



Global Diplomacy Lab

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# **Global Leadership and the SDGs: What Role for Local Communities?**

**GDL@Făgăraș Report**

**2020-2022**

**Făgăraș - Sibiu, România**

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# INTRODUCTION

The Global Diplomacy Lab organised in Făgăraș, Cincșor, and Sibiu, Romania was entitled *Global Leadership and the SDGs: What Role for Local Communities?* (The Lab consisted in online and in-person meetings that opened a space for discussing on the role of local community actors, both public and private, in achieving the SDGs, national multi-sector collaboration for sustainability, migration, and security.) The organization of the lab was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, that led to the postponement of the in-person parts of the Lab for two years. The local host for the Lab was the Center for Global Affairs and Postdevelopment (C-GAP) of the Făgăraș Research Institute (FRI).

Three main challenges were selected by the Lab participants – **how community foundations can engage more with the SDGs, how local municipalities can engage with the SDGs, and how civil society and government institutions could be brought together in collaborative setups.** For each of the challenges we had one challenge holder, as follows, the Țara Făgărașului Community Foundation, the Făgăraș Municipality, and Ashoka Romania, respectively.

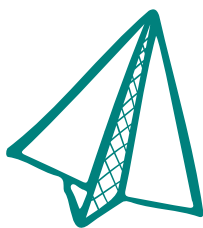
Several GDL members took part in the Lab and were accompanied by FRI researchers and practitioners, representatives from the challenge holders, as well as local participants. Given the COVID-19 pandemic, the activity of the Lab had to be re-organised several times, an example of the effects of the pandemic on the sustainability of local communities.

Although spawning over two years and a half, instead of one, the in-person component of the Lab did take place, generating multiple insights and powerful on-the-ground experiences. The insights were distilled in eight deliverables as agreed with the challenge holders, including this report.

**We are profoundly grateful to all local participants and to the challenge holders for their engagement and input throughout the implementation period of the Lab. We are equally grateful to each member of the GDL and FRI teams, as well as to the GDL Secretariat for their substantive contributions.**

The Lab has been supported by the Global Diplomacy Lab, with a significant contribution of the GDL Secretariat, by the GDL leading partners, including the **BMW Foundation**, the **International Alumni Center Berlin** and **Robert Bosch Stiftung**, the **German Federal Foreign Office**, the **Slovenian Foreign Affairs Ministry**, the **US-Germany Fulbright Commission**, and **Mercator Stiftung**. Also, the Lab has been a part of the project *Increasing the contribution of European community foundations to the SDGs*, generously supported by the **Charles Stewart Mott Foundation**. Further support was received from the US State Department through the program Citizen Diplomacy Action Fund (CDAF) and local actors such as the **Țara Făgărașului Community Foundation**, the **Făgăraș Municipality**, **Ashoka Romania**, **Case de Oaspeți Cincșor**, **Casa Terra**, and **Expert Cleaning**.

The role of this report is two-fold: Firstly, to present insights generated by the phases of the Lab and secondly, the core ideas on the main topics of discussion. These topics include the SDGs and local community actors, such as the Făgăraș Municipality and the Țara Făgărașului Community Foundation; the development of a national infrastructure for civil society collaboration; the importance of enhancing inter-sector collaboration for sustainability; community diplomacy as a less visible practice at an international level; and the necessity for developing an infrastructure for community sustainability.



# GDL@FĂGĂRAȘ: CONCEPT AND PHASES

In a world where everyone lives in local communities, we only rarely reflect on the role of local communities in global affairs. When we do, we most often focus on a few large cities, not on small towns and rural areas, although most of the world's population lives in such places. Given the increasing democratisation of international relations, ***the overarching aim of the Făgăraș GDL Lab was to explore the role of local communities in global leadership, contributing towards the SDGs, addressing security and global challenges, and innovating in diplomacy.***

*In terms of impact, we want to see that the GLD Lab in Făgăraș contributes towards a local region that becomes more engaged globally and that assumes more responsibilities towards achieving the SDGs, while being aware of challenges that can negatively impact its own development and security.*

The Lab brought together more than 30 participants - GDL members, staff, and partners, alongside representatives of the challenge holders and the FRI hosting team. The activities of the Lab took place in the Făgăraș – Sibiu area, Southern Transylvania, Romania.

## **The Lab addressed three challenges:**

- 1.** How can a national multi-sector collaborative system be developed? – having as challenge holder Ashoka Romania.
- 2.** How can the Făgăraș Municipality engage with the SDGs? – having as challenge holder the Făgăraș Municipality.
- 3.** How can Community Foundations enable communities connect to the SDGs? – having as challenge holder the Țara Făgărașului Community Foundation.

The GDL@Făgăraș took place from November 2020 to March 2023, consisting of three phases.

- ➔ The first phase included several online sessions.
- ➔ The second phase comprised an in-person meeting between May 17-21, 2022, in Făgăraș, Cincșor, and Sibiu.
- ➔ The third consisted of a follow-up in-person event that took place between November 29 and December 1, 2022.

Based on the three phases, the GDL members contributed to producing seven deliverables and this report. A follow-up process is developing a book proposal on community diplomacy and the role of local communities in achieving the SDGs.

# INSIGHTS FROM PARTICIPATING GDL MEMBERS

## GDL Member Cristina Gallegos



### **Recommendations for challenge holders at the start of the Lab:**

- 1) Dig deep into your expectations, be selfish in a good way and REALLY drive to what you want to go home with.
- 2) When the GDL Members arrive: A spaceship has landed, and your mission is to extract as much value out of the aliens.
- 3) Decide. Set it out either to continue after this lab OR you get something concrete and very specific today.

## GDL Members Theresa Carrington & Cristina Gallegos



### **Impressions & Assets of the Făgăraș Region:**

- 1) Love and pride for the Făgăraș mountains, for the history of the local people, and for the regional cultural and religious heritage
- 2) A strong spiritual component that permeates local life and larger scale strategies, acting as a bridge between Western and Eastern Europe
- 3) Roma children are an asset to Romania, representing the community in prestigious competitions and artistic events. There is great untapped potential in the Roma community, despite the current lack of readiness for integration that Romania currently has.

## GDL Member Gaurav Sharma



### **Făgăraș Fortress, "Culture and Vulnerabilities in the Făgăraș Region"**

- 1) The urban and rural settings do impact and influence areas such as education, access to healthcare and general growth and acceptance of liberal values.
- 2) Roma is a vulnerable group and mostly reside in the rural regions or in countryside in the Făgăraș region. The mentality of the Romanian citizens needs to change about the Roma community and more integration efforts are required to support education of Roma children.
- 3) Făgăraș municipality has made public appeal and lot of people have come forward in supporting the Ukraine refugee crisis. There has been hosting of public events, support from the government, civil society actors and resources have been pulled at municipality level for example to donate 100 mattresses to the refugees. In addition, hosting of refugees has been welcomed by Făgăraș community members and food and utility supplies have been provided. This showcases the solidarity of the people during times of crisis.








