

First steps towards Community foundations in Uruguay



Latin American Center of Human Economy

The Latin-American Center of Human Economy (CLAEH), founded in 1957, is a non governmental and a non profit organization. In the last 50 years CLAEH has been working actively to strengthen actors of development.

CLAEH's mission is to follow the principals of the Human Economy paradigm, and work towards the transformation of Latin-American societies into societies that would satisfy, integrally and efficiently, their people's needs.

Local Development Program

The Local Development Program (LDP) of CLAEH, since its creation in 1987 has been actively present in local societies. The LDP works towards the capacity building of the local actors of development (governments, civil society, and economic sector); and the strengthening of local development processes through three lines of action: Governance, Social Capital and economic development. During these years the LDP has cooperated with the creation of local development agencies and groups around the country.

The process in Colonia

In 2003, the Local Development Program submitted to the W.K. Kellogg Foundation a project for the Institutional Strengthening of Civil Society Organizations and their relationship with the municipal government in the Department of Colonia, Uruguay.

This project, called "Colonia Social," mapped and convoked the civil society organizations of Colonia to participate in training courses about strategic planning, networking, project formulation, communication and advocacy strategies. Consequently, several organizations from each of the communities of Colonia were trained.

The purpose of "Colonia Social" was to promote specific activities in which different actors gather their forces and resources to provide new ways of cooperating, fostering



the development of social networks that contribute to the definition and implementation of social policies in partnership with the State and especially with the local government.

As a result there were established Local Social Boards in different communities, as vehicles for democratic participation, where communities elaborated local agendas that were presented to their peers and to the local government. Subsequently, the local government set the basis for institutionalized relationships with the organized civil society, by the creating the Departmental Consultive Council of Public and Social Policy¹.

The social process in progress in the different local communities needed to move forward and develop strategies to provide long-term sustainability to the Local Social Board's projects. Thus, in February 2005, the Local Development Program of CLAEH submitted, to the Kellogg Foundation, another project called "Región Colonia" for the purpose of: extending the dimensions of the boards' agendas and enabling them to identify, collect, and move human and material resources and channel them to improve the life quality of the population.

This aim required the constitution of a more complex institution, which is the reason for "Región Colonia" to consider the concept of Community Foundation as a replicable model for adoption.

In this way, three strategies were followed: First the capacity building of the organizations in the mobilization of local resources, second the search of experiences that positively impact in local development and third the acquisition of knowledge about the concept of community foundations².

The first action taken, with the knowledge obtained, was the launching of calls for proposals sponsored by "Región Colonia" (with Region Colonia funds) in association with the local social boards. The intention was to promote the constitution of an organization that would mobilize funds for local development projects undertaken by civil society organizations within Colonia.

Fondo Región Colonia 2007

The first call for proposals for local development projects was made in September 2007 with the purpose of assigning small grants to civil society organizations of Colonia supported by the local social boards or to the social boards themselves. This call was named *Fondo Región Colonia 2007 (in English: 2007 Colonia Region Fund)*.

¹ Consejo Consultivo Departamental en Políticas Sociales y Políticas Públicas.

² Participation in the Emerging Leaders International Fellowship Program of the Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society, Graduate Center, City University of New York (CUNY). Fabiana Henández -Abreu Fellow 2007. Paper: Community foundations: a vehicle to endorse and sustain local development processes taking place in Colonia Uruguay?

With this call the idea was to work towards the constitution of a board that would build experience in evaluation and decision making. Thus our team asked the local social boards of different communities in Colonia to constitute a selection committee to work together and decide which projects were to be awarded. The result was: seven project from seven different communities were awarded and executed.

The projects awarded were:

“Elaborando y envasando naturaleza”: Training course to conserve and commercialize products from family organic gardens, in Carmelo.

“Conchillas una herramienta de comunicación”: Design, printing and distribution of informative news letters about activities and issues concerning the community of Conchillas.

“Saneamiento para la Policlínica de Fátima”: Connecting to the wastewater system of the Public Health Clinic of Fátima in Florencio Sánchez.

