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NGO Challenges in providing aid: Ukraine Context

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## Abstract

The NGO role in providing aid and internal/external impacts that are occurring during the process are central pillars in analysing the development objective and Sustainable Development Goals for the future. The challenges that the NGOs face during aid processes are not solely dependent on singular sources and rather require complex, and multi-faced approaches. Previous studies emphasise NGO involvement in armed conflicts to provide humanitarian aid and advocacy for minorities and human rights protection, as NGO involvement is believed to have positive impacts by bringing priority to human and civil rights, promotion of peace and environment, and social issues. In addition to participatory actions taken by the NGOs and their current involvement in the aiding processes, it is desired by this thesis to compliment current literature on a wider spectrum of problems arising from aid processes, such as the lack of communication among NGOs to respond to calls for humanitarian action, impacts on NGO sector at large, challenges for development and complex achievement of SDGs. Depending on the empirical findings collected through interviews conducted with NGOs that are in the process of aiding Ukraine in multiple parallels, findings suggest that the challenges they are facing are of the main importance to their future organisational performances and are impacting their day-to-day work. Additional factors, such as media impact, economic market, and civic engagement shape aiding processes conducted by the NGOs.

Key Words: *NGO, Aid, Partnerships, Development, SDGs*

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## 1. Introduction

“There was always some evidence that the willingness of international NGOs to work in war-affected areas helped institutionalise armed conflict, and supported local war economies” (Allen & Thomas, 2000, p 182). Sociologists argue, that the overarching significance of core organising structures is shaping the global economy and its societal impact, and that the NGO sector is one of the actors that are responsible for power-sharing inspection, and being content with the outcomes (Dillon, 2013, p 463). Thus, understanding how the NGO sector is changing and adapting to moving processes is crucial in order to reflect on the further development of sectors that NGOs have an impact on or are overlooking. Despite the lack of sustained theoretical engagement in research on NGOs, aid agencies, government-run programs, or combinations, practitioners take it as given that international development organisations require good management practices to succeed, generate development outcomes, access donor funds, use specialised assessment and facilitation tools, or/and rationalise administration and enhanced policy implementations (Srinivas, 2022, p 6).

NGOs are considered to be subjected to stronger pressures to become involved in the delivery of services on behalf of governments and donors (Lewis, 2021, p 90). Thus the notion leads to three identifications of NGO approaches: first, act as a contracted agent to provide services, second, ignore development assistance and work on radical initiatives, third, use contracting as means of gaining influence and trying to bring alternative development ideas, pursuing policy advocacy, and working in mainstream development (2021, p 90). Arguably another challenge for the NGO sector is recognition, civil society was misunderstood as equivalent to non-state actors, and non-state actors were misunderstood as unitary actors defined as a recognisable type, named NGO (Srinivas, 2022, p 7). To add, scholars consider that aid flows to fragile states are excessively volatile, poorly coordinated, and often reactive rather than preventative (Ware, 2014, p 6). These challenges faced by the NGO sector may lead to considerations about development as such.

An ideal development tool as described by McMichael (2008, p 278) is devolving responsibility for development to the individual, as a self-maximiser, enlisting the NGO community in dispensing and monitoring credit and its repayment, simultaneously empowering and disciplining its recipients. Development is considered to be about the extent of opportunities for people to improve their lives, yet is rarely straightforward (Ware, 2014, p 48-49). Different notions for NGOs and internal/

external relations create influences that challenge development processes. For example, as discussed by Ware (2014, p 83-84) in the context of the Kurdish region, foreign assistance created a relatively stable environment, allowing Kurds to find patronage and forms of recognition that resulted in state-like structure emergence and institutions, yet aid program checks indicated concerns of territorial integrity that resulted in the prohibition of INGO channeling funds to the region, stopped training programs an integration public sector professionals into the rehabilitation processes. These actions prevented long-term planning or development projects, leaving the Kurdish region under the indirect control of the Ba’athist regime (Ware, 2014, p 84). Thus, reflecting the example and development focus placed on NGOs, it is crucial to consider influences, localisation, possible challenges, and other aspects when providing aid and relief measures, meanwhile still aiming for development.

There is no exception in considering current sustainable development goals (SDGs), scholars consider that the lack of leadership and governance capabilities of non-profits challenge SDG achievements (Ogunyemi & Nwagwu, 2022, p 264). Authors further argue that such setback is witnessed due to the absence of internal and external sustainability as development agents, especially for NGOs that are focused on environmental sustainability promotion, degradation of the environment threatens economic and social sustainability, and the living conditions of future generations are affected as a result (2022, p 264-265).

The European Council states that “Europe has the means set in motion and synergise the forces that will enable it to count among the world powers of the 21st century, it can act for peace and promote its values, defend its interest, and influence the balance of an uncertain world” (Palomeros, 2023, p 4). Yet, the chaos in Europe, due to the Ukraine invasion by the Russian Federation is causing NGOs additional challenges, that disrupted not only pre-planned projects, further development spread, and SDG implementation but also proposed additional challenges for aid delivery conducted by NGOs.

## 1.1 Purpose and Research Questions

The thesis aims to demonstrate the complexity of changes witnessed in NGO activities due to aiding war-affected Ukraine. The focus on internal and external changes and challenges occurring in NGO work is born out of concern for the impacts made on long-term development, sustainable

development goals, and the NGO sector as such. In relation to Wenger's ideas of *community practice*, and Rousseau's *reason and rationality*, this study is constructed on the academic literature highlighting internal challenges of course change/mission drift, and external challenges to build sustainable partnerships and assess the needs of communities. Mirroring the collected empirical material gathered through interviews from NGOs (representatives) that are providing aid to Ukraine, and secondary data collected, the research questions leading the analysis are:

- What type of changes do NGOs experience when reorganising their activities to provide aid?
- How do external/internal challenges impact the aid process?

## 1.2 Disposition of the paper

The introduction of the thesis aims to highlight only a mere part of the challenges that NGOs are connected with, outlining views, concerns, and beliefs based on them, that may assist in complications in carrying out their missions, work, and aid processes. The second part of the thesis is investigating the background of the historical importance of NGO assistance and relates to the empirical findings of the research. Section three is concerned with existing research on the topic, outlining internal and external processes occurring in NGOs and hardships related to the empirical findings of the research. Further, section four consists of theoretical background, referring to Wenger's ideas of *community practice* and Rousseau's *reason and rationality* that is reflected in the analysis. The fifth section of the study is reflecting methods used to collect and analyse empirical data collected through interviews while considering the main limitations and ethical aspects. Part six of the research consists of gathered and analysed data, reflecting on outlined theories, and secondary data research to discuss distinctions, differences, and similarities of the collected empirical findings. Finally, the conclusion part of the research summarises the findings of the empirical data and answers to the research questions.

## 2. Background

“Governments have a primary obligation to provide security. Yet in a globalising world, preventing violent conflict and building sustainable peace requires complex strategies. These need to address structural causes of conflict, many of which may be inherent in the global system. To do so effectively requires cooperation between civil society actors at local, national, regional, and global levels and with governments, intergovernmental organisations, and, in some cases, businesses. Yet,

the role of civil society organisations in promoting peace and security remains contested by some, who see them either as irrelevant or as a threat to the sovereign prerogative states.” ( Barnes, 2006, p 7)

## 2.1 NGOs and Global Partnerships for Development

During the first six months of the Russian invasion of Ukraine United Nations report focusing on humanitarian aid, in partnering with NGOs, local authorities, and the government, the response reached 16 million people (United Nations Ukraine, 2023). In 2022, SIDA contributed SEK 545 million to support organisation on the ground in Ukraine, the cooperating organisations provided humanitarian aid, cash grants, and electricity (SIDA, 2023). Save the Children (Save the Children) reports responding through partners to deliver essential humanitarian aid to children and their families. In addition to these large organisations, the vast number of organisations responding to the crisis in Ukraine to aid through multiple sources is ever-growing. NGOs that are involved in providing aid to Ukraine are facing major challenges in the changed nature of their work, which is analysed by this research.

