

Galia Chimiak

Instytut Filozofii i Socjologii PAN

FROM *SOLIDARNOŚĆ* TO GLOBAL SOLIDARITY? THE ENGAGEMENT OF POLISH CIVIL SOCIETY IN DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

The paper examines the factors that determined the emergence of non-governmental development organizations (NGDOs) in Poland and their impact on the appropriation of development norms and practices by the Polish aid system. These processes are understood as a natural continuation of, on the one hand, the international appeal of the trade union and mass movement *Solidarność* in the 1980s and, on the other hand, the country's participation, dating back to the Cold War era, in the system of development aid. The contemporary development cooperation system has been shaped by geo-political factors. Polish aid, however, has also benefited from its cooperation with the NGDO sector, which willingly shared its hands-on experience and know-how in providing humanitarian aid, development cooperation, and global education projects. The indirect influence of foreign donors on Polish development cooperation should likewise be acknowledged.

Key words: solidarity; civil society; development cooperation; Polish aid; Poland.

This paper¹ analyses the factors which impacted the growth of NGDOs in Poland and their influence on the appropriation of development norms and practices by the Polish aid system. As such, this paper addresses a gap in our understanding of the indirect impact of foreign funders' support for democratization processes on contemporary Polish development cooperation. By focusing on the internationally-oriented sub-sector of institutionalized civil society, this paper likewise provides an analysis of an understudied field of societal self-organisation in the context of post-communist transformation. Unlike all other areas, where the role of the Third sector has been complementary to that of the state and the market, in the case of development cooperation, the role of the Third sector active abroad is believed to have been a key one (Kaczmarek 2014). This is especially important in the case of democracy assistance funded by Polish aid and provided by the Polish Third sector. The role *Solidarność*

IFiS PAN, 00–330 Warszawa, ul. Nowy Świat 72, e-mail: gchimiak@ifispan.waw.pl

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played in toppling communism, the nation's successful democratization and the fact that Polish civil society has been the major recipient of Western assistance in the region were argued to justify democracy assistance implemented by the Polish Third sector and supported by the Polish state (Pospieszna 2014). The inclusive values promoted by the *Solidarność* movement in the 1980s are especially relevant for the notion of global solidarity, as these values are based on the recognition of the universality of human needs (Korab-Karpowicz 2010).

The role civil society played in the overturning of the communist system and in the subsequent transformation processes in Poland has been acknowledged by national and foreign analysts alike (Pełczyński 1988; Bernhard 1996; Szacki 1997). Foreign assistance to *Solidarność* in the 1980s and for the fledgling Third sector after 1989 was of crucial importance during civil society's formative years (Domber 2008; Gliński 2006). Polish Third sector together with local governments emerged to have been the entities most effective in putting to good use foreign aid (Quigley 1997). However, the Third sector in Poland hasn't been interested only in *receiving* foreign support. The international dimension of Polish civil society's activity can be discerned as early as 1981, when the *Message of the First Congress of NSZZ Solidarność Delegates to the Working People in Eastern Europe* was adopted by the first Congress of the trade union *Solidarność* (www.encyklopedia-solidarnosci.pl).

After 1989 the international cooperation of the Polish Third sector included both cooperation with civil society organisations from other countries undergoing transition and partnership with public and private donors providing financial support and technical assistance to the Third sector in Poland. Foreign aid's impact on the development of the Third sector had at least four dimensions: financial, educational, cultural and political (Gliński 2006). A natural evolution of the internationalization of Polish Third sector activities has been its growing involvement in development cooperation and humanitarian assistance. Upon joining the European Union, Poland started developing its own bilateral development cooperation system. The Polish Third sector has been actively involved in civic dialogue with the line ministry to establish the priorities of Polish aid (Witkowski 2015).

The illustrated above internationalization of solidarity was initially taking place independently from the involvement of the Polish state in development assistance. The various roles Poland played in development cooperation, from becoming a COMECON² member in 1949 through receiving Official Aid³ after

²The Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON) was an international economic organization which functioned between 1949 and 1991. COMECON was established as an alternative to the American Marshall Plan, which was a prototype of modern development cooperation

³According to the OECD definition, Official Aid is understood as "flows which meet conditions of eligibility for inclusion in Official Development Assistance (ODA), other than the fact

the toppling of communism in 1989, to becoming an emerging donor with EU accession in 2004 and eventually joining the forum of established donors OECD-DAC⁴ in 2013, are indicative of the complex history of the engagement of the country in development cooperation. Yet, as this paper will endeavor to demonstrate, Polish aid has been shaped by external and internal developments alike. Contemporary Polish aid has namely benefited from its cooperation with the already relatively well developed Polish NGDO sector. Given that since the 1990s Polish NGOs' cooperation with partners from the post-communist states in Europe and Asia was encouraged and supported by foreign public and private funders, the indirect influence of these donors on the current shape of Polish aid should likewise be recognised.

The above-mentioned factors, which influenced the globalization of solidarity and the transformation of the country from aid recipient to ODA donor, should nonetheless be considered in a wider context. After all, we live in a world where certainties are being continuously challenged and boundaries redrawn. With the toppling of communism 25 years ago, the hypothesis of the end of history (Fukuyama 1992) understood as the unencumbered by the Cold War era further spread of liberal democracy, was developed. However, later on this seemingly self-fulfilling prophecy became undermined by unforeseen events. These are for example the spread of Islamic fundamentalist movements, the accelerated growth of emerging markets like China, India and Brazil, the escalation of conflict between the Russian Federation and the EU and USA and most recently the flood of refugees from war-torn countries towards Europe and the imminent secession of the United Kingdom from the European Union. The economic crisis which hit the world in 2008 and the subsequent backlash towards the dominating up to that moment neoliberal paradigm also brought about political and economic developments that were unimaginable at the time the "end of history" argument was put forward.

that the recipients are on Part II of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) List of Aid Recipients" (accessed 27.04.2016 at <https://stats.oecd.org/glossary/detail.asp?ID=1887>). Unlike Part I of the list, which includes aid to „traditional" developing countries counted as ODA, for which there is a long-standing United Nations target of 0.7% of donors' national income, part II refers to aid to „more advanced" developing and Eastern European countries. Among other countries from Eastern Europe, Poland was on the list of part II from 1990 until 2004 (accessed 27.04.2016 at <http://www.oecd.org/dac/stats/historyofdaclistsofaidrecipientcountries.htm>).

⁴Since the year of its establishment 1961, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee (OECD DAC) has been the major international forum for bilateral providers of development co-operation to discuss and agree principles of priorities of development cooperation. The Committee's main objective is to "promote development co-operation and other policies so as to contribute to sustainable development" (<http://www.oecd.org/dac/dac-global-relations/joining-the-development-assistance-committee.htm>).

Another false assumption turned out to be the idea that increasing affluence in developed and developing countries alike will have a spill-over effect and will thus reduce inequalities among as well as within those countries. Yet, as French economist Thomas Piketty contends, the importance of wealth in modern economies is approaching the levels from before the outbreak of the First World War (Piketty 2014). The critical argument presented by Piketty refers to the increasing concentration of wealth in the hands of the very rich. Data regarding the United States corroborates the claim that inequality in wealth is reaching record levels. Wealth inequalities are even more pronounced in emerging markets like China and Mexico (The Economist 2012).

Accordingly, counteracting inequalities worldwide was recognized as one of the gravest challenges humanity faces. Development cooperation policies and practices had to find ways to face these challenges. 2015 was a milestone year in the history of development cooperation. In 2015 the Millennium Development Goals expired and the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were agreed upon. One of the SDGs aims at reducing inequalities within and among countries. The European Commission announced 2015 as the European Year for Development. As such, it has been the first European Year to focus on an issue that lies mostly *outside* of the borders of the European Union. European NGOs were behind the idea of the European Year for Development and took active part in the formulation of the concept (Trialog 2014b). These initiatives have been matched by an increment of national and international NGOs' initiatives. In the open letter with which *CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation* addressed its fellow activists across the globe, it admitted new civic actors "sometimes rightfully, feel we [NGOs] have become just another layer of the system and development industry that perpetuates injustice" (CIVICUS 2014). To remedy this situation, *CIVICUS* called that NGOs direct their primary accountability not to donors, but to their core constituencies, many of whom "have been on the losing end of globalisation and inequality" (Ibid.). Counteracting inequalities has to go hand in hand with empowering those "at the losing end" while curbing the impact of the mighty globally. This recognition lays at the heart of the notion of global solidarity implemented by Polish NGOs and supported by Polish aid.

