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Participatory Decision-Making in Contested Societies: Examples From the Field of Community Philanthropy

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Keywords: Community, philanthropy, participation, grantmaking, contested societies

Key Points

- This article examines participatory, place-based philanthropy in two locations, Northern Ireland and Palestine, drawing on the work of the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland's Fair Share Programme and the Dalia Association's Village Decides initiative.
- The article considers the rationale for a participatory grantmaking approach as well as the manner in which local communities and residents experienced the methodology, and describes and evaluates the role community philanthropy organizations played in providing an important added-value dimension to traditional grantmaking.
- The fact that both Northern Ireland and Palestine are politically contested societies is factored into the analysis presented by the author, who conducted interviews with key informants to supplement literature from both community foundations.

Introduction

The past 25 years have seen a marked growth in community philanthropy organizations – most notably community foundations, but also place-based women's funds, youth-run grantmaking committees, and other forms of local, multistakeholder grantmaking that mobilize resources for this purpose. Although these organizations are as diverse as the contexts within which they operate, three characteristics mark them out as a field. The first characteristic is resource mobilization, which unlocks local philanthropic funding and

community assets in order to respond to needs and opportunities through grantmaking and convening. The second is investment in building the capacities and capabilities of community-based organizations, with an emphasis on the sustainability of a sector that underpins community resilience. The third feature relates to the work of community philanthropy organizations in building trust within and among the communities they serve, as well as among various sectors of society.

The Community Foundation Atlas (Tittle, 2014) identifies more than 1,800 community foundations around the world, with the majority outside of North America established within the last 25 years. This number increases if other community philanthropy organizations (such as women's funds) are included. Knight (2014), analyzing a sample range of those organizations charted in the atlas, concluded that community foundations:

typically are grantmakers that are highly accountable to local people, playing key roles in building trust, inclusion, and equity in communities while strengthening the capacity of civil society and building assets for the benefit of the community. The key words are "trust," "assets," and "capacity" (p. 5).

This analysis extends the understanding of the field developed in previous work drawn from the grantmaking experience of the Global Fund for Community Foundations and consultations carried out with community philanthropy organizations themselves (Hodgson, Knight, & Mathie,

2012; Hodgson & Knight, 2012). While there are multiple stories of community philanthropy that provide a rich and diverse narrative, there is agreement around a shared focus on building vibrant and sustainable communities.

It is this focus that sites community philanthropy geographically and provides it with a sense of place. Murdoch et al. (2007) compared place-based philanthropy with “traditional” philanthropy, where the latter prioritizes issues and problems in isolation rather than considering them in the context of communities. Open and responsive community philanthropy organizations are well placed to be guided in their grantmaking by locally identified needs and opportunities, particularly where such organizations subscribe to values such as the building of an inclusive and equitable society (Knight, 2012). The situation is considerably more complicated, however, when community philanthropy organizations find themselves working in violently contested societies. In these circumstances, the question needs to be posed: What are the specific challenges, and opportunities, for a place-based funder?

This article looks at the experience of two such funders – the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland and the Dalia Association in Palestine. Although the political contexts in which they are working are very different, they share an acute awareness of the politicization of both local communities and resource allocation. The article describes a participatory grantmaking approach adopted by both funders and considers broader issues related to place-based conflict-transformation strategies. Finally, it will draw out learning relevant to the practice of community philanthropy in situations of conflict.

Community Foundation for Northern Ireland

The Community Foundation for Northern Ireland (CFNI) was established as an independent grant-making foundation in 1979 in response to community advocacy for a funding source that was not curtailed by government narrative or security considerations. Political instability, combined with high levels of deprivation, fostered the growth

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of large numbers of community-based groups responding to the needs of a society that was both internally divided and experiencing high levels of violence. The board of trustees of the new foundation was structured to reflect both sections of this divided society and included individuals with a working knowledge of community development. Serving a region with a population of some 1.6 million, the CFNI mobilized resources, made grants, and purposely adopted a networking role to bring diverse communities together around shared concerns (Kilmurray, 2012).

