

Evolving Network Roles in International Aid Efforts: Evidence from Croatia's Post War Transition

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Abstract Social capital is created when members and organizations in a society enact relationships with others. The outcome of these relationships includes new opportunities, information, and access to a variety of resources. The purpose of this article is to study donor communication and relationships that help to build social capital. The site for this study is the evolving nature of donor organization relations with voluntary associations in Croatia from 1999 to 2002. Using network analysis, this article traces how donor–NGO–media relations changed over time and provides suggestions for international donors and NGOs in transitions to maximize the outcome of their communicative relationships.

Résumé Le capital social se crée lorsque les membres et les organisations d'une société établissent des relations avec autrui. Ces relations ont pour effet de renfermer de nouvelles possibilités, informations et l'accès à de nombreuses ressources. L'objectif de ce document est d'étudier la communication et les relations des donateurs qui contribuent à renforcer le capital social. Le thème de cette étude est l'évolution de la nature des relations des bailleurs de fonds avec les associations bénévoles en Croatie, de 1999 à 2002. En utilisant l'analyse du réseau, cette étude retrace comment les relations entre donateurs, ONG et médias ont changé au fil du temps, et présente des propositions pour les donateurs internationaux et les ONG en transition pour optimiser les suites de leurs relations de communication.

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Zusammenfassung Soziales Kapital wird geschaffen, wenn die Mitglieder und Organisationen in einer Gesellschaft Beziehungen zueinander etablieren. Diese Beziehungen bringen unter anderem neue Gelegenheiten, Informationen und den Zugang zu einer Vielzahl von Ressourcen mit sich. Zweck dieses Beitrags ist es, die Kommunikationen und Beziehungen von Spendern zu untersuchen, die zum Aufbau des sozialen Kapitals beitragen. Gegenstand der Studie sind die sich kontinuierlich entwickelnden Beziehungen zwischen Spendenorganisationen und gemeinnützigen Verbänden in Kroatien zwischen 1999 und 2002. Mittels der Netzwerkanalyse untersucht der Beitrag, wie sich die Beziehungen zwischen Spendengebern, nicht-staatlichen Organisationen und Medien mit der Zeit veränderten, und es werden internationalen Spendengebern und nicht-staatlichen Organisationen, die sich in einer Übergangsphase befinden, Vorschläge unterbreitet, wie sie das Ergebnis ihrer kommunikativen Beziehungen maximieren können.

Resumen El capital social se crea cuando los miembros y las organizaciones de una sociedad entablan relaciones unos con otros. Como resultado de estas relaciones surgen nuevas oportunidades, información y acceso a multitud de recursos. El propósito de este trabajo es estudiar la comunicación y las relaciones de los donantes que ayudan a construir el capital social. La base de este estudio es la naturaleza cambiante de las relaciones de las organizaciones de donantes con las asociaciones voluntarias en Croacia de 1999 a 2002. Utilizando un análisis de redes, este artículo repasa los cambios que se han producido en las relaciones entre donantes-ONG-medios con el paso del tiempo y ofrece sugerencias para los donantes internacionales y las ONG con el fin de que obtengan el máximo partido de los resultados de las relaciones comunicativas.

Keywords Civil society · Transitions · Croatia · Donor–NGO relations · Communication Networks

Social capital and civil society are created by a system of trusting and supportive interconnected organizations. These interconnected networks provide opportunities to study how communicatively constructed relationships shape the development of civil society. The purpose of this essay is to examine the different communicative relationships that donor organizations develop with voluntary associations as they promote civil society initiatives. We report the evolving nature of donor organization relations in Croatia from 2000 to 2002. This article will first position civil society as a communication activity. It identifies the different partners in civil society and the different network relationships that exist. The second section provides a case study of the civil society movement in Croatia 1999 to 2002 as an illustration of the different network roles that donors played as Croatia prepared its application for European Union (EU) membership. This section presents the results of two studies of the Croatian civil society movement. Teaching international donors how to identify civil society partners, build communication networks, and adjust funding, will help them further maximize resources needed for such networking. The final section offers some recommendations for how network

research can be used to guide how international donors communicate with local partners in future transition projects.

Introduction

Social and economic development suffered in the Soviet Union and in the member states of the East Bloc because of the lack of civil society and trust (Evans 2005). Citizens in these countries had no social or communal organizations and thus were at the mercy of the State. Consequently, there were high expectations in the early 1990s for NGOs to facilitate civil society development across the former Soviet Union and its member states.

NGOs were supposed to stand between the individual and the state and provide the “third sector in the second world” (Starr 1991, p. 65). NGOs’ potential was great because they were “the network of associations independent of the state whose members, through social interactions that balance conflict and consensus, seek to regulate themselves in ways consistent with a valuation of difference” (Hauser 1998, p. 26). NGOs included “private and public associations and organizations, all forms of cooperative social relationships that create bonds of trust” (Alexander 1998, p. 3).

It has been 20 years since the fall of the Soviet Union and there have been varying levels of Western donor assistance to nations in civil society transitions. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID), The European Union (EU), UK Department for International Development (DFID) along with the Soros Open Society Institute (OSI) have provided significant donor assistance to nations in transition in the latter 1990s and early 2000s. Some nations were provided assistance for the economic transition (Russia) while others were essentially provided all levels of assistance after civil wars (former Yugoslavia). The emerging nations of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina were given economic and civil society assistance. Roy (2008) cautioned that the term “civil society” needs to be “unpacked” to better understand donor agendas, weaknesses in relationships among like-minded groups, and the unanticipated consequences of civil society interventions.

This article is one such attempt. As Hadenius and Ugglå (1996) and Brinkerhoff (2003) have noted, donors’ actions can help or hinder civil society development. We argue that relationships among donors and NGOs are resource based and this will influence the development and status of the relationship. Local NGOs come to rely on donors for a variety of resources and we should follow Tvedt (2002) to problematize “how national and global civil societies have been impacted by, and shaped by, different forces: corporate capital; local and global protest movements and authorities; and, not least, by a new but powerful international social system—the aid system” (p. 375). These donor–NGO relationships are fostered by interpersonal and strategic communication. These relationships create the social capital necessary to the development and maintenance of a civil society. Of the many partners in civil society, this essay discusses seven key partners as they communicate and cooperate for civil society objectives. Each is briefly discussed below.

