Those Who Pay the Piper Calls the Tune: Meta-Organisation and Capacities of the Third Sector in Migration Policies

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Abstract In this paper, we examine the changing landscape of migration policy work conducted by civil society organisations (CSOs) in the Czech Republic. We focus on how funding opportunities affect CSOs’ policy work, long-term planning and everyday practices. Through a qualitative analysis of 15 interviews with representatives of non-governmental organisations and 11 interviews with policy stakeholders, we explored the critical and reflexive strategies adopted by CSOs. A crucial role in developing critical capacity seems to stem from umbrella organisations—organisations whose members are organisations. With respect to CSOs’ strong dependency on the state, umbrella organisations might serve as shields protecting individual organisations from direct conflicts with governmental policies and institutions. In the end, we assume that meta-organisations potentially function as important vehicles for the reflexive development and evolution of organisations and decrease transaction costs for the organisation field.

Keywords Meta-organisations · Transaction costs · Collaboration · Migration · Czech Republic

Introduction

Civil society organisations (CSOs) are used and funded by national states to provide public services. However, their role as watchdogs has been mentioned in numerous cases (Cuttitta, 2018; Fehsenfeld & Levinsen, 2019; Hasenfeld & Gidron, 2005). Even though this ambiguity is present in many fields where CSOs operate, it is a more salient and urgent issue in highly politicised topics, such as migration and the integration of foreigners. This dilemma is not only an analytical one, but it is also part of CSOs’ existence and decision-making. The so-called migrant crisis in 2014/2015 represents one of the wicked policy problems that could hardly be tackled without collaboration between the public sector and private and third-sector organisations (Brandsen & Johnston, 2018).

We are interested in how CSOs balance these contradictory aspects of their work. Since we are concerned with professional and formal organisations, we discuss non-governmental organisations (NGOs) instead of the more general term *civil society organisations*. Specifically, we focus on the role of umbrella organisations as meta-organisations—organisations whose members are also organisations (see Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008). We propose a hypothesis that in highly politicised and fragmented fields, such as migration policy, meta-organisations create platforms that can criticise the government, effectively negotiate with it and protect their individual members. We propose that hybrid organisations, such as meta-organisations, play an important role in these fields. In the article, we follow key research questions: (1) What functions do meta-organisations fulfil within the migration policy field? and (2) How do external constraints shape these functions?

In this paper, we focus on the policy work of Czech migration NGOs and their umbrella organisation, the

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Consortium of Migrants Assisting Organisations. Our analysis draws on semi-structured interviews and desk research. More specifically, insights into the attitudes of NGO representatives have been gained through semi-structured interviews with staff members holding different positions in a relevant number of organisations, identified during our analysis of publicly available sources, such as lists of successful grant applicants, lists of members of governmental advisory bodies, the media, roundtables and conference programmes and policy documents. We have structured this paper as follows. First, we theoretically discuss the dynamics of three dominant functions of the ecology of games approach (Berardo & Lubell, 2019): resource distribution, cooperation and social learning and the role of meta-organisations in governance systems. Second, we describe invisible policy work in a hostile environment. In the analytical part, we used the ecology of games approach to describe relations between NGOs and the state and transaction costs theory (Williamson, 1985; North, 1990; Jaffee, 1995) to examine the role of the umbrella organisation Consortium of Migrants Assisting Organisations. We conclude that the mere presence and initiatives of umbrella organisations representing the entire field of NGOs can enforce the development of the critical capacities of the third sector and allow the avoidance of external control connected with financial resources. We also introduce new types of transaction costs that are significant for third-sector meta-organisations.

