand, the respondents' answers concerned different strategies needed to bring about trust, credibility, and influence. This primarily referred to the capacity to overcome divisions, helping all the citizens to feel included and creating a space for dialogue among all the stakeholders:

We will have to work with people we personally do not agree with on many issues, I mean really a great deal of issues, life issues, but this is also a part of the community and some kind of communication among everyone needs to be established...

We often hear statements such as "Do not go there, we don't know what's lurking in there", etc. Therefore, even when we want to deliver these activities, we have to involve them as well so they do not sabotage us... literally we have to constantly think about whether anyone would be offended although the activities have to do with, for instance, the environment. Who could possibly be threatened by that? (...) We have to introduce some kind of affirmation and we have to involve (...) various sides for the citizens to be more responsive to our calls.

Our respondents do not see the circumstances more specifically related to the community foundations as a serious obstacle to achieving a durable and deeper impact on the local community. The key obstacle lies, in their opinion, in the fact that these circumstances reflect all the complex national social and political issues. A potential response to this problem lies in cooperation with foundations from other locations, i.e., in identifying common and, irresolvable (at the local level) problems:

It is impossible for us to expect that we will change something here right now and that the citizens will be strengthened and empowered; that all will be perfect while on the other hand we live in this chaos. (...) We cannot (...) entirely neglect the context we are living in...

Let's not allow this to become like, we are a community foundation and we do our stuff at the local level. Of course, this is of primary importance and the only thing we can do (...). However, but on the other hand, we must be aware that we there is a link to similar things happening in Serbia (...) I refer to other community foundations and initiative groups like ours, and also to some other things found along the same lines, because without that, everything we are doing is in vain, everything we create is so fragile...

The fact that, thus far, none of the respondents received negative reactions regarding the work of the foundation in their local community is encouraging. They are convinced that all the misunderstandings and poor interpretations may be overcome by “a good communication strategy, making everything consistent and argument-based”.

7.4. Personal motivation

Given that every successful initiative and invested efforts rely on individuals who, by their belief in doing the right thing, motivate others to make the sum of associated citizens a collective working for the common good, we were particularly interested in personal motivation of the community foundations' founders and representatives. Why did they opt for this kind of work? What are the values they deem important and how are these embedded in the work of their community foundations? What is the role of their past life and professional experience in this process?

To the direct question “What personally motivated you to get involved in the foundation's work?” we received similar answers that could be categorised as follows: First, there exists a strong motivation “to do something”, to show others by personal example that “it could be done (...) I'm working three jobs, I am a mother of three and it's possible”, we should not be sitting on the side helplessly, or as put by one of the respondents “in order not to be like those two old guys from the Muppet Show sitting on the balcony and criticizing everyone, we have opted to take that step and actually try to do something”. The second respondent strikingly underlined this position “I don't want to feel helpless about issues happening around me”.

Moreover, there is a clearly articulated idea that “this something” that needs to be done is not only a single, *ad hoc* action, but is heavily rooted in **motiva-**

tion to be a part of a “broader story”. “My motivation was rooted in the knowledge that there should be a larger entity (...) addressing something bigger than one single thing at the local level”. Linked with this is a clear position articulated by multiple respondents, that organisations like community foundations are those “entities” worth building:

For me, the very concept of a community foundation (...) is the most acceptable concept of work (...) because it is locally-based, because it offers broad opportunities to (...) fundraise from the citizens, unlike large foundations...

And the above complemented by a slight disappointment in the civil sector: I think that a lot of money is flowing through the civil sector, without common citizens actually seeing results. You know, they don't get much out of all these trainings, travels, campaigns... These things are tangible; not much money is invested but the change in the field is readily visible.

I worked in organisations providing support to the civil society a lot and got sick and tired of it at some point. This seemed (...) OK, because it relies heavily on the community and not donors.

