

The Transnational Advocacy Market – Pragmatic Altruism of Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs)

Transnarodowy rynek pomocy – pragmatyczny altruizm organizacji pozarządowych (NGOs)

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Abstract: The subject of this article is non-governmental organisations (NGOs), their specificities and strategies of action. It adopts the approach represented by transnationalists in international relations, who focus on processes that take place across state borders between state and non-state actors. Among these actors are NGOs, representing a very diverse group in terms of their objectives, structure and operating techniques. A market-based approach to the activities of NGOs is also demonstrated, pointing to their pragmatic altruism stemming from the need to raise funds to realise their philanthropic goals and ideas. Additionally, the article analyses the concept of a transnational advocacy market within which NGOs operate between supply and demand mechanisms.

Keywords: NGOs, transnational advocacy market, NGO funding, action tactics

Streszczenie: Artykuł został poświęcony organizacjom pozarządowym (NGOs), ich specyfice i strategii działania. W rozważaniach przyjęto podejście reprezentowane przez transnacionalistów w stosunkach międzynarodowych, którzy koncentrują się na procesach przebiegających ponad granicami państw między podmiotami państwowymi i pozapaństwowymi. Do tych podmiotów należą NGOs, stanowiąc bardzo zróżnicowaną grupę, jeżeli chodzi o cele, strukturę i techniki działania. Ukazano także podejście rynkowe odnośnie do działalności organizacji pozarządowych, wskazując na ich pragmatyczny altruizm wynikający z konieczności gromadzenia środków na realizację filantropijnych celów i idei. W artykule przeanalizowano również pojęcie transnarodowego rynku pomocy, w którego ramach między mechanizmami podaży i popytu działają NGOs.

Słowa kluczowe: organizacje pozarządowe, transnarodowy rynek pomocy, finansowanie NGOs, taktyki działania

*I don't know why one place gets attention and another not.
[...] It's like a lottery, where there are 50 victimized
groups always trying to get the winning ticket,
and they play every night and they lose every night.*

JAN EGELAND, United Nations Under-Secretary General
for Humanitarian Affairs (Hope 10.06.2004)

The dynamics of changes in contemporary international relations as a result of the emergence of non-state entities, and thus the emergence of transnational space, have created a new quality of multi-sectoral interactions in the international environment. The term “transnational” is used to define relations that cross state borders, where at least one of the actors does not represent the government of the state. It examines “non-governmental organisation” (NGO) actors in international relations as their initiators and creators, in their interactions with each other and with states. Transnationalists do not deny the important position of the state in the international environment, but point to its inefficiency in the face of environmental challenges, opportunities and needs of new actors (Rosenau 1997), resulting from the avoidance of many phenomena of the jurisdiction of the state within its territorial boundaries and the dominance of the selfish approach in the implementation of its goals. Many proponents of the transnational approach believe that the increasing number and type of actors in the international environment, as well as the interactions and dependencies that run across national borders, complicate international relations to such an extent that the classical realist approach does not offer solutions to many contemporary problems, such as financial crises, the depletion of natural resources, terrorism, the issue of global poverty, epidemics and pandemics or environmental threats. The growth of transnational linkages has created – in addition to the space for the realisation of the selfish interests of nation-states – an alternative political and economic space enabling actions based on cooperation and altruism on the one hand (e.g., some NGOs, and civil society) and competition in the market on the other (e.g., between transnational corporations). Such an approach has become particularly relevant for societies oppressed by authoritarian power, limiting the rights and freedoms of citizens.

As Sanjeev Khagram and James Riker argue, transnationalism transforms world politics by consolidating and transferring some power to weaker actors and universalising global norms, including human rights and freedoms

or ecological norms, among others (Khagram, Riker, Sikkink 2002: 14). The factor contributing to this process was and is the development of modern technology of information transmission, which allows for a quick response to emerging conflicts between the state and society. Transnationalists and transnational civil society organisations themselves maintain that NGOs, the media, journalists, transnational advocacy networks and other non-profit organisations represent ethical actors in the international environment, sensitive to injustice and ready to help. NGOs play an important role in international development and assistance. Transnational actors therefore bring particular hope to movements fighting against repressive state governments or defending certain rights. Richard Falk argues that the proliferation of such “ethical actors” creates a cosmopolitan democracy based on “human governance” and human solidarity (Falk 1995: 23). The activity of transnational non-governmental entities gives the possibility of cross-border influence on the internal activities of the state. However, the question arises whether there are established or individual strategies for their action in the transnational space. Can it be said that they operate in the transnational space in isolation from the pragmatic and realistic reality of many governments? The answer to these questions is the subject of this article. At the same time, it is assumed that the decisions of individual NGOs on financial, technical or instrumental support for social movements are based on pragmatic mechanisms. NGOs, when making decisions, are guided not only by ideological motives but also by rationality.