CSOs and Public Services: Between Collaborative and Critical Policy Work

Interactions between governments and CSOs have materialised in diverse forms, ranging from hierarchical positions to fully embraced partnerships (Brandsen & Johnston, 2018). The article employs the ecology of games approach (Berardo & Lubell, 2019), which can integrate multiple perspectives. It describes the policy field as the ‘ecology of games’ that consist of interlinked games played simultaneously by actors eager to achieve their individual goals. This theory recognises that policy decisions are made by networks of actors interacting in ‘multiple forums at different geographic scales ranging from local to global, addressing a myriad of interconnected issues’ (Berardo & Lubell, 2019, p. 7). The structure of the ecology of games refers to three functions of a complex governance system: (1) distribution of resources, (2) cooperation and (3) learning. *Resource distribution* refers to how benefits and costs are distributed in the governance system. *Cooperation* involves shaping the behaviour of multiple actors in ways that increase the likelihood that they will collaborate to achieve desirable outcomes. *Learning* takes place when

actors process new information about the problems they care about and how other actors think about those problems.

With respect to distributing resources, there is literature on NGOs using resource dependence theory (Froelich, 1999; Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003). Resource distribution affects the goals of the organisation (Atia & Herrold, 2018; Khieng & Dahles, 2015), autonomy and programmatic flexibility (Feiock & Jang, 2009), structure (Mitchell, 2014) and vulnerability to economic shocks (Hodge & Piccolo, 2005). Dependency on public resources contributes to the development of more bureaucratic structures and increases competition among NGOs (Mitchell, 2014). However, it increases the organisation’s sensitivity to the environment and its ability to adapt to it (Hafsi & Thomas, 2005). As Mitchell (2014) concludes, NGOs employ three kinds of strategies in response to resource distribution: (1) adaptation (alignment, subcontracting, perseverance), (2) avoidance (revenue diversification, funding liberation, geostrategic arbitrage, specialisation, selectivity) and (3) shaping (donor education, compromise). Paradoxically, some attempts to avoid external control and maintain organisational autonomy might reinforce the professionalisation process and competition between the entities for obtaining limited resources (Maya-Jariego et al., 2020).

In relation to cooperation, NGOs may differ from coordination and consultations (Chorianopoulos & Tselepi, 2019; Geyer, 2001) through contracting out (see Gronbjerg, 1993; Gutch, 1992; De Hoog & Salamon, 2002) and commissioning (Gillam & Siriwardena, 2013; Murray, 2009) to co-management (Plummer et al., 2012; Soliku & Schraml, 2020) and co-production (Brandsen & Honingh, 2016; Brandsen et al., 2018). Co-productive modes of governance are often promoted as a tool to increase the legitimacy of public policy (Börzel & Risse, 2010; O’Flynn, 2009), bring more targeted and innovative solutions (Bingham et al., 2005; Fung, 2006) and limit third-sector autonomy and legitimacy (Johnston, 2015). Hamilton and Lubell’s (2018) findings emphasise that transaction costs and an increase in the transaction costs among participants in an ecology of games can imperil their capacity to cooperate.

In relation to social learning, civil society actors appear to play five roles in domain learning: (1) identifying issues, (2) facilitating the voice of marginalised stakeholders, (3) amplifying the importance of issues, (4) building bridges among diverse stakeholders and (5) monitoring and assessing solutions (Brown & Timmer, 2006). NGOs are also increasing their influence over public policy through their ability to spread ideas and information (Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000) and facilitate the scaling up of collaboration and social innovation (Lee & Restrepo, 2015).

The system of patronage might be associated with the NGO-isation of civil society, which occurred in the 1980s and the 1990s in Western countries (Bebbington et al., 2008; Howell & Pearce, 2001) and in the 1990s and the 2000s in Central and Eastern Europe (Grünberg, 2000; Jacobsson & Saxonberg, 2016). The NGO-isation of civil society has been reinforced by the availability of European Union (EU) funding (Karlberg & Jacobsson, 2015). Europeanisation through funding entails channelling towards formalisation and professionalisation (Císař & Vráblíková, 2010; Hašková and Křížková, 2008), towards more structured and less militant forms of activism (Císař, 2010; Císař & Vráblíková, 2013; Císař & Navrátil, 2015; Koubek, 2020) and contributes to the shift in agendas to fit funding opportunities (Sudbery, 2010).

In such fragmented fields, the existence of meta-organisations seems crucial. They might be important actors in balancing dependency and autonomy, decreasing transaction costs for cooperation and actors facilitating social learning.

