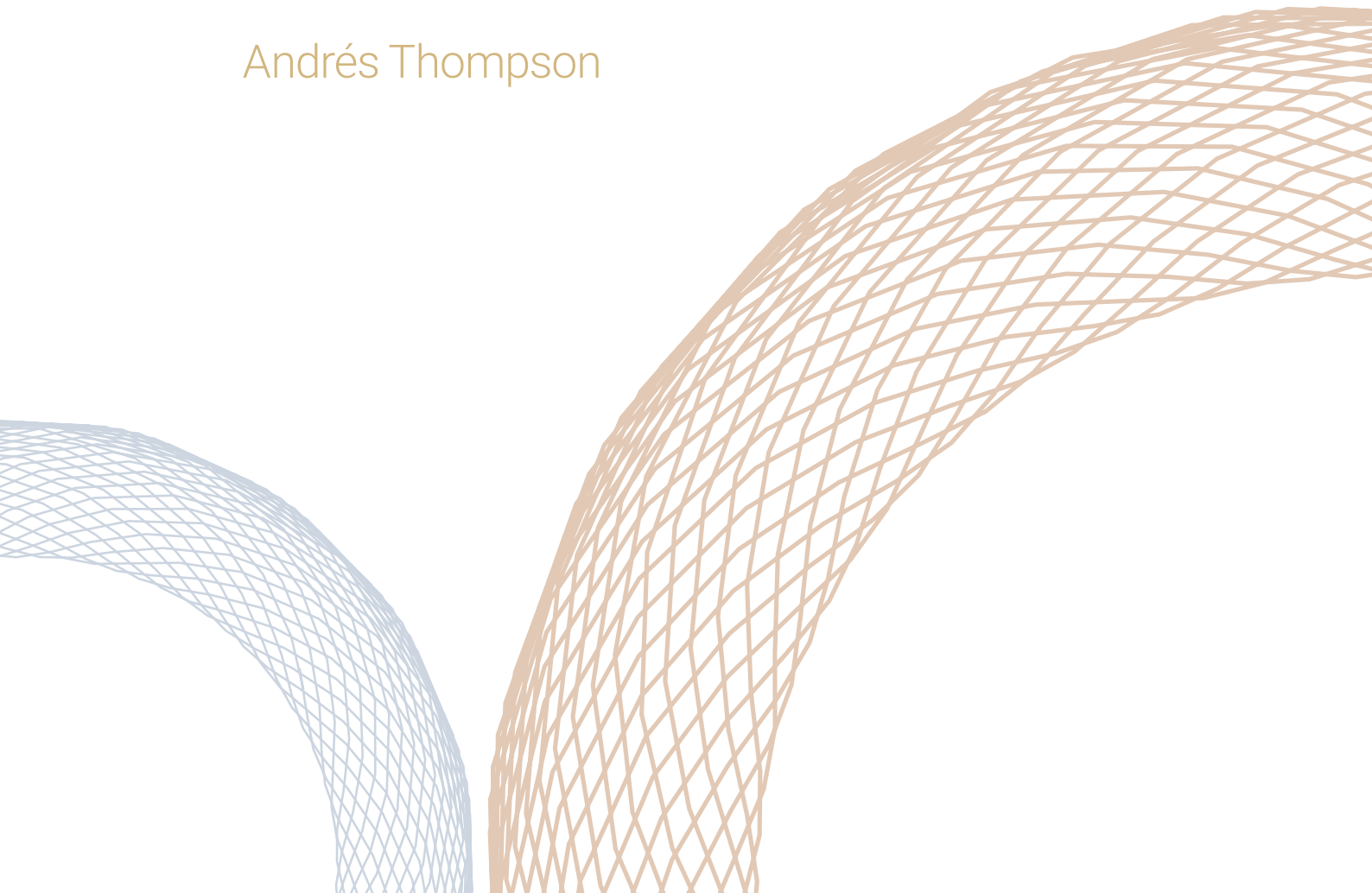




Community philanthropy in Uruguay

The case of Colonia

Andrés Thompson



Contents

Introduction	3
The FRC and social change	4
Resource mobilization and the interest group approach	10
Conclusions	14

