

FOOD AND HUMANITARIAN NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS IN GREECE: SYNERGIES, NETWORKS OF KNOWLEDGE AND INNOVATION

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Abstract

Civil society organizations (CSOs) provide humanitarian services, often substituting the welfare state. CSOs have developed new capacities and knowledge-based innovative methodologies to efficiently deliver quality services. Moreover, they participate in formal and informal networks and coalitions with diverse actors that have a positive impact on creativity and innovation and permit the transfer of knowledge and source-pooling. Networking and co-operation between CSOs further multiply the impact of their actions and provide more effective management of contributions in-kind in times of humanitarian emergency. The purpose of this paper is to examine whether and how these global trends are observed in the case of Greece's CSO ecosystem. During the last years, Greece has experienced both an economic and a migration/refugee crisis, which have required the supply of emergency humanitarian assistance. In this paper, we will examine the experiences of food and humanitarian CSOs operating in Greece during the last two years and investigate the following topics: a) the extent to which they have been implementing actions autonomously, or in cooperation with other organizations; b) with what type of actors CSOs usually partner to deliver services and for which reasons; c) how effective are these partnerships and what problems frequently occur; and f) how do CSOs manage contributions in-kind. Methodologically, our research will be based on a nationwide quantitative survey with a representative sample of national and international food and humanitarian CSOs carrying out operations in the Greek territory.

Keywords: *civil society organizations; knowledge management; humanitarian assistance; in-kind aid; Greek economic crisis; migration crisis;*

Introduction

During the last decades, the eruption of humanitarian crises has become very frequent. Humanitarian crises last longer, affecting critically people's lives and making them susceptible to shocks (UN, 2019). As crises emerge regularly 'humanitarian responses must be quick and context-based to be effective' (IOM, 2018). In such situations, civil society organizations (CSOs) have an important role in providing humanitarian assistance in an often challenging environment. To respond to the increased needs in the humanitarian sector, CSOs have developed new capacities and innovative knowledge-based methodologies. Besides, they formulate connections with formal and informal actors through their participation in networks and coalitions which enhance their creativity and innovation through source-pooling, exchange of knowledge, and transfer of ideas. The complementarity of their actions has a multiplying effect on the efficiency of their services. In addition, networking and cooperation between CSOs affects positively the management of in-kind donations during humanitarian emergencies. This is very important as in-kind donations offered in the aftermath of humanitarian crises can cause logistical chaos and disturb relief distribution.

Global trends lead CSOs to consider collaborations as an almost essential tool to achieve their goals (Carreras & Inglesias, 2013, p.12). Indeed, diverse actors can produce different results on the delivery of effective assistance based on their mandates, size, interests, comparative advantage, and power (OECD, 2014, p.12). In this context, several studies have discussed how collaborations between aid agencies, international and local CSOs have contributed to successful operations (AbouAssi et al., 2017; Altahir, 2013).

The role of CSOs in the provision of humanitarian assistance has been highlighted in the case of Greece which has recently experienced both a severe economic and a migration/refugee crisis. At the beginning of the economic crisis in Greece, the voluntary sector was underdeveloped and the civil society “atrophic”. However, social solidarity groups and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have mobilized to support the “victims” of the crisis since 2010 (Sotiropoulos & Bourikos, 2014) and new collaborations were established at an unprecedented level. The revitalization of civil society – engaged in various activities – was widely recorded after the outbreak of the crisis, even though state financing towards CSOs suffered a severe curtailment (Huliaras, 2015; Loukidou, 2014). In this respect, our article investigates whether the global trends on CSO collaboration and transfer of knowledge applies in the Greek context. Also, it analyses the experiences of CSOs in Greece in managing in-kind donations. The second part of this article investigates global trends on coordination and collaboration between CSOs providing relief services with a special focus on factors that affect the effectiveness of their activities. The same section also analyses the management of in-kind donations during humanitarian crises. The third section presents the case of the Greek civil society sector, focusing on how collaborations among CSOs actors have emerged during the economic and migrant/refugee crisis. It explains the methodology of our survey and analyses our main empirical findings. Finally, the fourth part discusses our conclusions.

Collaborations in humanitarian crises

During humanitarian crises, a large array of diverse actors – such as UN agencies and other international organizations, governments, foundations, INGOs, and LNGOs and private companies - are engaged to provide relief. In complex humanitarian emergencies, all actors operating in the field are expected to become part of a co-operative and well-coordinated effort (UNHCR, 2013). As a result, we remark the development of various interactions and collaborations at both horizontal (i.e., similar types of actors) and vertical (i.e., different type of actors) levels (Balcik et al., 2010). In the latter case, we observe, for instance, that INGOs provide resources and access to funding to LNGOs that have local expertise and knowledge of the conditions in the ground in the field of operations (Tzifakis & Huliaras, 2013).