However, critical scholars have pointed out that the partnership production of development imaginers creates truths about international development and consumer engagement that make development appear simplified, manageable, and outside history or politics (Ponte, 2014, p 84). Scholars (Richey, Hawkins & Goodman, 2021) argue that through the blending of for-profit, non-profit, state, and non-state development actors, the humanitarian sentiments of care, compassion, and responsibility are realised as utterly and inseparably synonymous with the capitalist and corporate sentiments of profit. In addition, the development partnerships, that are considered central to achieving sustainable development goals may impact the scale of inequalities and perpetuate existing hierarchies, which creates an understanding that the state is no longer respiratory for responsibility and power in solving humanitarian crises or development needs (Richey, Hawkins & Goodman, 2021).

## 2.2 Analysing Historical NGO Experiences

Alnoor (2003, p 19) argues that historical analysis of organisational change and its embeddedness in wider social norms and discourses becomes essential to making sense of current practices, relations, and tensions. Thus, exploring the changes occurring in today's NGOs that are impacted by the crisis witnessed in Ukraine might explain future choices, discourses, and relationships of future NGOs.

Historically, as overlooked by Ware (2014, p 202-210) the Afghan war began in 1978 between anti-communist Islamic guerrillas and the Afghan communist government, the state was already fragile and complex, including diverse economic, social, political, institutional, and international factors. In addition, the conflict was highly reflected in the economy of the country, which used to be a transit route between the Far East, Europe, and the Indian subcontinent no longer existed. The Soviet Union's invasion of the country cost a lot considering the economic and human resources of the country. The vital points for states' stability were dependency on external financial flows, including foreign aid. Thousands of people died of starvation, and diseases that could have been easily treated, regardless of donors committing inadequate levels of aid and security forces for the effective reconstruction and stabilisation of the country, they still failed to respond to Afghanistan's needs regarding the complex situation. This conflict led to around six million Afghan refugees living abroad in the late 1980s. Further, Helga Baitenmann (1990, p 65-66) describes how NGOs aided people in the Afghan war. By mid-1985 NGOs provided one-third of the refugees with basic health services, and promoted programs in Pakistan that have succeeded mainly due to the efforts of certain NGOs, in addition to providing uncountable emergency assistance by distributing food, medicine, and shelters. The author continues to describe how the NGOs worked with the refugee crisis in Pakistan, as the political fauna was not favorable towards certain NGO policies. The first large group of NGOs that aided refugees in Pakistan came from the US, that in result funded cooperation relief organisations, advised them, and served as an intermediary between the NGOs and Pakistan. The second group of NGOs mainly consisted of about 50 small organisations that aided on the border of Afghanistan, preventing further exodus and stress, and helping people left inside the country.

### 2.3 SDGs: NGOs and Partnerships

Ghaib and Chaker (2022, p 194-195) discuss the need for the integration of social innovations, outpacing classical established organisations, transforming them into viable solutions for the



discovery of the innovations, that arguably, would benefit in poverty reduction, that classify as number one priority in the SDGs proposed in 2015. In order to achieve Sustainable Development Goals, the need for partnerships is recognised as a crucial instrument among civil society, businesses, government, NGOs, foundations, and others (Ghaib & Chaker, 2022, p 196). In the case of social innovators, it is outlined that partnerships are crucial in order to achieve results, meaning that they need strong financial support that would set foundations for the co-creation of a sustainable impact of value (Ghaib & Chaker, 2022, p 197), authors further propose a framework that outlines different actors involved to create balanced collaboration dynamics for social innovations. The NGO's role in the framework is outlined as an empowerment and competence-building tool, that is also bringing in financial support to implement these programs locally, stressing that citizen participation mechanisms are of the highest importance to create a bottom-up dialogue and further impact engagement, empowerment, and improve services, and community projects (Ghaib & Chaker, 2022, p 200).

### 3. Existing Research

#### 3.1 Why investigating how NGOs aid in Ukraine is relevant?

Human Rights Watch (2022) reports that the law governing an armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine falls under an international armed conflict governed by international treaty law, as stated in the Geneva Convention. The basic principles of the law state that international humanitarian law provides protection to civilians and other non-combat from the hazards of armed conflict. Civilians may never be the deliberate target of attacks. Although, the events of the Russian attack on Ukraine are witnessed by Russia deliberately striking civilian infrastructure and non-military targets in order to needlessly harm civilians and attempt to install terror among the Ukrainian population (Garamone, 2022). Irrera (2011, p 90) adds that in many “new wars” the clear distinction between civilians and combatants dramatically weakens and civilians purposefully are chosen as targets of military action. Such actions often call for help from NGOs that provide humanitarian aid and advocate for minority and human rights protection. The numbers of NGOs in and near armed conflict zones have been increasing over the years, by giving priority to human and civil rights, promotion of peace and environment, and social issues (2011, p 91).

### 3.2 Trying to provide aid: NGO hardships

The NGO work in Ukraine has received a lot of attention, and NGO work is a vital point in restoring a broken society, advocating for rights, and helping people that are suffering from war impacts. The review of the literature points toward a larger debate about what shifts NGOs witnessed, what imprints they left, and what challenges they face during aid processes.

In the case of crisis, NGOs that are project-based may experience challenges, as in the face of a crisis flexibility and an event-based approach is crucial (Hasey, 2021). The research in mind explores the CVF framework in order to theorise about INGO project performance in a humanitarian crisis in terms of competing institutional demands and potential management tensions. It is crucial to reflect that the research is only based on the humanitarian NGOs, which experienced crises triggered by natural hazards and used by exploring four ideal organisational types. The research states that the main dimension reflected is flexibility in meeting beneficiary needs while simultaneously keeping control to meet organisational demands, that are emergent, structured, and/or mixed while investigating external-internal dimensions. The findings of Hasey, Morales, and Wittek (2021) indicate that a negative performance is witnessed if, one beneficiary's needs are not met, and two organisational demands are not met. The need for adaptability within NGOs is crucial for an effective structure, and willingness to adjust to changing needs and interests of donors, aid recipients, and governments (Edwards, 2010, p 203). Namely, changes occurring in the NGO due to crisis have to be effective, and satisfy the purpose of the organisation, as well, as go in hand with the beneficiaries' vision, in order to have a positive impact during the aiding process and an impactful NGO.

To continue, ALNAP (2022, p 140) presents findings that the gap between the kind of support people need and the type of aid they receive is not only due to the shortcomings of the humanitarian system. The shortcomings of the humanitarian system are reflecting the complexity of delivering aid, for example, in active conflicts it is limited by the operating environments that are highly constrained which results in constraining humanitarian operations. In some cases, it is reflected that the best need assessment could be attributed to the cash distribution programs and that it is reflected by evidence of its positive impact (ALNAP, 2022, p141-142). A question on the localisation of aid

is important to reflect when considering aid distribution. It is argued that localisation is thought to strengthen community and societal resilience in crisis-affected societies, which could be carried out by numerous forms of increased and more equitable partnerships, increased and more direct funding of local NGOs, or a greater role for local actors in aid delivery and coordination (Elkahlout, Milton, Yaseen & Raweh, 2022). Yet, localisation process proposes its own challenges, on how to deal with communities driven by practice, which is more largely pronounced in conflict zones due to the additional obstacles. This finding highlights what Barbalet (2018) is arguing for, that capacity building is not new to the humanitarian sector, and that the past efforts have not necessarily resulted in more local humanitarian action, but instead created a higher focus on looking for partnerships. Given that international organisations, including NGOs, have no established communication networks amongst themselves, in order to respond to calls for humanitarian assistance more smoothly (Jain, Prasad & Reinis, 2022) it creates greater hardships to assess the needs of the community in question and evaluate local organisation effectiveness. The complexity of aid delivery for NGOs is rooted in the debate on how it should be assessed, what type of aid is the most desirable, how to deliver it, and how to impact the community for the better while doing so.