Meta-Organisation as Civil Society Actors

As Laurent et al. (2020) pointed out, meta-organisations contribute to the coordination of the various interests of the stakeholders involved in each field and act as a legitimate and collective voice to address public authorities. In relation to the third sector, Karlberg and Jacobsson (2015) discuss civil society umbrella organisations as specific meta-organisations. Ahrne and Brunsson (2008, pp. 62–77) point out three general purposes for which a meta-organisation may be formed: interaction among members, collective action among members or creation of a collective identity. Significant economies of scale are among the most important motives for the formation of meta-organisations to lower the costs that individual organisations must pay (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008, p. 69). The creation of meta-organisations might also mean introducing a new actor who may fulfil new functions that have been absent in the field. The functions of meta-organisations may be classified as *inward functions*, such as cooperation, coordination and regulation among members, and *outward functions*, relating to the management of relationships with external stakeholders (Laurent et al., 2020). These two functions are reflected in two dimensions of the legitimacy of meta-organisations—internal and external. Legitimacy corresponds to the last purpose of meta-organisations mentioned by Ahrne and Brunsson (2008).

Meta-organisations can also be viewed, in line with the ecology of games approach, through the lens of transactional cost theory. In the context of civil society, *transaction costs* can be defined as costs from managing the field

itself. They can be divided into six broad categories (Williamson, 1985; North, 1990; Jaffee, 1995): (1) search costs (a lack of information), (2) screening costs (uncertainty about actors), (3) bargaining costs (conflicting objectives and interests), (4) transfer costs (transfer of ideas), (5) monitoring costs (watchdog activities) and (6) enforcement costs (influence on other actors). In this paper, we propose that meta-organisations can bear such transactional costs and are crucial in a system where individual organisations' costs for such activities are too high.

NGOs' and Migrants' Integration into the Czech Republic

The Czech migration policy is highly centralised, with the Ministry of the Interior being a crucial actor. Czech migration policy is inconsistent in terms of time switching between liberal and restrictive tendencies (Baršova & Barša, 2005; Bauerova, 2018), and it is marked by the coexistence of national and European levels. On the one hand, efforts have been made to introduce more restrictive conditions of entry and stay, while on the other hand, Czech migration policy must follow EU regulations that strengthen civil rights and support permanent settlement (Kušnirákova, 2014). Similar to policies of other CEE countries, Czech migration policy can be described as 'mainstreaming by accident' (see Józwiak et al., 2018) in which mainstreaming measures are caused by economic reasons rather than political ones.

The number of foreigners has been growing since 1990, with a short break during the financial crisis. The biggest groups by nationality are consistently Ukrainians, Slovaks, Vietnamese and nationals of the Russian Federation, who altogether constitute around 75% of non-EU migrants in 2018. There are important streams of labour migration from other EU countries: Romania, Bulgaria and Poland. In 2019, the total number of foreign nationals living in the Czech Republic was 593,000, approximately 5.4% of the population (Czech Statistical Office, 2020).

An active civil society and the support of NGOs and local communities are all conducive to successful integration in the EU. In cooperation with local authorities, they play a key role in the social integration domain, delivering social integration measures in local communities (Fóti et al., 2019). The Czech government recognises NGOs as crucial players contributing to MRAS (Migrants, Refugees and Asylum Seekers; Czech Government, 2015). Currently, 25 organisations deal with the integration agenda in the Czech Republic. The NGOs involved in the integration agenda have a relatively homogeneous offering of services. Most NGOs are involved in providing direct services and working with individual clients. Only a

limited number of NGOs are active political actors whose aim is to shape the current integration landscape through advocacy and participation in policymaking.

As mentioned, most NGOs are principally involved in service provision, offering direct services to foreigners (the most widespread of which are individual social and legal counselling), followed by language courses and the organisation of social events for both migrant communities and the public. The services provided by NGOs depend on funding from a variety of public resources, provided by ministries, regions and municipalities. Several NGOs benefit from EU funding, such as the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) and the European Social Fund (ESF). Individual NGOs are successful in securing resources from other international funding schemes, such as European Economic Area (EAA) Grants or Norway Grants. Funding from private donors represents a small share of the finances available to NGOs.