The concepts of co-operation, co-ordination, and collaboration in the humanitarian sector remain relatively vague. Wankmüller and Reiner (2020, p.243) reviewed the relevant literature in the relief supply chain management and remarked on the growth of different approaches. They argue that for some researchers’ collaboration might be the next step of cooperation while co-ordination a prerequisite for cooperation and collaboration. Another approach sets co-ordination and co-operation as the “foundations” for collaboration (ibid). In any case, there is little doubt that during an emergency, such interactions and relationships among diverse actors are crucial for

alleviating suffering. For this research, the term “collaboration” is used to describe interactions and joint projects where diverse CSOs participate in humanitarian emergencies (Saab et al., 2013). As collaboration is related to a long-term process, trust among partners is vital as CSOs have to share risks; moreover, similarities over organizational characteristics (culture, norms, language) promote collaboration (Wankmüller & Reiner, *ibid*). On the other hand, co-operation is defined as “the process of [NGOs] operating alongside other NGOs towards a common mission, sharing information and adjusting tasks in line with specifications of the disaster setting” (Wankmüller & Reiner, *ibid*, p.259). Through co-operation, duplication of activities is averted (Murdie, 2014), while transparency positively affects co-operation. Co-ordination is defined as “the process of organizing, aligning and differentiating of participating NGOs’ actions [...] to reach a shared goal” (Wankmüller & Reiner, *ibid*, p.259); however, for effective coordination, the sharing of information and resources is of utmost importance (see also Steigenberger, 2016).

Collaborations among CSOs mitigate the risks of emergencies as they contribute to better identification and assessment of the prevailing conditions on the ground (Twigg & Bottomley, 2011). What is more, through collaborations CSOs can increase their impact (Meyer, 1997), improve the quality of their services (Gazley & Brudney, 2007, p.392) and overall, achieve goals that no CSO can achieve alone (Balcik et al., 2010). Sapat & al. (2019) argue that collaborations among CSOs and other actors in emergencies offer positive effects such as improved cost-effectiveness, access to more resources, and knowledge dissemination. So, innovative methodologies could be developed through learning, affecting organizations’ effectiveness, but also the operation of the whole humanitarian sector (Ramalingam et al., 2009, p.37). This acts as a counterweight to the institutional isomorphism (Corfield & al., 2013, p.181) that is being shaped in the civil society sector - including the humanitarian field (Ramalingam et al., 2009) - where actors adopt mainstream practices to “look good” (Corfield et al., *ibid*) while becoming heavily bureaucratic and ineffective in addressing needs at grass-root level (Korten, 1990).

However, collaboration in such an environment is a difficult task due to the high complexity and the “non-centralized and multi-organizational” operational conditions (Stephenson & Kehler, 2004, p.5), on the one hand, and the lack of a single organization (a UN body for example) that has been authorized to coordinate activities, on the other (Stephenson, 2005). Moreover, collaboration is frequently hindered by the rise of competition among the various actors engaged. In many cases, as donor resources are limited, competition among CSOs appears to be “more beneficial than collective actions” (DeMars, 2005, p.13). Each actor has its interests and capacities (Cunningham, 2012) and a partnership does not have the same meaning for all actors, ranging from simple “coercion” to an honest collaborative attempt (Britton, 2005, p.11). Also, asymmetrical relations between INGOs and LNGOs exist, instead of being equal partnerships (Fernando & Hilhorst, 2006, p.298) over control, setting goals, and operational procedures (Al Adem et al., 2018). Koch (2008) argues that when large numbers of CSOs concentrate in an area, co-operation among them decreases, mainly due to competition for funding. In such cases, increased co-operation is noticed only in fundraising activities, while INGOs are more prone to co-operation as their funding is more secure (*ibid*, p.705). In the case of the Haiti earthquake, INGOs had a central role – receiving the majority of relief funds - and establishing partnerships among them, rather than with LNGOs. The latter were mainly collaborating with other LNGOs (Sapat et al., *ibid*).

Moreover, when competition gets fierce, NGOs might attempt to “undermine competitors, conceal information, and act unilaterally” (Cooley & Ron, 2002, p.17).

The collaboration of humanitarian CSOs is strategically promoted by donors through the establishment of specialized bodies, making active CSOs participation in this a prerequisite for funding (Egger, 2017). However, in cases where NGOs do not have incorporated the networks’ goals and processes, these are most likely to fail or become inefficient (Abelson, 2003). To overcome such issues and establish effective inter-organizational relations, trust between the different partners is vital (Murdie, 2014), especially in humanitarian emergencies, where actors - that probably had not worked together before - have to develop ties in a short period of time, based on “swift trust” (Lu et al. 2018, p.280).

Contributions in-kind

In humanitarian emergencies, a particular issue of concern is the supply by various donors (ranging from organizations to individuals) of aid in-kind. In the academic literature, this flow of items is known as “material convergence” (Fritz & Mathewson, 1957). Such items can be categorized based on priority for addressing needs, as “urgent-for immediate distribution”, “non-urgent distribution” and “non-priority goods-non urgent distribution” (PAHO 2001, p.19). Unsolicited items constitute a high proportion of donations. Holguin-Veras & al. (2014) estimated that it might exceed 50% of total donations. Authorities in Haiti and Japan reported that only 5%-10% of donations sent after the disasters met urgent needs, whereas 60% of donations were not needed (OCHA, 2013, p.11).