The overview of relevant literature shows that so far there hasn't been an attempt to analyze the whole sub-sector of Polish NGOs engaged in development cooperation, democratization assistance, humanitarian aid or global education. There are a couple of papers discussing particular aspects of the history of those organization up to a certain historical moment. The analyses conducted by Krzysztof Stanowski (2002), Grażyna Czubek (ed. 2002), Elżbieta Kaca (2011), Karol Haratyk (2011), Katarzyna Zalas-Kamińska (2013), Paulina Pospieszna (2014) and Jędrzej Witkowski (2015) merit attention in this respect. There is

a growing record of literature on global education in Poland. Some researchers, mostly pedagogues and NGOs' employees, are preparing publications on global education and NGOs' role in it (Kuleta-Hulboj and Gontarska 2015).

Particular NGOs' history has been the object of a couple of studies, too. Grzegorz Gruca (2011) and Jędrzej Witkowski (2012) conducted such case studies. The involvement of Poland in development cooperation has been addressed by several researchers. These are Paweł Bagiński, Katarzyna Czaplicka and Jan Szczyciński (2009), Elżbieta Drażkiewicz-Grodzicka (2015), Kamil Zajączkowski, Magdalena Góra and Katarzyna Jasikowska (in Chimiak and Fronia 2012), Piotr Kaźmierkiewicz (2008) and Jacek Kucharczyk (Kucharczyk and Lovitt eds. 2008), Dominik Kopiński (2011). And last but not least, the reports and analyses prepared by *Grupa Zagranica*⁵, CONCORD⁶ and Trialog⁷ and the respective Polish state institutions are an important source of information for anyone willing to learn about development cooperation in Poland. There came out even a book *Zapach anioła (The Scent of an Angel)* which plot is an allegory of development cooperation. Jan Piekło of the *PAUCI Polish-Ukrainian Cooperation Foundation* authored this book.

To make up for the gap in the literature, this paper examines the circumstances conditioning the development of the internationally-oriented NGO sector in Poland and the impact these civil society organisations exerted on the priorities and modalities of present-day Polish aid. These two developments are understood as processes indicative of the globalisation of the solidarity principle. The issues addressed in this paper are so the more pertinent given that traditionally it has been NGOs that used to be the objects of socialization in public institutions' effort to further policy transfer and norm appropriation (Smith 2011), rather than the other way around. In the case of NGOs in Poland, it is argued here that NGOs themselves played a seminal role in the appropriation of norms and practices in the area of development cooperation by the line ministry. This study traces the growth of the NGO sector and its impact on official Polish aid policies, while taking into account the dynamics of the relationship between these stakeholders.

⁵ The Polish NGOs' umbrella organization

⁶ CONCORD is the European NGOs' confederation

⁷ TRIALOG was a project that ran from 2000 to 2015 to strengthen civil society organisations in the enlarged European Union for active engagement in global development.

The empirical research

The theoretical underpinnings of this research draw on constructivist thinking and specifically on the second generation of constructivist scholars. Instead of focusing on the restricted realm of public international governance that interested pioneering constructivists, over the last fifteen years scholars from the second generation moved the discussion towards private international governance (Hall 2014: 149). A taxonomy of private authority in global governance identified three major categories of private authority: “market authority”, “moral authority” and “illicit authority” (Hall and Biersteker 2002 in Ibid: 151). The potential of NGOs’ authority can be actualized via the second of these categories. The concept of moral authority is also in tune with the recognition theory of NGOs, which rests on the premises that NGOs working “on behalf of, and for the recognition of, others” rely for their legitimacy on their specialist knowledge (Vibert in Heins 2014: 18). Given that global solidarity presupposes human fellowship, whereas in terrorism or militarism, rules of morality are denied (Korab-Karpowicz 2010), NGOs promoting global solidarity are capable of exercising moral authority.

The object of my research was the Polish development cooperation system and specifically its non-governmental branch. The research subjects were aid professionals, i.e. individuals involved in development cooperation. The analysis is based on desk research and interviews with representatives of Polish NGOs, policy makers and experts. 25 interviews with aid professionals were conducted in between May 2014 and February 2015. In fact, with the exception of one respondent, virtually all interviewees have been engaged with an NGO or an NGDO. The respondents in the purposive sample were chosen on the basis of preliminary defined criteria. Both personal characteristics and criteria regarding the organization(s) the interviewees represented were taken into account. The choice of NGOs was guided by the following principle. In line with the understanding of aid presented in the amended in 2013 *Development Cooperation Act*, development cooperation is understood as “the totality of actions undertaken by government agencies in line with the international solidarity rule” with a view to providing developing countries with development aid and humanitarian aid as well as undertaking activities in the field of global education (*USTAWA z dnia 16 września 2011 r. o współpracy rozwojowej* 2013).

Virtually all respondents worked in the area of development cooperation at the time of the interview. Six of the 25 people interviewed were also engaged in humanitarian aid, whereas 12 of the research participants were likewise involved in global education. 15 of the respondents were men and 10 of the research participants were women. Four of the interviewees were in the age group 26–35, ten were aged 36–45, seven were in the age cohort 46–55 and four were in the

56–65 age group. The length of respondents' engagement in development cooperation varied from 7 to 36 years. Most of the interviewees have been active in international cooperation since the toppling of communism. Nonetheless, the legacy of the *Solidarność* movement could be discerned in the autobiographies of at least seven of the interviewees.

The interviews were conducted in Polish. They were recorded and subsequently transcribed *verbatim* by an experienced transcriber. After once again comparing the recorded interviews with the transcriptions, the latter were printed out, coded and analysed. Michael Huberman and Mathew Miles' methodology (2000) regarding coding of the research material informed my approach to the interviews. After the analysis of the research material was completed, the findings were presented in a way that provide ample research evidence to illustrate the interpretation while also allowing readers to make their own inferences from the research material. Each issue was described, richly illustrated, classified and interpreted separately. To put it in Clifford Geertz' words, the aim was to "draw large conclusions from small, but very densely textured facts" (Geertz 1973). In order to guarantee the anonymity of the respondents' views, the codes of the interviewees contain only the number of years the respondent has been engaged in development cooperation. For example, the code **r10_17** should be read as: respondent nr 10 who has been engaged for at least 17 years in international development cooperation.

The internationalization of solidarity and the impact of external support for democratization processes on the current Polish NGOs' work abroad

In what follows the impact of the trade union and mass movement *Solidarność* from the 1980s on the subsequent international engagement of Polish civil society will be discussed along with the role played by foreign aid, with a special emphasis on the external support for internationally-oriented Polish NGOs. It should be remembered, however, that those processes were part and parcel of broader developments. As suggested earlier, not long after the toppling of communism in Poland, the end of history understood as the unencumbered further spread of liberal democracy, turned out to be a wishful thinking. On the other hand, power as we used to know it, has become increasingly dispersed (Naím 2013). Both these developments have been associated with the onset of neoliberalism and its corollary, the Washington consensus. The tenets of the latter were likewise implemented in Poland in the beginning of the transformation. The dominance of neoliberal thinking configured not only the roles of the state and the market, but also impacted on the function ascribed to civil society.

The withdrawal of the state coupled with the domination of thinking in free market terms created demand for a growing role of non-state actors. Accordingly, states and development agencies alike took on to support civil society organizations as these started to be viewed as critical to democratization, good governance and development (Chimiak 2014).

The importance of these external factors for the support for civil society notwithstanding, in Poland it was indigenous grassroots activism that undermined the communist regime and established the foundations for civil society in the country. The internationalization of solidarity as expressed by the contemporary engagement of the country in development cooperation, can be traced back to the *Message*, which said: “*Delegates gathered in Gdańsk ... extend greetings and words of support to workers of Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, the German Democratic Republic, Romania, Hungary and all nations of the Soviet Union... We support those of you who decided to embark on the difficult road of struggle for a free trade union movement. We believe that your and our representatives will soon be able to meet with a view to exchanging union experiences*” (<http://solidarnosc.gov.pl/index.php?document=89>). The *Message* was succinct, yet implicit in its aim to highlight the community of experiences of the working people in the other communist countries. This observation was also highlighted by several of the aid professionals I interviewed. One of them admitted that the “*ideational roots*” of the contemporary international engagement of Polish civil society derive from that *Message*. This research participant was convinced that the “*obviousness*” of Polish civil society’s effort to share the “*democratic know-how*” abroad has been a result of the “*messianic conviction that the skills we acquired should be further transferred. This is the mission of Polish civil society, which goes back to the Solidarity ethos*” (r25_18).