## THE ONLINE PHASE

The online meetings were organised for three reasons. First, to provide a space for all participants to get to know each other – GDL Members, Challenge Holders, FRI Hosting Team. Second, to offer the chance to meet the Challenge Holders and co-create the specific focus of the challenges we will be working on within the framework of the Lab. And third, to enable participants to create groups on specific challenges and start engaging with the Challenge Holders, in order to learn about the local context and co-create solutions to the challenges. Throughout the period of the Lab, we also held several online meetings and workshops.

**Agenda 2030** is a **global agenda**. At the same time, it does not only relate to what countries can do, but also at what can be done by various other actors to achieve the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Urban and rural communities are key for achieving the SDGs, yet after several years since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda there are only a reduced number of cities taking the SDGs seriously. An online panel on the topic Cities, the SDGs, and Innovation: Examples and reflection based on experiences from Cluj-Napoca, Izmir, Mannheim, and Stuttgart was organized on May 12, 2021. The aim of the panel was to inform GDL@Făgăraș members and our challenge holders on the experience of such cities that embarked on various approaches to Agenda 2030: be it connecting their strategy, practice, and budgets to the SDGs, or putting an increasing focus on innovation.

### SPEAKERS INCLUDED

-  **Dr. Bettina Bunk**  
Coordinator International and Local Sustainability and Cooperation,  
International Office, City of Stuttgart
-  **Christian W. Hübel**  
Head of the Strategy Department, City Director, City of Mannheim
-  **Onur Eryüce**  
Counsellor to the Mayor, Izmir Metropolitan Municipality, Secretary General  
of Turkish Social Democratic Municipalities Association, and GDL Member
-  **Ana Maria Vrabie**  
Director, Urban Innovation Division, Cluj Cultural Center and City of Cluj-Napoca
- Moderator:**  
 **Annegret Warth**  
Coordinator Partnerships for Education for Sustainable Development,  
Office Stuttgart Partnership for Education, City of Stuttgart and GDL Member.

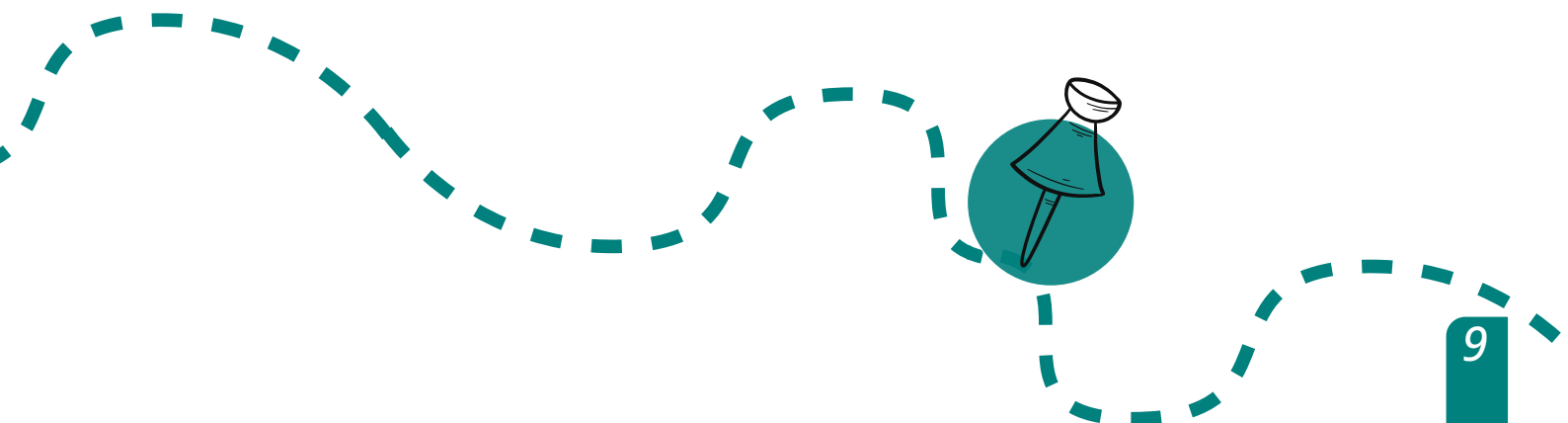


A second online panel on the topic Localizing the SDGs at City Level: Strategy, Capacity, and Data was organised on May 21, 2021. Urban and rural communities are key for achieving the SDGs. In such a context, do local communities have the needed capacity to engage with Agenda 2030? The aim of this panel discussion was to inform the GDL@Făgăraș members and our challenge holders and partners about the capacity needed for local communities to engage with the SDGs and about ways in which cities work with data. We heard in more detail about Stuttgart's engagement with data collection and analysis and, also, about the Romanian context - national perspectives on community-level data and a review of available indicators for Făgăraș.

## SPEAKERS INCLUDED

-  **László Borbély**  
State Counselor of the Romanian Prime Minister and Coordinator of the Sustainable Development Department of the Romanian Government
-  **Sarah Günster**  
Education Monitoring Specialist, Office Stuttgart Partnership for Education, City of Stuttgart
-  **József Benedek**  
Professor of Human Geography and Director of the Research Centre of Sustainable Development at the Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania.
- Moderator:**  
 **Annegret Warth**  
Coordinator Partnerships for Education for Sustainable Development, Office Stuttgart Partnership for Education, City of Stuttgart and GDL Member.

Throughout the online phase of the GDL@Făgăraș, we organised several meetings to learn about the region, to provide a space for participants to meet each other, to organise ideas, plan for the in-person activities, and co-generate deliverables. Besides the online part of the Lab, we held two in-person meetings and below we present more details about each of them as reported by the GDL participants.



# THE MAY 2022 LAB

The in-person meeting of May 15–18, 2022 enabled the participants and challenge holders to come together, test, and further develop identified solutions for the main challenges. Below we are presenting how the Lab unfolded and the main ideas generated by participants and guests.

## Kick-starting the Lab

by *Banu Pekol*

**15.5.2022**

**On the first day which took place in Sibiu / Hermannstadt / Nagyszeben**, the morning session was all about **planning** how the Lab facilitation would be shared among participants, as well as **determining methodologies** for the exploratory sessions.

In the afternoon, with all participants having arrived, we kicked off on a cultural note. We **visited the Brukenthal Museum** in the historic centre of Sibiu. Here, we got the chance to connect and reconnect with each other through art and architecture as well as to admire two extremely chubby cats in the courtyard.

Following this visit, we held the **kick-off session where the three challenge holders** – Ashoka Romania, Țara Făgărașului Community Foundation, and Făgăraș Municipality – presented themselves briefly, and then worked with GDL members to set the stage for the Lab. The aim was to start seeing what they hoped to accomplish by the end of the Lab. The evening concluded with **a dinner hosted by the Consulate of the Federal Republic of Germany** in Sibiu / Hermannstadt / Nagyszeben.





# Civil society and inter-sector collaboration

by *Stefan Cibian*

16.5.2022

## Sessions

- **Input session on civil society and inter-sector collaboration #1** *Guest speakers from civil society and government* Facilitated by: *Cristina Gallegos and Stefan Cibian, GDL Members*
- **Exploration session on civil society and inter-sector collaboration #2** Facilitated by: *Theresa Carrington and Cristina Gallegos, GDL Members* - Group work to think through modalities of civil society cooperation, highlight impact of civil society in relation to governmental institutions and support governmental institutions to replicate and scale good practices coming from civil society.