Communicative Roles in Civil Society Networks

Civil society will reflect the unique cultural, economic, political, and historic environment of a nation. How civil society develops in Russia may not be applicable to the Former Yugoslavia. Yet, regardless of the historic context, Taylor (2009) identified seven general partners in civil society that may have varying roles in a transition. The foundation of civil society is *the public*. The concept of the public will vary through different societies and cultures. Yet one fact remains a constant: citizens can articulate their needs through participation in societal institutions. *Societal institutions* include a wide array of religious, professional groups (associations of doctors, lawyers, educators), educational, union, and political parties. These institutions vary across societies but they are necessary for civil society. Their value is that they provide avenues for citizens to articulate their needs. Institutions that are considered legitimate have the power to speak out on issues and these institutions gain influence when they engage media such as print, electronic and today, digital news gathering organizations. Thus, the *media* in all of its forms and channels, is also a key partner in civil society. Jacobson and Jang (2002) have argued that how the media cover news can have serious implications for civil society. The role of the media is to disseminate factual information that citizens can use to make informed decisions. The agenda setting function of the media (McCombs and Shaw 1972) suggests that they are opinion leaders on key topics. An independent media (not owned by the government or political parties) can serve as watchdogs to ensure that government officials and businesses are held accountable for their actions (Siebert et al. 1963). The independent media are “the most critical of all civil society institutions” because they allow for communication between institutions, NGOs, the government, and the public (Shaw 1996, p. 31).

There is enormous growth in the number of *non-governmental organizations* (NGOs) across the world. These grass roots groups advocate for a variety of issues. In some nations, especially in societies that have been dominated by repressive governments, there is no tradition of social cause groups acting on behalf of social issues. What makes these grass roots organizations unique is that they work on behalf of issues, not profit. Profit seeking organizations that comprise the *business community*, however, also have a role to play in the development of civil society. Meyer (1992) suggested that many donor efforts are shifting from institution building to private sector assistance. Business organizations have opinions on issues such as regulation, licensing, access to natural resources, price controls, immigration laws, and legal reform. It is to their advantage that their voices also be included in civil discussions. And, an ancillary benefit gained by the civil society is that with business participation, communicative links with other civil society entities (government and media) are formed. However, too much influence from this group may impede civil society development as government is pressured to make decisions that benefit the private sector rather than the public.

Members of local, regional and national governance enact another pillar of civil society. This group also includes the class of civil servants in a nation that execute

the day-to-day activities of *governance*. Government leaders, as well as members of the bureaucracy that supports government, need to be accountable to the aforementioned partners. Government leaders need to carefully monitor public opinion and be willing to adapt to changing public needs. Moreover, government leaders engage in ad hoc committees and community initiatives that inevitably engage such groups as well. In an ideal civil society, government at all levels understands important issues and resolves them in a manner that benefits the nation and the people. Finally, as the last 20 years have shown, *international organizations* have an important role in fostering civil society. International organizations are usually donors. Donor organizations include both international NGOs and state donors. They are not all created equally and the two groups have different motives for their assistance.

In developing or post-crisis countries, the United Nations and other international organizations such as the George Soros Open Society Institute (OSI) are not linked to directly to national governments. These international donor organizations fund local groups who work to achieve certain desired societal goals. For example, in the wake of the Tsunami disaster, INGOs such as World Vision and Save the Children immediately opened local offices in affected areas. International organizations (both non state and state actors) are especially important during the initial stages of civil society because they work directly to fund indigenous organizations and provide important training to local civil society leaders. Another type of donor is the state donor. State donors such as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), UK Department for International Development (DFID), and the European Union (EU) provide financial and human resources to support foreign policy agendas. For instance, state donors helped to fund civil society organizations after the Tsunami in the hopes that long-term NGO development might help foster greater democracy in places such as Indonesia.

These seven general partners create a foundation for civil society. Figure 1 illustrates the network of partners, with citizens positioned at the core of the network, since it is the citizen volunteers who are a core attribute to civil society. While each partner in this network is a part of a broader and different network, has its own issues, its own needs, and will represent different citizen interests, it is the goal of civil society to have communication and inter-related objectives among these different groups. When the interests of two or more partners converge, then there is a much greater opportunity for those groups to achieve their goals. An effective civil society rests in the intersection of all of these partners' interests. As such, it is their interconnections that drive and maintain harmony in the community and when these are lacking or rife with distrust, the disparate or dysfunctional connections can undermine civil society.

As depicted in Fig. 1, an important implication of these seven partners is that the structure of civil society is not hierarchical. The individuals who participate often have concurrent membership and identification among groups. For instance, a government employee may also hold an elected office in the Parent Teacher Association and participate in a religious organization. The local businessperson may serve as volunteer to protect the environment. By looking at civil society from

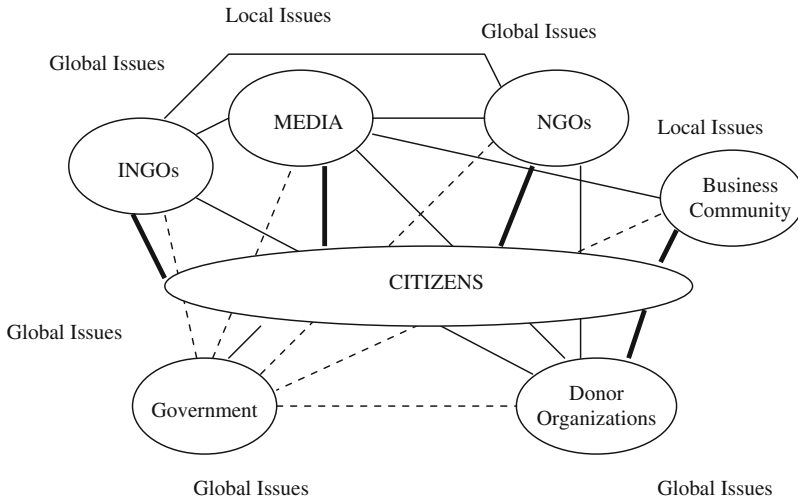


Fig. 1 The network relationship structure of civil society. *Solid line* shows the organizations that citizens have direct access and influence. *Dotted line* indicates those organizations that rely less on citizen input

the organizational level, it is evident that civil society structure is the antithesis of the centralized hierarchy in which power is reserved for the elite few. Because of their critical role in volunteer and community organizations, the idealized model depicted in Fig. 1 shows the potential power of citizens and also underscores the *decentralized* structure of civil society. The solid line shows the organizations over which citizens have direct access and influence. The dotted line indicates those organizations that rely less on citizen input. Notice that in this nominal model of civil society, the citizens are an equally powerful entity because of their participation in the various groups. Through participation in these groups, citizens put themselves in the center of the civil society network. An additional element to this model is the liaison role that the government, media, NGOs, institutions and international donor organizations play in the global milieu. As liaisons, these organizations have the potential to be brokers of information and other relevant resources such as financial and human capital.