Aid in-kind has serious management challenges. Items should be examined, assessed for appropriateness and quality, sorted and stored. Donated goods can only have a positive impact if they address the defined demands of the organizations that are active in the disaster areas (Stapleton et al., 2010). However, as low priority items and even useless items are included, valuable and scarce resources (personnel, infrastructure) are required (Destro & Holguin-Veras, 2011) for classification, labeling and storing - causing logistical chaos and disturbing relief distribution. Small - in volume - donations that come from individuals and small organizations may cause a much more serious logistical problem in comparison to donations from large actors - companies and international organizations (Arnette & Zobel, 2012). Such conditions create congestion and block entry points - thus becoming what has been termed “the second disaster” (Phillips, 2009, p.376). In some cases, due to management difficulties, CSOs might not accept in-kind donations (Balcik et al., 2010). While it seems that in some cases in-kind donations remain an efficient way to provide relief (ANLAP, 2017), governments and international organizations urge companies and individuals to offer cash donations especially for urban environments, where cash transfers have major advantages over in-kind or voucher programs (Cross & Johnston, 2011).

Overall, a well-organized supply chain management is of utmost importance during humanitarian emergencies - as was the case in the Colorado flood disaster in 2012 where a second disaster was averted (Day et al., 2012). In this context, over the last decades, the international community has attempted to embody the lessons learned from the various humanitarian emergencies and increase cooperation and

coordination mechanisms among the diverse actors: various initiatives have been established, such as the UN Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (1992), the ANLAP (1997), the Tsunami Evaluation Coalition (2004), the Code of Conduct, the Sphere Project (Osa, 2013) or the Cluster concept (Jahre and Jensen, 2010). Having briefly presented the debate concerning the international experience, we turn to our case study that focuses on how CSOs in Greece evolved to address emerging humanitarian needs due to the economic and refugee/migrant crises.

The Greek case

During the last decade, Greece faced both an economic and a migration/refugee crisis which required the provision of emergency humanitarian assistance. The economic crisis that broke out in 2009 had social consequences as it necessitated the adoption of severe fiscal adjustment measures which diminished household income and welfare spending (Sotiropoulos & Bourikos, 2014, p.35). Poverty levels increased and inequalities were widened (Simiti, 2015). In the meantime, the Greek civil society sector was “atrophic” and unable to act as a protection fabric for the vulnerable populations affected by the crisis. This situation deteriorated over the next years when a high influx of refugees and migrants started crossing its territorial and sea borders. The migrant/refugee crisis peaked in 2015 when more than 850,000 arrivals were recorded (UNHCR, 2019). Unsurprisingly, the Greek authorities were unprepared and unable to handle the dual crisis. There was an urgent need for the provision of first-aid services, shelter, food, and healthcare to large numbers of people, which the Greek state could not meet due to budgetary constraints and bureaucratic impediments.

In this context, social solidarity groups emerged after 2010, in addition to the revival of non-governmental organizations to assist vulnerable populations (Huliaras, 2015; Loukidou, 2014; Sotiropoulos & Bourikos, 2014). Various initiatives assisting were established at that time: The Greek branches of international NGOs and national NGOs mobilized funds from municipal resources, individual donations, and sponsorships; charitable foundations donated funds and provided technical assistance to CSOs (Sotiropoulos, 2014, p.40) while public organizations, as well as international agencies, were also engaged (Numerato et al., 2019).

These advancements led to the emergence of collaboration structures between CSOs at different levels. CSOs delivered relief services in cooperation with informal social networks and self-help groups (Sotiropoulos, 2014, p.40). Collaborations were also developed between CSOs and municipalities for the establishment of new social solidarity structures such as social grocery shops, social pharmacies, social tuition centers, and municipal gardens (Bourikos, 2013, pp.23-24) as well as between INGOs and local NGOs and solidarity groups (Rozakou, 2018). It should be noted that budget constraints further intensified cooperation between CSOs (Simiti, 2015). Overall, the crisis created new collaborations among multiple actors with often diverse interests to cover emerging needs (Simiti, 2015, p.20).

Methodology

This research's primary data were collected through a closed questionnaire which was designed to reflect the general findings from the literature review. The questionnaire included 11 questions focusing on cooperation between CSOs and the management of in-kind donations. It included both closed and open-ended questions and was distributed in two languages (Greek and English). The questionnaire was created to test the findings of the international literature on global humanitarian crises and trends in humanitarian interventions. More specifically, the first part of the questionnaire focused on networking and cooperation between civil society actors, investigating the benefits of collaboration in the provision in the field of relief services (Meyer, 1997; DeMars, 2005; Cooley & Ron, 2002; Britton, 2005; Abelson, 2003). The second part researches the management of in-kind donations in times of humanitarian emergencies (Fritz & Mathewson, 1957; Holguin-Veras et al., 2014; Stapleton et al., 2010; Destro & Holguin-Veras, 2011; Arnette & Zobel, 2012). To enhance participation in the survey and to safeguard sensitive information provided, respondents remained anonymous. Respondents were sent two reminders within approximately five weeks. Phone calls to all the selected organizations for the survey followed up to ensure wider participation.