The Romanian society presents multiple resources in relation to all sectors of society. Public institutions manage coordinated budgets and possess significant human resources. The civil society and business sectors present significant private resources as well as well trained and innovative human resources. Universities host students. Media has developed significantly in the past decades. However, the ability of these sectors to cooperate on issues of concern for the public continues to be limited. For this reason, in partnership with Ashoka Romania, we have created a space where voices from the public institutions, civil society, and the academic sector came together to explore what hinders inter-sector collaboration.



# Sustainability and development in Făgăraş Country: Prospects for the region

by *Theresa Carrington & Cristina Gallegos*

## Speakers:

- *Lucian Mija*, City Manager, Făgăraş Municipality
- *Florina Peptea*, Head of the Projects Department, Făgăraş Municipality
- *Monica Beleaua*, Environmental specialist, Făgăraş Municipality
- *Cristiana Metea & Emilia Ciurchea*, Țara Făgăraşului Community Foundation
- *Ana Murray*, Ashoka Romania
- *Elena Nemeş*, Făgăraş Municipality – Țara Făgăraşului Micro-region
- *Marina Batog*, Make Better: MKBT (tbc)
- *Barbara Promberger*, Conservation Carpathia Foundation
- *Stefan Cibian*, The Făgăraş Research Institute

Based on their presentations, community actors aim to build an integrated and collaborative strategy for the Făgăraş region, developing it into a powerful, thriving, innovative, and sustainable bio-micro-region, capitalising on territorial identity, while pulling threads of integration for minorities, and strengthening the resilience of local systems.

## CONTEXT SETTING

### Community Assets

Throughout the discussions assets pertaining to the region were identified:

- Love and pride for the Făgăraş mountains, for the history of the local people, and for the regional cultural and religious heritage.
- People who care and are meaningfully engaged in the local community.
- A sustained effort for integration of investments in the Făgăraş area.
- Very passionate and competent local professionals interested in seeing and working on strengthening the Făgăraş area.
- Good level of ambition overall.
- Good ability to synthesise and present success for the civil society.
- Participatory budgeting works at local level.
- A multi-layered approach to community development and re-activation.
- Cross-sectoral conversations and collaboration are already happening at a certain level.
- Some level of funding is successfully attracted to the region.
- There is a good level of visibility for the desired future.
- An emergent impact ecosystem.
- An emergent green and sustainable vision is being articulated in the region.
- Some demographic diversity with emergent efforts towards diversity and inclusion is visible.
- A strong spiritual component that permeates local life and larger scale strategies, acting as a bridge between Western and Eastern Europe.
- Some research capacity and data (with less access and understanding of the relevance/value of research and data for overall community progress).
- An understanding that a focus on innovation and investments in education is essential to creating a pipeline for leadership and community strength in the long-term, while short- and medium-term increasing population retention locally.
- Amazing patrimony in the region.
- Roma children are an asset to Romania, representing the community in prestigious competitions and artistic events. There is great untapped potential in the Roma community, despite the current lack of readiness for integration that Romania currently exposes.
- The diaspora has huge potential to move and support project ideas.





## Challenges and central topics:

- 1)** Difficult to scale up solutions from community level to national level.
- 2)** Population trends are a challenge as young people and young families leave for bigger cities and third countries with more job and educational opportunities, entertainment, and better economic perspectives.
- 3)** Mindset around mobility is a big focus for the Făgăraș Municipality, especially as it pertains to access and accessibility in the region, increasing connectivity with rural areas, environmental impact of traffic, and congestion concerns.
- 4)** Attractive living conditions and quality of life posits the aim of increasing attractiveness of Făgăraș as a place for people to live or move to.
- 5)** Local investments for Sustainable Development are needed for employment and increasing competitiveness as well as capital for transformation, while protecting the human, natural, industrial, and material heritage of the region.
- 6)** The communication frameworks for all the above is critical to enable successful initiatives.
- 7)** Increasing tourism and cultural offerings based on a strong territorial identity.
- 8)** Increasing educational impact (modernisation, teachers' skills, and improved access to resources).
- 9)** Increase capacity for medical services and the ability to serve the Făgăraș city and surroundings as the hospital is the only one in the region.
- 10)** Transition to green economy.

### 11) Strategic:

- Bridging a larger scale project in the region as part of a broader transformation effort (in research and education).
- Scaling up capacity at a policy level is difficult but essential.
- Funding and effort are scattered in too many small initiatives and efforts (especially in connection to civil society work and grants).
- Not enough cross-collaboration and partnerships on projects that could be leveraged by working together.
- Development of civil society and sustainable leadership is a long and complex project.
- A map of the stakeholders. Whom to include in the conversation to co-create a shared vision, igniting values, building collaboration for joint progress?

### 12) Systemic:

- Storytelling capacity. Difficulty in knowing how to talk about the work of the city. Radical need for training to present with effectiveness to showcase the power and expertise of the city and its people. Strategy: focusing on the “why are we speaking? What is the purpose of my presentation?”
- Resources appear to be underutilised (especially use of experts and expertise).
- Certain topics appear to be politicised, which may undermine the future of the region.
- Some minorities are perceived as more valuable than others (e.g., the Saxon versus Roma minorities). The Roma minority is viciously oppressed, even today, etc. How the Saxon community are perceived and treated is diametrically opposed to how the Roma community is perceived and treated. There are very few successful models to deal with understanding and addressing the challenges that the Roma face. The discrimination is still systemic and well known.

**14)** The Ukraine War has added a layer of complexity, bringing a small Ukrainian minority to the region.

### Example of projects Făgăraş Municipality undertook:

- Business revitalisation (business incubator, business supporting young entrepreneurs, supporting returning diaspora to start local businesses).
- Investment in medical capacity for the city. It includes increasing medical access (improving population access to emergency medical services, palliative care, etc.).
- Investments in educational capacity for the city (building a kindergarten, rehab of high school buildings, nursery construction, etc.).
- Infrastructure modernisation (streets, sewage system, hospital, pedestrian areas, industrial corridor, cultural hall, city park, lighting system, indoor swimming pool, school sports hall, sports base, increase energy efficiency and rehabilitate residential buildings).
- Administration advancements investments (improving technical capacity to apply for funding for future projects, anti-corruption and transparency initiative, other capacity building). Bringing public administration together with the citizens (investment in digitalisation and access).
- Restoration of the Făgăraş Fortress.

**Environmental efforts** are important and actively pursued in the region, increasing the quality of soil, water, and air. Several activities are organised by both public institutions and civil society organisations, including awareness campaigns, greening, cleaning, closing the landfill, youth education, waste management, recycling, etc.

**The local community foundation** (Fundația Comunitară Țara Făgărașului) has been active for 9 years, with a particular focus on rural areas in the region, and it is active on a wide spectrum of programs from education to, cultural initiatives, to animal protection. The foundation both raises funds and provides grants. The foundation also focuses on strengthening the capacity of local NGOs while growing internal capacity. A secondary focus is on revitalisation of areas that are in decline (depopulated and/or disused). Youth involvement is a through line in their work.