Introduction

Discussions and criticism regarding current development paradigms and the role of civil society organizations have become increasingly complex in the last few years. International cooperation practices related to development were specifically discussed at the Global Summit on Community Philanthropy.¹ In addition, the need for shifting the power and advocating for direct interventions and investments in communities were clearly identified during the Summit.

In that framework, community foundations and so-called ‘community philanthropy organizations’ would become key players, in that they could channel the flow of resources directly to local communities. Such a hypothesis, though plausible, lacks unequivocal evidence on which to better advocate to #ShiftThePower. This paper was prepared within such a framework. Its main purpose is to describe the strengths and weaknesses of community philanthropy by examining the case of the Fondo Región Colonia (in English, the Colonia Region Fund which will hereafter be referred to as FRC) in Uruguay.² The analysis centers on two main variables:

- 1 Capacity for social change, and,
- 2 Resource mobilization through a multi-stakeholder approach.

1 The Summit was held in Johannesburg, South Africa from 1st – 2nd December 2016, organized by the GFCF.

2 Colonia del Sacramento is the capital city of the Colonia Department, one of the 19 departments of Uruguay. The Colonia Department has an area of 6,106 sq km and a population of 128,241 (63,099 men and 65,142 women), according to the 2011 census. The city of Colonia, with a population of 22,000, is located 177 km from Montevideo – the capital of Uruguay – on the banks of the River Plate estuary, opposite the Argentine capital city of Buenos Aires.

The FRC and social change

The FRC is a social organization³ constituted by community activists from various localities⁴ in the Colonia Department, in Uruguay. Founded in 2007, the FRC was the result of a process to strengthen civil society in Colonia, promoted by the Montevideo-based Latin American Center for Human Economy (CLAEH), in partnership with the Colonia City Council and with the support of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. For this project, several social community-based organizations working on such issues as health, education, culture, and disability decided to join efforts to strengthen local development processes by outlining a common vision of the communities where they operated.

From the beginning, based on the 'community foundation' model, they worked to create an institution capable of mobilizing resources to foster local development. Although such an institution is not a legal form of organization in Uruguay, the FRC was created as a non-profit whose initial purpose, however, was to operate as a donor to provide financial and technical support to social organizations in the region.

FRC's mission is to 'efficiently mobilize and manage resources to promote social participation in the strengthening of development projects of organizations in Colonia and the region.' Its vision is 'a region where citizens participate and are committed to the social, economic, and environmental sustainability of their territory; and where the FRC is a leading community organization that mobilizes resources to achieve the sustainable development objectives of our localities.'

The FRC is made up of 40 members, 10 of whom work on an honorary basis. They meet regularly to evaluate, support, and develop programmes and projects. Since its inception, the FRC has had the support of the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, the GFCF, and the Inter-American Foundation, among others. More recently, the United States Embassy in Uruguay and local and national organizations have also provided their support.

Considering its original configuration, vision, and mission, I wondered to what extent the FRC and its work had had a relevant impact in terms of social change in Colonia. Aware of how difficult it is to define the type of 'social change' to which I refer, and the indicators to measure it, given the limitations of this paper, I do not intend to thoroughly discuss the prevailing theories on the subject. Nevertheless, in general, it could be said that 'a social change is a change in the structures of society created by ethical and cultural values, norms, symbols, and cultural products, as well as internal and external forces (multiple factors) throughout history. Such change has an impact on the way that the individuals in that social group live their lives and perceive the world. The notion of social change entails the change or transformation of various structures in a population. This social change can be expressed in many ways: from constant superficial changes to the transformation of structures that are deeply rooted in tradition. The reasons for social

³ *Asociación Civil Fondo Región Colonia*, Incorporation No. 298/2012.

