

FundAction Annual Assembly 2019 - Summary Report

Fundaction celebrated its second General Assembly on 24-26 May 2019 with some 40 of its members and funders at La Bergerie, Villarceaux. [Read the full notes report made by Nikola Pukarevic here](#), as well as the assemblies [collective note taking pad](#). See also here [the program of the meetings](#) (including the participant list of the assembly).

This summary report focuses on some FA main topics of discussion/working (and working groups) areas:

- 1. FA State of the Art**
- 2. Systemic Change, a working group proposal & the Renew 2019 grant results**
- 3. FA grants processes**
- 4. Resist grant**
- 5. FA as a Community : on community building and on outreach**
- 6. Community strengthening : What are we doing? What are our needs and our available skills?**
- 7. Categories**
- 8. Communications**
- 9. FA Governance, the facilitation group workings and its renewal**
- 10. Fundraising**
- 11. Feedback on the assembly itself**

For any comments or questions on the report, welcome to write to Ruby (rubyvdwekken@gmail.com).

1.FA state of the Art

The meetings started off with a '[FA state of the Art,' a Presentation given by the FA facilitation group](#). Questions and answers following the presentation were a first short exploration on the issues of funding, features of the platform, on communications as well as on creating more transparency and insight regarding the workings of the facilitation group.

2.Systemic Change, a working group proposal & the Renew 2019 grant results

FundAction wants to support actors working around systemic change, but what exactly is our common understanding of systemic change? This was a main question the Assembly wanted to further develop collective thoughts on. At one moment of the Assembly participants were asked to position themselves according to their stance with regards to whether societal collapse is inevitable or whether change is possible, which sparked off interesting reflections on how we see (the scope for) change, as also on the need for mutual support in this.

Another session then had participants break out in small groups and address the following questions:

- 1) provide a definition of systemic change
- 2) offer 3 key reasons why we need systemic change
- 3) give 3 better ways to foster systemic change

[A manifold and diverse set of answers was given.](#)

During a methodology designed to have participants reflect on FA's proposal categories (see more below) an additional category of 'systems thinking' was brought up, "as a body of knowledge and community practice that requires more time investments, more community and knowledge sharing, and learning from other movements". In fact, **a working group on systemic change was proposed**, to develop its own manifesto and activities and possibly come to a Rethink grant proposal on this with interested people. The intention is to call together a skype after August with those interested in taking this forward.

The assembly had a celebrative moment with the announcement of the Renew 2019 results, following several hours of intense working together of the P2P panel (a panel which was chosen by sorting) who had previously interviewed the voted upon and shortlisted proposals and who came to a final decision on the grantees during the Assembly. [Read more on the results on our platform!](#)

3.FA grants processes

We are committed to have grant processes that reflect our identity and values, and that work for the whole community. In how far do our grant processes reflect the whole of this? Is there any need to adapt any principles, criteria or anything like that? What do the process mean to FA's full Assembly? These were questions introducing the discussion on FA's grant process.

Whilst there have been question marks expressed as to how active FA's community as a whole is, it was brought to the forefront that actually around 50% of the community is active - which is great. Discussions also pointed to the issue that should there be more clear **community guidelines** with regards to participation?!

Another concrete proposal brought to the forefront was to design **a two phased RENEW round**, in which during the first phase drafts would be put in to receive feedback on in order to come to better proposals. This would also allow for intentions to become earlier known, which would be supporting interaction between community members. See here this [table with the inputs from the Assembly and the steps and decisions taken by the process WG so far](#)

The work around FA grants process will continue to be taken further in the [FA process working group](#), [see its assembly space on the Decidim platform](#). (Welcome to participate!)

4.Resist grant

Space was also reserved during the Assembly to get further feedback on [the pilot design of the Resist grant](#), which is a third not yet implemented FA grant round wanting to offer rapid funds for urgent matters and which would also be open to actors not in the platform. According to the Resist pilot design a bi-monthly changing team of three FA members would commit to within a given framework review proposals as they come in for eligibility and a proposal would move forward as soon as two members of the team would have given their greenlight The grant round is seen as a way for FA to reach out to more grassroots groups, as also to gain awareness on critical issues in Europe. Resist is seen as starting implementation probably towards the end of year, FA funds permitting.

5.FA as a Community : on community building and on outreach

During the Assembly there were different moments of discussion concerning FA's community, namely on community building as well as concerning the issue who is in the FA community, and who is not (yet) but should be.