NGOs are highly professionalised, subsidised by the state and only rarely based on volunteerism. Only during the so-called migrant crisis were several rather informal initiatives started (e.g. Pomáháme lidem na útěku [Help for People on the Run], Iniciativa Hlavák [The Main Train Station Initiative]). However, they were established largely as attempts to pass through the crisis period immediately provide migrants with urgent humanitarian aid and help meet their basic needs.

The integration services that target migrants are not evenly distributed. Most service-oriented NGOs operate in the two largest cities of the Czech Republic—Prague and Brno (Bauerová, 2018); however, more than half of migrants live outside these two areas, in cities and towns close to the borderline (Czech Statistical Office, 2020). The offered services, thus, do not reflect the needs of all MRAS, who have increasingly spread across semi-peripheral areas of the Czech Republic (see Čermák & Janska, 2011). Moreover, migrants have access to a limited spectrum of social services. While social counselling services are available in all major cities, subsequent services that are important for successful labour market integration, such as social housing or street work, are provided almost exclusively in major cities or only in the Czech language (Fišarova, 2018; Klinecky, 2012). Migrants in peripheral areas are, thus, more vulnerable to social exclusion and more dependent on their personal connections and networks.

Methods

The desk research, based on the review of available documents and relevant materials, was complemented with semi-structured interviews, 15 with NGOs' representatives

(out of 25 organisations operating in the Czech Republic) and 11 with policy stakeholders. The sampling was driven by an effort to achieve empirical saturation and gather a plurality of NGO experiences.

The sampling was based on an NGO list that provided an overview of the field. There were two key sources: first, the 'List of Organisations Providing Assistance to Foreigners', available on the website of the Ministry of the Interior, and second, the list of member organisations of the Consortium of Migrants Assisting Organisations. These sources of information were further verified during the fieldwork, consisting of interviews with NGOs' representatives, as well as participation in relevant migration-related forums, including public debates, conferences and roundtables.

The sampling was driven by an effort to achieve empirical saturation and to gather a plurality of experiences of NGOs. The sample was dominated by interviews with representatives of Prague-based organisations. Nonetheless, it also includes several interviews with organisations from other Czech regions and municipalities with a large number of refugees. This focus reflects the geographic distribution of NGOs in the Czech Republic, the size of the organisations and the type of services provided. The sample covers all main organisations active in the field, as well as smaller organisations operating in areas where foreigners live. The goal was to obtain a whole spectrum of NGO experiences regarding the contexts in which they operate. Interviewees represent different levels of management, varying from directors to social workers, with a particular focus on those who specialise in labour counselling.

All interviews were recorded and then transcribed. The respondents were asked about their position in their organisation and their professional trajectory, the kinds of support for labour integration, the activities of their organisation, the participation of migrants in their organisation, collaboration with external actors, funding and internalisation, participation in public policy and future development.

The data were coded and further analysed using NVivo software. In the analysis, we focused on forms of collaboration with external actors and NGOs' policy work. We gathered materials from the studied NGOs—their manifestos, press releases and blogs or media outlets. In the analysis of the documents, we focused on the same codes that had evolved during the analysis of the interviews, particularly those connected to NGOs' collaboration with external actors. To further explore validity and reliability, the data were triangulated using participant observation in workshops or roundtables attended by NGOs. The findings were also presented to NGOs' representatives and discussed with them. The findings from interviews were constantly compared with policy documents, interviews

with migrants, social partners and experts, which were conducted within the SIRIUS project from which the article originates.

NGOs' Policy Work and The Ecology of Games of Migration Policies

Following the ecology of games approach, we examine three dominant functions of the system: (1) resource distribution, (2) cooperation and (3) social learning. We seek evidence of these functions at both the state and local levels and disparate fora. These functions, though, are heavily influenced by their context. The hostile context in which NGOs operate creates an environment for invisible and less publicised policy work.