Finally, NGO involvement in crisis and international systems contributes to redefining concepts of development and security, by giving them a humanitarian dimension, as well as directly or indirectly contributing to developments in the health sector (Sidiropoulos, Emmanouil-Kalos, Kanakaki & Vozikis, 2021, p 279). However, as pointed out by the author the critique of the NGO involvement arises in transparency and effectiveness. Accordingly, scholars argue (Cabedo, Fuertes-Fuertes, Maset-LLaudes & Tirado-Beltran, 2018, p 331) that organisations seek to reduce information asymmetries between internal and external agents, and in this way, enhance their legitimacy, while also making themselves accountable and that motivations for organisations to unilaterally disclose information is to serve a public purpose, that outside stakeholders might not note.

#### 4. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework reflects on aspects raised for communities, social order, and development notions to reflect the realities of NGO-aiding processes. The paragraph below reviews

theories raised for community characteristics and integration processes by Wenger (1998), social order and reason by Rousseau

#### 4.1 Wenger: *Community Practice*

Wenger and colleagues (2002, p 69) argue that community development is rarely smooth, involving painful discoveries, difficult transitions, and learning through hard-won experiences. *Mutual engagement* is the first specification provided as a first characteristic of community practice by Wenger (1998, ch.2). Mutual engagement involves competencies, that are specific for every individual, allowing meaningful connection, and knowledge, yet may lead to certain limitations (Wenger 1998, ch.2). The limitation outlined by Wenger (1998, ch.2) involves overlapping competencies and complimentary contributions leading to the concept that a community of practice is when the aim is to help each other, instead of knowing everything yourself. In addition, mutual relations are usually witnessed by complex relationships of power and dependence (Wenger 1998, ch.2). A second specification for community practice is *joint enterprise*, which is a result of a collective process, reflecting the complexity of mutual engagement, defined by the process of pursuing, and is not defined as a stated goal, instead a product of relations of mutual accountability that is an integral part of the practice (Wenger 1998, ch2). *The shared repertoire* is the third specification of community practice by Wenger (1998 ch2) concluding that the community has produced or adopted repertoire in the course of its existence, and is a part of the practice, allowing members to express their membership and identities through it.

Wenger (1998 ch.4) states that communities of practice cannot be in isolation, their various ventures are closely interconnected with other practices, and as a consequence, the practice results in external relations. The author goes further to explain the *Boundary practice* that is common for organisations, in order to explain how communities that have their origin, attempt to bring two practices together. The practice is likely to emerge if it becomes established and provides a forum for *Mutual agreement*, *Enterprise* deals with boundaries and relations among practices, and the resulting practice becomes a form of collective arrangement (Wenger 1998, ch.4).

#### 4.2 Rousseau: *Reason and Rationality*

Wenger's ideas about the communities of practice closely relate to Rousseau's notion of *Reason and Rationality*. Focusing on the larger community than individual self-interest is the best way to regulate individuals' as citizens committed to the common good, argues Rousseau ( Dillon 2014, p 15). Rousseau also considered how social order is achieved during social progress, and that individuals should use reason to determine their destiny and to achieve political freedom and social progress worthy of their humanity (Dillon 2014, p 14, 79). Reasonable solutions, according to Rousseau (Dillon 2014, p 14-15) are those that aim for balance among competing interests, and which work in practice to produce some sort of social consensus. Further, an example by Dillon (2014, p15) is provided to illustrate Rousseau's ideas in a contemporary context, by analysing abortion laws in the USA. The legalisation of abortion with restrictions imposed on circumstances, the solution is broadly acceptable to a large portion of the public and maintains social order, yet it is not to the consensus satisfaction of activist groups on either side of the issue.

The need to determine the difference between reasons and causes is analysed by Hempel (Risjord 2014, p 88). First, the principle of instrumental rationality is normative (Risjord 2014, p 88) and is considered a norm for rational action, rather than a rule. Second, to say that something is a reason is to say that it justifies the action (Risjord 2014, p 89). In addition, primary reason and action ought to have a relation, explaining that without some kind of causal relationship between belief, goal, and action, there is nothing to make the primary reason primary (Risjord 2014, p 90). Concluding that in order to explain an action, the reason that is its cause must be found.

### 4.3 Composite

The theories represent an understanding that is common for NGOs: beyond self-interest. In Wenger's (1998) *Community Practice* it is emphasised that the aim of helping each other is beyond, despite the overlapping interests, that is witnessed by mutual engagement and raises the notion of community practice, beyond boundaries. In such a sense, Rousseau's ideas of the balance of overlapping interests create a focus on a larger community, and as such contributes to the process of community practice, by going beyond and creating the common good that as a result contributes to the social processes. Unifying these perspectives may indicate why civic society organisation may be willing to participate in the research of aid investigation and contribute through the organisations. Thus, creating an understanding that by overcoming boundaries, being engaged, and

adapting to the realities, despite already emerged actions, applying reason and rationality to the occurring challenges may create larger impacts and additional processes.

## 5. Methods and Data

### 5.1 Research Design

A qualitative investigation method reinforces this thesis due to the lack of material on qualitative studies considering challenges occurring in the NGO field during the contemporary Ukrainian crisis and the deficiency of investigation on how civil society organisations shift their line of work to cope with the arising challenges, internal processes, and structures to accomplish their goals and make an impact (Massoud, 2015, p 336). Also, a personal interest to obtain a deeper knowledge of the realities of NGOs that have to adapt to changes in order to provide impactful aid informs the decision to investigate a qualitative case study. The research adopts a case study approach, by selecting a small number of related cases of concern, and of a situation, as well complimented by the collected information via data collection technique of interview and documentary analysis (Robson & McCartan, 2016, p 80). Nonetheless, the case study approach of the research allows us to analyse qualitatively complex events, and take into account numerous variables (George & Bennett, 2005, p103) and such an approach is desirable in researching the shifting and moving realities of NGO-aiding processes.

The method of semi-structured interviews is the main data collection tool used, in order to obtain primary information and more insightful data, which allows the researcher to receive information on structured questions, and provides the interviewer with greater freedom for evaluations (Robson & McCartan, 2016, p 291). The gathered material was afterward investigated by harnessing thematic coding analysis, which was followed by interview transcripts being coded through several phases to identify the occurring themes and the lacking counterparts of the collected data (2016, p 463).

### 5.2 Sampling

Four research participants were sampled, all being (representatives of ) NGOs based in Europe and one of them being from the United States, the sampling process was guided by logical purposive sampling. Despite the complex debate (George & Bennett, 2005, p 45), about whether claims of

sufficiency should be tested only against cases that are positive on the outcome of interest, and claims of sufficiency by testing an independent variable, the research included secondary data sources as a means to provide greater sufficiency and comparisons to the analysis of the topic. The purposeful sampling approach is chosen in order to focus on the selection of NGOs that match the criteria raised by the research purpose, to focus on a small number of gathered information in order to achieve highly concentrated information that may lead to more advantaged knowledge of experiences and challenges.

To continue, purposeful sampling or theoretical sampling allows additional information flow, that can be obtained to help generate conceptual categories (Robson & McCartan, 2016, p 163).

Reflecting on the requirements to participate in the research, all of the organisations shared these characteristics: an established NGO, providing aid for Ukraine, and sharing common values and moral standings about the oppressed country. To ensure a cross-section of characteristics of NGOs included in the sample, it was desired by the researcher to include differently sized NGOs, basing their work on different spectrums and complexities. The researchers' experience and position as an intern at the Lithuanian Development Cooperation platform allowed a wider selection of samples and provided contacts for three conducted interviews. Besides the scope of invitations to participate in the research was large, only a handful of NGO representatives responded and the process of sampling had to reflect on the number of participants. The final sample is based on the interviewed NGOs that answered the request to participate in the research, which resulted in a great representation of different-sized NGOs. Further, an overview of the sample is presented.