Working in the context of ongoing violence, the three main options for the CFNI were to ignore the conflict as being too divisive and off-putting to potential donors, to focus on community relations and conflict-related issues, or to support local community groups by responding to their priorities while being cognizant of the impact of the political conflict. In adopting the third approach, much effort was invested in building relationships of trust and respect with activists in the many “single identity” communities across Northern Ireland, which are characterized by populations that are either 90 percent Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist or 95 percent Catholic/Nationalist/Republican. The theory of change adopted (although rarely articulated) was that community development and empowerment, when based on

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The advent of the main Republican and Loyalist ceasefires in 1994, and the acceptance of the Belfast/ Good Friday Agreement (even the naming is divisive) four years later, allowed the CFNI to develop a more explicit peace-building/ conflict-transformation role.

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Dalia Association

The Dalia Association is Palestine’s first community foundation, starting its work in 2006 with the mission to mobilize and utilize resources to empower a vibrant, independent, and accountable civil society. The association was established by members of the Palestinian community from the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip, Israel, and the diaspora, in the incredibly challenging political circumstances of the region. Three elements influenced the formation of Dalia:

- the impact of political developments, including Israeli occupation and recurring violence;
- extensive consultation with Palestinian civil society leaders, activists, and potential donors; and
- an interest shown by leaders in international philanthropy.

A shared vision was agreed around working to realize Palestinian rights to control their own resources and sustain their own development.

Dalia developed a program of work that included the mobilization of both financial resources and assets in kind, linking knowledge and expertise

with community activists working in local areas, designing community-controlled grantmaking, and acting as an advocate for systematic change, with particular reference to the management of international aid. Unlike the changing circumstances of Northern Ireland, Palestine is still caught in a cycle of political violence and occupation, with Dalia's priorities reflecting this reality.

Model 1: The Village Decides

In 2008 the Dalia Association implemented The Village Decides programme - a pilot initiative in community-controlled grantmaking in Saffa, a small village west of Ramallah. Grantmaking resources allocated to the pilot amounted to just over \$12,000, reflecting both the limited resources available and the belief that small grants can unleash community creativity and facilitate community participation.

Dalia representatives did some local research into local community priorities, needs, and capabilities. They then invited Saffa residents to an open meeting to consider how to best meet community needs and to hear from existing groups working within the community. Thirty-eight villagers turned up. They were told they could choose four local organizations to receive grant funding (to prevent lobbying beforehand, this information was not shared in advance of the meeting). Representatives of Saffa-based community groups were then given 10 minutes each to present their current work and plans for the future, and to answer questions from the residents.

The attendees then voted, choosing the Saffa Sports Club, the Farmers' Committee, the Morooj Cultural Center, and the Saffa Women's Committee for funding. The available \$12,000 was divided among meeting participants (each controlled just under \$320) who could allocate their funds as they wished among the four selected groups. The allocations were then announced and the four grant totals calculated; they ranged from \$1,768 to \$3,600.

Dalia representatives followed up with visits and workshops to support the local activists in thinking through issues, from planning and budgeting

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to community engagement and evaluation. To ensure transparency and local accountability, a meeting was organized for grant recipients to report on their work.

Once a set of local priorities were agreed on, the participants at the meeting were asked to consider how the money might be allocated and for what purpose. This resulted in "expressions of interest" (not grant applications) being put forward, which were in turn shared and discussed at subsequent community meetings, until agreement was finally reached on one composite proposal for the allocation of the area funding. This proposal, supported by a CFNI staff member, was presented for ratification to the advisory committee for the overall program and to the CFNI board.

Over the following years, Dalia refined its methodology and extended the approach to the Al Zawiya village in Salfeet and to Sanour, located about nine miles from Jenin. Each village is home to 5,000 to 6,000 residents and both are heavily dependent on agriculture; Al Zawiya is particularly disadvantaged, having lost more than 40 percent of its agricultural land to the nearby Israel-built separation barrier. Among the criteria for participation in The Village Decides were

the number of active community-based groups operating at village level and their acceptance of a consensual grantmaking approach. To promote transparency Dalia also added the election, during the initial open meeting, of a village monitoring committee.