Czech NGOs were affected by the so-called 2014–2015 migrant crisis. Although the immigration trends in the Czech Republic have remained almost unchanged during and even after the crisis, Czech NGOs have had to face the indirect effect of the crisis and, more specifically, the hostile approach towards NGOs. In the media, refugees were depicted as a security threat and an administrative burden partly imposed by the European Union (Jelínková, 2019). This discourse was replicated by the president's or political parties' leaders (see Čada & Frantová, 2019; Tkaczyk, 2017). In comparison with other EU countries, Czechs scored the highest in hostility towards migrants (see Pospíšilová & Krulichová, 2018). According to the results of the Eurobarometer poll (2018), immigration remains the most important issue facing the EU for 38% of European citizens, with the rate found in the Czech Republic (58%).

Several actors have attempted to damage the public image of NGOs. The negative impact of the public debate can be well illustrated by a remark made by a director of an NGO that was significantly engaged in service provision: 'It is uncomfortable. Our clients are often people in difficult situations, so it is a hard job to deal with attacks from the public at the same time. We are also worried about what will happen if some political subjects that are calling for the destruction of the civic sector are successful in the election'. All our interviewed NGO representatives admitted to having experienced verbal and symbolic abuses. Prague-based organisations encounter hate speech on their Facebook sites. The negative attitudes towards NGOs are not expressed online only. For example, a local service provider's office door was glued with anti-refugee stickers in broken Arabic. Similarly, members of another organisation found a hangman figure on their entrance door.

Several NGOs initially aimed to actively contrast the stigmatisation of their work by contributing to the public debate and to attempt to change the hostile public

perception of migration. However, they have withdrawn one by one. Having no resources and capacities to contest the negative stereotypical image of NGOs, sometimes legitimised, and even propagated by the highest political representatives, they have decided to focus almost exclusively on less visible initiatives.

As the director of a local service provider stated, 'Publicity never brought us any good'. Her colleague from a citywide organisation says that this is a task for other organisations specialising in public relations but that 'their work should speak for itself, and those who matter will get to know about it'. This also explains NGOs' relatively low involvement in activism and their primary focus on service provision. As argued by a social worker in an organisation that bears the term 'refugee' in its name: 'Our office moved 2 years ago, and we decided not to put the full name of our organisation anywhere around the doors'.

In a hostile environment, publicity is a danger for an organisation. Hostile environments create a crucial context for ecologies in which NGOs play their games, representing an important variable structuring the rules of field and strategies of NGOs. Costs and risks which relate to publicity are perceived as so high that they can ruin the organisation. These costs endanger the survival of the organisation and the stability of personnel. The environment is also characterised by high insecurity. For these reasons, the organisation turns away from activism and public work towards invisible work, which can be associated with transactional activism—lobbying, participating in expert bodies or influencing policy as social service providers.

Resource Distribution

Most of the organisations working with migrants provide direct services—most often counselling. The state perceives the civil sector as a service provider, and NGOs have identified themselves with this role. Although a significant number of NGOs rely on public subsidies and display considerable professionalisation and formalisation, the conditions of funding prevent them from developing specific knowledge and providing innovative services based on accumulated knowledge. A representative of an NGO specialising in research and campaigning in this regard commented on the lack of funding opportunities: 'We have many great ideas but no way to make them happen'. Notwithstanding this situation, NGOs are looking for strategies to avoid such limitations using international funds; however, this route needs specific capacities.

In local contexts, in addition to state funding, most of the interviewed representatives of organisations received some form of financial support from municipalities. However, financial support and resource dependence play a

more important role in the case of NGOs from smaller towns. Funding also plays a strategic role, especially when it is low and allocated to cover expenses for specific events. One of the important organisations operating in Prague applies annually for funding, not for economic reasons, but to maintain good relationships with the city council. As its representative pointed out, ‘The received funding does not even cover the time of staff to write the application and the report’. The funding has a ritualistic function. The purpose of the application is not the funding itself but an assertion, ‘We are here’, somehow resembling the phatic function of language (Jakobson, 1960), serving to keep open the communication channels between NGOs and municipalities.