The four NGOs share a common interest in providing aid for Ukraine, in multiple sectors. The majority of organisations indicated having international relationships with other organisations, at any stage and/or had conducted development cooperation actions. The NGOs backgrounds are various and they are based in three European countries and the United States. All of the organisations got involved in aiding Ukraine from the first days of the invasion, some of them having prior relations and being established in the country, before the invasion. However, despite the common characteristics of NGOs, all have a unique way of aiding, depending on their established contacts and location. Having evidence for certain mechanisms operating in certain contexts witnessed by the sample group it is desired to be sensible about specific circumstances that might be happening in other settings or cases (Robson & McCartan, 2016, p 166). In addition, by

using the purposeful sampling method it is not desired to create conceptualising distinctions for all NGOs providing aid to Ukraine, rather it is desired to compare and evaluate the challenges and experiences of different-sized, and cross-sector non-government organisations.

### 5.3 Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews with NGO representatives were mainly done by using online platforms (Zoom and Google Meets), while one interview was conducted via phone due to time differences and other circumstances. Interviews lasted from 45 minutes to approximately an hour, the longest one taking to an hour and a half. Interviews were conducted in English, except one being in the researcher's native language-Lithuanian. The topics covered in the interviews consisted of three parts. Part one was used as an introductory part, allowing the participants to engage in conversations about their role in the organisation and organisations establishing purposes, and additional work. The second, and largest part of the interview is made up of questions concerning aid for Ukraine, internal and external shifts, and challenges. The final part of the interview is closing remarks, giving attention to lessons learned that allowed interviewees to reflect on development, sustainability, and other learning experiences while providing aid. The interview guide<sup>1</sup> was developed considering the theories raised in the previous chapter, including questions about transitions, social processes, and partnerships with locals, while still reflecting on the participating NGO experiences.

Partly it was of the main importance to allow the interviewees to have an “open stage” by answering the questions, but as well as going into more details about their work, some of the participants seemed greatly touched, showed emotions, and expressed their concerns for the future. Thus, the “consultation” conducted by this research was used as means of assurance that an orderly, rational process was followed in making important decisions (George & Bennett, 2005, p 99) conducted by NGOs while aiding Ukraine. All of the participants showed a great deal of gratitude for being interested in their line of work and daily challenges. The interview guide allowed the researcher to ensure standardisation across different interviews (Robson & McCartan, 2016, p 268), yet no additional questions were needed, as the answers from respondents were lengthy and they closely related them to not only their work but as well to their personal environments.

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix A



Furthermore, concerning the online/internet interviews there are some practical issues, such as stable connection, or usage of webcams (Descombe, 2010, p 178), while conducting this research no such issues occurred, participants were willing to use webcams, and to answer questions using not only verbal but also visual means. Although personal identity is a part of the evaluation process, usage of online means to connect to people might decrease the effects made on data through the notion, no hardships were experienced due to that. Since, the questions of the interview touched on sensitive issues for most of the respondents, and most interviewees answered with emotional weight, it was important to demonstrate mutual understanding through identity and to not influence the nature of the data collected (2010, p 179).

All conducted interviews were audio and/or visually recorded, and while it might bring self-conscious or shyness aspects from the interviewees' position (Descombe, 2010, p 187), every interview was smooth in nature and extensive, allowing consideration that the representatives might have experience in providing interviews. In addition, although some interviewees do not speak English as their first language, it proposed no obstacles and allowed honest, and detailed data collection.

## 5.4 Data analysis

The data analysis process began by firstly transcribing all of the interviews consistently, within short periods after being conducted, in order to connect the experience to the memos collected during an interview, reflecting on initial feelings and reactions. Secondly, the data analysis process followed the five-phase path suggested by Robson and McCartan (2016, p 469). Consistent data analysis of transcriptions allowed a simple method of process tracing that threw light on a greater understanding of the events and how they came about (George & Bennett, 2005, p 192) in analysing the interviews.

The first phase of the data analysis proved crucial to familiarise with the data collected, while transcribing, reading, and re-reading in order to have a broad reflection on the initial ideas and notions raised (Robson & McCartan, 2016, p 469). During the process, most data had occurring themes and similarities, yet sometimes proposed different views, or challenges, that created a clear

distinction, and allowed further analysis through coding. The coding stage included a process of going back and forth to compare the data collected among all interviews in order to label it in a systematic order (2016, p 469). Using coding technique in the data analysis allowed a further investigation of identifying particular responses, organise, and analyse the data (2016, p 272). Further, the center stage of thematic identification, which proposed re-occurring themes and sub-themes allowed an investigation of the topic, this step allowed the main identifications of similarities and differences, and further investigation of transitions (2016, p 475). In order to reflect on the thematic identification, a thematic network was used, to ensure that the data collected supports the themes and the data coded supports the thematic code (2016, p 476). The final stage of the data analysis included the main reflection on the factors, underlying the processes that are under investigation, that are crucial for further analysis, allowing interpretations and integrations of the data collected (2016, p 467-477).

## 5.5 Limitations and ethical considerations

The main limitation of the data-gathering process occurred in the infant stages, which dictated most of the research's further stages. Inviting NGOs to a research process and gaining their attention for no-profit research for learning purposes proved to be challenging, very few answers were received, despite a large scope of NGOs being invited to participate from all over Europe. Although, the time frame of sending invitations through multiple sources to NGOs took approximately 5 months, only a very selected few answered and participated, challenging the researcher to create standing research and analysis. The challenge of gathering enough data dictated how the research will be conducted, and due to that a lot of time was spent deciding on a research strategy, while still trying to collect more interviews.

Ethical norms during the interview included an informed request of consent to participate in the research, the purpose of the study, how the material gathered will be used and reported, and finally, the participant's right to withdraw from the research or discontinue the interview. Confidentiality of interviewees and their represented NGOs was maintained, in order to protect organisations reputation, and possible effects on the individuals (Robson and McCartan 2016, p 214) or their positionally within the organisation. Another aspect of maintaining confidentiality while gathering

the data for the research is to allow the interviewees to respond truthfully, openly, and without possible consequences.

## 6. Analysis

	NGO1 (Large)	NGO 2 (Large)	NGO3 (Medium)	NGO4 (Small)	NGO5 (Small)
<b>Professional changes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not identified</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identification of no changes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identification of change, but did not affect work efficiency</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identification of change, highly affected work efficiency</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identification of change, highly affected work efficiency</li> </ul>
<b>Partnerships and contacts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identification of existing partners</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identification of existing partners, no new partners after the invasion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identification of looking for partners, but due to existing contacts not complicated</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identification of looking for partners, complicated</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identification of looking for partners, but due to existing contacts not complicated</li> </ul>
<b>Need assessment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High need reflection</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High need reflection</li> <li>• Strong trust</li> <li>• High level of communication</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High need reflection</li> <li>• Strong trust</li> <li>• High level of communication</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High need reflection</li> <li>• Strong trust</li> <li>• High level of communication</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High need reflection</li> <li>• Strong trust</li> <li>• High level of communication</li> </ul>
<b>Challenges</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mental health concerns</li> <li>• Managing infrastructure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Language</li> <li>• Mental health concerns</li> <li>• Continuing pre-planned projects for development</li> <li>• Economical challenges</li> <li>• Managing infrastructure</li> <li>• Transparency</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mental health concerns</li> <li>• Managing infrastructure</li> <li>• New and/or existing project distribution</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mental health concerns</li> <li>• Relying on volunteer work</li> <li>• Managing infrastructure</li> <li>• Border control</li> <li>• No pre-existing cooperation for similar crisis</li> <li>• Transparency</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mental health concerns</li> <li>• Economical challenges</li> <li>• Information spread (media)</li> <li>• Relying on volunteer work</li> <li>• Managing infrastructure</li> <li>• Border control</li> <li>• No pre-existing cooperation for similar crisis</li> <li>• Transparency</li> <li>• Media</li> </ul>

*Figure 1:* The figure is an illustrative summary for further analysis, indicating the sizes of NGOs by logical criteria. NGO1 is ICRC functioning with multiple international partners, focusing on providing humanitarian relief aid and assistance for the local communities, research of NGO1 is based on secondary data. NGO2 is an organisation that functions by providing financial support and mentoring for its members targeted to aid the most vulnerable communities and build capacity.