What is wanted by the members from FundAction and the platform? What is then **FA community building**? Is perhaps a very general yet useful way to describe what the conversations were about in the community building working group session. Discussions in the group pointed to the fact that FA community building concerns:

- >Knowledge resource sharing
- >Strategic collaboration
- >Understand each other better
- >Off line meetings

As all working groups, also the community building wg has been running following the 2018 in person assembly, has seen certain suggestions being taken forward, but has yet to see more participation and clarity in its workings. Concrete suggestions came out of this session, see [the notes from this session taken up in the Community Building working group working plan document](#).

FA Outreach : The FA community today, who is missing?

Who is in FA today and who is not (yet, but should be)? has been a question playing throughout the young history of FA, and addressed at different moments in the Assembly. In the [FA State of the Art presentation](#) made by FG members more details and numbers can be found regarding FG's membership. At one moment during the assembly the lack of eastern European countries (like Russia, Turkey, Belarus, Ukraine and Czech) were mentioned and among the reasons for their lack were given legal obstacles, but also conceptual framing of what Europe is.

One of the questions regarding the growing of FA community has concerned the question as to how? FA has tried to manage an expansion process via controlled rounds of 'invites', in which members were encouraged to invite others based upon certain criteria, in order to ensure for diversity in the community. Another core question is do we want to/can we grow? Which is of course also an issue related to FA grant resources. Of course FA would not simply want to grow the community without being able to grow the grant resources as well.

During the community outreach session during the assembly a **nominated outreach committee** was envisioned which would survey during the coming time what is missing in the platform. (issues, countries,...) "After a research process: identify what is underrepresented and have scouts in the identified territories to organise meetings, outreach. Find out more about who is active in certain issue areas. Invite on the basis of that." (read more on this proposal in [the collective note taking pad](#), under the Outreach and Invites session)

The work around FA community building will continue to be taken further in the [FA community building working group](#), see its assembly space on the [Decidim platform](#). (Welcome to participate!)

6. Community strengthening : What are we doing? What are our needs and our available skills?

The Assembly wanted to start off a process for FA to be facilitating more understanding and collaborations between FA members (beyond the grants), and asked participants to chart down the projects/processes they were involved in, what needs they have, and what skills they have to offer to assist others. The things charted on the canvas made for this purpose in Villarceaux will put onto an excel sheet, which can then (soon!) be taken further to the FA community at large!

The *needs and skills sheet* offers also an answer to what was commented during the assembly that “a common space is missing. It is difficult to get a sense of community (for newcomers). Discover too late (at grant level) that others are doing the same. (Should be) a way to share ideas and concepts in a common space.”

7. Categories

There is an ongoing discussion in FundAction regarding the categories which are used to earmark project proposals. Currently they are these :

- Human rights & anti-discrimination (gender, race, minorities, ableism, etc.)
- Climate justice & environment
- Alternative economies (commons, circular economy, transition towns, etc.)
- Alternative media, arts & culture
- Digital activism
- Democratic innovation & civic education
- Migration
- Civil, political & social rights
- Feminisms and oppressed genders
- Public space, housing & right to the city
- Other (please specify)

A main objective of the having of the categories is to give visibility, to encourage a diversity of projects to be funded, so for FA to be inclusive. But how useful are the current categories? How well do they reflect on all the work done in FA and how well do they show what is missing? During the Assembly the exercise was done of participants grouping themselves into the currently existing categories, and to discuss with others in the group on what they are involved in and how well the category reflects this. Under “Other” the concept of ‘system thinking’ was brought up, ‘as a body of knowledge and community practice that requires more time investments, more community and knowledge sharing, and learning from other movements’. Following the exercise there was an agreement that the categories need more work on.

The issue of FA categories also ended up being a main point of focus also at another moment during the Assembly, namely in the discussion which came to take place during the ‘FA Identity and Values’ plenary break out on Saturday, and a proposal came to the forefront which was coined as being “**double labelling**”. People would be labelling their proposals according to two dimensions:

1) What are the systemic change issues we are furthering/what are the systems of oppression we are fighting?

food, energy, space facism, racism, sexism

2) what are our strategies ?

co-producing empowering, advocacy,...

The double labelling proposal gave rise to own (critical) reflections as “Interesting to make distinction between content and strategy. To value forms of organisation/action differently. Maybe preferred theory of change will emerge?”, “Preference of white supremacy and patriarchy over sexism and racism? (Do the) labels focus on the system that perpetuates the oppression?” As commented, clear is that the conversation about language and terms is not finished.

The work around categories will continue to be taken further in the [FA process working group, see its assembly space on the Decidim platform](#). (Welcome to participate!)

8. Communications

During the assembly, the current communications strategy as well as its implementation over the last two years was reviewed and the conversations came to some operational ideas for improvement.