Model 2: The Fair Share Programme

Fair Share, the program designed by the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland, differed from The Village Decides in several ways. Funding was provided to the CFNI by a large U.K. grantmaker, the Lottery Charities Board, which was concerned that specific geographic areas had either not applied for or received their "fair share" of lottery grants. The CFNI agreed to work with 49 such areas across Northern Ireland, with available grant money averaging \$50,000 for each area. The challenges included the fact that there were few active community groups in some of the designated areas, while in others there were competing political and social groups. The CFNI was also concerned that a traditional responsive grantmaking program would simply result in grant "winners" and "losers," which in single-identity communities could be portrayed in terms of a sectarian grant count. The foundation decided to do things differently.

The CFNI set up a Fair Shares advisory committee to form a strategic framework for the program. Members were selected from regional nongovernmental organizations working on youth development, active aging, community development, and anti-poverty issues. The committee began by organizing information road shows in each of the geographical areas identified to benefit from the Fair Shares programme to explain the approach and the amount of grant money available. Further meetings to discuss community priorities were then held in those areas with all community-based organizations and other stakeholders working in the community, e.g., health agencies and local authorities invited. Attendees were asked to establish local area steering committees.

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TABLE 1 Similarities and Differences in Approach

	Number of Communities Served	Level of Grants Available	Length	Nature of Grantmaking to Community-Based Organizations	Nature of Decision-Making	Final Decision-Makers	External Funding Partner Involvement
Palestine	3	\$12,000 per village	1 year	Support for selected existing CBOs	One open residents' meeting	Residents	No
Northern Ireland	49	\$5,000 - \$50,000 per area	6 years	Emphasis on partnership among CBOs	Several facilitated meetings	CFNI advisory committee and board	Yes

purpose. This resulted in "expressions of interest" (not grant applications) being put forward, which were in turn shared and discussed at subsequent community meetings, until agreement was finally reached on one composite proposal for the allocation of the area funding. This proposal, supported by a CFNI staff member, was presented for ratification to the advisory committee for the overall program and to the CFNI board. A grant offer was then issued to an agreed lead partner organization in each area to fund the composite work program.

As in the case of the Dalia Association, follow-up was in the form of visits, further discussion, and training provided by staff, with an emphasis on developing a cooperative, rather than competitive, mode of work within each local area. Fair Shares took place over a six-year period and was externally evaluated (Horsley & Grant, 2009). While there were some similarities in the approaches adopted in Northern Ireland and Palestine, there were also differences. (See Table 1.)

Voices From the Field

Notwithstanding the differences in the grantmaking design, the similarities in the approaches of The Village Decides and Fair Share were reflected in comments received from community residents. People reported that:

- the processes adopted were open and transparent
- they liked the sense of engagement and respect shown for local priority setting, and

- they welcomed the fact that Dalia and the CFNI had stretched the comfort zone of traditional grantmaking approaches.

A community meeting attended by the author in the Al Zawiya community center included members of the local Village Decides monitoring committee. Billboards throughout the village publicize infrastructure programs funded by international donor organizations, but community representatives pointed out that transparency is equally important for small community-based organization grants. Financial reports on the work are presented to the whole village in addition to appearing on Dalia's website. It was a similar story in Sanour, where community activists confirmed that representatives of the funded groups were not permitted to be members of the monitoring committee – a first lesson in conflict-of-interest policy.

The local activists also explained how procurement procedures were designed for transparency. Some of the projects included the purchase of sheep and another involved mechanical work on an old tractor; the monitoring committee oversaw the bidding process, including the opening of bids. The committee also followed up on the implementation of the agreed-upon community activities. Local people also pointed to transparency as an important aspect of the Fair Shares program.

The funder's level of community engagement was noted in feedback from participants in both

In Palestine, a Sanour resident expressed surprise at the fact that the Dalia Association was “not just coming to collect information,” as was the case with many other donors. Local people noted that Dalia always remained focused on solutions if there were any problems – and there were – without a punitive attitude.

The Village Decides and Fair Shares. In Northern Ireland, a Belfast community activist remarked of the CFNI:

They came to us – they wanted to engage with us. They were proactive in their approach. This was encouraging, and we went on to engage with many young people to get involved in volunteering in the community . . . and building social capital that had a lasting impact here (Campbell, 2010, p. 13).