The network model reflects that the existence of these seven partners is *necessary* for the development and maintenance of civil society. Their mere presence, however, is not *sufficient* for civil society. Relationships among the partners are needed to fully leverage the potential of each group. Interactions among sets of partners create a synergy that multiplies the reach and effectiveness of the partners. The interactions are facilitated by face-to-face communication, media relations, and interorganizational relationships. While all seven partners should be engaged in regular communication and coordination, the interactions between donor organizations and local NGOs are of particular interest for this case study.

Constraints and Opportunities in Civil Society Communication

An important relationship for indigenous NGOs to negotiate is the NGO–donor relationship. Many governments are non-responsive to the needs of their citizens. Citizens alone may have little influence on national level politics but, through NGOs that are supported by international donors, they can have influence over local governance. Indeed, civil society is premised on local accountability, transparency, participation, and citizen influence over local decision-making. These values are part of the global civil society movement.

With international donor assistance during the early years of civil society initiatives, NGOs can emerge as partners with government, a partnership that is pivotal to civil society development. However, the NGO–donor relationship is subject to challenges. Nations in transition provide both opportunities and challenges to civil society development. There are different kinds of transitions. Some transitions are radical changes when a country experiences a significant shift in political or economic institutions (coup, civil war, free elections, end of Apartheid). Other transitions are economic based when a nation moves peacefully (though painfully) from a command/government-directed economy to a market economy. INGOs and donors have been known to have too much influence over local NGO actions during and after transitions. And, too much direction can destroy the credibility of fledgling civil society movements—constraining the creative solutions unique to that particular society (Giddens 1984).

Building relationships between donors and indigenous NGOs is not as straightforward as one may think. Donors cannot rely merely on granting money to establish mutually beneficial relationships with indigenous organizations. Relationship building can be advantageous to both parties and have ancillary benefits to the system as a whole. But such positive outcomes require developing mutual trust, sharing informational resources, and understanding the history of relationships that organizations have experienced in the past. Network theory helps to shed light on the nuances of building relationships at both the dyadic level (between donors and NGOs) and then collectively at the community level. The collective fabric of information sharing, relationships, and social influence is the focus of network theory and research and enables a rigorous way to view and understand more broad social contexts (Doerfel et al. 2010; Monge and Contractor 2000; Shumate et al. 2005).

Network Theory Explains Donor Roles and Communication

Networking has emerged as vernacular for creating opportunities for success. Network theory and research advance idealized models of social capital, information sharing, and information flows, but there is scarce field research that tests ways to improve organization-level networks. The literature that has tested the veracity of interventions is mostly about interpersonal networks connecting individuals inside organizations or in neighborhoods and communities. The work that has been done has shown the importance of various roles in the network (Flanagin et al. 2001), the value of having an optimally structured network (Burt 1992a), and the importance

of building trust to ensure subsequent cooperative interactions (Doerfel et al. 2010; Doerfel and Taylor 2005). Understanding the underlying reasons for forming links with others is part of the network-civil society puzzle.

Interdependency of Organizational Actors in a Communication Network

Organizations have motivations for linking with others—they exchange resources. Linkages, or ties, can range from strong to weak and can exist for the sake of a single purpose such as a financial exchange or be a more involved relationship marked by multiple levels of exchanges (e.g., information exchange, tangible resource flows, and social contacts). Complex organizations face constant turbulence and change (Miles and Snow 1986, 1992). They thus engage in creative and nontraditional activities in order to increase the likelihood of organizational survival and success. In his seminal study, Schermerhorn's (1977) test of interorganizational networking pitted performance distress (scarce resources) against performance slack (extra resources) as determinants of cooperative interorganizational activity and found support for slack as a determinant of cooperative activity. Put another way, organizations with extra resources (time, money, personnel) are those that are willing to engage in partnering across their network. Yet a lack of or need for resources also motivates organizations to seek cooperative links. What has since emerged is a model of resource dependence, in which organizations that are more "needy" or highly dependent on other organizations for resources are more likely to act in cooperative ways than those who wield the resources and are, thus, less dependent for sustenance from others (Pfeffer 1981; Pfeffer and Salancik 1978). More recently, Uzzi (1997) analyzed the network structure of an apparel industry and found that organizations reap benefits from critical transactions that take place "in networks of social relationships that produce positive and unique outcomes that are difficult to imitate via other means" (p. 64). Reflective of Uzzi's findings, there is evidence that individual organizational performance is less important than how an overall interorganizational network behaves. In their study of community health systems, Provan and Milward (1995), suggested that effective organizational relationships are influenced by an organizational environment that is relatively stable and generous in terms of information sharing and interaction.

Resource dependency research emphasizes network centrality, which refers to the relative connectedness of a focal organization to other organizations in the system. In being more central the focal organization gains access directly through their immediate communication partners, and indirectly because ideally, those immediate partners have connections to others. Resource dependency research has identified a strong, positive association between centrality and reputational influence (Benson 1975; Brass and Burkhardt 1992; Flanagin et al. 2001; Galaskiewicz 1979; Krackhardt 1992; Laumann and Pappi 1976; Mizruchi 1993), access to informational resources (Pfeffer 1981, 1991; Pfeffer and Salancik 1978; Taylor and Doerfel 2003) ongoing cooperative relationships (Doerfel and Taylor 2005), power (Brass and Burkhardt 1992), and social influence (Burt 1992a, b; Doerfel 1999; Mizruchi 1993). Consistent with the association between centrality and resource dependency, Flanagin et al. (2001) found that there are long-term

advantages associated with being an early member of a network, such as having access to key information and resources. Gulati (1995) found that history matters when organizations decide with whom to ally, such that past interaction that is perceived as trusting and useful predicts subsequent joint activities. Moreover, Stuart (1998) also found that organizations with many previous alliances benefit from social capital that provides them with access to future potential exchange partners (p. 694).

Being more central and being an early member of a network are ways organizations become more embedded in the social context. The more embedded an organization is in the greater context, the more likely such an organization can create additional opportunities (Uzzi 1997). Studies on centrality, timing of network membership, and embeddedness, show how networking with other organizations is foundational to the stability of the players that comprise these social spaces. Networking moves beyond a network's foundation—the dyadic interaction—to a complex web of communication through an aggregation of dyadic exchanges resulting in multiple levels of relationships.