Sampling

The initial sample was based on data from a nationwide study on Greek NGOs conducted by the University of the Peloponnese in cooperation with researchers from nine Greek universities and research centers. The research included an on-site survey of Greek NGOs that was completed in 2015. Thus, a database on Greek NGOs was created including valuable data on the CSOs ecosystem in Greece. Through this database, a representative sample was selected for this study, based on specific criteria set by the research team. The sample comprised of humanitarian and food organizations that were operational between 2015 and 2019. Geographically, the organizations should be active in the cities of Athens, and Thessaloniki and on the island of Lesbos and should be operational for at least one year. Based on the above criteria, a representative sample of 80 organizations was initially selected. Further cross-checking of the database revealed that five organizations have ceased their operations, while 12 of them were implementing activities not relevant to the scope of this study. A final list consisting of 54 organizations was compiled. These were the recipients of the on-line questionnaire. Sample organizations included Greek branches of INGOs, foundations, local NGOs, and social solidarity groups that are well known for their activities. The survey collected data from 19 organizations, an answer rate of about 35%. With respect to the organizations which did not participate in the survey, only one organization strictly refused to take part. The questionnaire response rate might be affected by the overflow of requests towards CSOs to participate in similar researches and a lack of motivation for the organizations to contribute. In addition, considering that personnel and volunteers continuously change, the current personnel might not have actually knowledge of activities implemented during the last four years. Finally, some organizations might have considered that the information required was sensitive and, therefore refused to respond, notwithstanding that the survey was based on anonymity.

Findings

The main findings of the report concentrate on CSOs actions that have been implemented either independently or in cooperation with other actors. Interestingly, the great majority of organizations participated in the survey (15 organizations) stated that they have implemented actions in cooperation with other actors. Thus, a collaboration between actors has been considered an important component for the implementation of actions, since the majority of organizations have formed some kind of “alliance” with another actor (Figure 1).

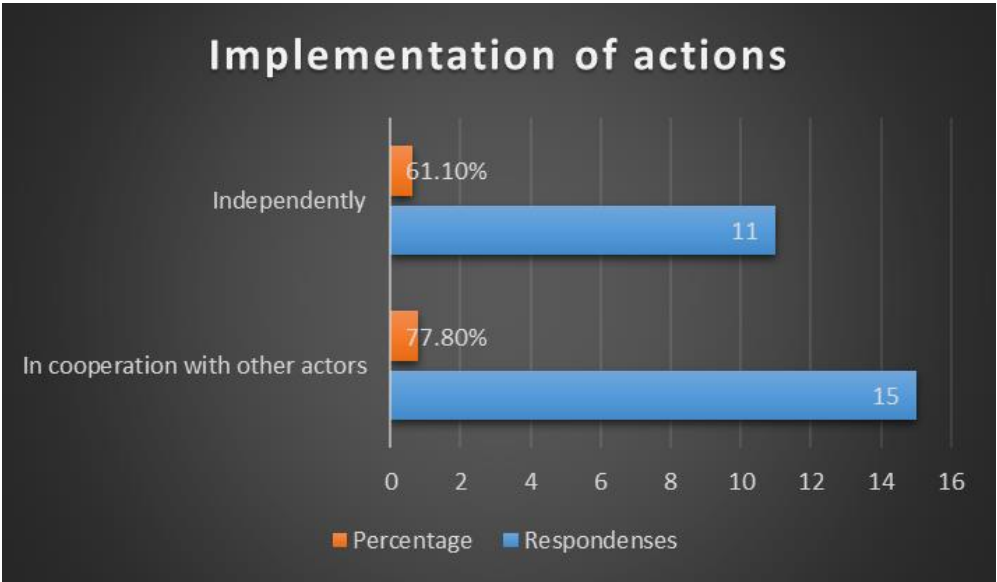


Figure 1. Number of organizations implemented actions independently or in cooperation with other actors

The number of actions implemented differed considerably between organizations, but that depends also on the size of the actors, their capacity, available personnel, and funding sources. As it was reported, the highest number of actions implemented by an organization was 1,250 actions.

This number covers small-scale and large-scale operations on the field. Another organization reported the implementation of 150 actions/programs, and it was the second-highest response. The majority of the organizations stated that they have implemented from 1-15 programs/actions within two years’ period as shown in the graph below (Figure 2):



Figure 2: Large- and small-scale actions implemented by participant organizations

Collaborations have widely been documented among actors active on the ground. CSOs have realized that working collaboratively with other organizations forming alliances and networks can increase their efficiency and manage more effectively their resources. The most common collaborations are established between CSOs as it was reported by 16 organizations. The next most valuable collaborations are with foundations (13 organizations) and companies (11 organizations), which partly depicts the necessity for new funding sources as well as technical expertise. Considering that state funding towards CSOs has been limited and that the main donors in Greece are foundations and companies through their social responsibility funding schemes, civil society organizations need to find sustainable ways to maintain their status and also implement their projects.

The economic and migration crises have resulted in an increased need for CSOs to work closely with government agencies, regional and local bodies, to solve emerging problems and to overcome bureaucratic impediments in Greece. Paradoxically, much less cooperation can be observed between CSOs in Greece and international organizations such as UNHCR, UNICEF, IOM as well as EU bodies. Given that UNHCR and IOM have coordinated many actions during the migration crisis, and EU bodies have financed many programs in Greece to overcome the crises, it is rather surprising that most collaborations involve NGOs with private and/or public sector and also between them (Figure 3).