The literature on NGOs includes the concept of “Transnational Advocacy Networks,” which refers to a network of NGOs representing similar ideas and goals (Keck, Sikkink 2018). This article uses this term to create a “transnational advocacy market” in which NGOs representing specific needs and interests operate. The analysis focuses primarily on the strategies of NGOs as market players, where pragmatism is intertwined with altruism. Further questions arise as to why some problems attract attention and capital and others do not (on what it depends), and what methods and strategies social movements should use to be noticed in a market of innumerable needs. In the first part of the article, the concepts of actors and the transnational advocacy market will be defined, followed by selected strategies for the operation of NGOs from the point of view of market mechanisms. The explanation is based on supply-demand theory, treating NGOs as entities, both on the supply and demand side.

1. Transnational actors

Transnational actors include transnational corporations, international organisations, non-governmental organisations, social movements, and foundations whose activities and organisational structure are of a cross-border nature. There are also organized criminal groups and terrorist organisations. The subject of analysis in the article is NGOs and the forms of their organisation and strategies of action. Due to the huge variety of these actors, it is difficult to define them precisely enough to take into account all their features, functions and actions. In the literature on the subject, you can find different terms for NGOs, taking into account their specifics. Margaret Karns and Karen Mingst (Karns, Mingst 2004: 18) give more than a dozen names according to different criteria, such as “anti-governmental organisations” (AGOs), “business and industry” NGOs (BINGOs), so-called “advocacy coalitions” (ANGOs), operational NGOs (ONGOs), transnational and global social movements (TSMO and GSM), or transnational and global NGOs (TRANGOs). The concept of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) is also distinguished from international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), the former of which are established in one country but carry out activities of a cross-border nature, and the latter, in addition to such activities, have their representative offices in different countries.

A fairly general definition of NGOs, although somewhat universal, is that formulated by the Secretary-General of the United Nations: “An NGO is a non-profit entity whose members are citizens or an association of citizens of one or more States carrying out activities based on the collective will of its members in response to the needs of the members of one or a group of States with which the NGO works” (Otto 1996: 104).

This definition is broad enough to include most non-governmental organisations, but it lacks, firstly, the element of identifying with the problem, and secondly, precisely with the “problem,” which does not need to be empowered. The definition proposed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) seems more apt: “Non-governmental organisations are independent and voluntary associations of people acting together over a period of time for a specific purpose other than the acquisition of power, the making of money or illegal activities” (Willets n.d.). The definition should be supplemented by the fact that NGOs can meet formal requirements to varying degrees (and thus appear or not in official international registers) and have a narrower (national) or

wider (international) scope. In addition, NGOs play an important role in raising the interest of states and the international community in certain phenomena and problems.

NGOs are an essential element of civic social movements. If, e.g., a protest or demonstration lasts more than a few days, existing or newly formed organisations can give it a certain shape, transforming the amorphous mass into an organized pressure group. On the other hand, social movements are made up of various organisations that work together to achieve a goal and raise a sense of common identity and identification with the goal. Hence, social movements are more than coalitions of NGOs, but narrower than civil society. The term “civil society organisations” (*UNDP and Civil Society Organizations* n.d.) has a broader meaning and denotes all public involvement in state policy-making, their activities and interactions (*UNDP and Civil Society Organizations* n.d.), and includes individuals, organisations and social movements. The addition of the complementarity term “transnational civil society organisations” allows the subjects to be narrowed down to those that operate and/or pursue their objectives in the transnational space. Andrzej Dumala believes that NGOs are evolving from the local, national and international levels to the transnational space (Dumala 1995).

NGOs are diverse in terms of 1) the purpose of the activity (such as protecting human rights, pro-environmental, supporting or denouncing some idea); 2) the degree of independence (from governmental, business or criminal group influence); 3) the number of supporters (depending on whether they represent the interests of, e.g., the general public or a narrower group); 4) the degree of organisation (having an internal structure or completely decentralised). According to the criterion of impact, there are organisations with a global, international or local reach. In terms of functions, one can mention NGOs that specialize in building networks of coalitions that bring together smaller organisations with a similar goal of action, those engaged in publicizing certain phenomena in the international forum, or those looking for sources of funding. NGOs therefore carry out support and assistance activities, not service activities.