Similarly, community building and civil society research have tracked general participation and argued for the value of networking for the sake of civil society (e.g., Putnam 2000), assessed static networks to find that foundational organizations (early entrants into a network) are often the resource wielders and emerge as influential (e.g., Flanagan et al. 2001; Taylor and Doerfel 2003), have conducted longitudinal assessments that described and argued for idealized market structures (Burt 1992a, b) and civil society structures (Doerfel and Taylor 2005), and considered network relationships as a source for support in turbulent times (Doerfel et al. 2010). These studies found that ideal interorganizational networks are structured in such a way that organizations, through their links to other organizations, are privy to and have access to other needed resources. How organizations obtain those resources and to which other organizations they go for them are at the core of a network model of resource dependency. Thus, training organizations to maximize centrality should be part of any training for civil society organizations. Merely controlling centrality by increasing the number of links to the network, however, can exhaust resources.

While centrality is a way to understand an organization's role in the network, social network structures on a whole contribute to understanding civil society, too. The normative model in Fig. 1 shows the potential power citizens can have when they activate ties with the various INGO, NGO, and government agencies. Citizens have the potential to be early entrants to the network vis-à-vis life-long activism, have the potential to wield central and powerful relationships in various forms of participation, and, thus, be deeply embedded in the civil society network. Yet, the organizations that host citizen involvement must interact in ways that also foster civil society. Therefore, a normative network model like that in Fig. 1 also must consider the quality of relationships, not just their existence. The following sections address aspects of relational quality and its benefits. Cooperation and competition are situated on a relational continuum and then the benefits of cooperation in the form of social capital are discussed.

Cooperation and Competition

The interorganizational network in a civil society is, in a word, social. Linkages are created by civil society organizations' agents, or the people who represent the host organization and populate that organization so that it can exist as an entity. The interpersonal relationships among such agents are the basis of the civil society network links in the model in Fig. 1. Yet, interactions among them involve both cooperation and competition. They cooperate by sharing information and jointly running programs. They simultaneously compete to amass resources such as funding and volunteers. The resulting tension—a relationship between cooperative competitors—has been addressed in theory and empirical research on social networks.

In development research, Abramovay et al. (2008) explored competition in and found that cooperative structures allowed for greater impact. Research consistently indicates that organizations (both development and profit seeking) that are actively interconnected reap mutual benefits such as industry growth, innovativeness, and corporate learning (Ahuja 2000; Gulati and Singh 1998; Lazega and Pattison 1999; Powell et al. 1996; Stuart 1998). Training civil society organizations on how to strategically ally with others and providing them additional information resources can help them make informed, strategic partnering decisions. Relevant to organizational activity is knowledge about interpersonal exchanges since the foundation of an organization (or macro) level network is on dyadic (or micro) level exchanges. In understanding the macro level benefits, research about micro-level exchanges is relevant.

Deutsch's (1973, 1994) competition-cooperation theory suggests that the nature of relationships will have an effect on subsequent interactions. Echoing the interorganizational literature that shows that history matters (Gulati 1995) past interactions in interpersonal relationships yield similar future ones, as well. Interactions marked by trusting, informative discussion, future exchanges are expected to and will likely be similar. If past interactions involve deceit or other subversive behaviors, the people involved will expect, and likely experience, similar future exchanges. Deutsch suggests that relationships can be transformed with the alternate communication content. That is, a distrusted/subversive relationship can be repaired with subsequent open, candid, and sincere communication. Research that tests the manipulation of communication interactions continues to offer empirical support for Deutsch's theory about transforming cooperative or competitive climates (Lindsfold et al. 1986; Tjosvold and Wong 2000). The history of the relationships is thus relevant to enhancing the likelihood that future cooperative (or competitive) relationships are enacted and maintained.

Some relationships, however, are not always mutual (i.e., symmetric). For example, an organization might tie itself to another to receive information, but not have unique information to contribute to the relationship. Asymmetrical network relationships are those in which one party is motivated to enter into an exchange (cooperate) while the other party may not be similarly motivated or be motivated in a more competitive way. Asymmetry reflects an aspect of resource dependency theory (Pfeffer 1981, 1991; Pfeffer and Salancik 1978) in which more "needy"

members of a system are more likely to cooperate than those with whom they seek out connections—the resource wielders. So cooperation is complicated by focal organizations' resource needs. Economists Bala and Goyal (2003) studied the dynamic nature of networks as a result of participants having learned from past interactions. Echoing Deutsch's propositions, Bala and Goyal showed the importance of incorporating memory into an understanding of network models in international contexts. Knowing past behavior of a communication partner is a good way to have accurate expectations for future interaction. Moreover, being privy to past interactions and having a history of positive interactions are associated with reputation (Doerfel and Taylor 2005). This research about the history of relationships at the dyadic level helps simplify dynamic contexts (civil society) into basic elements of relationship management. A complex web of relationships is translated into basic units of interaction. Those that have historically positive communication are seen as cooperative and having similarly good reputations (Doerfel and Taylor 2005). Turning to how the structure of cooperative relationships emerge and change over time can provide further insight into the norms and perceptions associated with the recurring patterns of cooperation and thus inform better strategies towards building civil society.

There are relationship-building and need dimensions between local NGOs and international donor organizations. Due to a need for information and other resources, organizations build relationships with others in order to exchange such resources. To be effective in achieving their goals, donor organizations need to develop many different relationships in the host nation. For instance, they need to develop relationships built on trust with their grantees. They also need to develop relationships with other donors to maximize outcomes and create synergies. When all of the donors know about the funding activities of the others, redundancies in grants can be alleviated. Donors also need to develop relations with the local media. Finally, they need to help their grantees build relationships with other like-minded organizations. Building a web of such relationships is what amasses social capital.

Network Density Creates Social Capital

System density is a way of describing the overall communication links in a network and thus represents how information flows among organizations in a community. Research suggests that density offers evidence of emergent order in a formerly chaotic system (Kauffman 1993, 1995). Kauffman (1993, 1995) idealized that a moderate density in biological systems indicates a transition to order. In their test of Kauffman's hypothesis on interorganizational networks, Taylor and Doerfel (2003) found that a relatively moderate density indicated order. Brown and Ashman (1996) suggest that dense organizational networks indicate high levels of social capital. Density offers a general picture of the connectedness and thus potential information flow throughout the network. Extending the network description beyond simple density, structural holes theory provides specific details about the nature of connections among entities.