A woman working with the Gailligh Development Trust in Derry, Northern Ireland, agreed:

Inviting communities to say how best funds could be used to meet need is unique in grantmaking experience and very empowering. Involving all in the debate around local need and local solutions meant it democratized grantmaking and created an opportunity to realize our ambitions and to succeed in meeting the objectives we set. It also attracted other funding opportunities. opportunities (Campbell, 2010, p. 25).

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Dalia always remained focused on solutions if there were any problems – and there were – without a punitive attitude. Said one resident: “Dalia gave us the push; [Dalia chief executive officer] Saeeda gave us the courage.”

By far the most extensive area of comment related to community participation. During a visit by the author to Al Zawiya in 2015, 14 village activists proudly presented a video of their work and commended the Village Decides experience for recognizing that local people can make a difference. “My vote works,” said one woman about the allocation of funding; “I have power.” Another observed that “any small amount of money would make a difference [where the decision-makers] know the people.” A similar sentiment was expressed by a member of the Sanour Women’s Club: “People really felt the ownership of the money; they divided it down to half a dollar.” The process itself was seen as empowering and enhanced local confidence.

These themes of local ownership and empowerment were also reflected in Northern Ireland. “We like being trusted to know what needs there are in our community,” said a community activist from a rural area (Horsley & Grant, 2009, p. 25). A West Belfast participant said, “The program was really user friendly and not just a tick box. It was about reality. We were allowed to take ownership of the project. We knew the problems that existed and how to resolve them” (Campbell, J. 2010, p. 16).

Another important issue that was noted by those involved in both The Village Decides and Fair Shares was the need for funders to encourage cooperation rather than competition among community-based organizations. Interviewees in Northern Ireland and Palestine made this point, saying that the participatory approaches adopted by Fair Share and The Village Decides supported community-based groups to work in partnership across priorities rather than competing with each other. In Sanour, people recognized that prior to the Village Decides initiative there had been infighting among local families, but that they were now “discussing things with each other that they didn’t before.” Prior to this people would not

attend each other's meetings; indeed, the situation was so bad that when the Dalia CEO took the bus from Ramallah to Sanour to initiate the grantmaking approach, she was advised by other passengers to "turn back; they'll never cooperate!" Events showed that change can happen.

Learning From the Participatory Approach

Comparing the Village Decides and Fair Shares approaches, differences can be seen in:

- levels of funding available and the time period for spending the grant funds;
- the design of the local decision-making process;
- resources available for the management and administration of the programs; and
- program follow-up.

Overall, the CFNI had considerably more resources to call on, although, unlike the Dalia Association, it was in a regranteeing relationship with an external funder. While this funder was open to the participatory design promoted by the CFNI, the arrangement did entail additional layers of program reporting.

The levels of funding available to the program areas were substantially higher in Northern Ireland, and the time periods for both community planning and implementation of the agreed activities were also considerably longer than in Palestine. The latter offered funding on the table within three weeks of the village vote, but was flexible with timing in the face of difficulties, as when one of the organizations selected in Sanour had to be negotiated out of bankruptcy. The limited availability of funding was also used as an opportunity to encourage the villages themselves to identify additional resources to increase the money available. In Sanour, this was contributed in kind, often in the form of organizational fees; in Al Zawiya, connections had already been made with philanthropic community members living in Jordan. The community consultation and planning approach took place over an extended period in Northern Ireland but, unlike the Village

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Decides approach, the opportunity was not taken to encourage local donations to maximize the funding available. Where seed grants were provided under Fair Shares, however, they often levered in additional resources from state agency sources for longer-term support.