⁴ Colonia Valdense, Colonia del Sacramento, Conchillas, Florencio Sanchez, Juan Lacaze, La Paz, Miguelete, Nueva Helvecia and Riachuelo.

change are varied and can be explicit or implicit, voluntary or involuntary, according to the type of population and the elements outside of it.⁵

From a more community-based approach, 'social change is the psychological component of the concept of development in that it ensures consideration of extra-economic factors in its treatment. In other words, to achieve development it is also necessary to change the habits, values, behavioural patterns, interests, etc. that shape the lifestyles of individuals, groups, and institutions. Social change stresses, therefore, that the economic phenomenon is not autonomous and that its analysis should be incorporated into a reflection on the motivations, behaviours, and value system of the people, who must be regarded as the central protagonist of development.'⁶

During the first years of operation, the FRC did not undertake any activities of its own in Colonia. It only financed projects that were executed by other organizations. Therefore, an analysis of the portfolio of the projects that it funded can shed more light on its work. Traditionally, in the world of philanthropy, the proposed projects that are submitted to funding organizations comply with the guidelines that they establish. That is, the financing institution provides guidance – either detailed or general – as to what actions or projects it wishes to support. This guidance is usually (or should be) in agreement with the vision and mission of the institution that issued the call for proposals.

In the first years, FRC's calls for proposals were general and open. Although the first call (organized in 2007) pointed out that the objective was to 'strengthen the management skills of social organizations in Colonia regarding their local development initiatives', most applications for funds did not mention it; rather, they merely proposed a wide variety of projects. For proposal evaluation, an ad hoc committee was formed with members of the FRC. CLAEH, acting as a support organization, defined the 'eligibility criteria based on the pertinence of the projects to the development of the locality (excluding welfare), their links to local agendas, and their viability and feasibility.'⁷

Given the characteristics of this call, the result was not surprising. There was a certain degree of confusion and contradiction between the objectives of the call and the aforementioned criteria. That year (2007), the projects that received funds included training in the care and preservation of food for 14 participants; production of a community newsletter as a space for communication among social actors; connection of a polyclinic to an urban sanitation system; publication of a book that reflected the cultural identity of a community; purchase of a movie projector for another community; manufacture of traditional dresses and repair of musical instruments for a dance ensemble; and, preservation of the roof of a heritage building.

Similar projects were financed over the following years, during which five additional calls were issued. The projects focused on the provision of equipment for some institutions,

5 https://www.ecured.cu/Cambio_social

6 EL CAMBIO SOCIAL COMUNITARIO. Análisis de la Influencia de los factores de Implantación y Asimilación sobre la Aceptación de las Innovaciones en contextos Comunitarios de Bolivia. Erick Roth U., Departamento de Psicología, Universidad Católica Boliviana 'San Pablo.' No date provided.

7 Región Colonia: movilizando recursos locales para el desarrollo, W. K. Kellogg Foundation and CLAEH, CLAEH, Montevideo, 2009.

development of cultural products (books, films, film festivals, etc.), repair of playground equipment, and renovation of buildings. Until then, the FRC had not developed its 'theory of change' or any other similar proposition.⁸ One could say that the open calls were the result of the lack of a theory of change. Since there was no clarity as to what objectives and results the FRC was trying to achieve, it was difficult to find projects that would give credence to its theory and/or strategy. Thus, the support granted was varied. In many cases, the funds were awarded to welfare projects with questionable impacts on local development. Undoubtedly, they constituted a great learning for FRC members because it led them to rethink their role in social change, refine their evaluation instruments, and better define the bases of the calls.