Collaboration

In terms of policy work, at the state level, the Ministry of the Interior is a key policymaker. The ministry convened periodic meetings between its representatives and the whole NGO sector. However, these meetings were finished after the so-called migrant crisis. Currently, NGOs officially participate as policymaking members of the Committee for the Rights of Foreigners—a standing committee founded by the governmental Council for Human Rights. The committee is a main institutional platform in which representatives of both government departments and NGOs participate. Furthermore, a representative of NGOs chairs the committee. Even though the interviewed committee members recognise the committee’s importance in establishing a dialogue between the government and civil society, the committee only plays an advisory role, and its resolutions are not binding. The committee is also a platform where NGOs can critically discuss issues with the government.

An interviewee mentioned the lack of vision in the Czech integration policy: ‘We do not know how the ministry perceives the integration; this is not written anywhere and has never been said. This is something I would like to accomplish through discussions with the ministry. What do they mean by ‘integration’? What is the goal of the policies? As one would think that if there are obligatory integration tools for foreigners, there will be some idea where those should lead, but there is nothing like this’ (a director of an NGO).

However, the committee’s position is weakened due to the political representation’s lack of interest in migration and integration policies. As revealed by the discourse analysis of policy documents and the interviews with policymakers, integration is not considered a social problem. It is an unpopular issue, and repressive migration law predominantly corresponds to securitisation discourse. ‘The state’s view on migration is rather repressive, and the

rules are so strict that people can fall into illegality quite fast, also for bureaucratic reasons’ (an NGO representative).

On the local level, NGOs function mainly as service providers. Representatives of NGOs also participated in community planning meetings. Collaboration through institutionalised fora depends on municipal activities and varies greatly in diverse places. The Centres to Support Integration of Foreigners, which locally operate as part of the Ministry of Interior, are also responsible for the creation of regional platforms that gather the relevant actors involved in MRAS’ integration. However, the experience with these networks differs across regions; the intensified interaction between NGOs and the municipalities of Prague and Brno has contributed to the development of trust relationships and mutual understanding: ‘[W]e are meeting regularly, and they trust us’. Conversely, cooperation with municipalities in smaller cities is viewed as problematic. In smaller cities, there are narrow networks of organisations with intensive connections. In such settings, the presence of the centre is perceived as more dangerous for existing social service providers. Generally, the centres are regarded with suspicion as the state’s tools to colonise local spaces.

Social Learning

Besides institutional platforms, there has been policy work on an individual basis through contacts between representatives of NGOs and government officers. Several interviewees mentioned that communication with the Ministry of the Interior has improved in the last few years on a personal level, explaining this progress because of personal changes. In general, they reflect on the increasing yet still accidental presence of ‘*enlightened bureaucrats*’, whose approach to migration would go beyond the securitised and instrumentalised vision of integration. The changes have resulted in more frequent meetings and less conflict-laden communication between the ministry and the non-governmental sector. These personal contacts are crucial for the transfer of best practices.

Some NGO representatives have actively lobbied for specific cases and programmes. For example, an NGO has actively pushed for recognition of the introduction of mandatory courses on sociocultural integration for migrants staying longer than 1 year. The courses are inspired by the proven praxis that the organisation conducts. The significant agent of change is the personal flow from NGOs to the state administration, where the latter hires the NGOs’ ex-employees, bringing their expertise and contacts with them.

When political representation does not indicate any willingness to make a policy change and there is a lack of

policy vision, personal contacts seem crucial for policy work. However, under these circumstances, access to policymakers is unequal. Contacts and access points between particular NGOs and state administrations were often established many years ago. The policy dialogue between NGOs and public administration occurs at the state level; however, it takes place almost invisibly in a closed system that favours established organisations and brings about a high cost for newcomers to get involved. For example, migrants do not participate directly in this dialogue, and their positions are mediated by established NGOs. Organisations, perceived mostly as service providers, have a limited capacity for watchdog activities and critical policy work. Critical and collaborative functions of NGOs often go hand in hand, based on informal alliances between several persons on both sides and the representation of NGOs in established fora.

