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**BOOK REVIEW: THE GROWTH OF NON-
GOVERNMENTAL DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATIONS
IN POLAND AND THEIR COOPERATION WITH
POLISH AID, BY GALIA CHIMIAK, WARSAW: IFIS
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Galia Chimiak's book continues the work she started in her first book *How Individualists Make Solidarity Work* (2006), in which the angle of research was focused on the social activists' grassroots endeavors in the development of the Polish civil society. However, the core-subject that aims to capture the process of Polish non-governmental development organizations (NGDOs) from recipients of aid to providers of aid, as well as the multi-level analysis angle - makes this book much more ambitious than the previous one.

The research question that guides the reader throughout the book is "What are the factors which determined the emergence of the non-governmental development organizations (NGDOs) in Poland and their impact on the appropriation of development norms and practices by the Polish aid system?". The angle of research entangles variables at the macro-level (country and geopolitical contextual variables), the meso-level (characteristics of NGDOs) and micro-individual level (motivations of activists). The starting point of the research is that the dominance of neoliberalism reconfigured both the roles of the state and the market worldwide, as well as the function ascribed to the civil society sector. However, what the reader learns is that the contemporary Polish aid has not been shaped only by geopolitical circumstances. In fact, the whole process of aid should be analyzed and understood as a socio-cultural phenomenon, a claim for which the author provides empirical evidence.

The empirical research took shape from May 2014 to February 2015 in Warsaw, Szczecin, Sejny and Lublin where most NGDOs have their headquarters. The 25 in-depth, semi-structured interviews have been conducted with activists engaged in the NGO sector and NGDO sector, out of which three work in national institutions supporting NGDOs and five work for foreign or international institutions funding NGOs. All subjects were involved in development cooperation, be them development workers, humanitarian workers, development educators, policy makers or experts. The interviewees in the purposive sample were chosen on the basis of preliminarily defined criteria, such as personal characteristics (age, gender, the number of years of engagement in international/developmental cooperation) and criteria regarding the organization(s) that the activists represented. Such criteria are the working experience that also included affiliations with intergovernmental organizations, international foreign NGOs, business, the media and the academia, to name a few.

Needless to say, the research also gripped on secondary analysis of relevant strategic documents, academic literature and media releases, as well as the author's own experience in this field: participation in various academic and multi-stakeholder conferences dealing with development cooperation or global education and first-hand observations during consultations meetings organized by the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the European Commission. Therefore, the author uses the approach of data triangulation for validity and reliability.

What the reader firstly finds engaging is the author's scientific endeavor, narrated in a way in which it covers both contemporaneous issues and historical variables that make sense of the state of the art of the development mosaic of aid. The voices of the Polish aid professionals give added-value to the book, at the same time moving beyond a descriptive approach and bringing overtly challenging issues to the light. The author is not afraid to bluntly raise the activists' worries and inner struggles, an aspect that insightfully portrays the ups and downs of this particular profession. For instance, one interviewee says: "(...) It turned out we only thought we possess cultural sensitivity. It turned out it is a difficult job to fraternize with other people, one has to be careful" (r14_8, p. 218).

The book is divided into five chapters, a thick introduction, and generous conclusions. It is to be noted that throughout the chapters, some myths are deconstructed and theoretically and empirically augmented. I will expand on this in the next pages.

The first chapter develops the main theoretical considerations, in an interdisciplinary manner. The author combines approaches from international relations, educational science, psychology, political studies and sociology of development. The theoretical foundations of the research come from the second generation of constructivist thinking (Szaki 2002, Bauman 2012, Berger and Luckmann 1967, Adler 2008 to name a few) in international relations and the supply-side economic theories of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (Hansmann 1987; Baldet 1997). This allows the author to link motivations and backgrounds of individuals involved in organizations that provide humanitarian aid, development cooperation, and global education. This angle incorporates change and the sources of change by highlighting agency, process, structure and practices of aid professionals in the process of growth of the non-state actors in world affairs (p.17). Beyond the theoretical approach, this chapter offers an overview of the most important developments that impacted the global process, the roles of NGDOs in national and international affairs and the much-complicated changes in the Polish post-communist context. Here, Polish NGOs are recipients of official aid and face many challenges that further create specific conditions for their developmental agenda.

The second chapter recognizes the role of foreign assistance in the developmental process, while the third chapter analyzes the development of the NGDO sector abroad. In these chapters a first myth is uncovered, namely, the one that attributed foreign donors the main role in the developmental agenda in the region. In this sense, it is argued that the Polish civil society has been oriented towards establishing contacts with other nations since the 1980's Solidarity movement. Moreover, the contacts established were different than those of the political and economic elite, which were

at that time oriented to the West but rather turned to establishing contacts with its immediate neighbors (p. 251). The second chapter offers a detailed picture of how the civil society sector has evolved post-1989, while the third chapter explains the process undergone by NGOs from beneficiaries of aid to providers of aid.