Another difference related to the direct-democracy methodology that underpinned The Village Decides program. This is clearly linked to the philosophy of the Dalia Association, which emphasizes the importance of Palestinian participation in supporting Palestinian-led social change and sustainable development. This approach was described by one participant as "more transparent than any other election" that the community had

In order to respond to local people with sensitivity and flexibility, Dalia and CFNI staff had to be readily available for travel to meet local groups. This availability is one of the most valuable attributes of a place-based funder – and it is a major issue for poorly resourced community philanthropy organizations. The two foundations also invested in technical support for project planning, budgeting, monitoring evaluation, and other related areas to help build the longer-term effectiveness of the groups and communities involved.

experienced, although its success depended on who turned up at the community meeting and what organizations won support on the day. The allocation of grantmaking resources was more determined by local organizational credibility than formal community planning, an approach that some municipal representatives were unhappy with. The fact that residents were responding to an invitation from Dalia to participate in the local meeting, without prior notice that grant money would be available for allocation (in order to prevent lobbying), had to be balanced against the potential benefits of the villagers being given adequate time to think through broader community priorities.

The CFNI strategy was more about engaging with existing community-based organizations to enhance local participation in cooperative and consensual community planning. While the area information road shows were open and accessible to all residents, community activists and local government agency staff stakeholders were the participants in the various follow-up seminars and workshops. As well, both the process to be adopted and the available grant money were disclosed at the outset. The emphasis was on agreed community priorities rather than engagement of local people in direct democracy; indeed, the final decision was subject to the CFNI board signing off on the grant allocation. There were two other important concerns: administration and management, and sustainability.

Both programs required considerable staff time and, in Northern Ireland, additional facilitators and mentors to support community agreement. In order to respond to local people with sensitivity and flexibility, Dalia and CFNI staff had to be readily available for travel to meet local groups. This availability is one of the most valuable attributes of a place-based funder – and it is a major issue for poorly resourced community philanthropy organizations. The two foundations also invested in technical support for project planning, budgeting, monitoring, evaluation, and other related areas to help build the longer-term effectiveness of the groups and communities involved. This capacity-building approach is not always attractive to donor funding, but is necessary to ensure added value in a “grants plus” approach.

The question of sustainability was addressed in a more considered fashion by Dalia, which made efforts to encourage the selected villages to establish their own village funds. This did happen in Al Zawiya, where village donors and a diaspora philanthropist matched two \$1,000 challenge grants provided by Dalia, and a \$6,000 challenge grant was partially matched. Several public meetings were held to establish priorities for the fund and Dalia provided training in grantmaking and financial practices in addition to continuing as the fiscal sponsor of the village fund. In Al Zawiya, local activists are evaluating the impact of

a microloan scheme they put in place, with a view to looking at a longer-term fund. Sustainability in Sanour is tied up with the refurbishment of a Farmers' Cooperative tractor, undertaken with the help of an initial Village Decides grant. The tractor has been sold for triple the value it would have brought as scrap metal, and the profit will be invested in a chicken-breeding initiative rather than a village fund.

There were no similar approaches adopted in Northern Ireland, where longer-term sustainability was seen more in terms of better intracommunity relationships and enhanced linkages between local activists and other funders and statutory agencies. The CFNI did organize a series of conferences and meetings to facilitate networking and intersectoral relationship building, given that the benefits of both maintaining and building on good community relationships is particularly important in contested societies, where the existence of trust is critical.

Specific Challenges of Place-Based Work in Contested Communities

The nature of both the political landscape and the conflict itself influences how place-based community philanthropy organizations work in violently contested communities. A common challenge is the rapidity with which conditions can change, which requires adaptability and flexibility from local funders. While these elements are essential, so too is the need for a clear value base in order to maintain a bedrock of principled strategy. Without the latter, the inherent community suspicions that flourish in situations of violent conflict can distort and misinterpret funder objectives. The situation in Palestine meant that the Dalia Association was working with villages that were uniformly resentful of Israeli occupation, security apparatus, and settlements, but that still grappled with intracommunity tensions. One area of tension was highlighted in Sanour, where 80 percent of the village belonged to one "family"; another related to the public position of women. In Northern Ireland, the CFNI was working with both single-identity Catholic/Nationalist/Republican and Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist communities, often located in the most violently

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contested areas. The stage of conflict transformation – post ceasefire and post Belfast/Good Friday Agreement – did allow the CFNI to be proactive in bringing local activists together across sectarian divides. While not always enthusiastically welcomed, the credibility of the foundation itself enabled the CFNI to build in a cross-community networking approach to augment its grantmaking through programs such as Fair Shares.