Previous life and work experiences have had a major impact on our respondents in opting for this type of commitment. Many of them have been working in the civil sector for quite a long time, often their entire professional life. Many are experienced volunteers, and particularly stress the value of volunteering and engagement in their communities: “I find it important to be in the community, namely to be active in the community”. They perceive themselves as activists, and professionals whose knowledge and experience can make a tangible contribution. Some of the respondents emphasised quite personal experiences of living through difficult periods and knowing they had overcome them relying exclusively on the support and help of others. This is the reason they themselves now want to be a part of the support system. They recognise the values they personally find important in the people they cooperate with and consider the foundations should reflect them: “This is it, this is transparency, care for people, empathy, public good, giving. This is how I live. This is it, there are no compromises about this and people recognise it, and I believe we are a great team”.

An additional motive to actively lobby for the work of community foundations lies in their perception of the role such organisations ought to and can play,

not only in the communities they operate in, but also at the national level. The respondents believe that **engagement at the local level can produce direct and tangible benefits** for the citizens: “Under the circumstances we have been living in for quite a while, the only thing producing effects are these various initiatives (...) in micro-communities hoping that all that would somehow be activated and then raised to the national level”. For them, the role of community foundations is to “recognise the context...the situation they are in”.

I think that an ideal community foundation primarily listens to the needs of the citizens, responds to the problems, and quickly takes decisions and solutions, without extensive administration, without some tricky requirements. (...) In my opinion, in order to be sustainable, it should assume a portion of local funding, be it from public or corporate sources – that is irrelevant. I think that a community foundation needs to prove its transparency, to know what the funds are being used for and to manage them well. With all these things falling into place, this could be sustainable.

Furthermore, another role of the foundations they are motivated to advocate for implies encouraging and empowering people, “enabling them to get together, to fulfill their aspirations, to implement their initiatives, to empower them a little and help them gain trust in themselves and their communities”. This calls for raising awareness among the citizens that they ought to learn to use their own **resources**, build accountability towards the **community** they live in, and thus relieve the local civil sector of obligations they would otherwise have towards major donors, in case they were to be the only source of support to civic initiatives:

To mobilise community resources and show that the community alone has (...) assets to resolve all problems, which means that no external assistance is needed and that we are not helpless.

An attempt to focus on local resources, to reach a point where we are not dependent on external donors as much. The donors are not so familiar with the local community, but have their own agenda (...), to get the citizens to organise themselves, to learn to use local resources and dispose of these local assets in a way they find most suitable, in a way that will allow the community to develop.

I believe this is the main misconception - we are not the ones to address these problems, we are there to provide support and strength and encouragement and initi-

ation and inspiration (...) for others to get moving and start doing these things on their own...

Some pillars that actually ought to motivate people to assume the responsibility or to assume it more, to have a different relationship towards the common good.

7.5. Cooperation

Despite the strong emphasis on the necessity to rely on one’s own resources, our interviewees also stressed the immense importance of cooperation: with other community foundations; with larger organisations addressing the needs recognised as important by the local community; however, they also underscored the formalisation of processes ensuring cooperation at the local level, primarily between community foundations and citizens.

Given the ongoing process of the community foundations’ establishment, all the respondents recognised the utmost importance of **mutual communication and support**, as well as of the exchange of ideas and experiences. They stated they have already had opportunities to learn from one another. For instance, the respondents from Stara Pazova indicated the importance of cooperation with the foundation from Niš, whose idea about auctions as a fundraising method they took over, while the Niš-based foundation replicated the idea of organising public raffle. Everyone believes that there will be more opportunities for closer cooperation in the near future, and all of them have high expectations in this respect. They also note the importance of cooperation with more experienced community foundations from the neighbouring countries. Irrespective of the differences in national contexts, they still share lots of similarities in the work principles that may serve as an inspiration and models for the more successful development.