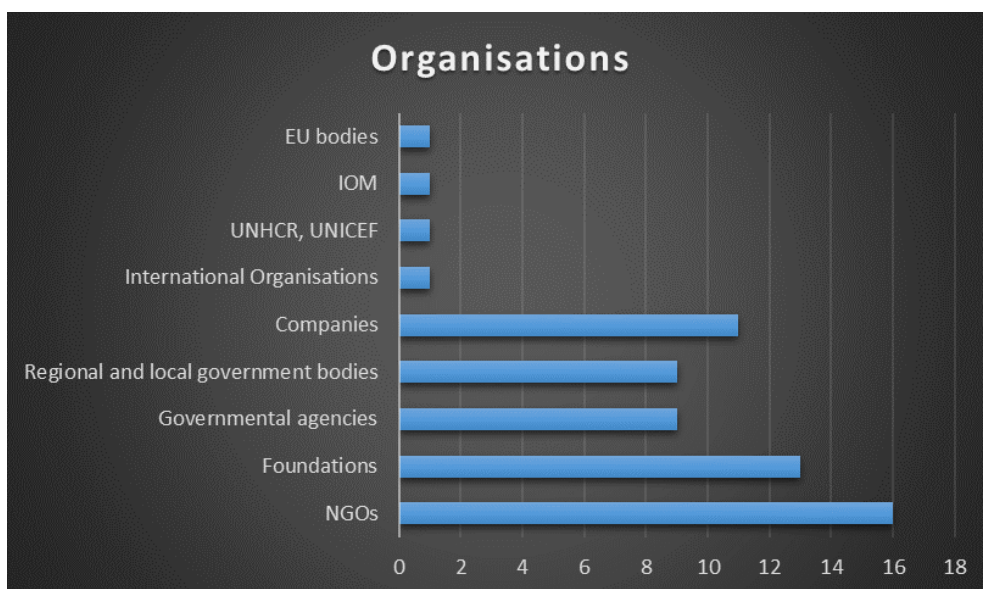


Figure 3. Cooperation structures per type organisation

To explore this further, participant organizations were asked what are the reasons for cooperating with other actors during the implementation of programs/actions. **The complementarity of actions** was identified as the most important factor for cooperation by 15 organizations. Organizations consider essential that collaboration with other organizations is the key to effective provision of services in a cost-effective way. Exchange of information, ideas, and technical expertise also drives these collaboration structures. **The previous positive experience** of cooperation with other actors is the second most important factor as it was responded by 12 organization representatives. This is an interesting statement, considering that the same organizations mostly cooperate either with CSOs or private and public organizations. Previous cooperation can eliminate arising problems and facilitate collaboration. What was reported as the third most important factor is **the cooperation required by the program specifications**.

Interestingly, when organizations were asked to indicate other reasons which influence collaborations, three of them reported financial burdens, funding, and lack of resources. Other organizations stated that although they work independently, dissemination of information and support towards other CSOs are common practices (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Reasons for cooperation indicated in the survey

To the extent that the types of relationships between CSOs remain of high importance, organizations were asked to identify positive and negative outcomes of cooperation with other actors, organizations have responded positively to all outcomes indicated in the survey. Very small discrepancies have been observed in the answers of the participant organizations. Thus, good interpersonal and trusting relationships between partners (37%), information exchange at the organizational level (35%), and finally the transmission of good practices and innovative methods (28%) were all identified as positive outcomes. It is worth mentioning that all participating organizations have viewed their cooperation with other actors as positive (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Indicated positive outcomes of cooperation with other actors

While cooperation was rated overall positively, when participants asked to evaluate any cooperation problems, responses highlighted **coordination problems** as the most challenging (Figure 6).

This outcome could be expected at a certain level, due to the emergency character of interventions in the humanitarian field and also because various types of actors with different sizes, capacities, and organizational structures need to coordinate their actions in often demanding environments. Particularly in the Greek context, when the coordinating authority is a public organization, the implementation phase might be delayed or be problematic due to bureaucratic procedures. This might prolong the problem but does not cause a further burden on cooperation as respondents suggested. At this point, there was a disparity in the answers of the participants, who while having identified good interpersonal and trusting relationships as the most valuable cooperation outcome, their responses reflected that lack of trust remains the second most problematic area. Competition between actors was not identified as a problem by participant organizations, although they have mentioned other emerging issues in collaborations, such as different working pace between organizations which might delays project implementation.