Specific challenges of place-based grantmaking in divided communities include dealing with circumstances and perceptions of:

- mutually exclusive physical territoriality within which single-identity communities take refuge from "the other side," which can result in different levels of community development with less developed or less active areas feeling victimized;

Both the Dalia Association and the CFNI have experienced how apparently well-intentioned policies can be distorted in implementation by the rigidities of bureaucratic demands, oppressive administration, and an emphasis on short-term project outputs over development outcomes. Consequently, both The Village Decides and Fair Share were consciously designed to model a funding alternative.

- internal intracommunity tensions, with local gatekeepers and controls often linked to political or paramilitary allegiances;
- anxieties about being seen as cooperating with “the other side,” for fear of accusations of collaboration or political sellout;
- the perception that one “side” gets more resources/attention/power than the “other,” raising suspicions about funder motivation; and
- a sense of being marginalized, mistrusted, and demonized by decision-makers, both internal and external.

These factors demand funder awareness of the need for transparency and community insight and a commitment to inclusion and the building of community relationships, alongside a clear value base. Trust is hard won and needs to be nurtured between funder and local communities in their

totality, but at a pace that is appropriate to the stage of the conflict and can win the effective participation of local people.

Another aspect that is common in contested societies is the experience of the impact of external aid programs that are often designed and delivered in a top-down manner. There have been three European Union PEACE programs in Northern Ireland from 1995-2014, each one further removed from the developmental needs of the most marginalized communities and from any sense of community decision-making. The multiplicity of development-aid initiatives in Palestine offers an even more complex picture, where local reference is made to “benevolent humanitarian occupiers” encompassing international NGOs as well as aid agencies. Both the Dalia Association and the CFNI have experienced how apparently well-intentioned policies can be distorted in implementation by the rigidities of bureaucratic demands, oppressive administration, and an emphasis on short-term project outputs over development outcomes. Consequently, both The Village Decides and Fair Share were consciously designed to model a funding alternative.

The need to emphasize the importance of cooperation and community empowerment in difficult political circumstances, rather than contributing to a “winner-loser” scenario that can all too easily be interpreted locally as investment in one political identity or allegiance instead of the other, is critical. The drawn-out community consultations undertaken by the CFNI reflected the fact that the Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist community tends to be less organized in bringing forward community plans than their counterparts in Catholic/Nationalist/Republican communities; thus time and support was invested to ensure their involvement. In Palestine, Nora Lester Murad, one of Dalia’s founders, acknowledged that although the Village Decides process is democratic and transparent, it does not necessarily transcend traditional lines of conflict. To achieve this, people need the confidence to move beyond familial and political allegiances that splinter communities. While the current political context in Northern Ireland

allows this to happen to a certain extent, the situation is more difficult in Palestine. In both situations, however, it takes long-term relationships of trust and credibility to enable a place-based funder to adopt the necessary challenge role. The CFNI experience in recent years shows that it can be done.

Lessons Learned

There are a number of points of learning that can be drawn from the participatory grantmaking strategies described in this article. The first is the need to adopt an inclusive approach to community-based engagement, recognizing that even in contested societies, communities are heterogeneous in nature. Consequently, particular attention must be paid not only to participation, but also to the active involvement of marginalized and silenced groups. For its part, the Dalia Association spoke about being conscious of the need to secure the representation of women's voices in such a manner that they felt safe and secure in their participation. The CFNI was conscious of the need to ensure the full range of community engagement, across political and social spectrums. The task of identifying potentially silenced and silent community voices is important in any place-based scenario, but in contested societies requires an explicit willingness to think through the obstacles to effective engagement.

The second point is that participatory, place-based funding offers the ability to hear voices that reflect the lived reality of people's lives rather than priorities that are determined by externally designed donor guidelines. The evidence drawn from the examples of Palestine and Northern Ireland suggests that listening with respect to local people lays the basis for building relationships of trust. These, in turn, can allow funders to network and connect often diverse communities with one another around shared interests; as well as to position them to address opportunities and challenges. In contested societies, the organizational relationships established, and the networks facilitated, can even allow inter-community peace-building initiatives to be introduced, depending on the stage of macro-level conflict transformation.