NGO3 is a Ukrainian diaspora organisation, that used to be only volunteer-based, functioning in multiple parallels, providing financial, humanitarian aid, and advocacy. NGO4 established due to the women's movement, in order to advocate for reproductive rights and other gender questions, focused on humanitarian aid for Ukraine. NGO5 functioning as an organisation that was established to deal with the internal crisis, aiding Ukraine by providing humanitarian aid.

## 6.1 Professional Changes

“New volunteerism” and “spontaneous volunteering” are the terms used to describe the wave of emergency responses from ordinary people that assist Ukrainian refugees in Poland after fleeing the country due to the Russian invasion (Domaradzki, Walkowiak, Bazan & Baum, 2022). The authors continue by stressing that there is a strong need to act and be a part of the solution among people, engaging a sense of civic responsibility expressed by the volunteers. Yet, while this might be the case for ordinary people that are driven by civic responsibility feeling, NGOs have a slightly different perspective. The researched organisations have provided mainly humanitarian aid, financial aid, and/or development cooperation. One of the main changes recognised and compared from the collected interviews and secondary data of NGOs occurred in the voluntary obligation to provide professional aid to people that are in need in Ukraine instead of solely relying on voluntary assistance.

To begin with, small-scale (NGO4 and NGO5) organisations changed their strategies of humanitarian aid assistance and delivery as the ongoing invasion continued. The feeling of aiding and contributing among the people continued to influence the changes in NGOs, as the response from ordinary people was unstructured and unpredictable (Interview with NGO5) in the face of war and even, as it is believed that civil courage values and competencies are raised by encouraging volunteering programs (Willems, 2021, p 681), volunteering may create changes in the organisations trying to provide aid.

The respondents of the interviews stressed the change from voluntary aid drifting to hiring professionals in the field of small-scale NGOs occurred due to the fact that voluntary aid was insufficient and difficult to manage (Interviews with NGO4 & NGO5). Although, collecting the most desirable and demanded necessities was done by enhancing the public to donate and provide,

still the packages contained parts that were not needed and would be wasted or re-packed as collateral waste (Interviews with NGO4 & NGO5). In addition, media channels contributed by allowing some organisations to reach a bigger public acknowledgment and as a result accumulate more revenue and assistance (Interview with NGO4), while other organisations critiqued media spread as incorrect or unfair (Interview with NGO5). The media spread classified as unfair was due to the fact, that not all organisations received media attention, although the aid system was much greater and larger within organisations that had none or close to no media coverage. Another difficulty from the media for NGOs was witnessed in the humanitarian aid packaging, while media covered what is most needed and had the greatest use in the war field, it lacked information on what is not of use or cannot be transported. As well, some respondents critiqued the media as unaccounted for the information provided on the most needed products, which were bought in stores by ordinary people and as a result raised economic prices for goods planned to be bought and packed in the humanitarian packages by the NGOs. As a result, media-impacted volunteers and small-scale NGOs together could not provide impactful humanitarian aid collecting, leading to NGOs searching for other and more professional ways to collect and distribute the aid.

Another main indicator for change to professional assistance for small-scale NGOs was the aid delivery system and the challenges of infrastructure. While there were hardly any problems to collect and store the humanitarian aid packages, the representatives stressed the obstacle of delivering humanitarian aid through volunteers as not always reliable (Interviews with NGO4 & NGO5), and hard to manage or account for. Combined together with the humanitarian aid packages being re-packaged in dedicated aid centres in order to transport them in a structural and logical order and the difficulties of dealing with volunteers transporting the packages to the war zone led NGOs to hire their own transportation and professionals knowing how to deal with a ruined infrastructure. In addition, hiring professionals to deliver humanitarian aid packages contributed to a better understanding of border control, as the information spread was more direct and made a bigger impact.

Meanwhile, small-scale NGOs have a more direct touch with volunteers and it leaves a greater impact on their work, medium or large-scale NGOs (NGO1, NGO2, and NGO3) have different challenges (See *Figure 1*). It could be argued that volunteer work does not impact larger organisations as much as it impacts its smaller counterparts, mostly, due to the fact that all the

medium and large size organisations that were interviewed work with direct funds for direct purposes. The main challenge witnessed by medium/large-scale NGOs is in the project distribution sector (Interview with NGO2). Working with partners and having clear assignments for the funds led to different project distribution once the Russian attack began (Interviews with NGO2 & NGO3). In most cases, funds for development and other/new activities were re-distributed and directed to the most pressing matters in wartime.

Mejheirkouni (2020) argues that the key challenge that leaders face is how to work effectively to achieve the required goals through institutional-cultural barriers, it is important to note, that even medium and large-scale NGOs (NGO1, NGO2 and NGO3) involve volunteers in their daily routines, yet the challenges in managing volunteer work highly reflect dependency on the funds, human resources, and time management. Due to the different natures of the small-scale and medium/large-scale NGOs, it is complicated to assess how much volunteers impact the work of NGOs, considering that some NGOs have a more direct connection, reliability, and more highly reflect volunteer influence, while others have different means to manage and maintain high volunteer efficiency. Finally, all the respondents of the conducted researcher noted that their work with volunteers was relying on high adaptability while facing the invasions into the Ukraine, in order to provide the best possible aid.

### 6.1.1 Crowding Out

The crowding out and in effect is analysed by Mikolajczak and Bajak (2021, p 108) in a commercial environment and suggests that when introducing commercial relationships to volunteers creates an instrumental exchange of work in return for personal gratification. In addition, the authors continue that this might create more business-like relationships in the sector that contribute to the selection of personnel and reflects concepts of professionalisation. The notion raised by Mikolajczak and Bajak (2021) is highly related to the theoretical notion of Wenger's (1998) ideas of the complexity of mutual engagement, and Rousseau's balance among competing interests, as it presents how adding professionals to the aiding processes might impact volunteers' expectations and overlap interests. In the case of NGOs looking for professionals in order to deliver humanitarian aid may contribute to the crowding out effect of people losing the desire to deliver professional volunteering. As well, the

phenomena of searching for professionals instead of relying on the work of volunteers might also be impacted by the media, explaining the crowding in effect, as exemplified by an NGO<sup>5</sup> representative. NGOs and media alter the context in which preferences are acquired and change the process of preference updating by which managers internalise new social norms (Graafland & Bakker, 2021, p 2389) and as such relate to the social processes analysed by Rousseau that are impacted by the social order. Thus, reflecting the research data it could be implied that media attention to the current issue and common NGO call for volunteers is partly responsible for the change, considering the uneven attention given to different NGOs by the media may explain the need of looking for more professional help while the crowding in process is occurring.

## 6.2 Contacts and Partnerships

Establishing new contacts or maintaining the ongoing ones proved to be challenging once the invasion into the Eastern part of Ukraine began for all the interviewed organisations. Naturally, as the invasion progressed, multiple organisations drifted away from Ukraine as wartime is classified as a high-risk investment, yet many new organisations began contributing by providing aid and other relief methods. The representatives of the interviewed organisations outlined the main challenges in looking for or maintaining partnerships and future bonds that will remain after the invasion is over (See *Figure 1*). During the research process, all interviewed organisations were asked to describe their development cooperation partners, if they are conducting the development cooperation notion, and what impact it has on the NGOs.