### **Other insights and thoughts to keep in mind:**

- Lack of academic proficiency in basic education is a huge barrier for remediation of seemingly unrelated social issues. Some of the local organisations do deep work in basic education as well as healthy values, changing perspective, persistence, making hard work “cool” and modelling good work practices for school age children.
- The community here is interesting, and they are people with whom you can really do things together. They have deep history across the centuries, and it has the advantage of being extremely adaptive. For example, during the communist era, many of the people in the satellite villages gathered here to work for the chemical plant, and they were hoping to see their own specific customs in the local church, which brought a huge need for diversity of approach and mutual understanding, as well as a need-based, organic practice of collaboration and co-creation. Out of diversity, good things came, including decreased mortality rate, and better levels of ethnic inclusion. Out of joint trauma, reconstruction can be generated.
- In Romania, graduation rates are the only thing that matter because that is tied to funding. There are no metrics that connect actual academic performance with schools’ institutional success or effectiveness.
- Each little thing can make a difference, often for a community, and definitely for an individual, and that is important to remember, because the progress of each of us is progress for all of us.
- Sometimes, just being heard and being in the room is a victory. A frustrating, slow, not-enough victory, but some weird kind of progress.

**“Freedom could lead to doing nothing, but also to doing a lot.”**



# Input from the local business community

*by Cristina Gallegos - 17.5.2022*

The following aspects surfaced in the meeting with the local business owners,

- Business owners would like a wider, more consistent forum for themselves to meet and talk.
- Utilising local resources is always important.
- Făgăraş has a lot going for the town, interesting people, innovation, and also a strong female contingent of business owners.
- When we look at the community, all the necessary key players are there, they have convergent interests, and are already talking to each other in civil and productive ways. There is work to do, and value proposition to be identified and deepened, but overall, vibrant, and promising.
- Poverty is an issue in the community, but tools and pathways exist to lower the rate of poverty.
- At the centre of the business owners' intersection with civil society and local municipality are three needs:

**1).** Widespread need for education for all, from academic achievement for kids, to voter education and civic education, decision-making informed context setting conversations, etc. how to debate and disagree in a community, how to present, etc.

**2).** Communications efforts to better share with the community relevant things, as well as consistent communication between key stakeholders, and

**3).** Marketing needs where everything needs to be made visible to showcase the unique and very special things in the Făgăraş community.

- Jargon is a barrier to communication in general and to open communication, in particular.
- GDL presents an inherent quality to galvanize spaces where people come together in a way that would seldom happen otherwise.

Factors to consider for collaboration to even be possible:

**1).** A focus on retaining and increasing the numbers and strengthening the capacity of the local population.

**2).** Făgăraş is attractive but its qualities need to be made visible and actionable.

**3).** There is workforce and creative potential among the Roma minority and that needs to be tapped into. One should not complain that there are not enough people and yet ignore a significant number of those that are different.

**4).** Trauma – informed practices at scale addressing trauma should be at the core of and beginning of any process and project.

**5).** An environmental protection perspective needs to be woven into all projects and efforts.

**6).** Capitalisation on the innovation, community goodwill, and overs advancement ignited by the COVID and Ukraine war crises.



# Culture, international connections, and vulnerability in the Făgăraș region

by *Cristina Gallegos and Gaurav Sharma*

## Speakers:

- *Petry Groza*, Regen Foundation
- *Ionuț Androne*, Partida Romilor Făgăraș
- *Johannes Klein*, Jungendzentrum Seligstadt and the Evangelic Church
- *Emilia Ciurchea*, the Ukraine Fund of Țara Făgărașului Community Foundation

The session presented an open dialogue platform in one of the best settings – the Făgăraș Fortress – and provided a wider input into the lives and everyday challenges and the intercultural nature of tensions that exist within the societal fabric of the region. The three representatives presented the socio-cultural interactions, the challenges of minorities and the underlying faith and religious practices that existed within the Făgăraș municipality.

The following were the three prominent inferences that could be taken from the discussions.

**1. Roma people and how their current challenges:** The urban and rural settings of population settler nature does impact and influence areas such as education, access to healthcare and general growth and acceptance of liberal values. Roma is a vulnerable group and mostly reside in the rural areas of the regions and also in some neighbourhoods of the Făgăraș municipality. Children and families of Roma are less progressive in their thought and lack opportunities and themselves are averse to change. Roma community suffered most because of slavery as their people were enslaved for over 500 years.

**a.** There is lack of education about Roma people and their culture and language in the Romanian schools as there are no history lessons and no cross-learnings about Roma culture.

**b.** The government and the political leadership are not much interested and there is no context setting that attempts to integrate the Roma community via education into the mainstream. Roma rural communities could benefit from becoming more aware of the advantages that technology and programming bring for their context. More effort is required regarding volunteering, mentorship, and partnership with the Roma community.

**c.** The mentality among Romanian citizens about the Roma community needs to also advance and more integration efforts are required to support education of Roma children. In addition, this effort cannot take shape, until the Roma elders accept that education is the way forward and make more and more children to graduate from school and get higher education.

**2. Ukraine refugee crisis support:** Făgăraș municipality has made public appeal and a lot of people have come forward in supporting the Ukrainian refugees. There has been hosting of public events, support from the government and civil society actors and resources have been pulled at municipality level for example to donate 100 mattresses to the refugees. In addition, hosting of refugees has been welcomed by the Făgăraș community members and food and utility supplies have been provided. This showcases the solidarity of the people during the times of crisis.

**3. The Făgăraș municipality is perceived to be relatively progressive** in thought and action, and its people to live in an adaptable community, Făgăraș has retained its original habits of co-existence and is an inviting community. There is a need to bring the Făgăraș diaspora together and intertwine efforts with each family member that were residing in countries like Italy, Spain, Germany, and the US and make them part of the municipality initiatives in terms of building back home. When ties are strong and there is a feeling to contribute back home.





The following needs have been articulated during the discussions:

**From Petry Groza:** resources, experiences and models that worked in education when trying to catalyse change and actually succeeded in changing individual lives.

**From Ionut Androne:** please include minorities in your projects. We want to work with you to learn how to better connect and relate with public authorities so we could self-advocate. What are successful models you have seen in your countries in integrating minorities?

**From Lucian Mija:** support us in extracting the essence of Făgăraș to bring people back to visit and stay. We need quality human resources to be attracted to Făgăraș and make a difference in our town.

**From Johannes Klein:** I am simply grateful you are here, and that you did not bypass us. We just want you to come back and help us figure out our stuff.

**From Emilia Ciurchea:** we need quality education, empowered teachers, and students to be given a chance to thrive. Support us with methodologies, models, and ways to increase everyone's ability to break dysfunctional cycles and increase self-trust and a collaborative and integrative ground for quality education. It is not about the curriculum per se, but about soft skills and everything around the curriculum that goes into the production of an environment that is conducive to quality education. Help us see what is missing because something is missing.