In the context of **cooperation with citizens at the local level**, we were interested in the mechanisms used by foundations to allow citizens to join them, propose ideas and suggest priority problems to be addressed. We have learned that all the foundations have an open channel of communication with the citizens, mostly via questionnaires and open calls on social media channels, where citizens have an opportunity to state their views about the local problems and their prioritization. However, almost all the interviewees agreed that this process cannot get a full swing in this kick-off stage of their institutional-

ization due to two reasons. The first refers to insufficiently built capacities that would allow the foundations to fully adapt to citizens' expectations, while the second concerns the fact that foundations need to earn the trust and be more visible in the broader community first:

If we don't have this capacity to build it, like, "it would be great for you to do this and that", OK, great, thank you, but...this is the idea, I really believe it is, and I think it is one of the key things- foundations should be listening to the community (...) and we have planned to have that, even for the community to vote.

I think that, we have not involved and consulted citizens much in the process of setting priorities to date. We have done it to some extent, although more superficially (...) Actually, we should have become somehow more visible and done something to serve as a basis for discussions with the citizens. We can't just say like "there are six of us that got together and now we want to change things in Pančevo, so come around, talk to us and tell us what is bothering you". Still, this was the path we took, let's first have some kind of a structure, and then, we can tell them "you see, we have supported these projects, we have this many donations, that many citizens have already supported us, that many companies and now, I believe, we already have something based on which we can develop clear mechanisms to involve citizens"...I find this very important - to have some results to show, because this is how we will earn trust, and make the first step towards establishing trust.

The respondents see large potential for broader association and cooperation in the near future and primarily with organisations addressing the issues they themselves perceive as important. In that sense, environmental and human rights organisations were stressed. They also find networking at the local level important, as well as cooperation with other foundations operating in the same local communities, although often they also perceive the future role of their foundations as "some kind of a resource for local organisations".

7.6. Perception of challenges and problems

The issues pertaining to the operational difficulties kept emerging throughout the interviews. However, when the discussion increasingly focused on the challenges faced by individuals or their organisations, it became clear that these were shared by the community foundations in Serbia in their effort to gear all of their resources towards resolving the problems of local communities.

The absolutely biggest challenge for all the interviewees, as individuals committed to local activism almost exclusively through volunteering, is **lack of time** and reconciling the work at the foundation with other responsibilities and tasks. The project-funded work also implies that things are to be completed in a precisely set timeframes, i.e., that the calls and specific local actions need to be finalised at the specific points in time. This requires major effort when the persons implementing the tasks have other (primary) assignments and when the entire work at the foundation is taking place in "their free time". The second problem identified is closely linked to this - **sustainability of foundations' work**: "If we could pay at least two more people to fundraise and find projects and (...) work more with the community, etc, etc. "Currently, the tasks are divided on the basis of capabilities and affiliations of individuals and the time they have at their disposal which turned out not to be the best possible and sustainable model. There is a pronounced need for specific full-time jobs, as well as for premises that not all the community foundations have.

This is followed by a systemic, broader problem, reflected in the fragmentation of work of the local level civil society organisations. Insufficient networking slows down their work and reduces the efficiency of community foundations' actions:

One of the things I see as an obstacle is absence of coherence of local civil society organisations, and generally, limited opportunities for organisations to (...) do something together, which I consider would be relevant for the local community. I believe that you, as a single organisation, can hardly cover diverse issues, at least at the level and to the extent you would like to (...) It would be good to have a more strongly developed civil sector, to mutually help one another and work together in order to (...) be able to utilise different available resources. I hereby primarily refer to the knowledge of the people engaged ... We are now trying to do something in this respect, to advocate for a social hub that would be used by the civil society organisations and some active individuals in the community, because 90% of organisations do not have their own premises. This is the reason they cannot execute a bunch of their activities.

Finally, the respondents noted the **widespread lack of trust** in local communities as a general problem. There is a strong consensus in the perception that citizens are mistrustful by default "since they have been deceived so many times by who knows whom", same as that the public mistrust in the work of

institutions and organisations is a given thing, a primary context in which the entire social life takes place.