In 2015, due to the accurate perception that local institutions had limited capacity to put forward proposals for change, an innovation was introduced. The innovation consisted of incorporating into the process – which starts with the call and ends with the selection of grantees – an intermediate stage: a 'call for ideas' rather than a call for projects. The institutions were asked to send ideas for change instead of project proposals. Based on these ideas, they were invited to a 'workshop for idea development' to be trained in project planning – identification of the problem to solve, how to do it, what strategy to implement, expected results, timeline, and budget. In addition, to accompany the workshop, the FRC prepared a *Manual for idea development – transforming problems into proposals*.⁹ The workshop, which has been held regularly ever since, improved the technical capacity of the organizations, creating spaces for exchange and mutual support.

Recently, in 2017, the decision was made to build the organizations' institutional capacity instead of financing their external projects. This decision stemmed from the fact that the organizations were experiencing management difficulties in the conduction of their projects. The idea was that by supporting institutional improvements, their local impacts would increase. The bases of the call expressed this unequivocally:

2017 FRC call for proposals

In the social sector, institutional strengthening has become increasingly relevant since the 1990s. But what are we really talking about? And how important is it?

In general terms, to address institutional strengthening, there are two main approaches:

- 1** The technical approach This prioritizes organizational efficiency and efficacy. It is associated with the internal dimension, which seeks to optimize resources and quality programmes.
- 2** The political approach The idea here is to coordinate the work of the organization and the expected social and political implications. This approach facilitates participatory

8 There is extensive literature on the 'theory of change.' For the purposes of this paper, we adopted the theory developed by Patricia Rogers for UNICEF. Rogers states that 'a 'theory of change' explains how activities can produce a series of results that contribute to having the final expected impacts. A theory of change can be formulated for interventions of any sort – an event, a project, a program, a policy, a strategy, an organization.' UNICEF, 2014.

9 The Manual was developed by the author and is available at <http://www.fondoregioncolonia.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/manual-para-pagina.pdf>

processes as it recognizes that an organization is driven by its values and mission, which are embedded in a context where the relationships with the environment are of the essence. It is associated with the external dimension.

These approaches have sometimes been unnecessarily dissociated. Nevertheless, in fact, they complement each other, as the following definition proposes: 'Institutional strengthening can be understood as the social actions (agreements, behaviours, and learnings) that give an organization a degree of internal strength that enables it to be efficient in its social, political, economic, and cultural environment.'

Institutional strengthening is an efficient balance between resource management, organizational agreements, skill development, and the context in which the organization is to establish the relationships necessary to achieve its objectives and goals, raise funds, mediate politically, and advocate for an effective change in society. Therefore, its importance lies in the direct relationship between the institutional maturity of an organization and its ability to transform the reality where it operates.

The strengthening of social organizations may include, for example:

- Doing internal strategic planning.
- Developing a consistent communications policy.
- Improving internal processes and the work environment.
- Reviewing the organization's mission, vision, and objective.
- Improving the abilities and knowledge of the members (languages, topics, skills).
- Organizing a sustainable fundraising campaign – not a single event.
- Purchasing the necessary equipment to improve work performance.
- Acquiring more knowledge about the context or the problem on which they work.
- Formulating a policy for transparency and accountability.
- Structuring a work programme with volunteers/honorary members.
- Coordinating work with other organizations.
- Hiring specific external advisors.
- Engaging their beneficiaries in the programmes.¹⁰

The 2017 FRC call for proposals was more detailed and the projects proposed were more focused. Nonetheless, the ones selected still reflected the different ways in which the organizations had understood the bases of the call. Therefore, some proposals centered on such institutional issues as reinforcing volunteer work, legally incorporating, or creating their web page, whereas others requested funds to purchase a defibrillator, produce a video about a historical figure, or make signs for the protection of a beach resort.

¹⁰ CONVOCATORIA DE IDEAS 2017, FRC records.