It should be mentioned that in the 1980s the social movement *Solidarność* not only extended a helping hand towards other nations from the then communist bloc, but the movement itself was subsequently supported by international, mostly American, foundations. In fact, during the 1980s there was much less European support for the dissident movements in Eastern Europe than in the years superseding the toppling of the communist system. Poland started to receive significant US assistance as early as the 1980s, as “the Polish corridor was the West’s entry point to the region” (Sussman 2010: 127). It was the US government and some private donors which provided assistance to the dissident movements in Poland and the then Czechoslovakia (Kucharczyk and Lovitt eds 2008: 20). The specifically established in 1983 with the aim to support political dissidents abroad *National Endowment for Democracy* – NED provided grants to underground civil society in the 1980s and continued supporting Polish NGOs after the toppling of communism (Potocki 2008: 15). Foreign foundations were also instrumental in establishing from scratch and supporting existing Polish

NGOs. For example, the president of the American Federation of Teachers Albert Shanker, whose parents were Polish immigrants, founded the *Foundation for Education for Democracy* in 1989. This Foundation is currently engaged in democratization assistance to the East of Poland.

The importance of individuals from Polish origins for the support of civil society in the 1980s and in the 1990s merits a special attention. Zbigniew Brzeziński and Nicholas Ray, who were on the board of directors of the *Polish-American Freedom Foundation*, should be mentioned in this respect (Pospieszna 2014: 76). Some of the representatives of foreign foundations delegated to support Polish civil society were of Polish origins, like Irena Grudzińska-Gross from the Ford Foundation, Zbigniew A. Pełczyński who worked with George Soros, Michael Kott, and Rodger Potocki (Iłowiecka-Tańska 2011: 88). Also individuals like Lane Kirkland of the United States and Alina Margolis-Edelman of France, who were not of Polish origins, but who have previously established contacts with Poland, supported Polish civil society. Since 2000 the *Polish-American Freedom Foundation* has been running a Lane Kirkland scholarship program, which aim has been to share Polish experiences in transformation with candidates from Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia. As one of the research participants indicated, “*On behalf of the American trade unions, Lane Kirkland supported Solidarność, but he also learnt a lot from the Solidarność movement. He promoted the idea that the concept of solidarity should be further transferred to the East*” (r15_10). The pediatrician and social activist Alina Margolis-Edelman, who was wife of the last surviving leader of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising Marek Edelman, should be credited for establishing the then *Nobody's Children Foundation*⁸ in 1989. This foundation has been the first to deal with child abuse in Poland and it also trained other organisations from the former communist region to cope with this issue in their societies.

Although foreign donors did not primary aim at building an internationally-oriented NGO subsector in the countries receiving aid, they saw value in supporting trans-border initiatives. As one of my interviewees noted, “*The [Open Society Institute's] East East program rested on the premises that we represent the East, too... A network of Polish trainers, under the leadership of Krzysztof Stanowski, who himself was an eminent trainer, trained other trainers from Ukraine, Russia, etc... The Americans went whole hog, because they seemed not to discriminate between Poland and Mongolia. They wanted to create a network of trainers in the whole region... But then, the network lead by Stanowski stood out and became their darling*” (r15_10). Undoubtedly, the history of contemporary Polish NGOs' international cooperation cannot be reviewed without taking into account the impact of foreign aid on the Polish Third sector.

⁸ The organisation subsequently changed its name to *Fundacja Dajemy Dzieciom Siłę*

Importantly, early analysis of foreign aid for democratization processes in Poland was rather critical of this support. Thus, for example in 1998 Joanna Regulska claimed that the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and other donors had exhibited “delayed commitment” to building local democracy in Poland. She claimed that foreign donors’ approach was not derived from local circumstances and localized needs and that USAID did not provide equal opportunity for all NGOs in Poland (Regulska 1998: 74). In a similar vein, another researcher claimed that NED played partisan politics by favouring leftist groups after 1989, to the extent of claiming that the former dissident Adam Michnik became the “darling of many Western foundations” (Wedel 2001: 99). This line of argumentation has not found empirical support in my research. On the contrary, as one of the respondents who has first-hand experience in implementing projects funded by US public and private funders, admitted, *“the strongest interference [on behalf of US donors] I remember was when the Ford Foundation asked us to fill in a table how many men and women worked in the project, which in those boorish times we considered as a horrible imposition of some rotten, feminist ideas... Now I actually have the feeling that these foundations didn’t interfere as much as they should have. Let’s consider the Ford Foundation: they were very liberal and progressive and they used to distribute funds indiscriminately, thus also supporting rather conservative individuals and organisations... Were I the Ford Foundation, I would have been more uncompromising back then... I am actually under the impression that the Ford Foundation and Soros weren’t the ones to enforce their priorities on us; quite on the contrary”* (r25_18).

Furthermore, as another respondent explained, the underside of foreign aid eventually helped Polish NGO activists understand early on the importance of partnership with aid recipients, *“this was education, when we were beneficiaries [we learnt] how important the partnership approach is. After all, we did experience the Marriot brigades and even though not all NGOs had first-hand experience [with them], [the Marriot brigades] were notorious”* (r15_10). The “flying experts” (Puchnarewicz 2003: 43), who in the Polish circumstances were dubbed the “Marriot brigades”, stand for the cohort of consultants providing support to aid recipients from all over the world. They have become proverbial among the Polish NGO sector to indicate handsomely remunerated, yet insufficiently familiar with the specificity of the country, consultants residing in upper-end hotels while providing assistance to local civil society.

No doubt, however, civil society activists in Poland were exposed to new ideas and approaches via their cooperation with Western partners (Quigley 1997: 54–55). Perhaps the most palpable effect of foreign aid on the fledgling Third sector in Poland has been the internalization of these ideas by the group of leading social activists (Hłowiecka-Tańska 2011: 87). Many of these ideas were

progressive and novel to this part of the world, which contributed to the internationalisation of Polish NGOs' activities. The cases of the *Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights* or the then *Nobody's Children Foundation*, which early on started cooperating with other countries from Eastern Europe and later on with former USSR states to share the know-how they gained via their cooperation with Western partners, corroborate this contention.

As a matter of fact, as some research participants admitted, they were not always ready to fully take advantage of the foreign aid they received in the beginning of the transition. Indeed, some of this support might have been ill-targeted. As one interviewee, who was working on local government reform in the early 1990s claimed, *"the priorities of the Dutch donor, invented in the Netherlands, had nothing to do with our needs"* (r17_15). Another respondent, who also worked with Dutch donors, explains the friction of this cooperation the following way: *"I remember how our colleagues from the Netherlands came and they seemed to know better [than us]. They drove me mad. Actually, as I can see this now, 3/4 of the times they were right indeed. But I was not ready to agree with them. Or perhaps they were not sensitive enough when they communicated their ideas"* (r19_34). Another interviewee appreciated the support they received from their Dutch partners in the formative years of their organisation, which deals with environmental issues (r14_8). Interviewees' accounts about support from Western European countries are mixed and echo the concerns about aid provided by US funders. Most of these concerns have to do with the alleged lack of sensitivity of those donors to the local context and the barriers in communication.

The limitations of foreign assistance to Polish NGOs notwithstanding, Polish civil society activists who are now engaged in providing development cooperation abroad feel more competent and avoid the pitfalls of international cooperation. As one of them put it: *"we know what made us resist [Western donors'] ideas, what angered us... so, now we treat our colleagues [from the former USSR states] like partners... I know that they are the experts on their own country"* (r19_34). As another respondent engaged in the Eastern Partnership⁹ countries explained, *"We have tried to remember these experiences we had in Poland, these Marriot brigades, we try to avoid such relationships [with our partners]"* (r13_20). One of the interviewees told a story when the German presenter at a conference in Ukraine shared her dissatisfaction with the feedback she received. My research participant explained to her that her speech was not as appreciated

⁹ The Eastern Partnership is a joint initiative of the EU, its member states and six European partners: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. The declaration establishing the eastern Partnership was signed in May 2009. The architects of this policy initiative were Carl Bildt of Sweden and Radosław Sikorski of Poland

as the speech he delivered because, *“you see, they respect you, but you speak about standards that would be relevant here in 40 years. Whereas I talked about issues I have personally been involved in changing”* (r17_15).

NGDO activists are therefore aware of the advantages of the *in-between developmental status* of Poland for the country’s engagement in development cooperation. In spite of the end of the Cold War, some of the divisions dating back to the Cold War times still hold true. The current bipolar divides whereby we have the Global North vs the Global South or the Minority vs the Majority world haven’t obliterated the in-between developmental status of some former communist states, including Poland. The following statements substantiate this observation: *“Poland is the 22 economy in the world. In an ideal world, we should be the 22th biggest donor. We have no colonial past. Yet, as a rich country, which nonetheless has first-hand experience with poverty... I think we have a duty to help those who are poorer than us”* (r4_14) and *“We have this advantage that we have been in the European Union for ten years now, and we are the affluent West. On the other hand, we still belong to the rest of the world; as far as our mentality goes, we are closer to the people of Birma than to the Dutch”* (r14_8). Clearly, those who have first-hand experience in development cooperation projects have (gained) an understanding that in spite of the economic growth and socio-political transformation the country underwent over the last quarter of a century, Poles still have a lot in common with the current recipients of aid.