### The Community Foundation of Țara Făgărașului:

- Ownership of the role for Board Members.
- Board development and 100% participation in such conversations for the team and the board.
- More dialogue and engagement.
- Executive coaching (stine management, team management, bandwidth management, “how to say no”).
- “How to” on team building and limiting objectives to align with capacity and a more coalesced, and articulated vision.
- Advocacy to funders, community, and key partners.
- Own the Foundation’s vision statement as people.
- Appreciation as a community foundation and as people.
- How to communicate (internally and with external stakeholders). We do not have clear structure for specific audience (municipality, other NGOs, community, etc.).
- Methodologies to overall strengthen the organisation and the integration of the SDGs in the community vision which could be shared.
- Significant and strong strategic thinking anchored in what is happening in the world.

### Some potential ways in which GDL could further contribute:

- Propose and implement trust-building support and methodologies.
- Help local actors see the opportunities that come their way and prepare them for seizing those opportunities.
- Hold the space for facilitated communication and collaboration.
- Offer strategy support.
- Technical assistance and capacity building.
- Create a space for local actors to prioritise listening across constituencies and engage with each other.
- Engage in a way that is mindful towards the capacity of local actors.



# Meeting with youth from Făgăraș

GDL@Făgăraș participants had the occasion to meet several young people from the region and engage with them in discussions about the local community. The meeting was perceived to be powerful and insightful. Outcomes of the meeting include:

- Creating a youth advisory board (at various levels within the community, in public institutions, and local organisations) is surfacing as a definite output as it would enable young people to have a voice on local community matters.
- A community thrives when everyone from within that community thrives. We need to rewire and think about personal development, as well as carve time for reflection and deeper dives with ourselves.
- Youth is surprising, and positively disruptive, they know so much, they have such clarity, and we need to give them much more credit. They also shake us from our complacency and remind us that we are not as all-knowing as we think we are. As fabulous as we are, we need to be shaken (in a good way) on a regular basis, and so does every initiative, public or private, in any community.
- More youth (and probably all youth) should be given the opportunity to sit at such tables, and in general to sit at decision-making tables within the local community.
- Inclusion is important. Not just students from “best schools” need to be invited and involved. How can we be more inclusive?
- Changing perception is on us, the adults, because people self-exclude and do not feel welcome.
- For the GDL: we should include a youth component to every lab from the outset. Youth is critical to everything we do.

## Needs expressed by high school youth:

- ★ **Mentorship.**
- ★ **Funding for school projects.**
- ★ **Psychological help at scale to address communist trauma on local and national levels.**
- ★ **Making the local villages visible for all sorts of youth interest, from jobs to education.**
- ★ **Lasting workshops, active partners, opportunities for learning and ongoing programs.**



# The local community and the SDGs

by Gaurav Sharma

## How to build the capacity of both community and Municipality to discuss the integration of the SDGs into future strategies?

The discussion was baselined on the fact that both the community and the Municipality are required to have a framework that provides stakeholders relevant guidance for building a better region. In addition, a need to attract international audience to the region was very much the centre of the discussion, both in terms of hearing the voice of the Făgăraş people and inviting international investment to the region.

Localisation of SDGs was the core of the discussion and how this could be staged in a simplified way that crosscuts the SDG requirements and integrates them with the priority of the Municipality. A three-tier approach was recommended to shape the localisation of SDGs for Făgăraş.

1. Analyse examples of cities in India, under the Smart-City Mission of India, and in other countries, in their approach to integrate the national vision of making cities smart through digitalisation and having at the core the localisation of SDGs – in term of understanding, capacity development, and training about SDGs.
2. Analyse examples currently available that support SDG integration in cities such as the United Cities and Local Government (UCLG). UCLG is an umbrella organisation that brings together cities, local and regional governments and municipality associations and represent the interest of the local governments. UCLG would have SDG integration examples from towns that are similar to Făgăraş and can facilitate cross-learnings that shorten the timeframe for implementing projects with actionable recommendations.
3. There are colleagues within GDL that can be approached working at the cross-section of cities and SDGs. Some cities in Germany, such as Frankfurt and Stuttgart, are examples where GDL colleagues have a direct contribution to the future planning and implemented projects for SDGs localisation.

dream really BIG  
what inspires you  
the most?

# PROBLEM-SOLVING AND SOLUTION GENERATION

At the brainstorming session following the community-engagement part of the lab, GDL members put forward several ideas:

- Bring more internationals to see this amazing area, to spend time here, and help infuse their perspective. Not because foreigners have better solutions, but because they could help local actors see themselves and the Făgăraș region better. That helps local actors trust their own ability in finding a path to the future you want.
- Going beyond the first layers of the work (beyond just demographics/ethnicity, etc.) and engaging more substantively with the core challenges of the region – poverty, discrimination, weak educational and health infrastructure, etc.
- Assess the emergence of the UNESCO geoparks as a framework and use it more.
- Identify strategies to connect economic empowerment with self-esteem and personal empowerment.
- Collaboration and capacity building between already existing projects. Build on what is already there and keep strengthening it.
- How can schools be engaged in neighbourhoods outside the schools, to both reshape mindset and contribute to understanding environment and inclusion values. Look at Canadian models.
- Look at models of private educational institutions and schools in other countries and see what can be incorporated in closing the gap of missing higher education in the region.
- Finding a way to continue projects between local administrations and community actors on the long-term.
- Responsibility for clear communication belongs to those communicating. When it comes to local administrative processes, more attention is needed to the accessibility of communication practices. A patient and persistent approach is needed, with repeated communication, until the audience “gets it” and starts acting upon it.





- A reconciliation effort between systems and people is necessary. There are multiple types of traumas in the local community, and until those start to be addressed, any other objective will be an uphill battle, especially when it comes to projects and objectives requiring trust-based collaboration.
- Replicate the success of the Țara Făgărașului Bike-a-thon. Identify the key ingredients for success and use them again and again. A key ingredient appears to include ownership being distributed between citizens, local civil society, and the city, and it works. It is a very transparent process, cross-sectoral, concrete, open, and inclusive; and those characteristics seem to be relevant. Stability and continuity at local administration level is a big success factor because the mayor can be a supporter for impactful ideas.
- Encourage local stakeholders visit international programs to see how others are succeeding and failing as well. It should not be just foreigners coming in from outside and providing input, but for locals to step outside in different but similar micro-contexts, combining various inputs into value added contributions that can enrich and accelerate impact.
- Address the energy in the room at community meetings. If there is conflict, acknowledge and make a plan to address it. If there is “othering” or feeling that “we don’t belong” or “you don’t belong here” plan to talk about it, however unusual and hard that might be. While uncomfortable, moving past the discomfort, disconnect, and/or political differences is key to productive collaboration.
- Even something as simple as showing solidarity is sometimes hard to do. Those having the courage to stand and show solidarity should be recognised.

Based on the above, the design of the November 2022 follow-up meeting has been created.

## November 2022 Follow-up lab

Four GDL members accompanied by local partners and challenge holders, contributed to the follow-up Lab, which took place between November 11-14, 2022. The Follow-up Lab was organised also with the support of the US State Department through a Citizen Diplomacy Action Fund for U.S. Alumni (CDAF) grant led by Theresa Carrington, in addition to the Global Diplomacy Lab, the International Alumni Center Berlin, and the C.S. Mott Foundation. The four participating GDL members were Andreea Petre-Goncalves, Theresa Cartwright, Marty Castro, and Stefan Cibian. Each was engaged in facilitation of meetings and holding training sessions and structured dialogues with local community members. We were glad to receive the visit of the Cultural Attaché of the US Embassy in Romania.