The latest call for proposals, issued in 2018, also had a specific focus: social environmental issues. Recognizing the limited expertise of its members in these matters, the FRC decided to carry out a prior consultation with institutions that are references in this field, and with relevant social organizations that had done outstanding work on the issue. This was the first time that the FRC demonstrated an openness to external voices to thus be able to determine the scope of the call. The result was very interesting. For the FRC, which does not define itself as 'environmentalist', the narrative of the call – though later simplified to make it easy to understand – had become more sophisticated. In addition, it was consistent with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda, and also timidly incorporated a gender dimension. Thus, the call read as follows:

Seventh call for funding projects of social organizations in the Colonia Department, issued by the FRC

Within the framework of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), concerned by the effects and social impact of environmental problems on communities in the Department, we seek to support organizations, which by using different strategies work to raise awareness and provide education on these problems, test sustainable initiatives for the use of our natural resources, and identify alternative methods of production and consumption that can be replicated and scaled up.

Although every field of economic activity has a negative impact on the environment, or one that must be mitigated or reduced, the call will focus on four main fields:

- 1 Agroecosystems** Soil degradation, loss of biodiversity, pollution of waterways, energy inefficiency, use of agro-toxins, loss of family agriculture, deterioration of food sovereignty. Examples include: public information about agro-toxins and studies of their impact on health, orchards, and organic agriculture, in various spheres (schools, households); awareness raising through the media; sensitization through the arts.
- 2 Waste management** Examples include: recycling of inorganic waste, composting of organic waste, alternative waste treatment, alternatives to the use of plastic (bags in particular), education and awareness creation, clean urban and rural circuits, etc.
- 3 Water** Rational use, access, reutilization, degradation of coastal areas, pollution. Examples include: dry latrines, water collection in tanks, pollution analysis, installation of water saving systems (for example, cisterns), etc.
- 4 Sustainable tourism** Environmental care, fauna protection, waste management, new opportunities, local development. Examples include: booklets for awareness raising, new circuits with a social impact, community income generation, etc.

All proposals should include the gender dimension, to engage and have an impact on women, prioritizing them in the design of projects.¹¹

11 IMPACTO SOCIAL DE LOS PROBLEMAS AMBIENTALES, FRC records.

The evaluation of the proposals, though fewer than for previews calls, was more coherent. The projects that were financed included waste composting in the home, school orchards, sustainable management of a stream ecosystem, production of reusable bags to decrease the use of nylon, and actions to reduce the degradation of a beach resort. None of the projects, however, expressly included the gender dimension.

There is one additional reflection that may be of interest to the reader: a FRC mapping of civil society organizations in the Department (discussed further in this document) led to the prioritization of challenges in Colonia. These were identified by the interviewees. Interestingly, according to the following table, only one of the challenges (the environment) has been the primary subject of FRC's calls for proposals (as outlined above), followed by some cultural projects. The other three priorities have not been considered as important. It is logical, then, to explore the assumption that community foundations respond to the needs of the communities where they operate, as existing literature emphasizes.¹²

Table 1 Top five challenges of the Colonia Department

	Employment generation
	Education
	Environmental care
	Roads and infrastructure
	Promotion of culture

Based on an analysis of the projects funded by the FRC, as financing has been its main activity, can we say that the FRC has been a relevant agent of social change in Colonia? Has it managed to change social structures that give rise to inequities or has it influenced individual or collective behaviours or habits? Has it responded to the needs of the community? These questions are difficult to answer because no baseline assessment was made and no theory of change was developed. Nevertheless, undoubtedly the fact that there is a new and innovative institution in the Department that promotes sustainable development is a good starting point and constitutes a platform and an opportunity to create a relevant agent for social change.

¹² For more details, see my paper *Exploring the concept of 'community foundations' and its adaptability to Latin America*, Center for the Study of Philanthropy and Civil Society, the Graduate Center, the City University of New York, 2005.