The evidence drawn from the examples of Palestine and Northern Ireland suggests that listening with respect to local people lays the basis for building relationships of trust. These, in turn, can allow funders to network and connect often diverse communities with one another around shared interests; as well as to position them to address opportunities and challenges. In contested societies, the organizational relationships established, and the networks facilitated, can even allow inter-community peace-building initiatives to be introduced, depending on the stage of macro-level conflict transformation.

The third learning point is about the potential power of small grants in building local community confidence and solidarity. As Dalia reflected on the situation in Palestine, "We have many projects with tens of thousands of dollars, but we learned best from this project with a small amount of money." What these grants offer is as much a validation of the importance of locally directed community action as it is the scale of the resources themselves. To be effective in the longer

TABLE 2 Evidence-Based Participatory Grantmaking: Opportunities and Challenges

	Community Relevance of Grantmaking	Resource Mobilization	Positioning of Community Foundation	Building Social Capital and Trust
Opportunities	Grantmaking grounded in locally identified priorities	Small grants can make a difference.	More equitable decision-making between donor interests and local residents	Relationships built with marginalized groups by participatory approach that models direct democracy
Challenges	Involving all sections of the community	Mobilizing resources to fund added-value work of community foundations	Reputational risk-taking around issues and activities funded	Considering community issues in terms of macro-policy challenges
Suggestions	Develop an inclusive network of local activists.	Address longer-term sustainability issues through planning.	Establish lines of communication between donors and local communities.	Create inter-sectoral policy channels and use enhanced social capital to challenge single-identity/issue perceptions.

term, however, there needs to be the potential to build on the initial investment, which underlines the importance of taking action to address the challenge of sustainability (Salam, Burghal & Jiryas, 2010).

The fourth point relates to the added-value process that positions grantmaking as an essential part of a larger development process. Materials produced by the Aspen Institute Community Strategies Group and CFLeads (Feierabend & Merenda, 2014) draw usefully on the experience of place-based foundations in the U.S. with an interest in resident engagement, noting that “as community foundations have become more involved with their communities, expanding their role beyond grantmaking, resident engagement has emerged as a practice that is helping them make more sustained impact” (p. 3). The experience of both The Village Decides and Fair Shares demonstrates how grantmaking itself can be part of that process, but it works best when there is the added-value dimension of support, networking, and the sharing of peer learning. In violently contested societies, there is a specific need for community funders to think around corners in order to engage in added-value grantmaking that

delivers participatory community initiatives that are more than the sum of their parts.

Finally, genuinely participatory grantmaking, which like the Dalia Association appreciates the importance of the experience of direct democracy and active citizenship, has a role to play in offering an insight into effective civil society. This is particularly important when working with local residents and communities that have been effectively disempowered due to their circumstances. On the more negative side, it is important that community foundations and other place-based funders recognize that investment in this work comes with a financial cost to the foundation itself. Added-value work (such as staff time and facilitation costs) needs to be resourced. There is also the additional consideration that in situations where there is a genuine sharing of decision-making power with local residents and communities, there is an element of reputational risk for the funder if prioritized projects are controversial or prove difficult to implement. (See Table 2.)

The specific challenges and opportunities facing community philanthropy organizations working in contested societies have been outlined over

recent years by two philanthropic initiatives: the Foundations for Peace Network, a peer-learning network of locally based funders working in divided societies, and the Global Alliance for Community Philanthropy, a learning consortium that focuses on the contribution of community philanthropy.¹ Both recognize the potentially important role of a community philanthropy that models participatory and sustainable approaches to place-based work. If space is considered place with attitude, then it is certainly timely to create space for resident and community participation in philanthropic practice.

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¹ The Global Alliance for Community Philanthropy is comprised of the Global Fund for Community Foundations, the U.S. Agency for International Development, the Aga Khan Foundation USA, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, and the Charles Stewart Mott, Inter-American, and Ford foundations.