This observation explains why Poland considers democratization and sharing the Polish experience with transformation its comparative advantage. Nonetheless, it is not so much the hands-on experience with transformation, but the *credibility* of Polish aid professionals that represents the real comparative advantage of Polish aid. Unlike established Western donors, Polish NGOs are more likely to find synergy with partners from aid recipient countries, because of the shared common past and the comparable level of socio-economic development. As one of my interviewees explained: *“it is not so much a matter of having some concrete transformation experiences to share... but the credibility of Polish NGDOs, when they work with partners from Ukraine or Georgia, is different than the credibility of German NGOs, for example... The Ukrainian partners may negate the relevance of the experience of German NGOs, but they can’t tell us: Well, you did it, but the situation is different in our country... [Also], the representatives of think-tanks from Egypt found real synergy with Janusz Onyszkiewicz, who from being in the anti-communist opposition moved to become a vice-minister of defense; they listened to him attentively, because they faced the same issues at home, i.e. having civilians to reform the military department”* (r25_18).

Another respondent gave the following example to illustrate the argument that although the situation in Poland is already different than that in countries

receiving Polish aid, it is nonetheless comparable: *“When our partners from Russia, Ukraine, Georgia or Armenia go to visit prisons in Denmark, Belgium or Sweden, they come back as if they have been to outer space. They [our partners from the East] told us that even the conditions of sanatoria in their home countries are not as good as the conditions in the prisons [in the Western countries they visited]. The same could be said about the areas of self-government, the educational system, health care or the psychiatric wards in hospitals... We [in Poland] have a similar experience with a totalitarian system. And we have successfully outed of this system. You cannot overestimate the importance of these issues. We have a common point of reference and we share similar values. Poland stands for an example that one can [do it], and it is worthwhile, to take this road [to self-determination]”* (r19_34). My Belarussian interviewee also admitted that Polish consultants engaged in Belarus *“are more knowledgeable than the French or the Germans”* (r23-11). Another respondent, who has been involved in transferring the Polish experience with reform of the self-government, put it this way: *“Polish experts are credible, they understand the mentality of Ukrainians, their soul. ... [The German consultant] is probably wiser than I am, but he has no sense of what communism was, what it means to be a Slav, that we drink vodka together”* (r17_15). In addition to this anecdote-like comparison, the same respondent listed the “community of experience”, “intuitive knowledge”, “competence”, “background”, “sensitivity” and “synergy” as the strengths of Polish engagement in the Eastern partnership countries.

Another respondent, who prior to his engagement in the NGDO sector used to work for an international organization providing humanitarian aid in various places in the world, pointed out some other advantages of Polish aid: *“Poland has experience in all kinds of transformation, be it democratic or developmental one... But also, Poland has a neutral image in the world. We, Poles, are canny and we are good at maneuvering, which helps us find solutions in various situations which other organizations or people would find unsurmountable... We are not only capable of working in difficult situations, but we also have greater respect for our partners”* (r4_14). According to the same respondent, the facts that Poland is a new-comer to development cooperation (and, by extension, didn't have the opportunity to have her reputation sullied) and also has an intuitive understanding of the challenges partner countries face, also stand for the comparative advantage of Polish aid. “Adherence to freedom”, “defiance”, “[the promotion of] human rights and liberties” were in the opinion of another respondent the Polish *“specialite de la maison”* worth sharing (r19_34).

In fact, respondents who were proponents of the idea that the trade mark of Poland in development cooperation is the country's experience with peaceful transformation, were clear about specifying their understanding of democratization and development. As one of them explained, *“Poland does not believe*

in development without empowerment... I say empowerment, not liberal democracy. Just as we check whether gender balance and environmental protection have been taken into account, we should be paying attention in our projects whether, as an outcome of these projects, the local communities have gained a little bit of ownership” (r6_22). Other respondents’ statement were in tune with this vision: *“it is not so much sharing our Polish patents of problem-solving... but creating space for independence, so that [our partners] can come into their own”* (r14_8) and *“In Asia we are better off [than established Western donors], because we understand the cultural specificity of these countries. We are capable of not imposing democratization and participation [as it is understood in the West], but identify the existing mechanism on the spot... and involve the local leaders [to own the project], because this is how these communities have been functioning for thousands of years”* (r13_20).

What more, a significant share of respondents admitted that rather than trying to impose on their partners their own visions, Polish NGDO activists are learning themselves in the process. The following quotations well illustrate this point, *“We are the ones who learn from our foreign partners [in the Global South].... Also, and this is an issue rarely talked about in Poland, because we are in this network with Western partners, we learn from them, too... People who are not engaged [in development cooperation] tend to think that ours is some philanthropy, sacrifice, that we are the ones who help. But what we, Polish NGOs, get is a win-win situation. We are the ones being enriched”* (r14_8). Via their engagement in development cooperation, other respondents came to the conclusion that oftentimes it is their partners who have the know-how, and not the other way around, *“we realized that the competence is on their side”* (r22_36). Some of the interviewees actually talked about their cooperation with partners in the Global South with humility. A respondent who worked in Afghanistan said, *“in the development cooperation sector it is crucial to apply the anthropological approach. One should go native, one should accept and live the life of local people. I cannot imagine living in a bunker, which I would occasionally leave to help those poor people. This would be lack of respect, disdain [on our part]”* (r20_11).

The aid professionals I interviewed emerge as competent and emphatic human beings. However, could they be motivated to work on behalf of global solidarity for other, more earthly, reasons? The fact that Polish aid professionals working in NGDOs are in a more precarious position, when compared to their colleagues in Western donor countries, substantiates the argument that Polish NGDO activists are not motivated by monetary self-interest. Furthermore, as the analysis of the motivations of Polish NGDO activists I interviewed indicates, intrinsic motivation (related to accomplishment, self-actualisation, competence achievement, satisfaction) and curiosity (related to an exploratory worldview

and openness to other cultures) emerge as the most typical motivational underpinnings of NGDO activism. Striving after change was likewise characteristics of a significant share of aid professionals I interviewed. NGDO activists furthermore clearly enjoy each other's company. There is a constructive and well-informed reaction to global problems, which is why they are not frustrated with their work in development cooperation. This is not to say that NGDO activists are not critical about the reality of aid. Research participants have identified a number of circumstances they consider encumbering their work in NGDOs. The limitations of work in NGDOs notwithstanding, aid professionals themselves are aware engagement in these organizations is not for everyone. The following responses to the question regarding the opinions research respondents had about *other* NGDO activists illustrate this point.

Here are the explanations two interviewees provided, *"you don't opt for working in an NGO to make money. You make this choice, because you want to do something good, be satisfied with one's own humaneness"* (r11_22) and *"work in NGOs is meant for people who manage to make use of restlessness"* (r9_12). Aid professionals, who currently work for other than NGOs institutions, also had a positive opinion of the NGDO community. They said, *"the ideological motivation dominates, I would say, the positive one. I know people who still work in the NGDO sector, and they are still idealists"* (r12_9) and *"there are many young, sympathetic people, who are fascinated by development cooperation and they work for NGOs, often for small remuneration and they want to keep working [there]. This is not a closed, unpleasant, fossilized community. It is worthwhile to be part of it"* (r7_13).

NGDO activists I interviewed were not however blind to various side-effects work in development entails. As one of the respondents recalled, *"there is one aspect no one is willing to talk about. When I go to Africa, being a white woman, quite well educated, there everything comes much easier for me, than it would have been here in Poland or anywhere in the West. You enter this community [in Africa], this society and by default you have a higher status. This is an outcome of social inequalities... one can develop a whole post-colonial theory [on the basis of this experience]... For my colleagues [in Africa] I am a woman from Europe, and I am immediately better off [than women who are from Africa].... Upon my arrival there, I become part of the upper class... It is hard to admit this, but [being in Africa] I can achieve more, I have a bigger capacity, there are more opportunities there for me. The impact I could have there is many times bigger than what I could do in Poland. In Poland I am but one of a million; there, I am one of a few"* (r3_10). Although this statement indicates the underside of development cooperation, i.e. that it reinforces social inequalities in the recipient countries, it also points to an unforeseen side-effect of aid. Namely, the impact of aid professionals' work in the Global South can be

manifold higher, due to the status they enjoy. This quotation is also indicative of the self-critical, open-minded attitude of NGDO activists to development cooperation and their own role in it.