Resource mobilization and the interest group approach

Since its inception, the main pillar of the FRC has been the promotion of sustainable development in the Department. To that end, it has granted funds (between USD \$1,000 and \$2,000) for development micro-projects of local social organizations. Based on public information provided by the FRC, since 2007 it has issued seven calls for project proposals and has benefited 88 organizations in 17 localities by granting funds totaling USD \$140,000. The organizations, in turn, have mobilized an additional USD \$37,000. The process of financing projects was analyzed in the previous section. The point here is to highlight not so much the grants that the FRC has made, as much as the resources that these grant recipients have been able to mobilize. A condition attached by the FRC to grant funds is that the recipient organizations repay 20% of the amount that they receive. This mechanism has allowed the FRC to replenish the grant fund, and at the same time promote philanthropy in local communities (to the extent that the grantees mobilize new resources).

The second major programme of the FRC is a Mapping of Civil Society. Its main objective has been to learn more about civil society organizations in the Colonia Department – numbers of organizations, fields of work, length of operations, and number, sex and age of members (or staff). In addition to this general characterization, the FRC sought to identify the most frequently used fundraising mechanisms, in order to understand and implement them, and better achieve its mission.

The FRC, during its first years, worked with civil society using intuitive and rather spontaneous knowledge. Having reviewed the results of the mapping, the FRC decided to become stronger by acquiring formal empirical knowledge of the Department's civil society to optimize its mechanism for project financing. A second objective of the mapping exercise was to create an updated database to disseminate information about FRC activities more effectively.

This work was carried out jointly with members of the Institute for Communication and Development, who contributed their technical expertise in research of this sort, using the results of the mapping completed in 2016. The FRC also had the support of the Colonia City Council and other municipalities in the Department, which provided information about civil society organizations in their localities.

In total, 317 active organizations were identified. The organizations that were part of promotion commissions at schools were not included. The following graph presents an overview of this 'social capital' of Colonia.

Table 2 Fields of work

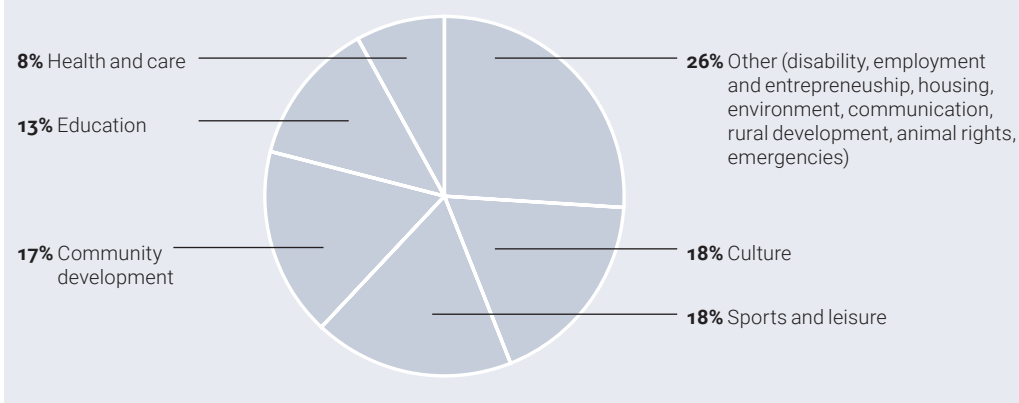
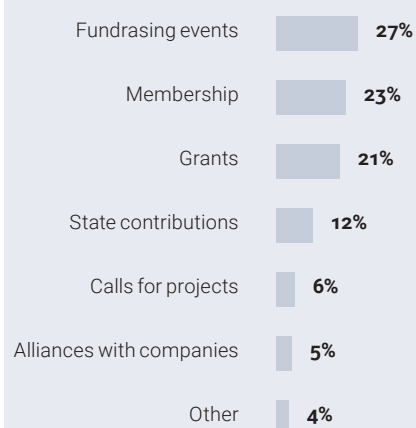


Table 3 Fundraising mechanisms



An observation about fundraising: as shown in Table 3, the two main mechanisms used by the local organizations are fundraising events and membership fees. The contributions from the state and businesses are much smaller. A first read of the graph shows that the income of civil society organizations comes mainly from their own efforts, with voluntary members playing a fundamental role. In Colonia, international cooperation has been only of secondary importance.