From the point of view of the financial strategies of NGOs in the market, which are the subject of research later in this article, it is necessary to mention non-governmental organisations established and financed within the framework of official development assistance provided by states (the so-called ODANGO – ODA – financed NGOs), non-governmental organisations established to raise foreign funds (DONGO – Donor-Organized NGOs) and

non-governmental organisations established and supervised by donors (DODONGO – Donor-Dominated NGOs; *UNDP and Civil Society Organizations* n.d.). According to the type of activity, NGOs can be divided into operational and campaigning organisations. The former are tasked with acquiring the funding, helpful materials and volunteers needed for the project. Receiving material support requires knowledge for the proper preparation of the application, and then a report on the use of these funds. Hence, operational NGOs have a certain bureaucratic structure and trained staff. Campaigning organisations are more spontaneous and their main objective is to generate the widest possible public and media interest at a specific time (*UNDP and Civil Society Organizations* n.d.).

Due to the scope of activities of non-governmental organisations in the global, regional and national dimensions, we can distinguish those that strive for change at the national or international level. This division also allows us to distinguish between small social movements at the national level, seeking financial support from outside, and large non-governmental organisations, providing various forms of support to these smaller movements or organisations.

On the basis of the argument and for the purposes of this article, the following definition is adopted: non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are non-profit organisations organised at the local, state or international level with specific action objectives (e.g., philanthropic, development, social), implemented in the national or international advocacy market.

2. Sources of funding for NGOs

As participants in the transnational market, NGOs, despite their often lofty goals, have to adapt their implementation to the means (tangible and intangible) at their disposal. The financing of NGOs is a “sensitive” issue with regard to maintaining their independence. Amnesty International, e.g., does not accept grants from governments in order to maintain its impartiality towards its objectives. Hence, a common strategy used by NGOs is to seek capital from various sources, which at the same time allows for preserving the financial security of the organisation. According to Lee Davis, funding can come from three sources: private, public, and state (Davis 2000: 16). The same author reports that a significant portion of the funds in NGOs

come from private donors and membership contributions, although there is a large group of those that have their financial condition linked to the state government (Davis 2000: 17). Nicolae Bibu lists seven sources of funding for NGOs: 1) unconditional payment/donation; 2) sponsorship; 3) grants; 4) allocation of funds from the public budget (subsidy); 5) granting of tax exemptions; 6) partial participation in personal income tax; 7) membership fees (Bibu, Lisetchia, Brancua 2013: 487).

Given the territorial scope of the action and thus the size of the organisation, it may be financed from sources transferred from the internal or international market, or both. International funding can be regional or global. There may sometimes be a fear that NGOs pursuing some goals at the state level, and financed from foreign sources, assimilate some external ideas into their strategies of action and lose the confidence of the group they represent (cf. Łapińska 2017).

3. Transnational advocacy market

At the transnational level, there are interactions between global economic actors, transnational organizations, civil society and nation-states. Transnational politics takes place at the intersection of the state's interior and its external environment, but also on a local scale, where we are faced with a multi-level diversity of actors, different in terms of tools of influence, capital, access to decision-making centres or information (Beck 2005: 160, 162). This diversity is evident among NGOs and some of them pursue policies at the national level and some at the global level, but the interests of both meet above national borders.

The concept of the market refers to the place of transactions between entities, and its types can be determined according to the following criteria: 1) territorial scope – in this aspect, we distinguish local, national, international and global markets; 2) level of development – according to this criterion, markets are divided into those covering developed and developing countries; 3) purpose and timing – at this level, a distinction is made between markets oriented towards quick profits and aimed at meeting immediate needs, and long-term plans that prioritise growth. It is also possible to define the market using the market participant criterion and distinguish between the market of participants seeking capital and the market with

certain instruments or financial surpluses that the former need. It also allows you to separate markets by type of transaction and divide them into markets on the supply and demand side.

The concept of the market is closely related to economics, especially finance. With the help of many mathematical formulas and statistical data, it is possible to determine the balance sheet of losses and profits or assets and liabilities on the part of participants in this market. So can transnational civil society organisations, which are supposed to act ethically and/or altruistically for higher ideas, be seen as actors in a market dominated by absolute mechanisms based on profit and loss?