## FCTF: Sustainability, the SDGs, and organisational transformation

*Facilitated by Andreea Petre-Goncalves and Marty Castro, GDL Members*

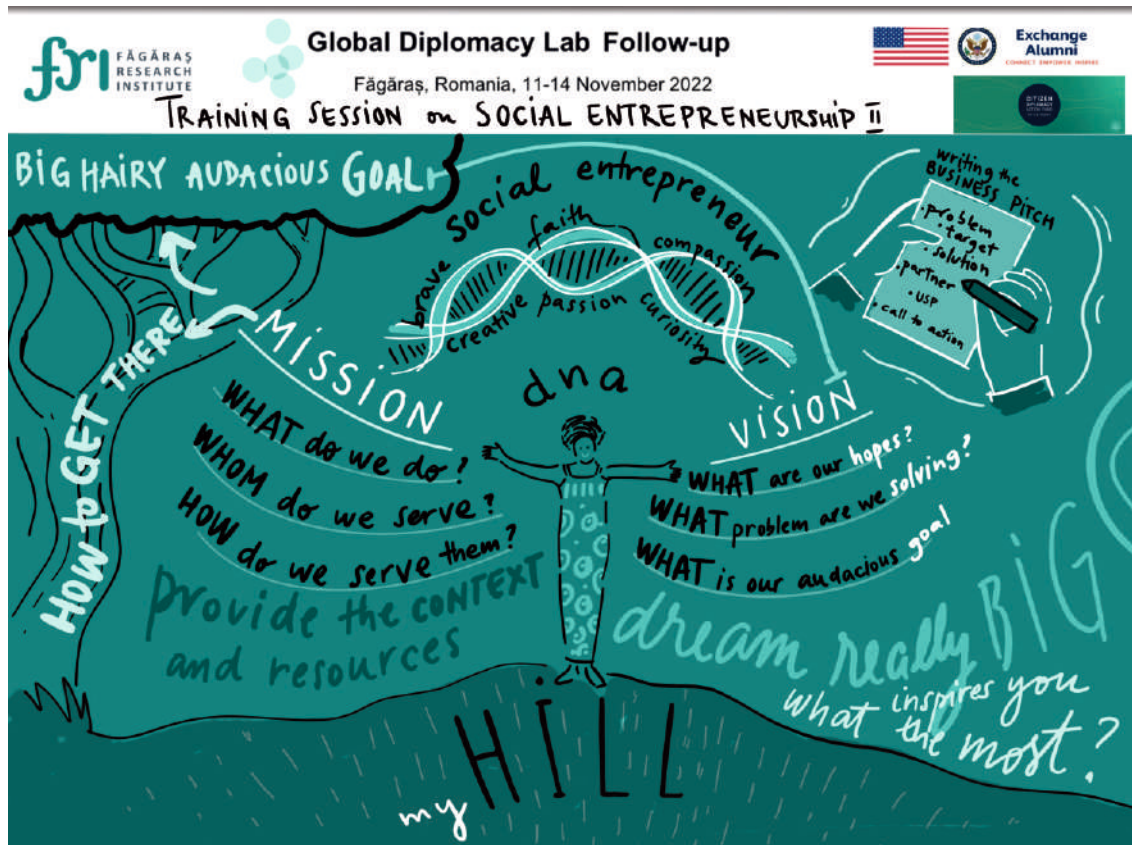
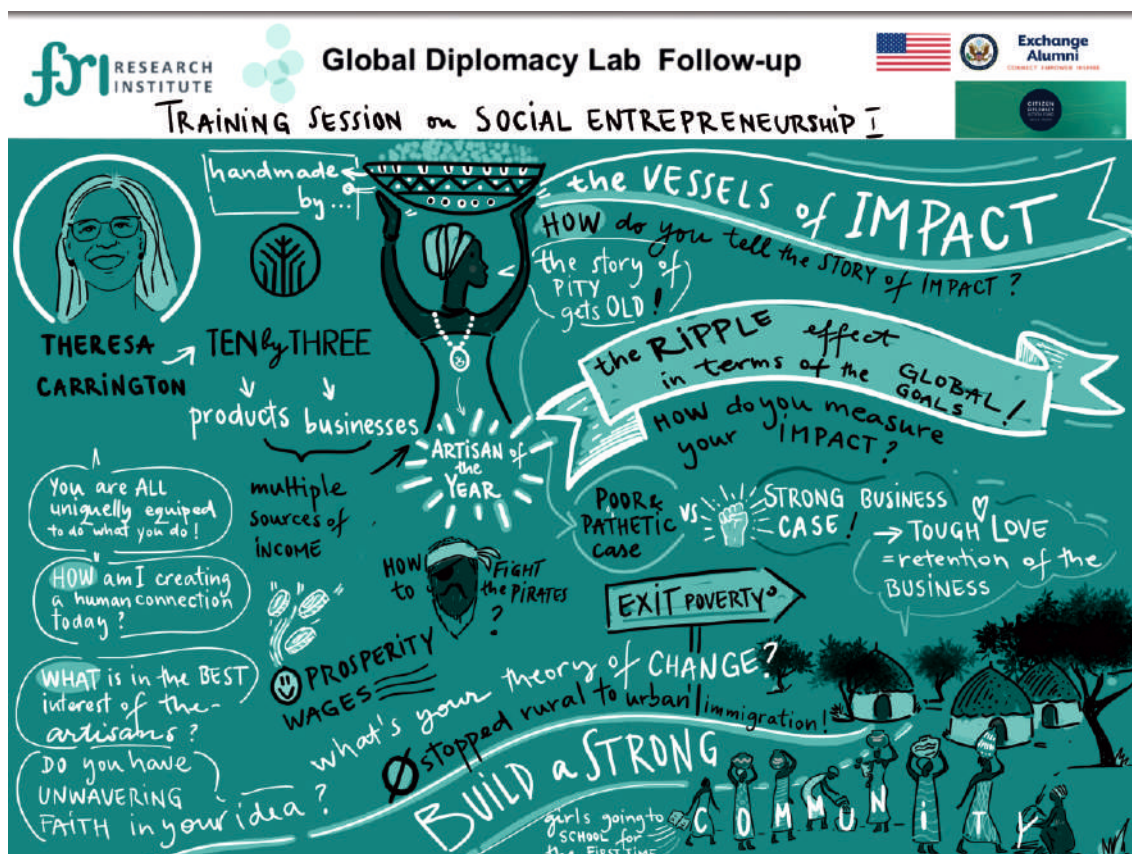
The applied workshop on the case of the Țara Făgărașului Community Foundation aimed to explore how sustainability thinking can be brought at the core of the activity and all programs of the Foundation. The workshop opened a space for exploring how specific programs such as YouthBank, Țara Făgărașului Bike-a-thon, and others can be connected to the SDGs in order to strengthen the sustainability of local communities.