Meta-Organisations and Transaction Costs

The whole sector is represented by the umbrella organisation—Consortium of Migrants Assisting Organisations. The Consortium has a lean office with a team consisting of five persons (some with part-time contracts only) and uses a diverse portfolio of funding resources, such as small grants from the municipality of Prague, international donors or EU funds. The consortium currently gathers 18 NGOs that are active in migration and represents them in their advocacy initiatives. In fact, the NGO representatives stress that they do not attempt to influence the policy-making process separately and that they prioritise (thanks to common perspectives on the MRAS' agenda) the representation of NGOs' voices through the consortium. 'Services give organisations good knowledge of praxis, and they [the consortium] spread it out through their research and advocacy activities' (a director of an NGO).

Such an approach might help them to avoid conflating their service provision initiatives—which require a certain degree of alignment with the state—with more critical, advocacy-driven initiatives. 'This might sound cowardly, but I believe that we need to enter the debate cautiously. I do not want my organisation to face [a] difficult situation if I would make some strong statement about Czechs as xenophobes' (an NGO representative).

The Consortium organises policy roundtables and conferences. More recently, the consortium has called for the stronger involvement of actors, such as local political representatives and employers, who have only rarely joined integration debates and initiatives. The consortium members are involved in research projects and have published policy papers, participated in the evaluation project and published an overview of legal changes. The role of the

consortium is also informational. In particular, the representatives of non-Prague NGOs recognise the importance of the umbrella organisation. They view the consortium as a valuable source of information about legislative changes, migration policy and activities of other organisations. As such, the umbrella organisation has an important networking function and is a source of shared inspiration. 'Of course, there are differences in approaches of different organisations, but we can talk it through' (an NGO representative).

Through the lens of transaction costs theory, the Consortium actively searches for information that it shares among its members, looks for policy actors who are willing to cooperate, participates in policy dialogue, transfers ideas through media, and monitors and evaluates policy programmes (see Table 1). Such activities save costs for individual members or provide them with services for which costs will otherwise be too high for individual members. In terms of civil society meta-organisations, search costs relate to research and policy reports, informing members of news in migration policies and providing information on migration law. Screening costs are tied to looking for partners from different fields and establishing a dialogue with them. Bargaining costs are associated with establishing and maintaining platforms for exchange and dialogue among member organisations. Transfer costs are linked to communication with the media and the broad public and the transfer of best practices from NGOs to policymakers. Evaluating public policy and monitoring legislative changes correspond to monitoring costs, and organising policy advocacy is associated with enforcement costs.

Other types of transaction costs also are mitigated: (1) performance and (2) development. *Performance costs* represent the field symbolically and institutionally. When the performance costs for critical action are too high due to the dependency of individual organisations on funding and their precarious conditions, the meta-organisation can perform critically on their behalf. Performance costs are particularly relevant in the Czech context, where the attempts of the third sector are viewed with hostility. Finally, maintaining the meta-organisation is also a way to make the field itself visible. *Development costs* are related to the transformation processes and the temporal evolution of organisations. The consortium organises professional training and workshops on topics relevant to the work of its member organisations. The participation in meta-organisations provides individual member organisations with a platform for reflection, innovation and development.

Table 1 Meta-organisation and transactional costs

Type of transactional costs	Activities
Search	Preparing policy reports and research compilations on varied topics connected to migration Publishing a newsletter about members' activities and recent policy changes Providing information on migration law
Screening	Participating in and initiating meetings with relevant stakeholders among politicians, civil servants, experts, businesspeople, academics and others Providing journalists with contacts among experts in the field
Bargaining	Engaging in cooperation and exchange of good practices among members by organising regular meetings of four working groups: social work, legal counselling, advocacy and lobbying, and communication and media
Transfer	Organising debates and seminars on the current most relevant topics Holding cultural events and educational activities Holding special meetings for journalists and publishing press releases Providing background materials on migration-related topics Transferring NGOs' experiences to policymaking
Monitoring	Evaluating public policies and monitoring new legislative changes
Enforcement	Engaging in policy advocacy, negotiations with policymakers and power relations
Performance	Representing the field symbolically and institutionally undertaking critical policy work
Development	Conducting professional training and workshops Strengthening reflexivity and innovation Evolving the entire field