Clifford Bob used market instruments to analyse the strategies of non-governmental organizations, proceeding from the assumption that the scale of suffering in the world is enormous and inadequate to help everyone. Hence, there must be specific rules governing the activity of NGOs in some matters, and leaving other issues beyond their attention (Bob 2005: 1-14). Transnational actors operate in a transnational market, which can be defined as a collection of actors and a set of mechanisms that allow these actors to interact across national borders, one part of which represents supply and the other demand. The transnational market also refers to the objective of non-state actors, the objective being to disseminate and promote certain principles and ideas that are universal and cross-border, but also to extend their influence and position in such a market.

Clifford Bob's market model distinguishes two players among NGOs: 1) local social movements – loose or organized and formalized groups whose rights are violated; 2) transnational NGOs – with tools and means to help such groups (Bob 2006). NGOs raise issues, raise funds and pressure the governments of law-breaking countries. The involvement of a transnational player in a local issue can bring about a change in the behaviour of state authorities and, for him, appreciation and recognition in the transnational market. Thus, there is a community of interests between these two players, where interactions arise from moral but also rational motives. However, given this interdependence, C. Bob wonders if it is local movements that seek help or if NGOs are more likely to research the market for issues that require their involvement (Bob 2006).

By analysing the concept of a transnational advocacy market in economic terms, "aid" becomes a commodity of transaction between buyer and seller. Local social movements (nationalist, liberation, human rights, pro-environmental, etc.) are the demand side of the transnational market – they are

“aid buyers” – and transnational NGOs are the supply side – they provide aid. However, if the subject of the transaction is a specific issue, e.g., the protection of human rights, then local movements become a supply side (they provide the problem for intervention), and NGOs, taking up the challenge and engaging their “capital” in the issue, are a demand side (the capital, in this case, is the knowledge, money and contacts they have). Thus, a community of interests arises between one and the other. A transnational advocacy market can be defined as a place of agreement between buyers and suppliers of an aid or problem, where the aid takes the form of monetary, technical, knowledge or personal support.

Globally, the majority of NGOs with aid capital come from highly developed countries, while transnational market players seeking various forms of external support come mainly from developing countries.

4. Strategies for actors in the transnational advocacy market

The strategy is the main guideline of the players’ behaviour in the face of the emerging market situation, taking into account their own organisational, human, financial, as well as technical potential. It is determined simultaneously by external and internal factors and should determine the benefits to the player in relation to the expectations of the environment.

Pointing to the rationalized strategies of NGOs, one cannot deny them the motives of empathy that distinguish them from power-and-influence-oriented states or profit-oriented transnational corporations. Their primary mission is to promote specific principles, ideas and policies. On the other hand, NGOs are – like the rest – organisations that want to survive, grow and be recognized. Their involvement in the problems or issues of individual social groups simultaneously becomes a process of their legitimacy in the international environment and the achievement of goals as an organisation. The task of social movements is to draw the attention of the case’s patrons and the media to themselves and to receive rhetorical and material support. Certain issues raised by civil society at the state level require the involvement of external players of NGOs in order to increase the effectiveness of the protests undertaken and the expected change. This peculiar duality of interests of two players can be put in terms of exchange or transaction made in the market between them. The article uses the term

“pragmatic altruism,” which is intended to symbolize the dualism at the level of non-governmental organizations, which, when choosing beneficiaries of assistance, must pay attention to their own sources of funding, the burden of the problem and the prospects for the development of a given social movement.

Clifford Bob argues that many scientific analyses of NGOs treat them as almost identical entities, usually differing in purpose. However, issues such as financial capacity, the degree of professionalism of employees, credibility in the market, and links with other actors that allow for the hierarchisation of NGOs in the transnational market are overlooked (Bob 2012). For those seeking help, those with the most influence and financial resources are often the most desirable. However, this does not mean that smaller ones are less involved in aid activities. Their tasks may have a different character. For example, they can help local movements to find stronger players in the transnational market and to organise the taking over of the patronage of the problem by these institutions.

Faced with an excess of need for assistance, NGOs with capital and market positions can afford to select the issues that best fit their profile and needs. Often, supporting a specific issue is an element of an organisation’s long-term project. Social movements, on the other hand, usually simultaneously seek help from many organisations that may be potentially interested. NGOs therefore have an advantage because they are the ones who actually make the decision to choose the problem that needs help.

In order to change the existing situation in the country, local civil society organisations must first attract the greatest interest of foreign media, non-governmental organisations, public opinion, and governments of other countries. The strategy of attracting international attention can take the form of individual lobbying of potential patrons or awareness of the phenomenon on a large international scale. In the first case, it is personal contact with the organisations that provide assistance (you can use email, phone or direct meeting, e.g., during a conference), in the second, the media are used to publicize the issue. Lobbying allows you to maintain control over the transmitted information, which may be distorted in the transmission and interpretation of the media. Local civil society organizations usually choose the least costly strategies of action in the form of peaceful or transgressive protests. Strikes, marches, rallies, and demonstrations attract media attention, and acts of violence and terror generate even more interest (Bob 2012).