To sum up, foreign assistance was crucial for the development of institutionalized civil society in Poland especially after the toppling of communism. However, it should be highlighted that it was not external support that was formative for the emergence of civil society in the country. It was Polish society's self-organisation that triggered foreign public and private funders' decision to assist democratization processes in the country. By the same token, the authentic will to share experiences with other nations was prior to foreign funders' support earmarked for such trans-border cooperation. Polish aid professionals capitalized on their experience as former recipients of official aid. They furthermore built on the trans-border cooperation they have been advocating for since *Solidarność* times. The real comparative advantage of Polish aid professionals in development cooperation transpired to be their credibility vis-à-vis their partners. The moral authority exercised by Polish aid professionals is also derived from the in-between developmental status of the country. Partner countries consider the support provided by Polish entities trustworthy and relevant to the situation in their own country. The advantages of Polish aid professionals over their Western colleagues notwithstanding, to fully understand the history of Polish engagement in development cooperation, one has to study the involvement of the state in the development cooperation system.

The history of Polish aid and NGOs' role in it

As mentioned above, the history of the country's engagement in development cooperation dates back to 1949 when Poland joined COMECON. COMECON member countries provided development assistance to some of the then Third world countries, namely those which sympathized with communist ideology (Bagiński 2009: 190). The Polish People's Republic supported Yemen, Mongolia, Vietnam and Cambodia (Kopiński 2011: 144). The volume of COMECON countries' development assistance actually was "more than symbolic" as it complied with the current 0,7% of GDP target (Manning in Kopiński 2012: 34).

Nonetheless, the official discourse in Poland has been largely oblivious of the country's involvement in development cooperation prior to 1989. It has insisted on disregarding it as irrelevant to Poland's current role as an ODA provider. For example, the *2003 Strategy of Polish Development Cooperation* envisaged globalization and the end of the Cold War as the main factors influencing international development cooperation (http://www.un.org.pl/rozwoj/ppp_dokumenty.php). Piotr Kaźmierkiewicz likewise contended that the transformation of

Poland from beneficiary of Official Aid to a donor has been exacerbated by the “lack of tradition” (Każmierkiewicz 2008: 81). Such interpretations are argued to overlook the 50-years Cold War history of development, when the categories of First, Second and Third world, which shaped the politics of development, were coined (Drażkiewicz-Grodzicka 2013: 68). Indeed, most aid programs which existed before 1989 were terminated at the beginning of the transition. Yet, some types of foreign aid were continued. For example, in the framework of aid, Poland and Hungary kept supporting their respective ethnic minorities in neighbouring countries (Szent-Iványi and Lightfoot 2015: 53). The purposeful omission of the experience the country gained as participant in international development cooperation prior to 1989 resulted in framing Poland as a rising donor. Accordingly, the Polish aid system justified its focus on democracy assistance to Eastern Partnership countries on its own post-1989 experience with democratization.

The MFA representatives I interviewed were aware of the historical jump Poland has made in this field. As one of them recalled, “*Officially [our experience as a COMECON donor] has not been negated. But [it] is left unsaid as something shameful. I don’t understand why this should be so. We used to have so many students from Africa who studied in Poland and came back to become presidents in their home countries.... We built nuclear power station in Iraq and a shipyard in Viet Nam*” (r19_10). This statement is indicative of a discrepancy between official statements defining Poland as an “emerging donor” and the private opinions of aid professionals. Other interviewees likewise did not define Poland as being in an inferior position vis-à-vis established donors. This finding is contrary to the conclusion arrived at by other researchers who claim that “the hierarchy of donors is not only accepted but also reproduced by Polish development activists, both on the NGO and the state side” (Drażkiewicz-Grodzicka 2015: 44). Polish aid professionals are concerned with implementing the state-of-the-art principles of development cooperation and they do not feel the need to justify their engagement in development assistance in historical terms other than the *Solidarność* legacy. Their approach is easily understood given that civil society was not a stakeholder in COMECON-times aid.

Yet, the most important jump Poland has made appears to be the one from being an official aid recipient to an OECD-DAC donor. As one respondent commented, “*ten years after Poland and the other NMS joined the EU, there grew this awareness in OECD-DAC that the issue of DAC membership should be somehow addressed... But back then no one even imagined that Poland would become an OECD-DAC member*” (r7_13). OECD DAC membership is essential as it helps EU member states to develop their aid system in line with the vision of development promoted by the European Union. The successful transformation of Poland into an OECD DAC donor notwithstanding, it is a fact

that development cooperation and democracy promotion projects implemented by Polish NGOs started well *before* the country developed its own bilateral assistance programme. In the words of aid professionals, “*Undoubtedly, Polish NGOs have been playing a much more important role in development cooperation, when compared to other countries. This is beyond doubt.*” (r6_22) and “[*the role Polish NGOs played in shaping the governmental aid system*] *has been very different than it was in Western Europe*” (r9_12). Polish NGOs have furthermore been advocating for a definition of development assistance in accordance with OECD-DAC standards. In many respects, NGOs were pioneers in the field of humanitarian aid, development cooperation and global education.

However, given the former engagement of many NGOs as recipients of foreign aid, one is entitled to ask whether Polish NGOs have capitalized on this experience now that Poland has become a donor. My research participants provided explanation as to why the transfer from recipient to donor is not as straightforward as one could initially expect. The representative of the line ministry explained, “*We used to think that since we have experience with implementing foreign-funded projects, it would be the same now [that we have become donors]; but it is not. These [experiences] are not transferable*” (r16_20). Another interviewee argued that, “*when [Polish aid] slowly started functioning, Poland was still an aid recipient... We were used to the idea that we are the ones being supported. It is very difficult to overcome this syndrome... The syndrome of the recipient was deeply rooted in Polish minds and it was not overcome with the help of the [Polish] foreign ministry, but with the help of people like [Janina] Ochojska [of the Polish Humanitarian Action]; people who started to help others, because they knew there are those who were worse off than we were, people in Sarajevo or in Africa. We wanted to give at least testimony... that even though we may not have the capacity, the programs, the funding, we wanted to demonstrate that we can and we do get engaged in [humanitarian] missions along with the more experienced nations. ... [In Poland] we are used to thinking about ourselves as victims of history... So it has really been difficult to imbue in people that we are also responsible for what is going on in the world and that we can also do something about it*” (r11_22).

Although the transformation from recipient to donor is not as straightforward as one would expect, Polish NGOs have managed to capitalize on certain elements of their experience as aid recipients. Undoubtedly, the further strengthening of these organisations’ capacity was facilitated by the engagement of the state as a donor. The first official Polish Aid projects took place in 1998 (Gruca 2011: 36). The cooperation between Polish NGOs active abroad and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs started *before* the Polish aid was officially established in 2004. In December 1999 the Stefan Batory Foundation and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs co-organized the conference “NATO, the European

Union and East Central Europe. NGOs in Polish foreign policy”. A decision was taken to establish a sub-portal www.go2east.ngo.pl dedicated to NGOs’ cooperation with partners from countries to the East of Poland. The name of this portal is indicative of the roots of Polish NGDOs. These roots are clearly in democratization projects targeting Poland’s Eastern neighbours.

The year 2001 was another milestone in the history of NGDOs. *Grupa Zagranica*, the NGDOs’ umbrella organization currently having 61 members, had its first meeting on 26.03.2001. Initially NGOs engaged to the East of Poland had their secretariat in the Stefan Batory Foundation. As one respondent recalled, in those early days “*Batory Foundation was mothering the other NGOs [engaged abroad] and was closely related with Grupa Zagranica*” (r7_17). The East East programme at the Batory Foundation became a natural agora for NGOs active abroad. Networking support for NGOs was provided back then also by the *Polish-American Freedom Foundation* and the Austrian-led project Trialog. Trialog facilitated the networking among NGDOs at both national and international levels. This NGDOs’ capacity building project also served to integrate NGDOs’ national platforms into the European NGDOs’ confederation CONCORD (Trialog 2014a: 11).

Foreign donors also assisted the government in this area. As one aid professional recalled, “*along with supporting the establishment of Grupa Zagranica, the same [capacity-building] efforts were directed towards the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The MFA was lobbied, mostly by the European Union, but also by OECD and the UN*” (r15_10). Another interviewee explained why institutionalization of the network of Polish NGOs engaged abroad became pressing “[*NGDOs’ network institutionalization*] was triggered by the EU membership... To formally join CONCORD, the European [*NGDOs’*] platform, we had to had legal personality... In the meantime the government also caught up... They were trained by the Canadians. ... What more, [*CIDA*] knew that for Polish aid to kick off, they need non-governmental partners, so CIDA also supported Grupa Zagranica” (r10_17). The cooperation between Poland and Canada in the area of development cooperation took place under the Official Development Assistance in Central Europe Program in between 2002 and 2008. Foreign support targeting both governmental and non-governmental stakeholders was therefore instrumental in strengthening the capacity of these actors and by extension the development of the Polish aid system.