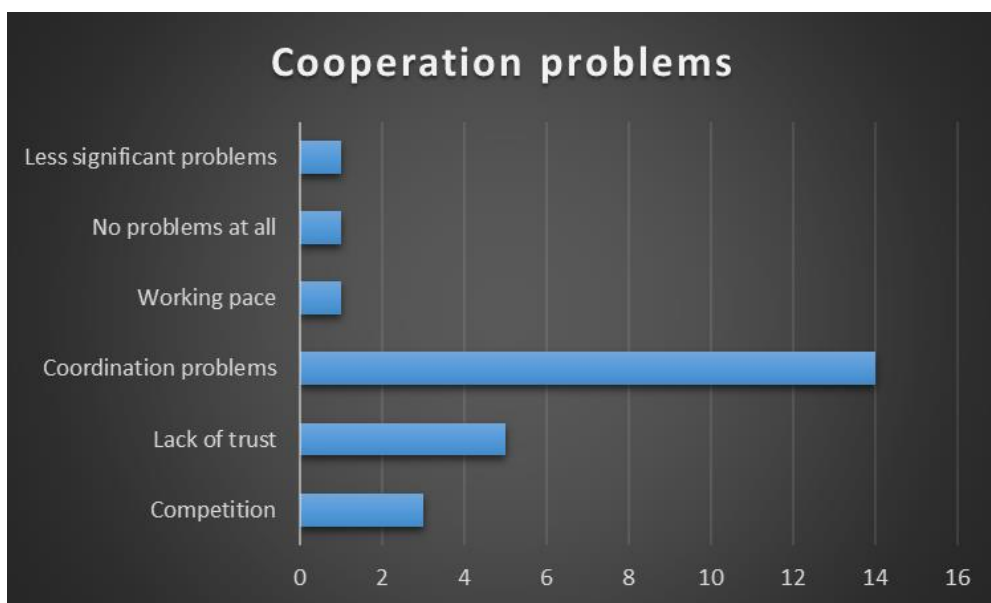


Figure 6. Cooperation problems indicated by CSOs

In-kind aid

The research also investigated the reliance of organizations for their operations on in-kind aid. 89,5% of the participant organizations stated that they received in-kind aid (Figure 7).

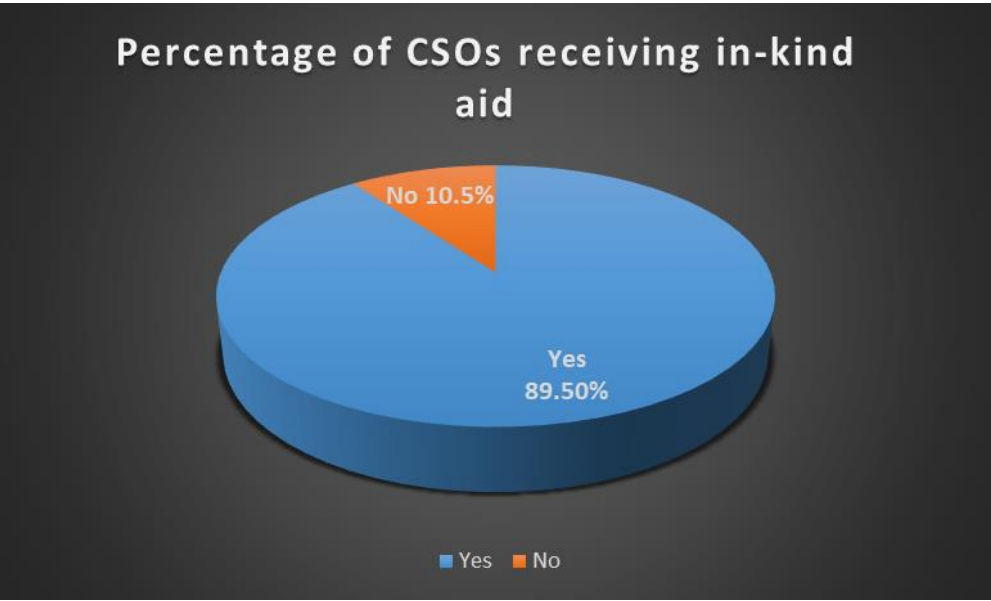


Figure 7. Percentage of in-kind aid received by participant organizations

With respect to the kind of aid they received, a great majority of participating organizations (70%) answered that they receive both products and services (for example, volunteering work). This depicts a positive outcome of in-kind donations in Greece which is widely widespread as a means of support.