When analysing a phenomenon requiring assistance (intervention) in terms of market mechanisms, it should be treated as a product that needs to be well advertised. It is necessary to determine the category of the problem (what it concerns), what is the form of abuse, what negative consequences it can entail, what is the purpose of the protest, and its cultural or ethical dimension. The greater the coherence of these categories between social movements and NGOs, the greater the chance for aid measures to be involved. Many issues can be perceived very emotionally in the local market, but look trivial and provincial in the transnational market. Hence, social movements should outwardly give them a universal character, demonise opponents, use intelligent rhetoric and appeal to the empathy of observers of this phenomenon. Therefore, territorial conflicts can fall into the category of ecological problems, and ethnic conflicts as a violation of the principles of democracy. It is therefore necessary to “promote” the problem and “sell” it according to the preferences of the potential sponsor/investor.

NGOs are happy to help when the costs and risks are lower. The risk assessment may concern coherence or lack thereof due to cultural values held by movements and organisations. Certain rules of behaviour accepted in developing countries may not be acceptable in the value system adopted in developed countries, where most NGOs come from, and vice versa (e.g., equality of rights between men and women). So many NGOs prefer to work with movements that share a similar worldview. Similarly, when movements use peaceful tactics, do not resort to violence and are themselves victims of abuse, they increase their chance of receiving support from the organisation. In addition, transnational NGOs prefer to support groups fighting for issues that make a difference not only locally, but also regionally, internationally, and preferably globally.

Before providing support, transnational NGOs collect information about the situation in the country, international circumstances, the problem, assess the costs of involvement and the likelihood of bringing about change. They also draw on information provided by the media. Clifford Bob also mentions the use of international standing by large NGOs, which is a kind of assessment of social movements, on which the decision on the provision, form and amount of assistance depends. Among the items analysed, receiving support in the past by an organization raises its standing with subsequent applications (Bob 2012).

The effectiveness of applying for help is also influenced by the “quality” of movement leaders. Knowledge of a foreign language – preferably

English – allows you to talk directly with such a leader. Important are his skills in mediation, knowledge of diplomatic procedures, charisma, as well as his media recognition (e.g., Dalai Lama). Leaders should be able to coordinate movements, plan their strategies of action, and present the most important message of the movement's activities to the outside world in an appropriate way (Boli, Thomas 1999: 123). It is much easier for NGOs to identify their goals of action with one person than with a large social movement. Hence, one can speak of using a strategy of personalising movement for marketing purposes.

The adoption by an NGO of some kind of strategy to operate according to market principles does not mean devaluing the values and objectives it wishes to pursue. It certainly creates a certain network of connections that forces certain behaviours and trends. On the other hand, the economization of relations between the subjects of international relations forces them to behave rationally, determining their existence and, consequently, the power of influence.

Conclusion

The strategies and techniques of actors in the transnational advocacy market highlighted above are only outlined in general terms. The quoted positions by C. Bob examine them in great detail and even more clearly indicate the rationalization of the behaviour of the analysed entities in the market.

Important for the growth of the number and activity of these entities is the development of modern technology and the speed of information transfer. It allows for instant news of the situation in different parts of the world and is the first stimulus to activate the international community.

The transnational advocacy market is constantly evolving as a result of the interactions between its actors. New political situations are emerging that require the intervention of NGOs and the involvement of civil society, which give a new quality to the international environment. While altruism, compassion, and empathy may be the motivation behind NGOs' actions, they must also make a rational choice so that they do not lose liquidity as a result of providing financial support to "all" those in need. Among social movements, there are winners and losers, so they need to develop strategies of action coherent with the expectations of NGOs. Both parties need

each other to achieve their goals and survive in the market. The community of interests of actors creates a transnational market for support, which, unfortunately, is characterized by an imbalance between the size of needs (demand) and the possibilities of assistance (supply). The study does not address the fact that even powerful NGOs are financed from external sources (grants, fees for services, e.g., expertise, support from private foundations, corporations, and wealthy people) and also have to take measures to provide them with a permanent source of income. As has been shown in the definition of transnational actors, there is a certain fluidity between the concept of social movements and NGOs, which, despite their multifaceted diversity, can be called transnational civil society organisations.

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