All commentators agree that a milestone date in the institutionalization of the dialogue between Polish NGOs and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was 2002. In 2002 the Polish NGDOs initiated contacts with the MFA by convincing the then minister of foreign affairs Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz about the need for Poland to provide funds for development cooperation. Here is how interviewees remembered this process, “[*Jakub*] Boratyński [*from Batory Foundation*] was the main

mover and shaker [of this process]. It was NGOs however who initiated the co-operation [with the ministry]. Cimoszewicz was the foreign minister back then... He felt the need to undertake dialogue with NGOs and he personally participated in these meetings... later on this dialogue [between NGOs and the line ministry] underwent routinization” (r25_18). Furthermore, “It was Cimoszewicz’s initiative to establish the Council for Cooperation with NGOs” (r7_13). The Council was instituted on 19 November, 2002 (Dobranowska 2003). The coverage of the agenda of the Council’s first meeting is indicative of the agential role NGOs played in the process of developing the priorities of Polish aid back then.

During the 2002 conference “Social diplomacy”, Polish NGOs working abroad finalized the draft document *Partnership in Foreign Policy. A proposal for co-operation between public authorities and non-governmental organisations* and presented it to minister Cimoszewicz. During this conference Cimoszewicz praised the seminal role played by NGOs in the area of social diplomacy and called for NGOs’ further engagement in this field. He said:

the organisers of this meeting have also emphasised that the activities of NGOs are complementary to the activities of government. I would go even further than that and say that they can and should be substitutive in many areas. Whenever public institutions cannot take up certain projects because of protocol or political correctness there is much room for civil initiative. It should be stressed that there are numerous fields where NGOs are irreplaceable and these are areas critical to the public interest (e.g. co-operation between societies) (Czubek ed. 2002: 20)

One of the postulates raised in the *Proposal for co-operation between public authorities and non-governmental organisations* was broadening the definition of international aid to take into account the support provided by Poland to its Eastern neighbours and other CIS countries (Ibid. 12–13). Initially the Polish aid governmental programme did not differentiate between aid going to the country’s Eastern neighbours and other aid recipients. It was NGOs who advocated for the enhanced focus on Poland’s eastern neighbours. However, the fact that eventually Polish aid started to earmark 70% of its bilateral assistance to this group of countries was related to the launching of the Eastern Partnership initiative in 2009. As one of the respondents recalled, “*it is a relatively recent idea that the countries from the Eastern Partnership are to become [Polish aid’s] priority countries” (r16_10).*

Polish aid itself dates back to 2004, because in 2004 Poland joined the European Union. The EU development policy is part and parcel of the *acquis communautaire* and all new member states have to accept it upon joining the EU. The official narrative promotes the view of Poland as a country that became a donor in 2004. However, the NGO sector engaged abroad doesn’t view 2004

as a caesura marking the engagement of Poland in development assistance. As two of my respondents argued, “*Aid provided by NGOs is older than Polish aid*” (r7_13) and “*Polish NGOs got involved in development cooperation much earlier than state authorities*” (r9_12). EU accession and the establishment of the Polish aid system however institutionalized the regular cooperation between NGOs and the line ministry in the area of development cooperation. EU membership likewise spurred the process of institutionalization of Polish aid. Since all new EU member states had to have their own development cooperation programmes, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs established the Polish bilateral cooperation programme *Polska pomoc* in 2004. Polish NGOs became natural partners for the MFA and started implementing projects financed by Polish aid. Jan Hofmokl of the MFA acknowledged NGDOs’ pivotal role in the process of institutionalization of Polish aid and establishing its priorities (Dudkiewicz 2015). He admitted that before the MFA started developing the Polish aid system, Polish NGDOs possessed experience in development cooperation and resources which the Ministry lacked (Ibid.).

It has been argued that at a technical level NGDOs had the leading role in their relationship with public institutions; however, their influence on policy was regarded as limited (Szent-Iványi and Lightfoot 2015: 153). In the case of Poland, however, this observation does not do justice to a couple of factors. Perhaps the most palpable impact of the NGDO sector on public policy related to development cooperation has been achieved by the transfer of human resources from the NGDO sector to the governmental institutions. As one of my respondents put it, “*it is people from NGOs who to a significant extent contributed to the present shape of Polish aid*” (r6_22). The scale of the “brain-gain” the MFA received from staff who used to work in the NGDO sector has not been researched in depth. The impact of NGDOs on the human resources of the MFA Department for Development Cooperation has been underestimated. Krzysztof Stanowski is perhaps the most important person to be mentioned in this respect.

Mr Stanowski has been involved in the development of the NGO sector in Poland, especially in the area of education. In 2007 he moved to the Ministry of National Education and in 2010-2012 he acted as an undersecretary of state at the Polish MFA. The passing of the *Act on Development Co-operation* in 2011 should be attributed at least partially to his efforts. As one interviewee recalled, “*Krzysztof Stanowski knew by heart what was ailing the NGDO sector, so he undertook the strategic goal to bring about the adoption of the draft act on development cooperation* (r10_17). Also, Stanowski played an important role in the signing of the agreement among the MFA, the Ministry of Education and the platform of Polish NGDOs *Grupa Zagranica* to support global education in Poland. As one of the respondents reminisced, “*We were actually really lucky to have this agreement signed. Weren’t it for minister Stanowski, this agreement*

wouldn't have seen daylight" (r5_8). Mr Stanowski keeps playing an important role in Polish development cooperation as since 2012 he has been the president of the management board of *Solidarity Fund*¹⁰.

NGDOs' impact on Polish aid has not been limited to the transfer of human resources only. As one of the participants of my research observed, "*Grupa Zagranica was really important stakeholder. Back then NGDOs were the main partners for the MFA Department for Development Cooperation, but the funds from the MFA were not decisive about the functioning of NGDOs. So NGDOs had advantage in terms of know-how and in terms of resources [during those first years of functioning of the Polish aid]. NGDOs shared their know-how with the MFA and supported the ministry to develop this new area in foreign policy. ... NGDOs taught the MFA to organize tenders. The know-how developed in NGOs and was then transferred to the MFA. A couple of people who now work in the department came from the NGDO sector. [Since then] NGDOs have been gradually losing their advantage over the MFA*" (r5_8). This statement is in line with the opinions of other respondents, who were likewise convinced about the seminal role Polish NGOs, mostly those engaged to the East of Poland, played in the early years of the functioning of Polish aid.

Another respondent also argued that were it not for the already existing NGDOs' capacity, the Polish aid's mode of assistance delivery would have been different and for the worse than it is at present. This research participant, who used to work for the MFA, admitted, "*weren't it for NGDOs, we might have kept organizing those competitions and the project proposals would have been horrible and the MFA would in the end have had to resort to providing budget support*¹¹ ... *Poland would have been like Turkey is now. There are countries, which are emerging donors like Poland, and this is how they go about providing bilateral assistance*" (r7_13). A representative of the NGDO sector likewise opined that "*we NGDOs feel underappreciated. Polish aid wouldn't have been possible without us, NGOs. There might have been cooperation among self-governments. But without Polish NGOs, who had contacts with local communities in our partner countries, Polish aid wouldn't have reached those people*" (r13_20).

¹⁰ Solidarity Fund PL is a State Treasury Foundation established in the late 1990s to provide aid to countries undergoing transformation. In 2005 the then „Know-How” Foundation suspended its activities. In 2011, in accordance with the growing participation of Poland in development cooperation and democracy support, it was decided to reconstruct it. (<http://solidarityfund.pl/en/fundacja1/o-fundacji>).

¹¹ Budget support involves direct financial transfers to the national treasury of the partner country, conditional on policy dialogue, performance assessment and capacity building (https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/how/delivering-aid/budget-support/index_en.htm_en, accessed 16.02.2016)

These comments highlight an aspect of the impact of NGDOs on the Polish aid programme which hasn't been reflected in the literature so far. Namely, an emerging donor, that doesn't have established and experienced partners at home to implement development cooperation projects abroad, has two options. One is to resort to directly supporting the budgets of recipient countries, which practice has been known to increase the danger of aid fungibility¹². Another option is to "breed" NGOs that will be taught to consume the funds earmarked for development cooperation. The latter option is not limited to the development cooperation sector only. It has been described in the literature as "grantosis" (Leś in Gębura 2013). In the case of Poland none of these black scenarios took place, due to the fact that Poland *already* had well-established NGO sector with hands-on experience in democracy promotion, humanitarian aid and civic education.

