

COMMUNITY FOUNDATION PFALZ: SUSTAINABILITY PRACTICES AT THE CORE OF A COMMUNITY FOUNDATION MECHANISM

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About Community Foundation Pfalz

One foundation which was created on the idea of regional sustainability is the Community Foundation Pfalz, based in Klingenmünster, Rhineland Palatinate. It was founded in 2005 comprising the private funds of concerned citizens with the purpose of supporting the sustainable development of the communities in the Pfalz.¹ Their main objectives are preserving and protecting the natural environment in the region, stimulating sustainable economic models, enhancing the quality of life of disadvantaged people, and reviving the region.²

A systemic engagement with the SDGs

The United Nations program of action Agenda 21,³ a predecessor of the SDGs, served as a basis for this vision, which has remained unchanged since the foundation of the CF.⁴ These principles are at the core of one of the Foundation's main projects – a hotel. Pfalz Community Foundation runs one of Germany's most sustainable hotels and conference centers, owned by the foundation.⁵ It is an inclusive project, with 40% of the personnel consisting of people with disabilities, thus ensuring social inclusion. Moreover, the food, especially the vegetables, is purchased seasonably and regionally, the hotel has its own herb garden and is surrounded by a 7000 m² park. It also serves as the residence for the foundation's Academy.⁶

A second important project is accompanying the villages in the region on their path towards sustainability. Using the SDGs as a compass, ten fields of innovation have been defined, such as energy, sustainable construction, mobility, subsistent economic circuits, healthy nutrition, sustainable agriculture etc. Each village must choose at least five goals and will then be supported financially by the Community Foundation in implementing them. These are called "villages of the future" (Zukunftsdörfer) and should become sustainable and self-sufficient by producing their own energy, for instance.⁷

As nutrition is a priority for the Pfalz Community Foundation, a third project focuses on bringing together producers and consumers of foodstuffs to create a more sustainable and environmentally friendly supply chain. To this end, the CF has championed a regional initiative that sets up communities of producers and consumers in order to facilitate the dialogue between them.⁸

¹ Interview with Christine Steinmetz conducted by Andra-Octavia Drăghiciu, 2023.

² <https://buergerstiftung-pfalz.de/>

³ <https://www.un.org/esa/dsd/agenda21/#:~:text=Agenda%2021%20is%20a%20comprehensive,human%20impacts%20on%20the%20environment.>

⁴ Interview with Christine Steinmetz conducted by Andra-Octavia Drăghiciu, 2023.

⁵ Ibidem.

⁶ <https://stiftsgut-keysermuehle.de/nachhaltig/>

⁷ Interview with Christine Steinmetz conducted by Andra-Octavia Drăghiciu, 2023.

⁸ Ibidem.



Due to its focus on sustainability, the Pfalz Community Foundation regards itself as a pioneer of sustainability among German community foundations.⁹ According to Christine Steinmetz, member of the board, the Foundation has been making its own way, doing things differently than other community foundations ever since the beginning, not only because of the strong focus on sustainability and self-sufficiency, but also because they invest their capital in the hotel and in the “villages of the future” project rather than depositing it in the bank.¹⁰

She stresses that it has not always been easy, especially 16 years ago, when they started implementing this model. Their initiatives and ideas such as not serving meat at the hotel’s restaurant were met with skepticism, but they decided to stay true to their beliefs and to prove that it was possible to do things differently.¹¹ Now that the SDGs are increasingly visible and sustainability has become an imperative, the Community Foundation has been receiving more support and understanding from local communities. They feel, however, that German community foundations have a long way to go in this respect.¹²

The importance of the SDGs is growing in the German community foundations landscape, but they have yet to become an integral part of the foundations’ agenda. Whereas some foundations in large cities have oriented their entire activity towards meeting the SDGs, smaller community foundations have limited knowledge and capacities to contribute to Agenda 2030. This, however, does not mean that sustainability is not a priority for them. On the contrary. The mission of German community foundations such as the Bürgerstiftung Pfalz is very similar to that of the SDGs, their main objective being to increase sustainability on a regional level in sectors such as environment, social inclusion, education, mobility, or economics.

Conclusion

The contribution of Community Foundation Pfalz to the SDGs in Europe is therefore a local one, not incorporated in a national or European strategy to further Agenda 2030. Whereas there is some exchange with other regional actors, the Foundation pursues its own projects aimed at furthering sustainability in the region.

⁹ Ibidem.
¹⁰ Ibidem.
¹¹ Ibidem.
¹² Ibidem.
¹¹ Ibidem