Still, the debate showed that the respondents were pondering the solutions to all of the aforementioned issues at the same time. For example, teamwork and internal communication are highly valued as tools for overcoming the current situation of difficult sustainability of the foundations' work. In addition, "when the implementation of these initiatives started, it lifted the spirits of all of us, when you see that something is actually happening in the community (...) these joint actions, gatherings, a mass of people joining to do something, it's motivating indeed".

It often happens that somebody else would take over, when one falls, then somebody else pulls things through...

I suppose it is also up to us and our abilities and our motivation - to find a way (...) to address the challenges encountered.

When it comes to the issue of general lack of trust, the solution is again seen in communication and face-to-face contact with the citizens. However, as reported by all the interviewees, the pandemic and limited opportunities for in-person gatherings significantly jeopardise this strategy. Without these, no closer connections may be established with people, and there is no opportunity to build credibility:

Discussions, talks, meetings, personal addresses (...) because it is different when something is just written somewhere (...), and different when you meet, and they are able to listen to you and hear you for real, what you are saying and feel your enthusiasm, your commitment and desire to help them. I believe it is very important to gather them together and personally talk to them.

7.7. Visions of future action

The prospects for future action were really important to all representatives of community foundations participating in the study. They demonstrate optimism, hope, and determination to overcome many problems they are facing. Asked to elaborate on their foundation's vision for the near future, they responded that they perceived their foundation as an organisation with a

large number of supported or implemented initiatives, gathering many committed donors, and citizens actively participating in the decision-making process. They all wish to gain reputation and credibility, primarily of citizens in their communities, to expand the donor network which would include small and medium-sized businesses and individuals who would then give regular monthly donations. Moreover, they stress the importance of being **recognised** as credible partners **by the institutions of the local government** and as a "trigger, challenging local government to move in that direction". First and foremost they want to be **citizen-oriented**, striving to become "the first place citizens would think of to resolve a problem", "the first institution, first channel citizens would turn to when they realise 'I have an idea for the local community development, for the city development, let's see how we can do it together'".

In their visions, the respondents outline the role of mediation in potential conflicts in the local community, and of a role model institution from the aspect of a transparent and credible community action. Many underscore their wish to extend their activities to the neighbouring municipalities and became more active in rural areas. Recognising that the overall economic and political situation may worsen in the coming period, they want their foundations to play the role of "shock absorber", and to mitigate to some extent the negative trends that threaten the quality of life of people in local communities.

They would particularly like to see the impact of their foundations on **continued independent engagement of the citizens**, that there be "follow-up activities of the projects they are supporting ... in order for their small, informal groups to grow, empower, do things on their own, etc. (...). Supporting someone is not enough, since it calls for some kind of a process-related thing". This implies changes in the mindset and awaking citizens from the omnipresent apathy.

Responding to the question of how they see their community in the future they themselves could shape, they say they see developed public spaces, decorated facades, developed cultural and art programmes, educational activities for youth, and also a place in which "it is quite normal, and not (...) unusual to see that someone has cleaned the park or a yard in front of their building, or the greenery surrounding apartment buildings (...), these things need to be habitual and that the people take care of their neighbourhood". The change they

would like to see the most in their communities is the change of the mindset of the citizens:

The change implies people understand they are able to make a change for themselves, their neighbours, their families, i.e., that they are able to fight for something, to be empowered, encouraged to fight for themselves, to confront what does not suit them or leads them in the wrong direction (...) not to sit quietly, but to stand up for themselves.