Politicians were likewise aware that the state didn't have the know-how and human resources Polish NGDOs possessed. In the beginning of the century it was not unusual for top politicians to contact Polish NGOs active abroad in an attempt to tap their resources. This fact is likewise indicative of the advantage NGDOs used to have in terms of capacity over the governmental sector. For example, before becoming prime minister in 2004, in between June and October 2003 Marek Belka was appointed a Chairman of the Council for International Coordination for Iraq and thus was responsible for international aid coordination for the reconstruction of Iraq. One interviewee recalled that at that time Mr. Belka organized a meeting with Polish NGOs engaged abroad and "*declared that the government doesn't have funds for [development assistance] and he is meeting us to ask us [NGOs] to implement development cooperation projects [in Iraq] using own funds*" (r25_18). Representatives of the Department for Development Cooperation at the MFA were likewise of the opinion that NGDOs used to have comparative advantage over the MFA, which NGDOs have now lost due to the development of the DDC itself and the stagnation of the Third sector (Witkowski 2015: 192). The human and know-how capacity of the MFA came to outgrow the initially stronger capacity of the NGDO sector in this respect. This diagnosis is in line with other analyses of the dynamics of the development of the Polish NGDO sector (Dudkiewicz 2015).

To recapitulate, it would be most accurate to say that whereas Polish aid tapped the capacity of NGDOs, which had already cooperated with foreign partners in East-Central Europe and in the post-Soviet space, the state bilateral

¹² Aid fungibility is an unintended side-effect caused by some aid modalities, especially by budget support. The concept of fungibility refers to the possibility that aid is used by the government of the partner country in ways not intended and not agreed with the donor country. For instance, direct budget support for the health care system of the recipient country may end up in the increase of its military spending.

programme played a role itself in the emergence of NGOs engaged in traditional aid recipient countries in Africa and Asia. One of the respondents observed, *“in my view, 80% of development NGOs, which were established after 2004, were generated by the Polish aid program”* (r3_10). Other interviewees’ statements substantiated this claim. For example, another research participant admitted that during the first five years of his NGO’s functioning, it *“focused only on development cooperation. But since, 2011, when the Polish government had its first humanitarian aid call for NGO proposals, we started to implement humanitarian projects, too”* (r4_14). In other words, the availability of funds for NGOs in the area of humanitarian aid was instrumental in the development of this field of development cooperation for some NGOs.

Other observers of the cooperation of the MFA and NGDOs are less critical in their assessment of the process. For example, Katarzyna Zalas-Kamińska argues that NGDOs and the Polish MFA are interdependent and that they *“need each other to be successful”* in development cooperation and public diplomacy alike (Zalas-Kamińska 2013: 173). Perhaps this observation was relevant in the first years of functioning of the DDC. As one of my respondents argued, *“up to 2006, NGDOs were the main partner for the MFA; later on their role decreased. Back then NGDOs were the prime movers, their impact was bigger, but also there were less NGOs. They also did not have competition from the other sectors, so [the relationship between NGOs and the MFA] was more symbiotic... Now that there are more stakeholders, it is more difficult to reach compromise”* (r12_9). Nonetheless, according to employees of the MFA Department for Development Cooperation cited by Jędrzej Witkowski who studied civic dialogue in the area of development cooperation, MFA’s employees’ cooperation with NGDOs played a very important or even decisive role in the professionalization of the Polish aid system itself. The impact of Polish NGDOs on the direction and mode of implementation of development cooperation in Poland has been assessed as very significant by the MFA (Witkowski 2015: 178).

And finally, even though the initiative to undertake international cooperation has been indigenous, foreign funders played supportive role in the process. They assisted the grassroots effort at federalization of Polish NGOs engaged abroad as well as the establishment of a dedicated department at the Polish MFA to deal with development cooperation. Both NGOs and individuals who used to be engaged in the sector played an important role in strengthening the capacity of the Polish aid system. Interestingly, although the NGOs who were the first partners for Polish aid were mostly engaged in the East, it was the establishment of Polish aid and the initially indiscriminate method to provide funding to project proposals, irrespective of the target country, that appears to have facilitated the emergence of a well-developed NGDO sector focusing on poverty reduction in traditional aid recipient countries in Africa and Asia.

Concluding remarks

In this paper it was argued that the internationalization of citizen initiatives in Poland can be traced back to the adoption of the *Message of the First Congress of NSZZ Solidarność Delegates to the Working People in Eastern Europe*. Although before 1989 the external support for societal self-organisation in the country for political reasons could only be limited, after the toppling of communism public and private foreign funding was one of the most important factors that contributed to the professionalization and maturation of the institutionalized civil society sector. Interestingly, unlike the critical accounts of this support produced in the 1990s, my respondents' account of the legacy of foreign funding didn't substantiate those critical claims. For example, respondents who have had first-hand experience in the NGO sector since the 1990s and whose organisations have benefited from foreign aid disagreed with the popular argument that foreign aid favoured and promoted organization and social activists voicing leftist and /or liberal views only. Instead, my respondents argued foreign funders were indiscriminate regarding left-wing and right-wing non-state actors as they supported liberal newly established NGOs and conservative individuals and organizations associated with the Catholic church alike. As far as the experience with the foreign experts collectively known as the Marriott brigades are concerned, Polish NGO activists have actually learned from their familiarity with cases of maladjusted foreign aid. Polish aid professionals declare they are careful not to treat their partners in a patronizing way. Furthermore, Polish aid professionals are capitalizing on the proximity of the Polish transformation experience to the situation in partner countries.

The importance of foreign aid for the maturation and professionalization of the Polish NGO sector notwithstanding, it was the indigenous, grassroots activity of individuals and groups the post-1989 avalanche-like growth of the NGO sector should be attributed to. However, unlike their western counterparts, Polish NGDOs do not have the financial stability their colleagues in advanced industrial countries enjoy. As a corollary of that, most Polish NGDOs are not competitive when it comes to accessing for example EU funds for development cooperation or global education activities. However, Polish NGDOs have another advantage over their Western colleagues as far as development cooperation is concerned. Polish aid professionals have come to notice that it is the legacy of *Solidarność* and the in-between status of Poland that stands for the nation's real comparative advantage in development cooperation.

It should be pointed out that the internationalization of solidarity as embodied by Polish civil society's engagement abroad and the transformation of the country from a COMECON member through recipient of official aid to an OECD DAC member, initially took place separately. However, towards the

end of the first decade of the transformation, the trajectories of the development of the internationally-oriented civil society sector and that of the state institutions responsible for providing development assistance, started to converge. The beneficial results of this synergistic cooperation can be observed *inter alia* in the establishment of the backbone of the Polish aid system and the dialogical relationship between these stakeholders in defining the priorities and modalities of Polish aid.

Although intuitively one could expect that the experience some Polish NGOs gained in trans-border cooperation in the beginning of the transformation would be relevant when the country became a donor itself, it turned out that the transfer from recipient to donor is not as straightforward as one could initially presume. Furthermore, the institutional memory was lost in some of the NGOs as far as the donor-partner relationship is concerned. Besides, it transpired that the syndrome of the recipient has stayed with the society and with its political representation accordingly. It is the uprooting of this syndrome that seems to be the biggest challenge the society faces. After all, global solidarity presupposes human fellowship and global society implies that there can be no justification for remaining indifferent to other peoples' sufferings (Korab-Karpowicz 2010). The uprooting of the recipient syndrome is therefore a task that has to be jointly tackled by all stakeholders in development cooperation. Clearly, awareness raising and educational activities focusing on the current role of the country in development cooperation and highlighting the interdependencies that characterize the world today could cater to this demand. These activities are needed to implement the model principles of development cooperation as defined by both state and non-state actors engaged in global solidarity.

Thus, the governmental "Polish aid" programme is meant to promote democracy, solidarity and development. In the *Multiannual Development Cooperation Programme 2012 – 2015* it is stated that "Solidarity is very high on the list of principles that underlie Polish international engagement. Solidarity is both the driving force behind and the objective of Poland's involvement in development cooperation" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs. 2011). In a similar vein, in line with the understanding of aid presented in the amended in 2013 *Development Cooperation Act*, development cooperation is understood as "the totality of actions undertaken by government agencies in line with the international solidarity rule" with a view to providing developing countries with development assistance and humanitarian aid as well as undertaking activities in the field of global education (*USTAWA z dnia 16 września 2011 r. o współpracy rozwojowej* 2013). Hence, governmental Polish aid is motivated by solidarity with other nations. The same can be said about NGDOs' activism. For instance, one of the Istanbul Principles agreed at the *Open Forum for Civil Society Organisations Development Effectiveness' Global Assembly* in 2010, is "Pursue equitable

partnerships and solidarity”. Existing research likewise indicates that NGOs’ professionals are motivated by political solidarity, humanist compassion and an exploratory worldview (Lewis 2013: 187).