Macro structures of relationships, depicted by a network structure that retains a balance between having interconnections throughout without the connectedness

being overly redundant, have been shown to be related to more broad advances in civil society (Taylor and Doerfel 2003), competition (Burt 1992a, b), and cooperation (Doerfel and Taylor 2005). On the other hand, few connections can leave an organization at the mercy of limited key others (Burt 1992a, b; Doerfel and Taylor 2005). Taking into account the advantages of efficiency yet the constraints of dependence on a concentrated set of powerful others, an understanding of the overall structure enables focal organizations to maximize information gleaned from minimal connections.

The above research considered network structure, however, understanding how strategic networking that might affect change can be done is scarcely addressed in the interorganizational research literature.¹ Strategic networking refers to networking with partners that provide access to needed financial, informational, and social resources. Such networking is considered strategic because simply creating additional connections in a system is not sufficient to create opportunities (Baker 1984, 2000). Rather, strategic networking necessitates identifying specific partners that connect a focal organization to others beyond the immediate, direct contacts. In that way, links provide some mutual benefit within the network of relationships. Moving beyond merely “getting to know” just any other organizational agents, strategic networking requires that organizations partner with other organizations that are deliberately placed in the greater network of information, resource, and power structures (Burt 1992a, b). Dyadic pairs of organizations that network with each other are the grassroots interactions that collectively make up these more-vast interorganizational network structures (Monge and Contractor 2000). Teaching donors how to identify partners without exhausting their limited resources (e.g., time, money) is a way to enhance the macrostructure. In other words, civil society collective networks begin at the micro, grassroots level of civil society movements.

This may at first sound simple. However, many grantees are in competition with one another for resources. Money, skilled people, training, and access to decision makers are often the most sought after resources. Sometimes there is competition between groups that minimizes cooperation on larger civil society goals. Donor organizations need to be able to balance these competing demands. The next section provides a case study of the evolving nature of a donor–NGO relationship in Croatia.

Evidence of Donor Roles from Croatia’s Transition

While most communication research involves studying organizing at one point in time, this case study reports on the donor–NGO network at two different times to trace the evolving nature of relationships. Croatia represents a valuable case study of civil society, social capital, and the impact that international donors can have in a transitional nation.

¹ Exceptions to this include Ron Burt’s work on structural holes (Burt 1992a, b, 1997) and Wayne Baker’s work on the social structure of competition (1984, 2000).

Background on the Civil Society Network

The Yugoslavian Republic of Croatia was one of the strongest economic, political, and cultural republics in the former Yugoslavia. Croats were the second largest ethnic group in the former Yugoslavia and the Croats benefited from higher levels of economic development than Bosnians or Serbians. Croatians resented the loss of their cultural autonomy as a member state of the former Yugoslavia and in 1970–1971 students protested for increased autonomy. The protesters were arrested but Croatians gained some new rights. When Tito died in 1980, Croatia was ready to leave the federation (Glenny 1996). Croatia finally declared independence in 1991 from Yugoslavia. President Franjo Tudjman and the nationalist Croatian National Party (HDZ) dominated the political arena.

The HDZ is widely acknowledged to be partially responsible for the Civil War in Bosnia (Glenny 1996; Silber and Little 1996). Opposition leaders and parties were unable to generate any momentum for political reform. The Bosnian and Croatian civil wars displaced over 2 million refugees, and left over 200,000 people dead. In 1995, the Dayton Peace Accord was signed by the leaders of Croatia, Bosnia, and Yugoslavia. A major part of the peace plan was to ensure that democratic elections would be held in each nation. Significant amounts of international humanitarian assistance were devoted to Croatia and Bosnia and an important part of that assistance was to help establish civil society organizations and independent media in these nations to help facilitate democracy building. In Croatia, international humanitarian organizations such as United States Agency for International Development/Office of Transition Initiatives (USAID/OTI), the Soros Open Society Institute (OSI), and International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX-ProMedia) started to fund civil society initiatives after the Dayton Peace Accord. These international donors helped to prepare local grass roots organizations for the much anticipated democratic elections. In December of 1999, President Tudjman died and new elections were called.

By 1999, there was a nascent civil society sector of NGOs, an independent media dedicated to political openness, and international donor organizations that devoted human and financial capital to civil society initiatives (USAID 2000). A network of Croatian NGOs cooperated to create a non-partisan movement to ensure accurate information and fair elections. The 2000 parliamentary election was important to the future of Croatia because it was the end of the Tudjman regime and thus the first time a democratic election was possible. Since that first free election in Croatia's history, NGOs, media, and INGOs continue to engage in civil society activities. Taylor and Napoli tracked media usage patterns from 2000–2002 and found that:

Today, it appears that people use the information they gather from the news media to make decisions and to share with others. Television remains an important source of information, and Croatians are also discerning about their media choices. Public support for the reformulated HRT suggests that its new editorial policy is improving the civil society contributions of this once politically motivated outlet. Radio is also frequently used as an information

source, and the people in Zagreb have a variety of radio stations to listen to. The independent station, Radio 101, continues to enjoy the highest scores over the two-year period (p. 19).

The improved political system has paid off. In January 2006, Croatia was officially on the path to membership in the European Union (EU). It took 15 years for Croatia to transition from being a Communistic republic in the former Yugoslavia, to a nation embroiled in civil war, to a nascent democracy, and now, to official candidate for membership in potentially one the greatest economic and political alliances (EU) the world has ever known. Croatia's experiences in the last decade provide a valuable case study of transition, the development of civil society, and donor impact.

Mentoring by the Donor Organization Created Relationships Among Partners

From 1997 to 2000, USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives (USAID/OTI-Croatia) made over 236 grants valued in excess of \$3,614,402 to 89 civil society organizations. Grantees included election monitoring organizations, women's groups, environmental groups, and NGOs dedicated to the issues of refugees and return. OTI/Croatia also made over 80 grants to independent media organizations including radio and print outlets. Media assistance totaled over \$1,516,731. In total, over 5 million dollars was devoted to civil society initiatives in Croatia by the U.S. government. In addition to this financial support, USAID worked closely with these NGOs and media organizations to help them identify and achieve their objectives.

In the summer of 2000, when the new Croatian Parliament was finally established, Taylor and Doerfel (2003) analyzed inter-organizational relationships in the Croatian civil society network. Their study used social network theories with measures including centrality and prominence, choice of communication channels between organizations, and the multiplicity of ties. In 2000, the Croatian civil society network consisted of 17 organizations headquartered in the capital of Zagreb. Though key informant interviews, the researchers identified members of the democratic movement. Eleven organizations are represented in both 2000 and 2002 datasets.