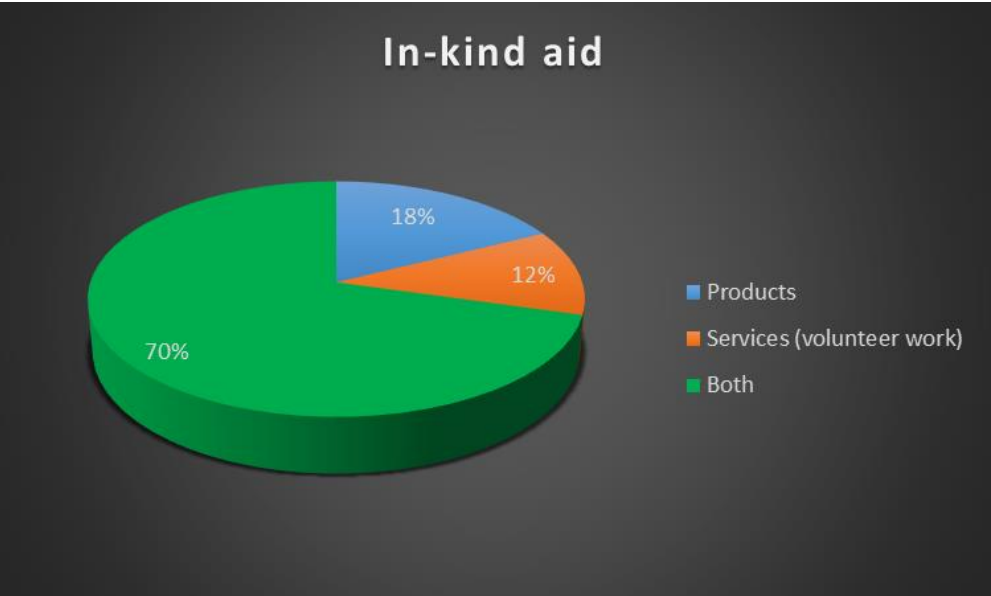


Figure 8. Percentage of in kind-aid per type of assistance

This is an interesting finding as there are organizations that seem to be dependent on donations and voluntary work, while others receive a very small percentage of in-kind donations. Results present a great deviation between receiving organizations. The great majority of responding organizations have stated that in-kind donations correspond between 1-35% of the total receiving aid, with the average estimated at $\approx 20\%$. Only three organizations totally base their activities on in-kind aid. This is an interesting finding since it contradicts international literature which supports that in-kind aid can be problematic due to management problems that it creates (Figure 9).

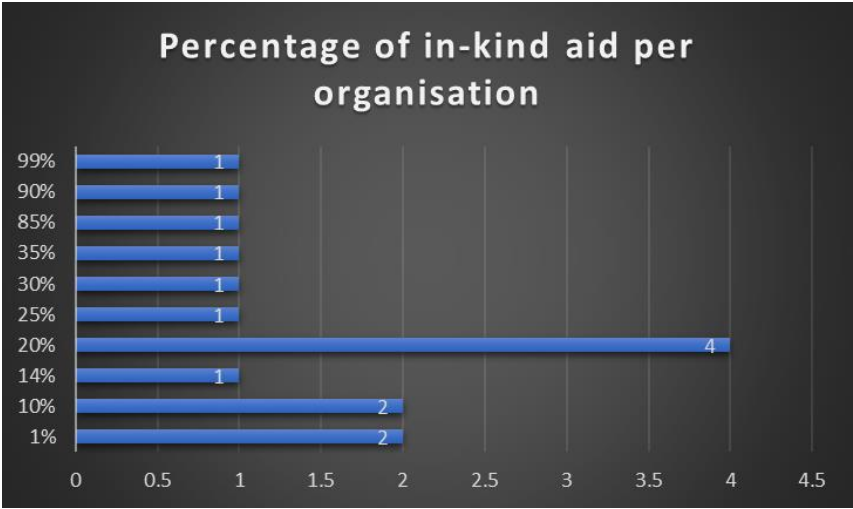


Figure 10. Percentage of the total received in-kind aid

Survey participants were asked to evaluate positively or negatively the in-kind donations that they receive. All respondents rated in-kind donations positively, projecting the necessity of donations in products and volunteering work. In contrast to the findings deriving from the international literature, civil society organizations operating in Greece seem to have managed to minimize management problems related to in-kind aid (Figure 10).

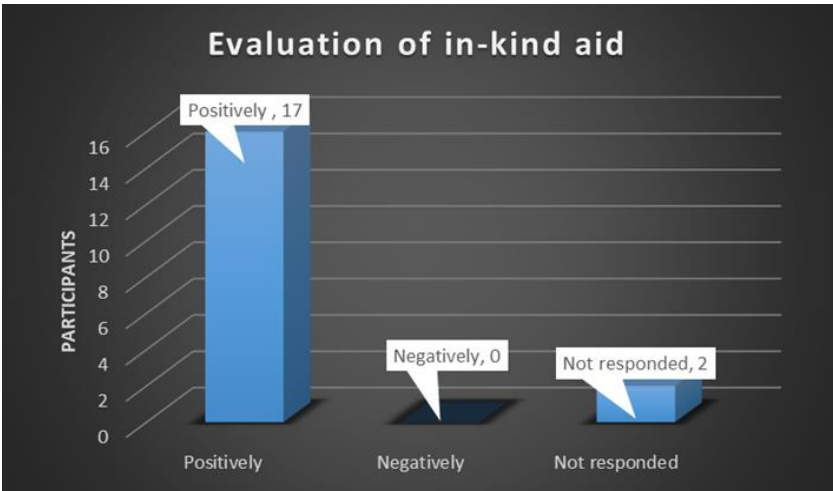


Figure 11. Evaluation of in-kind received by organizations

When respondents were asked to comment on reasons for identifying in-kind aid positively or negatively, participants suggested that donations in-kind cover the basic human needs of vulnerable populations. As some of the responding organizations stated, they base their whole operational status in in-kind donations, either in products, volunteer work, or food.

"This job requires a variety of goods and tools, so providing in-kind assistance is a big part of our job" (Participant 2).

They have explained that in-kind aid has dual benefits both for the organizations themselves and for the society as a whole. Several participated organizations stated that they receive large amounts of food surplus and other items and redistribute them to other charitable organizations or people in need.