"Villa La Paz, Colonia Piamontesa: Desde sus orígenes hasta fines del siglo XIX a través de documentos y crónicas”: Book edition of a recompilation and chronicles of the origins of the Piemontese colony in La Paz.

“Espacio para la recreación y la cultura”: A movie projector for the community of Miguelete, where a youth group is in charge of projecting films.

“Confeción de trajes típicos y refacción de instrumentos del grupo de danzas ALPENVEILCHEN”: Tailoring of typical customs and fixing of music instrument of the Alpeneilchen dance group of Nueva Helvecia.

“Paseo central de Tarariras”: Ceiling repair of the Ex Train Station, now a recreation space for youth.

This call was a start point. It was developed following a few structured lines with minimal requirements and procedures, based on the idea of starting to gain knowledge in team working and decision making.

Fondo Región Colonia 2008

With the second call, launched in May, our organization aimed to give this “board” the capacity to make decisions about the funds, to decide the amount of the grants, to determine whether the funds were to be given away completely or whether a reserve was to be kept to constitute a fund for future callings.

With the first call, the Social Boards got noticed in their communities. Once the fund awarded projects, they grew in credibility. With the second call the selection committee had to work harder on being transparent and rigorous, to be worthy of

trust. Thus it needed to work on clarity: to convoke other social organizations, to specify what was to be supported by this call, to redefine the criteria to be applied for selection, and to show results.

The selection committee and each social board, needed to delineate: communication procedures to bring more organizations to the calling; selection procedures to select 3 projects to send to the Selection Committee; communication procedures among them to interact within the committee; and the criteria to be applied for selection.

This meant a whole process of learning from experience in different areas:

Programming: the committee had to agree on the kind of project to be supported, and to discuss and determine the criteria for selection. It needed to be clear and let the potential organizations know the kind of proposals that will be supported. The committee agreed to support local development projects linked to the agendas that each community built during the process of Colonia Social. As the term “development project” is understood here, this refers to the kinds of projects that initiate or continue processes that will not end when the fund is spent out. In this way, at the same time that the committee acquired knowledge, it had to teach the organizations how to interact with the fund and how to present proposals.

Evaluation: It was needed to establish a system of collective evaluation that required: that each delegate had a number of projects (projects not from their own community) to evaluate and write a report about, then send it to the Región Colonia team to compile all comments and begin a second round of discussion on the reports. From that second round many projects were to be selected but many others needed to work on their formulation. Thus these projects received feedback and had a second opportunity to improve their proposals. The majority of the projects were selected after this reformulation period.

Communications: Communications systems were established in different ways: among the delegates and with the Región Colonia team, between the delegates and their local social boards, the social boards with their communities and broad society of Colonia. Different vehicles were utilized: e-mail, mail, phone, and media. The objective was to establish spaces where communication was possible and information would flow openly among constituencies.

Management: Management procedures and forms were created to ease the entire process: an application form, an evaluation criteria statement, an e-mail communications system, press communications, a grant agreement form and an execution report form, was created.

Governance: This learning by doing practice meant a rich governance learning experience.

Seventeen projects were presented to the committee. After the evaluation process and a reformulation period, fourteen projects were awarded.

The projects receiving awards were:

“Abriendo Caminos”: Development of a Census in two neighborhoods of Carmelo (Barrio Lomas and Barrio Centenario) to open a way towards better knowledge about social, economic and health aspects of its inhabitants to be attended in the Public Health Clinic that assists both neighborhoods and is run by a neighborhood commission.

“Pensando en el futuro, conozcamos mejor nuestro pasado”: Purchase of equipment to give lectures and workshops about Conchillas history and heritage.

“Parque de juegos Mevir Radial Conchillas”: Building a playground in a rural neighborhood in Conchillas.

“Computadora para la Policlínica de Conchillas”: Purchase of a computer to digitize the Public Health Clinic of Conchillas.