Time 1 organizations include (1) GONG, an election monitoring organization; (2) The Women's Ad Hoc Coalition (Ad Hoc), a network of single issue groups devoted to children's and women's issues; (3) Zelena Akcija (Green Action), a national environmental organization of several thousand members; (4) Women's Infoteka, dedicated to helping female refugees; (5) Zarez, an NGO to increase political and civil participation; (6) Radio 101, a prominent media outlet in Zagreb; (7) Attack Newsletter, a provocative investigative news sheet; (8) CJA, the Croatian Journalists Association; (9) USAID, the largest donor in Croatia at the time; (10) HRT, the public television station that was state-controlled in 2000; (11) HHO, a Croatian-Helsinki human rights organization; (12) Glas 99, a non-partisan coalition of 120 smaller NGOs; (13) Arkzin, a NGO with an infrequent news sheet; (14) UDD, a group dedicated to the Diaspora of Croats in the Balkans; (15) UNO; (16) five to 12, a news program similar to 60 min; (17) Legal Center, a legal NGO; and (18) Nomad, a small Zagreb-based NGO.

The Time 2 network included three donors (USAID, DFID, and OSI), four media organizations, and 11 NGOs ($N = 18$). Time 2 organizations include: (1) GONG, an election monitoring organization; (2) The Women's Ad Hoc Coalition (Ad Hoc), a network of single issue groups devoted to children's and women's issues; (3) Zelena Akcija (Green Action), a national environmental organization of several thousand members; (4) Women's Infoteka, dedicated to helping women; (5) Zarez, an NGO to increase participation; (6) Radio 101, a prominent media outlet in Zagreb; (7) Attack Newsletter, a provocative investigative news sheet; (8) CJA, the Croatian Journalists Association; (9) USAID; (10) HRT, the public television station that was formerly state-controlled; (11) HHO, a Croatian-Helsinki human rights organization; (12) Green Forum, an environmental organization; (13) Law Center, a legal rights organization; (14) Nomad, an organization that promotes youth culture and democracy; (15) British Development Fund (DFID); (16) Soros Open Society (OSI); (17) DIM, a youth organization; and (18) CCN, a cable network.

Systematic analysis of social networks involves various aspects of communication that takes place among members of a system. Taylor and Doerfel (2003) focused on the communicative roles organizations held and they also tracked overall network qualities. In a social network, organizations' roles are a function of the extent to which an organization is connected to others *relative* to how the others in the system are connected to the focal organization as well as other organizations. For this reason, overall network qualities are used to provide the context.

Overall Network Qualities

Density describes overall connectedness of all organizations in the whole network. In this case, density scores can range from 0 to 1. A score of 0 means there are no communication links between any two organizations, and 1 means that each organization reported that it has a tie with each other organization in the network (i.e., 100% connectedness). For this study of the donor network, density offers a simple description of the amount of communication flow among organizations in the network to the pre-election campaign.

The ability for information to flow efficiently and effectively throughout a network because of the variety of members' communication partners in the network can be evaluated with a measure called *structural holes*. As a concept, structural holes refer to missing connections in a network. The missing links leave disconnected members of the system cut off from the efficient and effective flow of information. The overall network that has perfectly efficient and effective linkages (all members are connected but with just enough links to keep them connected; not an overly exhaustive number of links) is said to have a balance of structural holes. The member of a network who forges a link that "closes the hole" to otherwise unconnected members is said to fill structural holes (Burt 1992a, b). So, when a member is said to have high structural holes, that member (in this case, a civil society organizational participant) has both efficient and effective links to other parts of the network. They close the hole in the network.

Relative Roles of Network Members

Whereas density and structural holes are ways to describe the overall system, centrality and a singular organization's structural holes measure help explain individual members' roles in a system *relative to others'* connections in that system. Degree centrality reflects the number of ties a focal organization has to other organizations. Betweenness centrality reflects the extent to which a focal organization is a liaison between groups. Degree refers to a basic count—who has the most connections. On the other hand, an organization with high betweenness centrality does not need to have the most connections, just the “right” connections such that the organization bridges gaps in the network and can thus control the flow of information in the network (Freeman 1979; Krackhardt 1992). Betweenness centrality is similar and complementary to individual-level structural holes. A singular organization's structural holes measure helps the analyst know the extent to which that organization has efficient and effective links to all others in the network. An organization that is highly efficient has the fewest possible links necessary to connect that organization to all other groups of others in the network. The effectiveness of the link suggests that the focal organization can glean information readily through those key links. A downside to extreme efficiency is that the focal organization is then more dependent on only those few key others for information.

The Croatian Civil Society Networks in 2000 and 2002

Based on the participants' self reports about their regular, ongoing communication relationships, the civil society network density was .43 in 2000. Figure 2a illustrates this moderately connected network of NGOs, media and donors. This network shows the extent to which organizations mobilized their efforts. The dense network in which all members have numerous partners throughout the network illustrates that they engaged in a flurry of communication activity during this time. In terms of specific roles of organizations in the network, centrality analyses from Time 1 showed that the donor, USAID, emerged as the organization with the most frequent and most rich communicative relationships (Taylor and Doerfel 2003). This finding is not surprising—USAID had been one of the largest financial supporters to the Croatian NGO community. Yet, the coincidence of both frequency and communication richness suggests that NGOs and media outlets saw benefits from frequent communication with this donor.

During the three-year transition initiative, USAID's overall plan was to keep the independent media alive in Croatia so that when the time came (for instance, the elections), there would be an outlet for voices for change. Moreover, through the development of civil society organizations, USAID nurtured a culture of activism and contributed to a public belief that the system could change. In the first 2 years, the donor provided financial and technical assistance on issues of return, refugees, alternative media, and NGOs. In 1999, USAID shifted its focus to concentrate almost exclusively on the parliamentary elections. USAID grants supported Get Out the Vote and election monitoring activities.

The final U.S. government report on the Croatian Transition noted that USAID/OTI was able to, through its mentoring and training, create a viable NGO network.