"The way that we operate is to redistribute food surplus which is perfectly suitable for human consumption but is impossible for various reasons to be sold in the market. The vast majority of the food we redistribute is surplus donations that instead of ending up in landfills, it ends up in the hands of people in need" (Participant 1).

In addition, some organizations reported that in-kind contributions provide them with the opportunity to minimize their operational costs, thus providing more support to vulnerable groups of the society. This is further reflected in the following statement:

"We accept donations of dry and canned food such as rice, oil, and beans. This helps reduce our costs so we can provide more help" (Participant 3).

The most important element of in-kind aid highlighted by the majority of organizations participating in the survey was that they consider volunteering work as in-kind aid.

"Assistance in-kind (goods and services) is valued positively, as it can facilitate the provision of services by the organization, contribute to the smoother operation of salaried staff and enables the organization to develop additional actions, which might not have been developed at the level which is now, due to larger numbers of salaried personnel and materials" (Participant 5).

What is worth mentioning at this point, is that organizations valued volunteering work very highly in a two-way approach. The level of mutual benefit in this kind of relationship depends on the flexibility to adapt and learn from each other, so organizations appreciated volunteers either way. They considered volunteering not only to the benefit of their organizations but also as an opportunity for younger people to learn and assimilate into society. This is mirrored in the phrases below:

"Volunteering is an important part of our organization. We recognize the importance of a dynamic and dedicated group of volunteers. Our volunteers mainly contribute to administrative support positions in various departments. We always try to identify the interests, skills, and experience of the volunteers and match them with the needs of the organization" (Participant 6).

"We are given the opportunity to have pro bono services, but also to provide the opportunity especially to young people to gain experience through volunteering" (Participant 9).

"The contribution of volunteers is among the statutory goals of the organization and is considered the main way of active participation of society" (Participant 8).

Conclusions

As complexity in world affairs has increased, civil society organizations need to adapt to a new dynamic environment. Adaptation requires the development of new operational capacities and knowledge-based innovative methodologies. To respond to humanitarian crises effectively, CSOs need to develop networks and collaborations with other actors. Networking and cooperation between organizations multiply the impact of their services. This facilitates the transfer of knowledge through socialization, externalization, and interaction with other actors, which combine their technical capacities and expertise to develop new competencies and generate innovative ideas. Firstly, because organizations learn from each other and secondly because complementarity of their services and source-pooling increases the possibilities to reach their goals, a task that would be impossible to accomplish alone. Moreover, actors gain the "collaborative advantage" through networking and avoid any overlapping of activities. Networking and collaborations between organizations can take different forms. They are identified as formal or informal and may involve public and private organizations, INGOs, and local NGOs or companies. Thus, this research supports that inter-organizational cooperation and trust are vital. Therefore, participation in networks contributes to the building of trust as well as the transfer of knowledge.

As far as collaborations are concerned, the CSOs ecosystem in Greece seems to be (partly) differentiated in comparison to respected systems in other countries and global trends. Indeed, CSOs operating in Greece implement most of their actions in collaboration with other actors. Collaborations take place between NGOs and public and private organizations as well as with foundations but to a lesser degree with international organizations and EU bodies. The main reasons which drive collaborations in Greece are complementarity of actions, previous positive experience in cooperation as well as the lack of funding, and the existence of financial burdens. This is partly in accordance with the international literature where collaboration is presented as a one-way solution for organizations seeking to achieve complex goals and develop new competencies through mutual learning and transfer of knowledge. But the differentiation in the Greek case is that most of the collaborative structures are based on the complementarity of actions and not to transfer of knowledge, or the development of innovative approaches. At the second level, as the interpersonal relationship and the exchange of information has been identified as the most positive outcome of cooperation, the Greek CSOs ecosystem seems to confirm the theories for knowledge-management and building of trust between organizations. Even though interpersonal relations were considered as the most positive result for collaborations, the lack of trust towards other actors has overall been considered as the main problem, thus confirming international literature that trust is the most important component for cooperation.

As far as in-kind donations, in comparison with international literature, the CSOs operating in Greece present an adversary image. The CSOs ecosystem in Greece value donated products and services very positively. Many organizations in Greece based their whole operational status on in-kind donations in food and products, while others receive aid which is later distributed to vulnerable populations. In-kind aid in services, such as volunteering, is largely appreciated by CSOs operating in Greece because it minimizes their operational costs. Furthermore, it is considered beneficial for both the organizations and the volunteers themselves. For the organizations, because they can facilitate the work of their salaried staff and can help to expand their services even more, and for the volunteers because it can offer young people the opportunity to participate in society and gain work experience within a charitable organization.

To conclude, the dual crises that Greece faced, gave the “opportunity” to CSOs to form new collaboration structures and to learn from each other. Although coordination and cooperation problems might have occurred, collaboration is still valued positively as it can maximize the impact of their actions. Similarly, in-kind aid can have positive effects for the organizations themselves, for the beneficiaries, and the whole society. Thus, this study provides further opportunities for research on the components of cooperation between organizations; as issues to be investigated can include the cooperation between the private sector and NGOs and the initiatives that emerged during these dual crises as well as the importance of informal organizations in addressing the crises.

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