8 Instead of a Conclusion

The community foundations in Serbia are still in their initial stages of development. The pandemic made this stage even more difficult for them. Besides the fact that the activists, the volunteers and their family members contracted the infection and had to take care of their loved ones, the declaration of the state of emergency, followed by the introduction and persistence of epidemiological measures, have all shrunk their opportunities for meeting citizens in person, for two-way communication and better representation of the public. Additionally, it ought to be stressed that four out of six presented foundations were established on the eve of the COVID-19 outbreak. Scarcity of funds followed, given that investments were predominantly made in the healthcare sector. Fundraising campaigns from individual citizens had to be organised in difficult circumstances due to frequent bans on gathering of a larger number of people in closed spaces. On the other hand, the need to act in extraordinary circumstances also yielded some positive effects: for instance, foundations had to design innovative approaches to fundraising and promotion of their work carefully - mainly on the internet. As mentioned earlier, all this led to rather successful online auctions as a fundraising tool. Moreover, as already indicated in the introduction, trust and reliance on the people in one's immediate surroundings was on the rise in the times of crises. Therefore, the local community was often the only place to seek and express solidarity and readiness for direct assistance.

On the other hand, apathy among the Serbian citizens became evident due to the unfavourable socio-economic and political situation. Although there have been certain indications about the increased social engagement in the past decade, the majority of the citizens remained inactive. The founders of community foundations believe in the **proactive power of the citizens**, provided they are offered **frameworks, support, and initial encouragement**, which they perceive to be their fundamental mission. Lack of trust is a significant obstacle to association and action, and community foundations, as perceived by their representatives, are exactly those who work on **restoring trust**, especially by **strengthening belief of citizens in their own capacities and the power of joint action**. Based on the areas of their activities we may conclude that community foundations are development-oriented and identify the **improved quality of life in the community** as their general objective.

The community foundations' representatives are mainly **volunteers**. They are strongly motivated to do something for their community, and they dedicate their free time to building community foundations. Their **organic connection** with the communities they operate in is impressive. They understand the problems of their local communities in the most direct way. In that sense, the way in which they managed to embed their previously established friendships and professional connections, i.e., their own "social capital" and mutually incorporate trust into the roots of their foundations is particularly important.

Despite broader population of the local communities not being directly included in the foundations' strategic and operational decision-making, community foundations do listen to the needs of citizens and integrate them in the prioritization of their actions, both via formal communication channels, and informally. By joining forces, the community foundations' representatives tend to create "an atmosphere conducive to connecting people". They see their community foundations as places **for communication**, as stakeholders capable of mediation **in building an idea of the common good**, thus contributing to inter-connectedness of citizens and their liberation from the feeling of a weakened or non-existent power to act.

Community foundations still face challenges and obstacles. The absolutely greatest problem is the **lack of time** and harmonizing the work at the foundation with other responsibilities and tasks. Some of the major challenges imply **planning the sustainability of their development**, and related specialisation of activities to more efficiently implement their plans. Identification of donors is somewhat easier among legal entities. However, attracting smaller, citizens' donations, that should be the heart and essence of the community foundations' actions, poses a particular challenge. Encouragingly, community foundations have not been forced to balance between the donor requirements and community needs, but are fully committed to the community needs for the time being.

The experiences of the community foundations' representatives testify to the strong **transformational effect** that mobilisation and joint work for the common good have on the citizens. Once the hope is awakened and some results are achieved be it "only" a reconstruction of a park or public gathering space, an opportunity opens up for the snowball effect and the consequent belief of citizens in their own power to change their living and working envi-

ronment. A special "higher" goal of such actions could be restoration of trust in institutions, i.e., of the awareness that local institutions (in governmental or non-governmental sector) must be focused on the citizens and accountable to them. Only under such circumstances, may we speak about functional communities that people want to stay and live in and their improvement. However, we must not neglect the spillover effect of this mindset to a higher, national level where citizens could take a more proactive and more engaged relationship towards institutions whose main purpose would have to be the improvement of quality of life of all the citizens. In that sense, it needs to be stressed that this is one of the objectives of the described Trag Foundation programme focused on the movement building of community foundations to allow them to act more efficiently at the national level, and to pool their knowledge and experiences.

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