One of the largest international NGOs that was researched through secondary sources Red Cross conducts partnerships with multiple nations in order to provide humanitarian relief and assistance through community-based volunteers. ICRC works as an organisation that is independent, neutral, and impartial, ensuring humanitarian protection and assistance for those impacted by armed conflicts (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the International Committee of the Red Cross, 2022). The Red Cross was established in Ukraine in 1918 and functions to this day. The organisation works with the support and cooperation of state authorities and local self-government bodies, public organisations, the corporate sector, and partners within the International movement (Ukrainian Red Cross Society). The organisation has not outlined any direct changes in its partnership aspect, thus it could be argued that their experience and direct focus on humanitarian assistance for those suffering from armed conflicts contributed to stability and

continuation of the purpose of organisation. It is important to reflect on a large-scale NGO such as the Red Cross partnership experiences in order to be able to compare the differences that contrast and smaller-scale NGOs experience.

To continue, NGO3 which is based on the volunteering of the local Ukrainian diaspora emphasised their focus on partnering with different organisations. The NGO in focus has witnessed a large growth in 2022 compared to its previous years of experience. Naturally, the growth was largely impacted by the invasion and allowed them to accumulate noticeably growing funding (Interview with NGO3). Although the organisation could be classified as small-scale before the Russian invasion, after the invasion, the diaspora connections and the fact of being related, having insight, and being well-informed of the cultural, political, and societal notions in Ukraine raised their visibility and acknowledgment among others. The organisation was established in 2014 and functioned as a volunteer-based organisation, that eventually grew into one of the large-scale diaspora organisations aiding Ukraine. The search for partnerships from the NGO3 perspective was highly impacted by their relation to the country, it allowed them to reach large crowds in Europe and outlined help received from Poland (Interview with NGO3). It was crucial for NGO3 to partner with organisations from Poland, as the respondent emphasised, that they were not able to deliver any of the humanitarian aid solely by themselves or manage the infrastructure.

Further, a partnership experience from a perspective of an NGO2 that already had established contacts in Ukraine and functions through strategic points by promoting social and economic inclusion, building civic space, and enabling civic space is analysed. NGOs target group is all vulnerable people and they focus on managing complexion issues (Interview with NGO2). NGO2 emphasised focusing on common values and ideals when partnering with another NGO, which is believed to lead to sustainable partnerships, including collaborative betterment, and collective empowerment (Mpofu & Govender, 2022, p 2). The NGOs main challenge is to remain in contact and account for the activities being done by their partner NGOs during the ongoing invasion. The main change witnessed was the focus on the agreed development notions, which could no longer be accessed or continued (Interview with NGO2). Also, the change brought challenges in funding and accounting. The usual accounting could no longer be carried out, as the current situation required different means than before the invasion, for example, existing offices needed to keep functioning as usual, in order to allow partners to continue their work or have any type of communication. The



main problem of keeping the offices open from the NGO2 representative's perspective was higher than usual economy prices and the need to provide aid. The target group of NGO2 being marginalised people they as well had an 'open door' policy as the office was the only one accessible with wheelchairs and still having a working internet connection in the area. The partnerships with Ukrainian NGOs for NGO2 brought certain challenges, yet the current support system created by NGO3 for partner NGOs in Ukraine allows the NGOs in Ukraine to function in high demand, be viewed as an expert in the field, and bring additional partnerships, as the aid processes from all over the World is continuing (Interview with NGO2). As well, it continues NGO2's purpose to aid vulnerable people and contribute by allowing civic space.

The small-scale NGOs (NGO4 and NGO5) had quite different experiences in looking for partnerships, although all the other challenges and experiences remained quite similar (See *Figure 1*). While NGO4 experienced a sudden shift from their usual activities and had to actively look for partners in Ukraine, NGO5 had connections that allowed them to develop a fast track to Ukraine, partnering with governmental bodies and institutions. NGO4 described their experience in looking for partnerships as long and hard and only as a lucky accident that they managed to partner with an existing NGO in Ukraine that helped them develop a track and deliver humanitarian aid. Meanwhile, NGO5 enhanced existing contacts in the governmental sectors, that existed from their previous work during the COVID-19 pandemic, as a result, they managed to partner with foreign affair institution in Ukraine and other NGOs in their home country that have already been working on developing the fastest track to Ukraine to deliver the humanitarian cargos. Yet, both small-scale NGOs stressed the need and challenge to find and work with official documents and require additional help in the legal field (Interviews with NGO4 & NGO5), as the information is hard to access or simply does not exist when it comes to looking for partnerships or delivering humanitarian aid.

All of the NGOs researched stressed the notion of functioning based on a high level of trust and common values with partner NGOs in Ukraine. As well, all of the interviewed NGOs have high expectations for future partnerships with the NGOs that already are partnered with them, creating long-lasting and stable bonds. The main differences among the researched NGOs in looking for partnerships are pre-existing bonds, that allow NGOs to develop fast contact and partner with relevant NGOs in Ukraine. The development cooperation notion with Ukraine was not common

among all the NGOs, but all of them had experience in development cooperation with other countries, so it could be concluded that experience in working on development cooperation is one of the attributing factors that allowed fast partnership occurrence and aid delivery. Another similarity among all the researched NGOs is the growing concern for the current mental state of Ukrainian people/partners, being burned out, experiencing stress, and lack of human resources is the main description provided in considering partnerships and the limitations that they experience (Interviews with all NGOs and secondary research). It is considered that direct exposure to war is a detrimental life event that can lead to long-term changes in mental well-being, psychological damage, and mental health disorders (Chudzicka-Czupala & colleagues, 2023, p 3602), the study continues, by stating that Ukrainian participants of the research report significantly higher scores for depression, anxiety, stress, and post-traumatic stress.

### 6.2.1 Mission drift

A further challenge raised by the researcher and analysed is the identity of NGOs and questioning of maintaining the mission of the NGOs, while partnering in order to provide aid. Marshall (2007, p 304) discusses how history illustrates ways that NGOs having a great deal of money, can lead to mission drift, one of the examples being spending money on projects that lie outside their mission. The invasion of Ukraine is not certainly classified as a project, yet for most researched NGOs it was an unexpected turn, that pushed them to look for partners and send aid, without any preparedness. Although, mission drift is not necessarily always seen as a negative aspect, modified missions demonstrate its contributions to the country, establish its credibility as a provider of public services, and move closer to the attainment of its wider vision, over and beyond its original mission statement (Bennett & Salvani, 2011, p 219). Arguably, mission drift, if impacted by Rousseau's *reason and rationality* could lead to positive impacts, that could be attributed to social order by reasons to determine destiny.

Yet, a further question could be asked, how does a mission drift in NGOs impact development as such? Organisations learn to attend to new sectors of their environment when other sectors begin to demand certain performances of the organisation, those that do not develop new, are less likely to survive (Henderson & Lambert, 2018, p 194). The limitations of the NGO sector enhance the fact that NGOs make a difference and empower the poor, yet will never change the world (Thomas &

Allen, 2000, p 213) combined with the contemporary mission drift might result in a developmental shift from local to more international space, as the NGOs that do not focus on contemporary crises and issues might be replaced, for example, by only focusing on local development.

### 6.3 Need Assessment

The course of refugees fleeing Ukraine and people that stayed in the country dictated most of the needs and evolved due to the complexity and scale of the invasion. The perspective that is described by all researched NGOs employed a high level of adaptability and reflection to the needs of those receiving aid (See *Figure 1*). Further, the main challenges in assessing the needs from an NGO perspective will be discussed and compared. In addition, the best practice outlined by all researched NGOs is strong communication and having logical, and structural work and/or criteria when assessing the needs of partner NGOs and Ukrainian people. The practices were beneficial to the NGOs as the needs were changing fast and highly depended on the course of the invasion.