In that regard, the FRC may be the exception to the rule. Its main source of financial resources has been the contributions of international organizations, including the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, which supported the FRC during its first years of operation, the Inter-American Foundation, the GFCF, and the United States Embassy. Although community philanthropy is very strong in the region, as shown by the mobilization of local human and financial resources, the FRC, up until 2016, had not been able to generate resources within the community despite the promotion of its activities.

The ability to generate resources, which is essential to every community foundation, was one of the FRC's main initial objectives. Therefore, in 2016, the FRC decided to launch an initiative to promote corporate social responsibility to create ties with that sector

and in hopes of obtaining resources. The *Programme to Promote Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)* sought to achieve the following objectives:

- Promote the concepts of CSR and sustainability in the private sector of the Colonia Department.
- Raise awareness in the Colonia society about the benefits and opportunities of production and responsible consumption (ethical consumption, ecological consumption, and solidarity consumption).
- Provide training in CSR and sustainability to a new generation of professionals (creating alliances with universities and local training institutions).
- Create possibilities to increase the effectiveness of financial contributions made by corporations to the FRC.

Due to the FRC's lack of knowledge of CSR, with the collaboration of an external consultant a proposal was made to work in coordination with major stakeholders to develop specific and articulated strategies. To that end, the FRC decided to: map groups of interest; organize an event to provide information about its work and to position itself in the Department; identify organizations working in education to develop a training programme; contact the main local media; and, start training its members to help them to own this approach.

Of note was a meeting – Businesses for Colonia – held in April 2017, with the participation of 120 people, including representatives of private corporations, academics, public officials, journalists, and members of local NGOs. The meeting was regarded as an event of 'interest to the Department' and was inaugurated by the city councilman. In addition to organizing the meeting, the FRC hosted a photo contest under the theme 'What do companies do for your locality?' The objective was to capture the citizens' perceptions on the social role of companies in the development of the communities where they operate. In total, 30 photographs participated and five were awarded a prize, and then exhibited at the Colonia Shopping Center.

The meeting revealed a latent need in the Department to know more about CSR and act accordingly. Since then, two relevant activities were developed. The first one was the training of managing staff at shopping malls (local businesses) in Juan Lacaze, Nueva Helvecia, Colonia Valdense, Colonia Suiza, and Rosario. The second was the creation of a School for Corporate Social Responsibility in the Colonia Department. The objective of this school is to have a space for continuous training, knowledge generation, and development of practices for the public and the private sectors, the media, and university students. Work on the school began in October 2017 with the institutional support of the Colonia City Council and DERES (a CSR promotor) and funds from a group of companies operating locally. In 2018, the school started a second cycle but this time it included a university diploma programme thanks to an alliance with the CLAEH University and the solid support of the United Nations Development Program.

Due to the success of the school's second cycle, a second meeting on CSR was held. In addition to various lectures, the event included the presentation of three social and environmental initiatives – which emerged from the 'Diploma on Corporate Social Responsibility and Local Sustainable Development.' These initiatives sought to reduce water consumption at hotels and introduce technology to promote sustainable tourism and an alternative to plastic bags. The leaders of each initiative presented their projects to raise funds and start execution. The audience welcomed these new experiences and gave UY \$10,000 to each project. For the second cycle, the school developed an innovative methodology for live crowdfunding, adapted from the work of The Funding Network, a British organization, which also gave USD \$1,200 in seed money.