“Alas Rojas”: Building a fence for the sports field of the *Alas Rojas Social Bicycle Club* of Juan Lacaze.

“Esperanza Sabalera”: Building a fence for a farm that provides training to young and adults handicapped.

“Grupo de Teatro Identidad Lapaceña” Purchase of equipment for the theater group *Identidad Lapaceña*.

“150 años de La Paz”: Filming of the main events during the celebration of the 150 years of the foundation of *Villa La Paz, C.P.*

“Apoyo al libro del Centenario de Miguelete” Edition of the Book of the 100 anniversary of Colonia Miguelete.

“Radio FM en Miguelete”: Purchase of the equipment needed to broadcast in FM band in Miguelete.

“Investigamos y Compartimos”: Compilation of historic materials, development of information circuits about Miguelete’s heritage, and production of two newsletters.

“La Plaza de Deportes y la formación integral” Support of a multidisciplinary group of professionals to assist the needs of the population that attend the *Plaza de Deportes* of Nueva Helvecia.

“Preservar para difundir” Purchase of a scanner that allows the Museum and Archive of the Cultural Center of Colonia Suiza to preserve historic pictures and documents.

“El juego y la recreación como parte de la formación integral”: Building a playground in the community of Valdense.

These projects are being executed and have to return an amount equal to 15% of the award received in 5 installments beginning in March 2009. These funds will help building a new fund for future callings.

The future of the Fondo Región Colonia

The ultimate purpose in this learning process is to support this board in building management capacities and fundraising strategies that will give the fund long term sustainability to constitute itself into a community foundation-like organization.

Región Colonia intends, through the process of integration and professionalization of civil society organizations in Colonia, to provide a means to establish a more complex institution that could offer them the possibility of mobilizing resources in their communities and among them. Yet the objective is not to impose a model, but to facilitate processes by providing knowledge, practices and ideas. Thus the decision of using the format of community foundation or community foundation-like organization has to be a result of the local development process taking place there.

The LPD-CLAEH is working in this direction by endorsing a process of constitution of a more complex institution capable of managing resources to endorse local development processes, and helping foundations in making the shift from giving funds to specific isolated social programs towards investing in projects that will positively impact in local development processes.

Community Foundations in Uruguay

This experience and the knowledge acquired about community foundations, encourage us in foreseeing a national scenario for community foundations as tools for development. Thus, the objective from now on is to lead the process of putting on the table the topic of community foundations among the stakeholders of development (foundations, socially responsible business, national and local governments, and civil society organizations) in order to take the first steps in the path towards community foundations as vehicles to support development in Uruguay.

In this way, in October the LDP-CLAEH launched the project “Community Foundations in Uruguay” with the support of WINGS The Global Fund for Community Foundations and the Inter American Foundation.

The ultimate purpose of this project is to support the process of introduction of the concept of community foundations as a vehicle to endorse local development processes, and as a way towards a more organized and focused local philanthropy.

The project will develop different activities to achieve the following objectives:

Determine a profile of local philanthropy and conduct research on the novelties that the concept of community foundations would bring to Uruguay: fundraising within the community for long term purpose, investing in the financial market, building a culture of giving, strengthening local philanthropy, introducing grant making foundations, ensuring a good fit within legal and tax frameworks.

Generate spaces for meetings to introduce the concept of community foundations, and to discuss local development projects, philanthropic and fundraising experiences within Uruguay. Gatherings of different actors in development, in order to identify future actions and future allies along the way towards a more complex, organized and focused philanthropy.

Organize regional workshops tailored to each region in the country to discuss the concept of community foundations as it applies to Uruguay.

Support the process of building a Community Foundation in Colonia as a result of the Fondo Región Colonia.

And design training courses for civil society organizations, foundations and socially responsible business, interested in introducing the community foundation concept to achieve development objectives.

This process has just started, and we have many challenges to face from now on. We begin here by showing what we have been doing and what we aim to do. First among our next steps, we seek to find along the way, partners, friends with whom to walk towards the development of our communities.

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