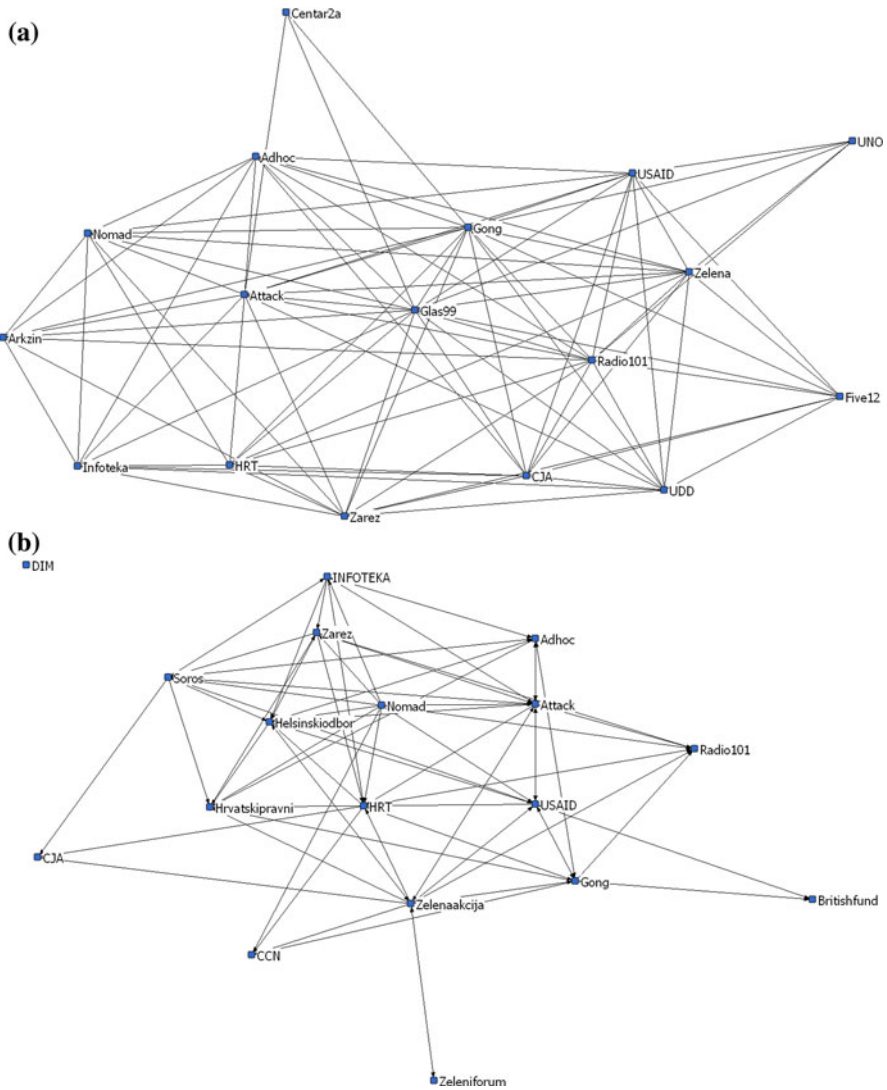


Fig. 2 **a** Croatian communication network in 2000 (density = .43). **b** Communication network in 2002 (density = .24). *Arrows* indicating the direction of communication flow were removed to improve the clarity of the figures. These figures and their respective density calculations are both directional graphs in which reciprocity of ties is not assumed

Croatia had no history of an active NGO or volunteer community. When one began to emerge after the war, it appeared to be dominated by elites. However, today OTI Croatia leaves a network of grass roots NGOs that will be able to work for the improvement of the nation. High impact NGOs such as GONG are on their way to sustainability. (USAID 2000, p. 5)

The U.S. Embassy's Public Affairs Officer in Croatia agreed that "there might not be any active, successful NGOs in Croatia without OTI mentoring and support" (USAID 2000, p. 13). USAID/OTI was the glue that helped make the network a relatively connected system. However, networks are constantly changing as new organizations enter and existing members leave the system. The Time 2 study illustrates what happened next.

Evolving Donor–NGO Relationships Create Gaps in Network that Diminish Social Capital

In 2002, the researchers revisited the Croatian civil society network to study how the system was evolving after the elections (Doerfel and Taylor 2005). Their interest was on network maintenance and how cooperation and competition were influencing the civil society sector. The major international donor in Croatia from Time 1, USAID, was again included in the study. Table 1 reports betweenness centralities of the study participants and two other donors included in the research—OSI and DFID. George Soros' OSI had been operating in Croatia since 1997. It is a well-recognized donor with special interest in Croatian media and civil society. DFID was a much more recent donor to operate in Croatia. It began funding civil society initiatives in 2000.

Figure 2b depicts the 2002 network, which had a moderate-to-low density of 24%, which is almost one-half of the 43% density from Time 1 study.² The data suggest that the civil society network was in danger of failing. A closer look at the network roles of the donors in Croatia suggests the reasons why.

In Time 2, donors had fewer financial resources to share with network members and thus provided *information* as their major resource to network members. Inspection of Table 1 reports betweenness centralities for the members of the network. OSI and DFID's relative positions indicate that they were not yet fully integrated into the civil society network, despite the fact that they added to the pool of economic and information resources the NGOs and the media can access. USAID's role changed in the latter half of the transition effort. It played an important role in the pre-election campaign in 1999 and 2000 but it changed its funding strategy after the 2000 elections (Doerfel and Taylor 2005).

The density of the 2002 Croatian civil society network decreased to one-half of its value in 2000 and data in the second study show the system lacked a balance in structural holes. Inspection of Fig. 2a, b also shows how the network changed from being completely connected in 2000 to one in which breaks were evident in the communication flow (e.g., in 2002, the Youth Democratic Initiative (DIM) became isolated, and Zeleni (Green) Forum and Croatian Journalists Association (CJA) have only two and three links, respectively, to the system). This result indicates a weakening network, which could have serious implications for civil society in Croatia. Despite the change in the network, there was a positive, significant correlation between the extent to which organizations had efficient and effective

² Density values are calculated based on directed graphs. In other words, if organization A reports communicating with organization B, we do *not* assume that organization B also communicates with organization A unless organization B explicates the link. In other words, reciprocation is not assumed. When reciprocation is assumed, the density values increase to .64 for 2000 and .26 in 2002.

Table 1 Betweenness centralities of organizations at time 2

Organization	Betweenness centrality	Rank
Green Action	21.89	1
USAID	10.17	2
GONG	10.13	3
HRT	9.34	4
Nomad	6.44	5
Soros	5.79	6
Attack	5.34	7
Helsinki	4.35	8
Law Center	3.37	9
Ad Hoc	2.06	10
Zarez	1.74	11
Radio 101	1.54	12
Infoteka	0.78	13
CJA	0.57	14
CCN	0.49	15
DFID	0.00	16
DIM	0.00	17
Green Forum	0.00	18

connections in the network and their relative cooperation. The networks illustrated in Figs. 2a, b also echo the idea that the network is more efficient and effective. In 2000, the network is nearly completely connected, so it is not efficient since nearly all members have direct contact with one another. In 2002, on the other hand, not all members have direct contact with one another, but, with the exception of the isolation of DIM, the network is still connected enough that communication could flow throughout it among the members' links. This finding indicates a relationship between the history of the organizational relationships and subsequent organizational choices for obtaining resources.