In chapter three one learns how the internationalization of Solidarity as initiated by the Solidarity movement should be primarily credited for the initiation of trans-border cooperation (p. 254). Also, the “change of hats” as the author calls the transformation of Polish NGOs from recipients of aid to aid providers is explained theoretically, with activists portraying the process as perceived at the time: We used to think that since we have experience with implementing foreign-funded projects, it would be the same now [that we have become donors]; but it is not. Now it is a different story altogether (r16_20, p. 117). This chapter also discusses the democratization versus developmental “visions and divisions” (p.128) and the difficulties that arise in the differentiations between promoters of poverty reduction and those of democracy enhancement. The comparative advantage in development cooperation, global education, and international volunteering raise important questions, not just for the Polish society, but the whole system of international activism in the neoliberal agenda both in the “underdeveloped/misdeveloped” countries and the Majority and Minority World.

The evolution of the Polish development system is further tackled in Chapter four. The dynamics of the relations between the Polish state, namely the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the NGO sector, covering on-hand experiences of the activists in projects, funding and overall cooperation. As one interviewee suggests, “in spite of Polish aid’s fault, [Poland] should be credited for being one of the [countries] most engaged in supporting the democratization [process]” (r23_11, p. 170). The role of the state, as an important factor in the appropriation of norms and practices in the area of developmental cooperation and the role of NGOs, is highlighted in almost every important facet of transformation, from one actor to the other. In this manner, the state is considered a dominant actor, while NDGOs are considered ‘norm entrepreneurs’.

The last chapter, focusing on the understanding of the Polish aid professionals’ vocational choice is by far the most insightful, since it tries to portray who are the people engaged in development cooperation, while other myths are further deconstructed. For example, a 2013 survey commissioned by the Polish Humanitarian Action showed that almost 70% of the respondents think that humanitarian workers receive no remuneration for their work, considering that being humanitarian workers is rather a hobby than a real profession that needs “professional skills, adequate educational background, command of foreign languages and personal qualities like resilience to stress” (p.200). The romanticized vision of humanitarian workers is addressed by the author in terms of analyzing the social and cultural capital of the activists, considering respondents’ biographies in regard to the family background (jobs, involvement in the Solidarity movement, career support for their children’s life choices, coupled with a cult of knowledge) and their affinities towards the Global South. This affinity is explained as “born from the in-between nature of the country as a nation, which faced various social problems and benefitted from Western assistance, as well as their first-hand experience in living under totalitarian system that represents their real comparative

advantage of the nation as participant in the development cooperation system” (p.254). The reader might find puzzling how activists discuss their experiences in other countries, in terms of cultural borders that first seem quite distinct and that further alter their roles as mediators (from trendsetters to change-makers) and their overall reactions.

It is hard to find the shortcomings of this book, especially since the author approaches the issue of developmental cooperation in such a holistic manner. Furthermore, the secondary literature and methodological framework go hand in hand in explaining almost all facets that determined the emergence of the non-governmental development organizations (NGDOs) in Poland. Although the book was written before the refugee crisis, the author tries to offer some possible explanations for why international solidarity works in some cases and not the other. However, some of the book’s shortcomings can be addressed from two directions. Firstly, regarding the theoretical approach: approaching issues stemming from critical theory, the author could have analyzed the language of development and foreign aid at a deeper level. Foreign aid is analyzed as a socio-cultural phenomenon, however the cultural forces of its language, frameworks, individual experiences and the structural transformation of the public space could have benefitted from a more critical standpoint. Also, post-colonialist studies would have added some interesting perspectives to the Polish case, especially in the process of its transformation from aid recipient to aid provider. Highlights could have included and not be limited to the way in which norms and practices have been built in the 1980s and beyond, and how today norm entrepreneurs as agents of change have transformed their discourse and approaches in regard to their partners from their Global South, by highlighting the underpinnings of this process. Secondly, more information regarding the representatives of Polish NGDOs could have been added to the codes of the interviewees, not just the number of years the aid professionals have been involved in development cooperation, but their gender and age. The socio-demographics could have pointed to the possible diversities of opinions and ways of addressing this type of work in the civil society sector.

Nevertheless, the book is a ‘must-read’ for scholars interested in civil society, international relations, post-communist transformation and the overall socio-cultural phenomenon of aid.

References

Chimiak, Galia. (2006) *How Individualists Make Solidarity Work*, Warszawa: MPiPs.