The main difference noted in the research is between NGOs delivering humanitarian aid and NGOs focusing on financial aid. While small-scale NGOs (NGO4 and NGO5) conduct a more volunteer-based humanitarian aid collection, they as well collected funds in order to buy the most needed and desired products for their partner NGOs in Ukraine to distribute and reflect the needs of the community. In addition, small-scale NGOs, particularly NGO4 which was established for different purposes managed to continue their mission by incorporating practices that are original to their NGO's purpose, to help sexually exploited children and females and still provide humanitarian aid. The organisation reflected the need of the community to receive health aid and was approved as a needed practice by their partners, which resulted in the creation and delivery of mobile health clinics that assist people “on the go”(Interview with NGO4). The practice mirrors strong communication and reflection of the needs of the community, as well, allowing the NGO to continue its original purpose and assist by not only delivering humanitarian aid. Meanwhile, another small-scale NGO (NGO5) was established due to another crisis that occurred in their home country and functioned as an organisation dealing with crises, without another direct purpose, now mainly focused on humanitarian aid for Ukraine. The organisations focus on needs was highly considered due to their partnerships and influenced mostly by logical criteria (Interview with NGO5). The organisation distributed aid mostly to internally spread refugees, arguing that the needs were very basic, most commonly needs for food, sleeping bags, soap, and hygiene products, which allowed

them to assess the needs strategically and buy them in the market, even importing from other countries. Yet, the organisation did not give in to the personal needs of people, as the representative commented it would be impossible to assess them all (Interview with NGO5). The aspect discussed in the paragraphs above, that disturbed acquiring certain products was due to overbuying by common people intending to aid, overpricing the market, and negatively impacting the humanitarian aid flow. The phenomena are highly reflective of theoretical approaches discussed in this thesis, including overlapping contributions and interests, balance among competing interests, and demands with changes in mind. Considering that NGO4 remained focused on their original purpose, both small-scale NGOs were providing humanitarian aid, and reflected the needs of the community, enhancing the partner suggestions. The main difference between the two is the purpose of the NGO, and while NGO4 sustained a higher spectrum of their aid, it could not be concluded that NGO5 had no clear purpose or that the aid provided was not as impactful, as their main activity dealing with occurring crises is carried out.

NGOs contributing by providing financial aid reflected their partner needs more than the communities, yet as a result, partner NGOs in Ukraine were able to contribute to the community in additional actions. In the case of NGO2, their contribution by building resilience by supporting their partners was mirrored during the invasion. As discussed in the previous paragraph, one of the main needs for the partners in Ukraine, from the NGO2 perspective was to sustain a workplace, that also contributed as a community centre for marginalised people or those in need of having a stable connection to the outside world. The need assessment is not uncommon for the organisation when partnering with another NGO, the representative concluded, that this action is conducted, even not in the face of a crisis or war (Interview with NGO2). NGO2 carries out need assessments and “reality checks” with every partner organisation in certain time periods, in order to allow the organisation to evolve independently, have a strong mentor behind them, and build resilience for themselves, and those surrounding them. In addition, NGO2 pays particular attention to members mental checks and psychological state, in order to contribute in the best way possible and allow people to become resilient in stressful situations. NGO2 also carries the responsibility of answering to their donors and contributors, thus there are more challenges during crises for NGO2 to mentor partners about financial decisions, and consult about financial risks. Considering the need assessment practice as not alien to the NGO2 their support remained strong and unbroken for the

usual need assessments and evaluations for partners in Ukraine, after the invasion (Interview with NGO2).

During the need assessment evaluation, NGO3 focuses on several parallels, the organisation works in order to aid in prioritising the most pressing matters. First, the NGO is focusing on stopping the invasion, advocating and educating about the threats and possible outcomes of war. Second, they deliver practical medical supplies, that are scarce in the region, and have programs for physical and mental help. Third, the organisation focuses on the need of rebuilding infrastructure that is crucial to continue functioning. The organisation tracks all of the needs of the community, partners, and people through a developed software, that allows the organisation to be the most productive, focus on priorities and categorise their aid. Thus, NGO3 has a positive need assessment system that is built over time, focusing processes and allowing them to see the changing needs of organisations and communities (Interview with NGO3).

To conclude, the need assessment is conducted in all researched NGOs with a strong preparedness to fulfill and reflect the needs in Ukraine. All of the NGOs in this research concluded, that there is a strong contact with the established partnerships in order to consult and highly reflect on the essential aid processes. The best practice outlined within all NGOs is strong communication, that allows NGOs to remain in contact and contribute. Meanwhile, the best practices are common for all, the main differences emerge in the specification of organisations work. NGOs that focus on financial aid had a bigger challenge to advocate why maintain partnerships in a high-risk environment, and how to account for the needs of organisations when the needs have changed drastically (Interview with NGO2). Humanitarian aid-focused NGOs had the challenge to adapt to evolving and changing needs and the complexity of the ruined infrastructure (Interviews with NGO4 & NGO5). None of the researched NGOs indicated experiencing challenges in receiving the needs of the organisations or communities.

### 6.3.1 Sustainable Development Goals

Meeting the needs of the partners and continuing to contribute to the Ukrainian society could attribute to certain sustainable development goals, meanwhile, some of them might be overlooked. The sustainable development concept is a result of a report that stresses meeting the needs of the

present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (McMichael, 2008, p 240). Sustainable development goals that are sometimes overlooked in the meeting of the needs, which is witnessed by some of the interview testimonies, might use a reflection of the SDGs, which states in the 2023 report (United Nations, 2023) that the fragility of going-to-be achieved goals was exacerbated by the Ukrainian crisis (and other factors), and the progress, is unfortunately too slow to possibly reach the goals by 2030. Further, the empirical data collected and the sources researched suggest a question of how international development will move forward and deal with the SDGs that are in a fragile state. In the case of NGOs aiding Ukraine, it might be crucial to consider the SDG practice involvement in their assistance, as SDG practice involvement may also have compounding social effects and enable them to enjoy competitive advances in the industry (Bose & Khan, 2022, p 2), it displays the commitment and demonstrates people and planet focused intentions, that contributes the community, environment, hunger reduction and poverty alleviation. As a result, the implication of SDG practices in providing aid might contribute to a better future of international development. During the research period, NGOs did not greatly reflect on the sustainability aspect, one of the aspects that were brought up was the notion of not treating Ukraine as a “trash can” that is able to collect all donations, without reflection (interview with NGO5).

#### 6.4 Implications for the NGO Sector at Large

Firstly, considering that NGO activities are highly dependent on beneficiaries and donor interests, Girei (2019) considers wider power asymmetries in the development industry, dependency on donor funding, and how funding procedures enforce the adoption of specific management modules and accountability practices. Drawing on the testimonies provided by the NGOs beneficiaries and donor interests are more reflected in the financially benefiting organisations, rather than the ones solely focusing on humanitarian aid delivery. The conclusion of financially aiding NGOs being more influenced by donors is based, depending on how much NGOs discussed the matter during the questioning of challenges<sup>2</sup> in the conducted interviews. Further, an article focused on ex-post mechanisms aimed at projects’ humanitarian effects states that the ex-post mechanisms do not fully inform the donor, due to challenges in assessing NGOs’ performances, and reasons for this difficulty include actors’ strategic interests in positive evaluations, such relationship is explored in

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<sup>2</sup> See Appendix A

regard of Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO) of the European Commission and NGO sector it contributes to (Voorst, Resodihardjo & Schneiker, 2022). Thus, an argument could be raised that for the NGO sector at large, donor influence is of importance, yet the relationship is not fully explored, requiring additional actions taken by NGOs to determine how to use the whole potential of donors and beneficiaries' support, while not causing power asymmetries in the development sector. "NGO acts to fulfill its mission, and that this mission probably doesn't make reference to finances at all, the finances are a tool to fulfill the mission, not the goal" (Hanson, 2023, p 101).

