

## ECFI Latvia Study Trip reflection document – september 17-22, 2018

Alejandro Hernández Renner – Fundación Maimona – Spain

### Day 1

I guess you do not write it like this. But I noted down how, phonetically, that important word sounded like to my ears: “Labe”, which means good. It sounds good at the beginning of a journey. It was already a good premonition. Good weather; good atmosphere; good initial impression of the group, in which I only knew 4 people from before. Good.

I could only think of one essential question at the introductory meeting, as we arrived in Valmiera and where asked for writing them down by our wonderful moderator and trip coordinator, Julia and Michaela. It was: “ Are we part of the future of philanthropy? ” By the end of the week, this was one of the very few questions that were appearing along the trip for which I had no answer. Almost all others were appearing and getting in short time an answer, due, I think, to the very correct scheduling, the openness ambience, and the absolute availability of all our host, specially Ansis and his colleagues.

### Day 2

We walk again. It is a pleasure to get your feet moving after so many hours sitting in a room, a bus or a plane. Walking is a good moment to approach colleagues, comment on what has happened, ask details about where they come from or how they face certain issues, of bringing forth some idea spinning in your mind in order to get a first impression of someone you appreciate, all of this embodied in a two or three people conversation.

The two presentations we got at Valmiera’s library were critically important to understand many of the experiences we had later in the week. Already, the site visits carried immediately afterwards by three different small groups to know both beneficiaries and donators first-hand, were much clearer in the light of this introduction. I was part of the group transferring to Burtnieki village. The visits and conversations really helped us “landing” with our full feet on this land’s reality, from many perspectives. This was also the case in the rest of contacts with the projects and people around Ape and Alūksne CF: none of them was a minor experience. We got enough time to discuss and ask, and no communication problem, due to careful planning and language (and general contextual) assistance in every moment.

Dinner was a good occasion to meet members of the Boards (yes, we learned that Latvian CFs. have two governing boards). In no moment where there any food issues, which also kept a good spirit in the group.

### Day 3

Everybody was very careful respecting the timetable for the whole trip. This helped productivity very much, and avoided not needed stress. Getting a deeper view of the issues surrounding Valmiera CF was clearly enhanced by the team’s openness and kindness, and by the process of discussing an actual challenge they are facing, allowing a very intense and rich debate and group work. Lunch was really an occasion of talking to Youth Bank members, thank again to careful

splitting into several tables and the cheerfulness and proficiency in English language of those very bright young people.

Reflection time after lunch was again a good example of right design of the visit and appropriate facilitation. The cycle of experimenting – learning – reflecting has significantly improved compared to the former study visits I could enjoy in former years, and I think ECFI has in this regard found an almost perfect model that enhances crossed learning, deep exchange and internal insight process. Again, the excellent work deployed by Julia Szanton and Michaela Giurgiu deserves special recognition.

#### Day 4

Ape came as a surprise to see how such a small place can be home to rich and dynamic community life, specially thanks to individual persons that make the difference with their personal involvement and love for their home land. This visit somehow opened the issue that has been present for the rest of the week, of how small money can achieve real impact.

The meeting at Alūksne and Ape foundation with Board members Dzintra and Ilse was really a very intense one, showing the intersection of two CF cultures that were clearly present in the group: an “executive” approach of bigger organizations, that regards the processes of our organizations as a structured transfer or flow of resources based upon a wide detection of needs, appropriate strategy, and professional impact KPI-based follow-up, *versus* the experimental and experiential approach of small CFs, relying on the dedication of many time non-paid Board members which act on behalf of their personal compromise, a real direct unorganized perception of needs, “heart” - based establishment of priorities, and immediate feedback concerning outcomes. The first being a more technical (engineer-like) strategy, the second a more humanistic one (garden keeping-like), but both clearly responding to a common and orthodox organizational, institutional and social form of CF.

#### Day 5

A strong start in this last day helped keeping the general mood high and active, this last site visit being a special case of how surprising things and persons are everywhere. The subsequent presentations by other Latvian CFs that had travelled far away in order to meet with us were stimulating and, again language barriers did almost not exist due to the great and attentive work of local CFs’ staff and careful facilitation.

Wrapping-up meeting was useful and appropriate, supplying us all with an opportunity to summarize and bring back home real and enlarged food for thought.

There is no other way to describe the last event, our joint cultural dinner, as defining it as “perfect”. The soft but deep landing in the country which had been happening throughout the week, and the well designed construction of an harmonious group, made us feel not as aliens but as part of the land as we shared their deepest emotions through music, dancing and social rituals. I am deeply thankful for this ideal closing that made me feel I had really used my week to learn in depth about the country and our colleagues working in it. Thank you to the sponsors, the teams, and thank you, Latvia. Everything was Labe.