The most important goals identified during the assembly for the communications were: 1. promoting the community and its members, not just focusing on the participatory grantmaking, 2. engaging funders by communicating the community and its processes, 3. raise awareness about trans-european engagement. These goals were considered for a target audience formed by the internal community, funders, potential members, interested public / civil society.

In terms of tools to be used, FA has a blog, a Twitter account and a public website with information. It was pointed out that three more tools would be needed in order to engage the target audiences mentioned before: 1. an instagram account to share the activities and actions carried out by activists in FundAction, 2. a public newsletter (maybe every three months) to general audience with activities, future events, articles, etc. 3. a whatsapp group or a telegram channel with FundAction members to be able to share information with them in a more simple way than emailing constantly.

Some other ideas that were mentioned:

- to hire for a few hours a week a community manager (someone from the FundAction community) to work on that.
- to share every communication content produced with funder representatives so they can use it for fundraising purposes.
- Write more regular short blogs instead of longer reports.
- For FA communications person to meet with Ivan from Guerrilla Foundation to learn from their comms strategy.
- Have 'members writing reports' as part of the contract of being in fundaction
- Make a Welcome communications pack that explains in detail but in a simple friendly way how the platform works.

The work around FA communication will continue to be taken further in the [FA story telling working group, see its assembly space on the Decidim platform](#). (Welcome to participate!)

9. The FA Governance, the facilitation group workings and its renewal.

Space was also created during the assembly to be discussing FA's governance at large, including the roles of the FG, working groups, and FA's fiscal sponsor EDGE. There have for instance been discussions on the long term possibility to become "independent" from EDGE, but decided was that for the moment at least things are to remain as they are and to be reviewed at the next assembly.

The assembly brought clearly to the forefront the need for more transparency and insight on the workings of the Facilitation Group and the working groups. Suggested were among other regular FG updates regarding what is being discussed and done in the facilitation group, for transparency sake, but also for the sake of gaining more insights on FA activities and challenges. Also the preparing of regular wg updates was suggested. Both these suggestions are to be implemented.

Furthermore considering the FG, there were a few suggestions on having a pool of members and their contacts, which could be "temporary" FG members in the case the FG is overloaded with work, or some of them have to withdraw for a shorter period from the FG for instance for health reasons. There was also a proposal to fully employ a coordinator or to distribute more tasks to Tobias. This would require further resources. For the moment it was decided things would stay as they are, but the FG will discuss all and prepare some proposals.

The process of the renewal of the FG was a topic of its own at the Assembly. Despite all good intentions, the recent FG renewal process had given rise to certain disappointments in the process, which were extensively addressed in a space for this during the Assembly. Please read here [the blog by outgoing FG member Rose Longhurst on the FG renewal process](#), exploring all related dynamics to its fullest in order for us to learn. Decided was that in any case the outcome of the executed process was to be validated in full appreciation of the new FG members, whilst the FG would commit itself to a full review of the process to have better guidelines in place for next years renewal process.

Besides the already mentioned suggested working group on systemic change, another suggestion for a new working group emerged from the discussions, namely a working group on Care.

The work around FA governance will continue to be taken further in [the FA facilitation group, see its assembly space on the Decidim platform](#). (Welcome to participate!)

10. Fundraising

Discussions around fundraising outlined "challenges, redlines and deadlines", and came to put the focus around wanting to come to **long term funding for FA**, larger grants, rather than the current yearly based funding commitments. There were a number of current funders in the group who committed to wanting to liaison with FA on this and get support for this in terms of materials from the FG. Idea is to develop this long term funding strategy until the end of autumn, as also to open a donation page by september. October marks FA's second anniversary which could well prompt more promotional material making.

The work around FA fundraising will continue to be taken further in [the FA fundraising working group](#), [see its assembly space on the Decidim platform](#). (Welcome to participate!)

11. Feedback on the Assembly itself

How did the Assembly come into being? The facilitation group formed a working group for the Annual Assembly end 2018, and a first version of the program was drafted in December 2018. Following commenting rounds first of all within the FG, and following more information coming in on for instance participation, the program was put for comments to the whole Assembly in April 2019 on the platform. Discussions then took place on the program and its objectives with the two facilitators Juan and Natasha which were selected by the FG based on an open call made to the whole Assembly that took into account geographical and diversity indicators.

And we had a good Assembly! In particular the Facilitation received many thumbs up, as you can read from all [the feedback](#) given. With regards to the program, there were comments on the need to have had more clarity and guidance during the smaller working breakouts. Agreed was also that all the practical and logistical arrangements were once again fantastically handled by Thibault. A warm thank you to everyone who was with - the meetings gave FA a lot of input from which to continue our working together!