Furthermore, an implication for the NGO sector depending on communication among NGOs themselves, institutional bodies, community, and other players is expressed in the interviews and regarded as lacking. Dumitrica (2021, p 74) claims that regardless of mission or size, NGOs have to be attuned to general communication practices within their particular environment. During the technological era, NGOs adopted communication practices, promising the development of a new culture based on engagement, participation, and dialogue, yet it is noted that NGOs tend to use channels in a broadcasting manner, to promote themselves or inform the public of their activities (Dumitrica, 2021, p 74). During the interview process, especially small-scale NGOs regarded that communication among sector players is crucial to be developed in the future, in order to share relevant information and to positively contribute during moving, and complicated aid processes. As such, NGOs' emphasis is based on development cooperation through technical cooperation, which is regarded as an intent to support partners with advice and know-how, thus helping to develop sustainable capacities for managing development processes (Klingebliel, 2014, p 56). As a result, development cooperation could become a new trend that is witnessed during complex aid processes and impacts the NGO sector. Meanwhile, the critique of technological cooperation is concerned with unsustainability, due to the aims of development organisations interest to provide it through their own adviser, and unusual measure broadcasting internationally, which limits the capacity of partners among projects (Klingebliel, 2014, p 56).

In conclusion, implications for the NGO sector at large are witnessed through multiple aspects of this research. It is desired to focus on the donor-NGO relationship and development cooperation notion in order to determine the main indications that were not largely overlooked during the in-depth analysis of the interviews. These results might impact further development of connected

implications for future research on the NGO sector at large and a higher role of development, by overlooking these examples brought up during the investigation process.

#### 6.4.1 The NGO's Role in Development Sector

Girei (2019, p 2-3) outlines that while there was a widespread agreement before, that NGOs could make a difference in the international development system, by offering alternatives to dominant models, practices, and ideas about development, nowadays a belief is based on NGO efforts remaining palliative, rather than transforming. Murphy (2021, p 2) states that although partnerships for SDGs are positioned as avenues for promoting transformation, the reality is that collaborative initiatives are faced with a range of contextual impediments that are likely to limit this potential. NGOs' role in development practice could be still described through the willingness to partner with other organisations, despite the complexities to achieve a higher level of impact and gain additional competencies. "You should be looking at something where you have more of a symbolic kind of relationship; that you're bringing something that they don't have and they're bringing something that you don't have, and, actually, you're doing something bigger" (Banerjee, Murphy, Walsh, 2020, p 173), regarding that the process of partnering could be messy, multistakeholder partnerships should have a clear purpose of what is to be achieved and a plan of how it can be achieved (2020, p 173).

The pivotal role in development practices from the NGOs' perspective and collaboration with partners could be explained through participation. It is no secret, that NGOs' early participation notions contained challenging reversals of power, with traditionally excluded groups increasing their control over resources and institutions (Lewis, Kanji & Themundo, 2020, p 78). Authors (Lewis, Kanji & Themundo, 2020, p 78) continue that the influence of NGOs in communities resulted in a growing interest in participation, which has been important in the project setting, people participating in decision-making in the example of Brazil context, created a wider distribution of resources to poor households, and overall quality-of-life improvements that helped to convince middle-class residents to accept higher city taxes. As such, NGO involvement in the development through participation further influenced the empowerment of communities, by voicing their needs and ideas within the public sphere (Lewis, Kanji & Themundo, 2020, p 78).



Another NGO partnership project and role in development is described through project engagement in private sector development, value chain development and pr-poor market development, as such contributing by employing “business mentors” that work with rural communities, by turning traditional activities into income-generating enterprises and help communities to function as business partners to the private sector, and to run own enterprise initiatives (Freeman, 2012, p 161). This type of development engagement from an NGOs perspective, while partnering with locals and employing professionals for advice, in return creates partnerships that arguably encouraged to reach SDGs.

The NGO's role in reaching better development for the global community is crucial, in order to achieve the SDGs that are now halfway to the finish line. Participatory action encouragement, empowerment, and creating project engagement are a few notions down the line of how NGOs function to better societies through development. Regardless, of the critique for partnerships, and complexities, it could be argued that partnering for development is in NGOs' nature and they continue to do so, in order to contribute to people in need and to achieve SDGs that are crucial for a brighter and better future.

## 7. Conclusion

Keeping in mind the internal/external factors, mission drifts, multiple challenges, and academic concerns for the lack of theoretical approaches for the NGO sector providing aid during a crisis, the thesis looked over the challenges of NGOs providing aid, in different sectors, and on multiple scales. The focus placed on challenges experienced by NGOs was motivated by concerns of crowding in and out effect, development notions, the impact made on SDGs, and future influences on the NGO sector at large and development. The following research questions were of the main focus, after conducting empirical data gathering from the interviews with multiple NGOs providing aid to war-torn Ukraine:

- What type of changes do NGOs experience when reorganising their activities to provide aid?
- How do external/internal challenges impact the aid process?

In regard to the first research question, three main changes were indicated, that are witnessed in all multiple-sector and multi-purpose NGOs (Professional changes, Partnerships, and Need Assessment). Regarding these results, it was indicated that these challenges were experienced due to the moving and ever-changing face of war and crisis in Ukraine. It was regarded, that while professional changes were more impactful for the NGO's functioning, the need assessment process was relatively easy, and there are high hopes for projects with partnerships that emerged during the crisis in the future. The reflections raised through interviews required a further investigation into the topics, which is analysed through crowding in/out effect, development focus at large, and impact and goals considering the SDGs. Considering these changes, it is important to reflect on community development, which is impacted by difficult transitions to create meaningful connections (Wenger 1998), in this case, the community is the NGO sector, and connections are the recipients of aid and partner organisations.

The second research question, considering the raised challenges relate to other aspects of NGO functioning, that are of importance, such as media interference, economic challenges, concerns for the mental health of people operating and contributing in the war zone, and project-based approaches, that were disrupted. Through the analysis of additional aspects, it was discovered that crowding in effect was highly impacted by media exposure, which pushed NGOs to search for professionals in the field. The development notion and mission drift were analysed, as a process that is needed for NGOs to remain relevant in the sector and not be replaced by focusing on one direction, instead leading to NGOs expanding their scope. Meeting the needs of the present, without compromising those of future generations, was investigated by placing concerns on need assessment operations and NGO reflections on SDGs, as the goals are in a fragile state, and the Ukrainian crisis is one of the aspects that exacerbated its progress. The economic challenges were mainly witnessed in the NGOs that provide financial assistance and/or buy the needed parts for aid packages from the economic market, which indicated imbalances, due to the state of war or civic engagement. All of the concerns raised by the NGO representatives impacted aid processes internally or externally, depending on the NGOs focus and scale.

In sum, considering NGO impact on local communities, piquing their interest in participation, encouraging empowerment, and advocacy for SDGs, it could be concluded that changes occurring today, due to aid processes are impactful to the NGO sector's further development, and there is a

need for a higher role in development, that could additionally positively impact Sustainable Development Goals.

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## Appendix A: Interview Guide

### Part 1: Introduction and Ethical Considerations

- *Introduction of myself and the project/questions*
- *Stating the researches purpose for the interview and how collected material will be used*
- *Ensuring anonymity of the representative and the NGO they represent*
- *Receive informed consent to use the material in the research, record, and video record the interview*

### Part 1.1: Introducing the NGO and pre-war activities:

- *What is your role in the NGO and what kind of activities/focus did the NGO conduct before the war in Ukraine?*
- *Did the NGO you represent conduct any Development Cooperation actions? In which countries?*
- *Did the NGO you represent conduct any humanitarian actions before the war in Ukraine?*

### Part 2: Aid processes

- *How did the NGO you represent get involved in aiding Ukraine?*
- *How fast was the track working with Ukraine? Was it smooth?*
- *How did you find partners in Ukraine? Did you have existing partners?*
- *How was the communication with partners and need assessment?*
- *What steps did the NGO take to ensure transparency?*
- *What was the main change for the NGO you represent when the war in Ukraine began? What was the greatest challenge/challenges?*
- *Did the NGO have any external/internal support during this process?*
- *Reflecting before the beginning of the invasion, what part of organisations workload went to working towards the support mechanisms for Ukraine?*
- *How do you ensure the sustainability of your actions toward Ukraine?*

### Part 3: Final remarks

- *Do you have any future projects for Ukraine?*
- *What was the NGOs best practice during the aiding process?*
- *Do you have suggestions for other NGOs trying to provide aid?*

*Thank you for participating in the research process!*