

Collective Impact: An Opportunity for Philanthropy in General and Especially for Community Foundations

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Abstract

Bernardino Casadei writes at a time when a social crisis is facing the welfare state throughout southern Europe and philanthropy is being asked to take on the extra burden of providing basic social services and addressing the economic wellbeing of local populations. He posits that this crisis is a structural one in which local philanthropy cannot provide more than palliative care, but it presents a unique opportunity for community foundations to rethink their ways of operating for a new era.

In particular, Mr. Casadei notes that the previous practice of piloting innovative projects to be taken on and replicated by government is no longer valid, as the prospects for the sustainability of such projects cannot be guaranteed. Furthermore, the pressure for local non-governmental organizations to constantly innovate may distract from their resources and priorities. Instead, he argues, community foundations should promote partnerships as a way to ensure sustainability in times of limited resources. Managing partnerships can be labor-intensive and time-consuming, but Mr. Casadei maintains that community foundations are best placed to leverage resources, to connect people across sectors, and to absorb risks. It will require a change in mindsets, as well as the elements of collective impact (as outlined in the Stanford Social Innovation Review), in order to mobilize communities and partners for the common good.

Mr. Casadei thus offers a rousing manifesto to his colleagues in the community foundation field, challenging them to take the lead in addressing the social crisis facing southern European localities. He stresses the need for a common vision and for community foundations to provide the essential resources to move beyond this difficult period.

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