# Training session on social entrepreneurship

**Facilitated by: Theresa Carrington, GDL Member**

Theresa Carrington held a training session on social entrepreneurship for local community stakeholders, including Ukrainian migrants to the region. The session was recorded graphically as follows:

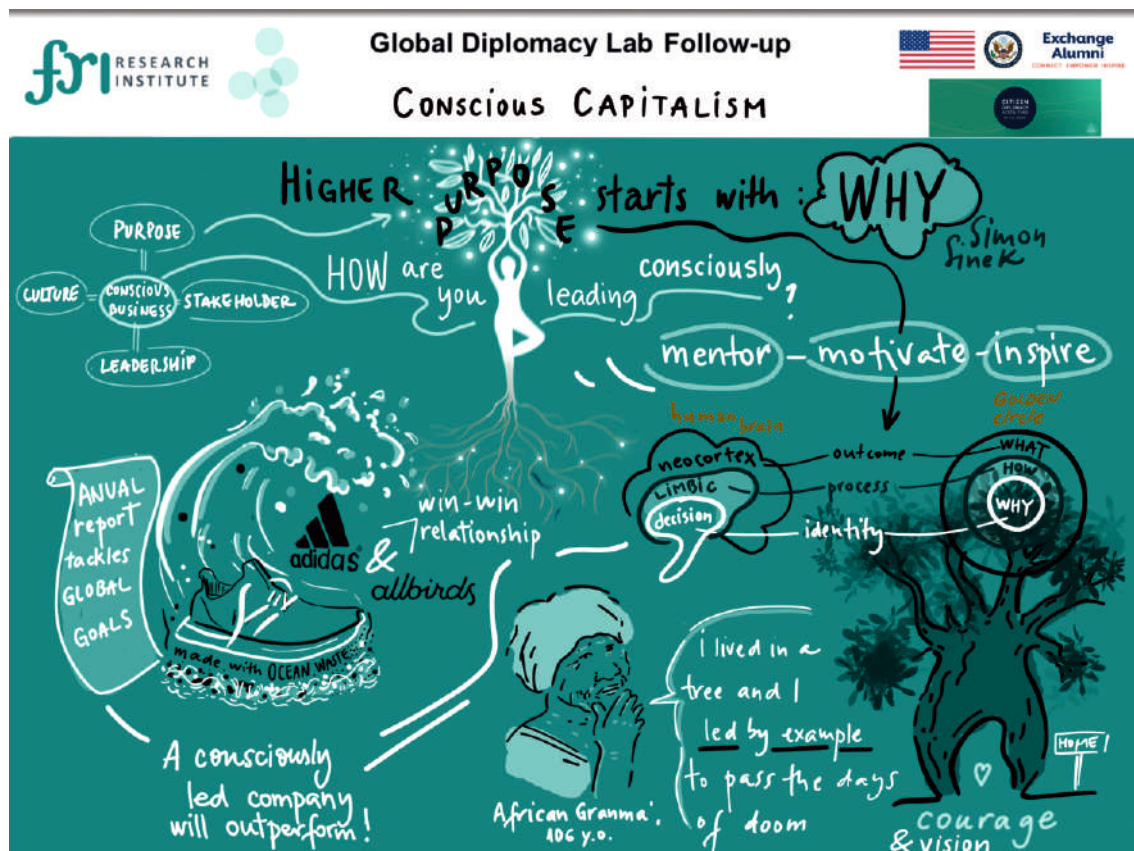




# Training session on conscious capitalism

**Facilitated by: Theresa Carrington, GDL Member**

Theresa Carrington also held a training session on conscious capitalism for local community stakeholders, including Ukrainian migrants to the region. The session was recorded graphically as follows:



# Community discussion: local and global challenges

**Facilitated by: Andreea Petre-Goncalves and Theresa Carrington, GDL Members**

The presence in the community of the four GDL members sparked interest among several local stakeholders, who were invited to a community discussion. The participants touched upon topics related to both local and global challenges that affect Făgăraş and the region. Some key aspects the discussion revolved around included the situation of the Roma minority and potential ways to mitigate it, the limited opportunities for youth that the region offers, and the problematic organisational culture in schools that is perceived to be oppressive and violent.

## Round table on Social Work Organisations in US and Romania

**Keynote Speaker: Marty Castro, GDL Member**

### Participants

- Petry Groza, Regen Foundation
- Cristina Rusu, Diakonia Făgăraş
- Lucian Mija and Bogdan Taflan, Făgăraş Municipality
- Johannes Klein, The German Community of Făgăraş

### Facilitated by

- Stefan Cibian, GDL Member

Given the importance of social work organisations and institutions for the Țara Făgăraşului region, we had a keynote address presented by GDL member Marty Castro of Casa Central, Chicago – one of the largest NGOs supporting the Latino community and not only. The keynote address was followed by interventions from local community leaders focusing in their work on social challenges. Petry Groza of Regen Foundation, Cristina Rusu from Diakonia Foundation Făgăraş, Johannes Klein from the German community were among the speakers from regional social work civil society. The discussion also benefited from the presentation of Lucian Mija City Manager and Bogdan Taflan, Director of the Social Work Department of the Făgăraş Municipality.



# Training session on facilitation

***Facilitated by: Andreea Petre-Goncalves, GDL Member***

The last event of the Follow-up Lab was a training session on Facilitation held by GDL member Andreea Petre-Goncalves. The training brought together several leaders of local initiatives, youth, and guests from the U.S. Embassy in Romania. The training session focused on the importance of inclusive and peaceful facilitation skills in enabling internal confidence and community partnerships that last.



## Conclusion

We briefly presented above the set of activities and key insights generated by the GDL@Făgăraș Lab. In what follows we will focus on some of the key topics covered during the Lab and which relate to the key deliverables produced by the GDL members.



## SDGs and local community actors

Agenda 2030 and the SDGs were adopted by the United Nations – a global organisation. While all states contributed to the development of the SDGs, local communities have only marginally been consulted in that process. Consequently, most local communities and local active stakeholders know little or nothing at all about the SDGs. That is a considerable challenge, given that many sustainability challenges will affect primarily local communities, with little capacity to respond.

Through the GDL@Făgăraş Lab we dedicated a significant part of our time to supporting the Țara Făgărașului Community Foundation (FCTF) explore ways to connect to the SDGs. Our discussions became more substantive once it became apparent that the crux of the matter is how can the Community Foundation support the local community to become more sustainable. While the SDGs might be perceived as a foreign global agenda at times, local actors, such as FCTF care deeply about the wellbeing of their local community. **It is such care for the local community which is the most valuable currency for not only meeting the SDG-defined targets, but also generating a community sustainability infrastructure that is durable and can maintain and improve sustainability achievements.**

Several deliverables were developed for FCTF, including a review of key global challenges and their potential impact on local communities, a set of recommendations regarding connecting fundraising to the Foundation's work on SDGs and ESG, and a set of recommendations on welcoming Ukrainians to the region.





## Făgăraș Municipality, the SDGs, and international relations

Făgăraș is a town of approximately 30,000 people in the southern part of Transylvania, Romania. It is also the main town of Țara Făgărașului (Făgăraș Country), a historical region of Romania, of approximately 150.000 people. While the community has a sizable diaspora, an increasing expat community, and the presence of several international companies and of a NATO Fighting Group in the region, its capacity to build durable international relations remains limited.