Discussion

The consortium embodied the characteristics of a meta-organisation. It fulfils Ahrne and Brunsson's (2008) definition of meta-organisations: It facilitates interactions among members, organises collective actions and contributes to the creation of a collective identity. The organisation combines both functions described by Laurent et al. (2020). The inward functions operate through workshops, roundtables and information sharing. The outward function is present in representing NGOs in policy fora, including the Committee for the Rights of Foreigners, and actively communicating with the media and the public. Furthermore, from the perspective of the ecology of games (Berardo & Lubell, 2019), meta-organisations can adopt functions that have high costs for individual organisations or represent a risk for their survival. Through the delegation of such functions, individual organisations might avoid resource dependency, realise activities that are too costly for them and, through their personal connections, facilitate social learning.

In the delegation between individual NGOs and the umbrella organisation, transaction costs play a crucial role. However, established types of transaction costs primarily deal with procedural and information aspects and only partially explore the dynamics of power and politics, as well as the more subtle social and communication aspects

of meta-organisations. To address these gaps, we aim to extend the listed types of transaction costs. Inspired by Laurent and colleagues' (2020) focus on legitimacy, this approach could also provide a more in-depth understanding of how meta-organisations enhance both their legitimacy and that of their members.

First, performance costs are particularly connected with the outward functions of meta-organisations (see Laurent et al., 2020), notably with the perceptions of meta-organisations by the representatives of NGOs. Working as a symbolic shield and based on third-sector representativeness, the legitimacy of the third sector could be enhanced, as previously suggested by Laurent et al. (2020). Performance costs, in a sense, represent prerequisites of enforcement costs. The increased legitimacy, as well as the appropriate symbolic connotations of a meta-organisation, can enhance policy advocacy capacities. Second, the notion of development costs is related to the inward functions of meta-organisations (see Laurent et al., 2020).

Conclusion

NGOs in the Czech Republic find themselves in a difficult position. The system in which Czech NGOs dealing with migration operates can be characterised by highly uncertain resource distribution with a strong preference for service

provision. The fact that integration is not considered a social problem results in the long-term inertia of the government finance of the NGO sector. Emphasis on professionalism and established services seems to be the main approach to coping with such challenging circumstances. Predominantly formal collaboration in combination with the importance of personal networks with policymakers creates unequal opportunities for organisations and increases transaction costs to participate in policymaking and advocacy activities.

Meta-organisations adopt functions that have transactionally high costs for individual organisations or that are too risky for them. Several structural drivers facilitate such delegation: (1) a hostile environment, (2) a strong inertia in financing and supporting service provision, (3) a lack of state interest in integration policy and involvement of NGOs in policymaking, (4) distrust of state actors on the local level and (5) a closed policy system with the importance of informal connections. Due to the precarity of funding and hostility of the general population, Czech NGOs are more concerned with the reactions of the general population and local government than with the voice of the immigrants, themselves, since it is necessary for their survival.

This system significantly increases transaction costs for individual organisations for social learning (identifying and amplifying the importance of issues, facilitating the voice of marginalised stakeholders, building bridges among diverse stakeholders, or monitoring and assessing solutions; see Brown & Timmer, 2006). Thus, these drivers structure the room for umbrella organisations that might find their niche within the limitations of the system. The meta-organisation provides its members with a shield, making their policies, notably, the way that they are implemented and less visible, and creating a safe space for collaboration and policymaking.

The transactional cost economy teaches us that meta-organisations usually succeed in areas where these transactional costs are high for individual members. However, traditional transactional costs theory overlooks one aspect that is crucial for civil society meta-organisations—performance and development costs. Civil society meta-organisations play an important role in constructing the specific policy field that has established the expertise of their members and the distinctiveness of their experiences. The development of this notion is inspired by Jessop's (2008) understanding of a meta-organisation as a form of meta-governance, which contributes to the reflexive revision and evolution of organisations based on external inputs, often inspired by expert knowledge. In this vein, the consortium contributes as a platform that enhances the reflexive understanding of member NGOs and their re-development.

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