From a network perspective, donors can bring the cycle of relationships full-circle. Donors can foster efficient and effective relationships. They can serve as liaisons in the network by being strategically central and by eliminating redundancy among the NGOs and media in the network during this maintenance period. The low network density and the nature of network's structural holes identified in the 2002 network indicate a weakening system. The three donor organizations, USAID, OSI, and the DFID need to reconsider which organizations are their key communication partners and to which organizations their partners provide indirect access. In strategically networking with new partners, donors must constantly think about partnering with new organizations that are not just part of the same sub group in the network. Rather, they should wield relationships with organizations that are representative of a variety of different subgroups throughout the system. They should fill structural holes. The resulting nature of their connectedness returns them to a central place in the network, the benefits of which include greater access to information, greater ability to disseminate information, and therefore greater social influence.

Conclusions for Donor Roles in Civil Society Transitions

The donor–NGO network relationship is by its very nature an asymmetrical relationship. Resource dependency theory suggests that members of a system without resources are more likely to cooperate with members that have resources (Pfeffer 1981, 1991; Pfeffer and Salancik 1978). Thus, there is an evident power imbalance between those organizations that have resources (donors) and those that do not (NGOs). Donor organizations have enormous power to select certain organizations as grantees and then they have the power to continue/discontinue funding these organizations. Two conclusions emerged from this longitudinal network study that may help donors in future transition efforts.

Donors Must Balance Short Term Network Needs with Long-Term Network Capacity

In the early Croatian civil society movement, USAID funded dozens of organizations in their special interest groups, media, and civil society initiatives. However, overtime, USAID strategically decided to fund only a few organizations. According to USAID, “The first two years of the program focused on issues of return, refugees, alternative media and NGOs. In early 1999, the Croatia program shifted its focus to concentrate almost exclusively on the parliamentary elections” (2000, p. 9).

The shift in focus of USAID in 1999 from broad civil society goals to specific election goals meant that many organizations without an election focus would no longer receive support. To keep money coming in, many organizations shifted their focus away from special interests such as women’s issues and resettling war refugees to the highly fundable election activities. This helped to create a large election network and certain organizations were in a position to coordinate resources. But, this may have also limited social capital creation. Organizations moved away from their core mission and minimized the amount of time and energy dedicated to important social topics such as women’s issues and refugees. Social capital in other sectors was lost while these organizations worked on election topics.

Donors Must Mix Direct and Indirect Influence

The power dynamic can have negative outcomes for civil society initiatives. Time 1 shows that USAID worked closely with the NGO sector during the 2000 elections. Staff attended NGO meetings, worked on strategic messaging, and provided grant money to NGOs so they could purchase airtime on radio and television. USAID staff was intimately involved in the pre-election campaign. This influence can have negative repercussions for the NGO network. In Croatia, “the NGO coalition split in factions during December 1999 and many NGOs reported that they felt pressured to “take sides—either Soros or [USAID] OTI”. Some NGOs continued to work with OTI on the campaign efforts while other NGOs worked within the Glas coalition” (USAID 2000, p. 14). The exact nature of the disagreement is not clear but it seems

to have been tied to a perception of too much USAID influence in the pre-election campaign.

A fragmented NGO community does not create social capital. Donors need to be able to perform ongoing “checks” to see that they are facilitating, not dominating, the environment. A debate in the donor community revolves around “indirect or direct” funding for civil society initiatives in transitional nations. The argument for indirect funding of local NGOs is compelling. Indirect funding filters financial resources through organizations not affiliated with a foreign government. There is a fear that direct funding by foreign government organizations such as USAID or the British DFID allows too much international influence over local groups. Too much influence undermines the capacity building and social capital of local NGOs. Indirect funding directly removes foreign governments from appearing to pay for social and political changes in another country.

Direct funding means that international organizations directly interact and fund local grantees. This direct funding practice allows a donor to work closely with an aspiring local civil society organization. The donor can guide the local NGO in its activities. The direct funding relationship also allows the donor to monitor activities to ensure that the indigenous organization maximizes its funding opportunities and minimizes waste.

In Croatia, USAID combined both direct and indirect funding practices to support civil society initiatives. It provided grants directly to specific NGOs and alternative media organizations. It also provided funds for the pre-election coalitions that decided how best to distribute the resources among network members. USAID’s centrality in the networks (Table 2) suggests that this combined approach was valued by the NGOs and media organizations in Croatia. Frequent and

Table 2 Centrality of organizations at time 1

Organization	In-degree centrality	Rank
USAID	104.00	1
GONG	90.00	2
Glas 99	86.00	3
Women’s Ad Hoc Coalition	59.00	4
Radio 101	54.00	5
HRT	54.00	5
Arkzin	53.00	6
Zelena	51.00	7
UDD	48.00	8
CJA	47.00	9
UNO	35.00	10
Infoteka	33.00	11
Five to twelve	33.00	11
Attack Newsletter	30.00	12
Zarez	28.00	13
Centar	18.00	14
Nomad	7.00	15

rich communication offered local organizations guidance on their activities yet the funding for the pre-election campaign through the umbrella coalitions was intended to remove direct influence over the campaign.

A social network perspective has much to contribute to understanding international communication, donor organizations, and civil society development. Specific to Croatia, the civil society transition is considered a success story for international donors and its accomplishments and problems provide lessons for future transitions. USAID took a very active role in financing and mentoring civil society and media groups during the election campaign. Today, it is less connected to the movement. The two new donors, OSI and DFID, are playing different network roles. All three donors need to continue to support fledgling organizations as they enact their emerging civil society roles. This means that they need to work towards building links among otherwise disconnected groups in the civil society network and enable the flow of valuable resources including information and communication that support NGO needs.

When donors train civil society organizations on how to strategically ally with other types of similar and dissimilar organizations, they are providing NGOs with a resource that is as valuable as donor money or expertise. The long-term strength of the civil society network of NGOs is the real impact of the donor efforts. Future research should continue to study the Croatia transition and measure civil society as the country makes it way through the EU membership process.

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