The school and the meeting were the two strategies that allowed the FRC to mobilize local and national resources throughout 2018. With contributions obtained with the 'Friends of the FRC' strategy¹³ and in-kind donations (for example, the free use of meeting rooms, lectures by volunteer guest professors, etc.), the FRC has obtained resources for its own growth. The 'live crowdfunding' event held during the meeting was an innovative way of promoting a culture of giving.

As pointed out by the consultancy report of the above activity: 'The real exercise of CSR in Colonia (as in other parts of Uruguay) requires constancy, presence, and resources if it is to be performed in the medium term. Local companies, evidently, are still reluctant to incorporate this paradigm into their business approach. A shift from the 'traditional business' model to one framed by the SDGs and aligned with the global market requires professional accompaniment in the long term...Nevertheless, significant progress has been made in positioning this issue in the Department, and the achievements of the FRC have become nationally and internationally renowned.'¹⁴ The report adds: 'Nowhere in Latin America (let alone in Uruguay) does there exist a community foundation like the FRC that has consistently worked with local businesses to build local capacity, train leaders, position the issue, establish multiple and various alliances, and create reputational capital. Though there is still much to be done, there has been evident progress and innovation in the field of community philanthropy.'

13 'Friends of the FRC' (*Amigos del FRC*) was a collaboration and co-creation mechanism that allowed all of the institutions operating in the Department to establish a permanent exchange and an active and effective cooperation in the medium and long term. Being a 'Friend of the FRC' facilitates the integration of an organization into the social fabric of the Department, and helps to make evident its commitment to sustainable development and the quality of life of citizens. In addition, it promotes best-practice exchange and a better visibility of the organization's commitments to sustainability among peers and other entities in the social, public, and academic spheres of the Department, the country, and the world.

14 F. Roitstein, 'Informe de consultoría,' November 2018, FRC records.

Conclusions

The FRC is the only social organization with a ‘community philanthropy’ approach in Uruguay and one of the few such organizations in Latin America. In this paper we have focused on two core elements of the FRC’s work: capacity for social change and resource mobilization through a multi-stakeholder approach.

What has been the FRC’s capacity for social change? As previously mentioned, it has supported more than 80 micro-projects that were very successful: all of them attained clearly set objectives and their results surpassed expectations. Nevertheless, since the FRC did not use any ‘theory of change’ or the like, or did not have a common vision of the communities it serves, it is difficult to assert whether its contribution to sustainable development in the Colonia Department has had any substantial impact. Moreover, the impact of its grantmaking activities cannot be evaluated because of the lack of an initial assessment with which to compare the changes that were made. As previously pointed out, the way that the calls for projects responded to the development needs of the Department was limited and tangential – according to the needs mentioned by the organizations themselves.

Regarding the capacity for mobilizing local financial resources, it had been practically nonexistent (except for the repayment of funds) until it was incorporated into the strategy to approach businesses. The strategy consisted of three instruments: the ‘Friends of the FRC’ campaign, the CSR school, and the meetings. Despite some difficulties, this work strategy carried out with stakeholders produced results both financially, and in terms of increased reputational capital for the FRC. As previously mentioned, the FRC has been more successful in obtaining international rather than national or local resources. Let this serve as a caveat when considering the possibility of replicating the ‘community foundation’ model in other contexts because the factors that gave rise to the FRC (having a facilitating agent, state support, international financing, and local leadership) are not necessarily present in other places.



The GFCF works with individual community foundations and other local grantmakers and their networks, particularly in the global south and the emerging economies of Central and Eastern Europe. Through small grants, technical support, and networking, the GFCF helps local institutions to strengthen and grow so that they can fulfil their potential as vehicles for local development, and as part of the infrastructure for durable development, poverty alleviation, and citizen participation.

About the author

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Published December 2019

This paper was produced as part of a 2019 GFCF research grants programme, which set out to build the evidence base, and strengthen the case, for community philanthropy.

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A company limited by guarantee. Registered in Northern Ireland No. NI073343

Registered charity number XT18816

Section 21 Company (South Africa):
2010/000806/08

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