Indeed, solidarity as an imperative that can address the ills of modern life is so the more topical nowadays when the world is facing a refugees’ crisis of an unprecedented scope. This crisis is indicative of the practical difficulties the extension of solidarity to other peoples encounters. In fact, the globalization of solidarity appears to face less resistance when it concerns people with whom the average citizen would not have first-hand contact. Furthermore, as Zygmunt Bauman insightfully put it, contemporary capitalism is antithetical to solidarity in the everyday as well as in the workspace as capitalism favors competition and distrust over mutual dependence and the promotion of synergy between private interests and the common good (Bauman 2013). Just as neoliberalism has permeated spheres of life other than the economy and has long time ago crossed over national borders, the action that could offer remedy to the underside of modern capitalism should have transnational dimension. The principle of solidarity, as postulated by the social movement and trade union *Solidarność* in Poland in the 1980s, promoted this universal aspect of grassroots activity.

In fact, the principle of solidarity has been described to cover six different meanings, which are identity, substitution, complementarity, reciprocity, affinity and restitution. The second of these, i.e. substitution, is exemplified by international development cooperation (Waterman in Kössler and Melber 2007: 32). To understand how *Solidarność* of the 1980s evolved to global solidarity initiatives, in this paper the floor has been given to contemporaries of the described events. Some of the aid professionals I interviewed have been involved in civic activism and international cooperation since the 1980s. Others, who were too young to participate in *Solidarność* in the 1980s, nonetheless referred to the legacy of the movement and felt strong identification with other peoples trying to improve their lives and democratize public life in their countries. The legacy of *Solidarność* of the 1980s goes beyond the actual people who were part of it. The very fact that Poland was the country, where *Solidarność* was born, provides credibility to Polish initiatives in the area of development cooperation. The *Solidarność* movement of the 1980s symbolizes the will and the possibility to achieve change when opportune circumstances arise.

The attitude embodied by the Polish champions of the Third sector during the first decade of the transition was also one of an “intellectual who heralds change” (Hłowiecka-Tańska 2011: 57). Jakub Wygnański claimed in 2005, that in terms of solidarity, spontaneity and selflessness, Polish civil society was stronger prior to 1989 (Wygnański in Ibid.: 81). The empirically observed ousting of the communitarian model of self-organization by the individualistic one (Chimiak 2006) testifies to this contention. On the other hand, though, nowadays solidarity

has acquired a wider and more urgent meaning, than that of a moral postulate. Solidarity has become a political requirement, as human survival in our interconnected world is increasingly contingent on the spread of the ethics of sharing and the safeguarding of some social cohesion worldwide (Kössler and Melber 2007: 35, 36). The emergence of a cohort of aid professionals in Poland is indicative of the actualization of this ethics in the society.

Whereas most of the activities that fall under the category of development cooperation are directed to other countries, global education targets the citizens of Poland. After all, to quote from the classic work of the philosopher and pedagogue Paulo Freire, “Solidarity requires that one enter into the situation of those with whom one is solidary... True solidarity is found only ... in its praxis” (Freire 2005: 49–50). Praxis, however, should not be limited to action only. Freire understands praxis as the “reflection and action which truly transform reality” (Ibid.: 100). Indeed, as Stephen McCloskey argues, action without reflection is “mere activism devoid of thought” (McCloskey 2015: 7). An example of the argument that in the case of development, action and reflection should be the two sides of the same coin, is the observed by McClosky dissociation of development education and development aid in the practices of some NGOs. He envisages the roots of this dissociation in the “creeping depoliticisation” of NGOs involved in development education. NGOs’ depoliticisation has been the result of a trade-off whereby those NGOs have “narrowed their policy engagement” to development aid, at the expense of advocating for and working on behalf of enhancing public understanding of the causes of global poverty (Hilary 2013).

This argument should be understood as a word of warning for NGOs in other countries, too, and at the same time as an endorsement of the role more and more Polish NGOs are assuming, i.e. that of educators. After all, public opinion polls present a positive picture of Polish society’s support for development cooperation. However, this optimistic view coupled with the public’s decreasing familiarity with the actual engagement of Polish governmental and non-state actors in development cooperation (Leszczyński 2015) is creating a situation where “Polish activists are trapped between holding onto the illusion of nation-wide support for the development paradigm and the lack of interest from the public in development matters” (Drażkiewicz-Grodzicka 2011). Unlike the general public, aid professionals exemplify both an interest in and a belief in the need and the possibility to impact change by engaging in development cooperation abroad and in global education at home. Their commitment to these causes is in tune with the outcome of the Special Eurobarometer conducted in 2014, which concluded that individuals “who are positive about the importance of helping people, and believe that aid should be increased, are also more likely to be positive about other aspects of development, such as an individual’s

ability to influence change. Those who are generally positive about overcoming poverty in the world often see this as an issue that transcends different areas of life: politics, charity and personal behavior” (European Commission 2015: 63). Indeed, only the synergetic effect of action and reflection can contribute to exerting the change aid professionals strive after. The fact that aid professionals are inspired by individuals who embody these qualities (reflection and action) bodes well for the their commitment to the causes and to their jobs.

Critics of the postulate to keep increasing the engagement of Poland in supporting other nations voice the opinion that the country has not yet solved its own most pressing problems. However, the argument about the unaddressed internal social problems could be constructively used as a justification for providing aid abroad. As the executive director of *War on Want* John Hilary argued, it is necessary to “explore the potential for new forms of “solidarity” based not on colonialist intervention on behalf of the Other, which has been the driving force for so much development education and global justice campaigning in Britain, but on the construction of a political project to build awareness of (and action against) a common enemy at home and abroad” (Hilary 2013). Indeed, Poland and other recent donor countries do not have a history of colonization. However, European rising donors have been encouraged to learn from other more experienced Western donors, many of which motivated their support for particular countries on their common, i.e. colonial history. John Hilary is right to argue that the austerity policies imposed on European nations mirror those that have long been inflicted on the peoples of the Global South by international financing institutions. This fact actually offers a unique opportunity to join up domestic struggles with those in other parts of the world. Aid professionals have an important role to play in this process. Their work should be supported, but also given greater publicity in an attempt to multiply its effect.

To augment the effect of aid professionals’ work, the general public should get more involved. The need for global education is so the more pressing bearing in mind that although Poland became an OECD DAC member in 2013, thus joining the club of traditional donors, the country still hasn’t reached even the threshold of 0,33% of its GNI earmarked for development cooperation. In fact, in spite of its declared support for the nations’ engagement in development cooperation, the public opinion is not in favour of *increasing* the amount of this support. The lack of political championship to advocate for the boost of the volume of aid further exacerbates the chances to move beyond the current commitments of the country in the area of development assistance. Therefore, NGOs have a further role to play in bringing to the attention of the public opinion and all stakeholders engaged in development cooperation the perspective of the partner countries. And finally, in light of the on-going refugees’ crisis

and the relative reluctance on behalf of the public to extend the notion of solidarity towards escapees from war-torn regions, all relevant stakeholders have a role to play in promoting critical citizenship education at home.

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Od „Solidarności” do globalnej solidarności? Zaangażowanie polskiego społeczeństwa obywatelskiego we współpracę na rzecz rozwoju

Streszczenie

Artykuł przedstawia czynniki, które ukształtowały ewolucję polskich organizacji pozarządowych zaangażowanych w politykę rozwojową oraz wpływ tych podmiotów na przyswojenie praktyk i norm związanych z międzynarodową współpracą na rzecz rozwoju przez rządowy program „Polska pomoc”. Procesy te są rozumiane jako kontynuacja posłania NSZZ „Solidarność” do ludzi pracy Europy Wschodniej oraz zaangażowania Polski w międzynarodową współpracę na rzecz rozwoju jeszcze z czasów „zimnej wojny”. Współczesny system współpracy rozwojowej ukształtowany został przez czynniki geopolityczne. Niemniej jednak rządowy program „Polska pomoc” zyskał na współpracy z polskim sektorem pozarządowym, który podzielił się swoją wiedzę i doświadczeniem w dostarczaniu pomocy humanitarnej, współpracy rozwojowej oraz edukacji globalnej. Uwzględniono również pośredni wpływ zagranicznych darczyńców w analizowanych procesach.

Główne pojęcia: solidarność; społeczeństwo obywatelskie; współpraca rozwojowa; polska pomoc; Polska.