Throughout the Lab, participants have been engaged in discussions with the Municipality of Făgăraș and multiple other local stakeholders to understand local perspectives on sustainability. Several deliverables have been created for the Făgăraș Municipality, including a document that recommends embedding the SDGs in the local strategy, a list of international networks focused on sustainability-related topics that Făgăraș could join, a list of towns and cities that expose good practices in their engagement with the SDGs, and a list of cities and towns that Făgăraș could explore connecting with.

## National infrastructure for civil society collaboration

While Romania has a relatively thriving civil society, the capacity to collaborate at a civil society sector-level remains minimal. This is one of the core topics we engaged with at the Lab, in our partnership with Ashoka Romania.

There are multiple potential causes that limit the capacity, ability, and willingness of civil society organisations to work together. During the Lab discussions the following were identified:

- A generalised lack of trust left behind by the Communist-totalitarian regime.
- Competitive funding that does not value partnerships.
- Lack of resources for collaboration and partnerships.
- Lack of spaces for meeting and sharing, lack of sufficient contact.
- Weak federations, that are often not succeeding to bring members together meaningfully in order to build mutual trust and a basis for more in-depth collaboration.
- A reduced number of hubs, offices, etc. designed for the civil society sector.
- Lack of socialisation and trust among civil society leaders from different generations.
- Lack of infrastructure for collaboration at a national level.
- Lack of facilitation skills in the sector, leading to less-than-optimal experiences in joint meetings.
- Thematic and value differences, that lead to incompatibilities.
- Different types of personalities that sometimes make collaboration difficult.



**In such a context Ashoka Romania could contribute by:**

- **Mapping leaders and organisations that have collaborative practices and succeed in bringing together civil society actors.**
- **Engage with existing federations and informal networks and coalitions in order to understand in more depth their vulnerabilities and potential ways to enhance their capacity.**
- **Engage with national funders and stress the importance of putting more emphasis on partnerships in their grant-making practices.**
- **Enable access for Ashoka Fellows and partners to hubs and other collective spaces where partnerships can emerge. Support the development of hubs and co-working spaces for civil society organisations.**
- **Open formal and informal spaces of interactions for civil society leaders to build trust and increase the prospects for partnerships.**

## Inter-sector collaboration and sustainability

Collaboration is not only difficult among civil society organisations. It is even more problematic among different sectors at local and national levels. That lack of inter-sector collaboration is among the leading challenges for a more efficient system in local communities and nationally – a system for efficiently and effectively addressing community challenges and enabling community dreams to come true.

Some of the challenges that limit inter-sector collaboration include:

- A significantly different organisational culture existent in each sector.
- Different legal frameworks for each sector make professionals from any respective sector to have a limited understanding of how other sectors work. Sectors are in silos, with little inter-sector transitions. Even when human resource transition does take place, outcomes are minimal for inter-sector collaboration.
- The language used differs in each sector, making it hard to arrive at a common understanding.
- There are neither physical nor organisational spaces that enable professionals from different sectors to meet, work, and spend time together. As a consequence, the level of acquaintance and trust is limited, hindering collaboration.
- There are very few programs for professionals from different sectors, that would lead to interactions and potential future partnerships.

To enhance the likelihood for inter-sector collaboration, Ashoka Romania could:

- Explore ways for guiding actors from different sectors in understanding the other sectors.
- Mapping leaders, initiatives, organisations, and institutions that build inter-sector partnerships, and support them in further enhancing and sharing their practices.
- Open and hold organizational and physical spaces for inter-sector interactions.
- Facilitate the creation of long-lasting inter-sector working groups that can generate alignment on policies and procedures.
- Organize formal and informal events where representatives of multiple sectors are present. Curate such events so that professionals with similar areas of focus can meet, build trust, and collaborate.

## Community diplomacy as a common practice in today's World Society

Having engaged multiple community actors over the period of the Lab we had the chance to uncover the multitude of international connections existing, often without being noticed, in the local communities of Țara Făgărașului. Those connections illustrate that local communities are not only a part of international phenomena, but that, at times, they are bring a significant contribution through determined individuals and initiatives.

Small communities (towns and villages) rarely get the attention of diplomats and ministries of external affairs. Even cities that are engaged in city diplomacy, often encounter challenges in relating to the foreign policies of their respective countries. Despite formal incapacity to recognise, monitor, and engage with international practices of local communities, these practices expand making local communities more internationally connected. Such practices are relevant as they also uncover an expanding global phenomenon where local state and non-state actors become increasingly internationally connected. Such practices are transforming the nature and fabric of the local community leading to the emergence of increasingly transnational communities.



In the case of Făgăraş, we have noticed the following aspects that connect the Region internationally:

- A large diaspora that is present in many countries.
- Many members of the local community that lived abroad, in various countries.
- A growing number of expats in the region.
- Several NGOs that developed international partnerships and are part of national and international networks.
- Local actors connect at a European level through multiple European projects.
- Tourism is attracting an increasing number of international tourists.
- There are multiple connections to several countries, including France, Germany, Italy, Spain, the U.S., the U.K., Canada, Israel, Greece, Austria, Hungary, the Netherlands, India, Turkey, Belgium, Argentina, Moldova, Ukraine, Denmark, Switzerland, and others.

The Țara Făgăraşului community, given its current international connectedness can be seen as a transnational community.

It is that wide array of international engagements that generates meaningful individual experiences, business connections, community partnerships, and long-term connectedness that we call community diplomacy. Various perspectives on community diplomacy will be explored in a collective volume that GDL members and participants at the Lab will publish.

## Toward an infrastructure for sustainability in local communities

The GDL@Făgăraş addressed challenges related to the SDGs and the international connectedness of local communities. Throughout the Lab, we encountered multiple community actors with whom we discussed about local sustainability challenges and how local and international partnerships play a role in addressing them.

Our key realisation is that more than an effort for achieving the SDGs, what is needed in all communities are thoughtful, well-designed, and well-resources processes for generating community infrastructure for sustainability. Sustainability cannot be an end goal; it is a perpetual goal of any community. As such, it is intrinsically connected to how each community lives its life. It is the way communities live their life that needs to be aligned with and geared towards addressing relevant sustainability challenges. That can happen if an infrastructure for sustainability is in place, enabling local actors to continuously co-create responses to sustainability challenges.

## Reflection

GDL@Făgăraş brought together GDL members from over eight countries with multiple local stakeholders over a period of two years and a half. Through the discussions we had, through encountering local and international perspectives, and through deliverables that aim to support the challenge holders in their future endeavours, this Lab managed to not only generate recommendations but also to generate multiple meaningful experiences and connections that are likely to continue, contributing themselves to connecting Țara Făgăraşului internationally and to strengthening its sustainability.

BIG HAIRY AUDACIOUS GOALS

How to GET THERE

MISSION

WHAT do we do?

WHOM do we serve?

HOW do we serve them?

provide the CONTEXT  
and resources

and a

VISION

WHAT are our hopes?

WHAT are we solving?

WHAT problem are we solving?

WHAT is our audacious goal?

dream ready

what inspires you  
the most?

HI!!!

