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**The Map Defines the Territory:  
Remodelling NGO Partnerships for Knowledge Translation  
in Transition Contexts**

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*A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy*

*Faculty of Management  
Cass Business School, City University  
London*

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## **Declaration**

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**Mariana Bogdanova**

## **Abstract**

This thesis originates in a case study examining support within an international partnership, where findings were seen to diverge from conventional accounts of organisational dependence. Instead case findings pointed to an inter-dependency more alike to a 'knowledge transfer' relationship between a younger organisation learning about how to be a civil society actor from an older and more experienced third sector organisation. Starting with the classical literature on partnerships and collaboration in the third sector, using selected readings from the individual mentoring relationship found in career development research, and some of the current research into knowledge transfer and learning relevant to organisational development, the researcher constructs a framework to guide a multiple case study. The aim of the research is to explore the knowledge acquired by and learning occurring in the process of NGOs developing their identities and practices in a transition context in Bulgaria. The focus is on the learning and knowledge context, namely, the key relationships which Bulgarian NGOs have developed with western partner organisations.

The case fieldwork provides in-depth descriptions of four NGOs and their modes of engagement with western counterparts, explored with qualitative case methods and grounded theory. Multiple qualitative case study design and grounded theory approach to the analysis produces a rich description of themes. Each case responds to the posed research questions through data layering and within- case analysis, whereas cross-case analysis leads to the main thesis output. This is the taxonomy developed around three projections based on literature strands - organisational identity, learning and knowledge instances, and context-related factors embedding supportive exchanges with western partners. These themes are further developed into concepts and dimensions, differentiating various nuances of knowledge and learning practices within a partnership micro-context in a transition macro-context.

The primary contribution of the research is the framing of NGO partnerships around key concepts and dimensions across identity, learning and knowledge instances, and context-related factors. This sets the conditions for forming better informed relationships between organisations, which are, above all, more aware of each other's complex information and knowledge practices. The primary direction for taxonomy development is towards a typology of inter-organisational partnerships focused on learning for practice. Specifically, key findings suggest a direction towards a partnership dynamic around the concept of a professional identity of third sector organisations, as well as around the managing of a dual credibility of NGOs faced with functioning within international networks whilst being embedded within local platforms. The resulting taxonomy offers links to various literature strands, presenting a complex picture of inter-organisational learning in transition settings. It is a contribution to voluntary sector partnership and collaboration theory, one the one hand, as it does not simplify either the NGO practices on the ground nor the inter-organisational relationship at the core of this NGO development.

## Introduction

The initial impetus for a theoretical exploration of organisational relationships is based on case study research on a Bulgarian NGO's implementation of values and goals into practices under a guiding relationship from a very experienced UK organisation in the same field. Findings diverged from conventional accounts of developing NGOs' dependence on more developed counterparts and that case study findings characterised the inter-dependency between the two organisations as more alike to a collaborative knowledge sharing relationship. An example of what could be described as 'organisational support and knowledge sharing' had occurred. The research expectation therefore is to observe Bulgarian NGOs and their partners enacting a playing field of transition, where certain negotiation of knowledge and learning between transitioning and assisting actors takes place.

The research explores the nature and impact of working relations between NGOs in an East European transition state (Bulgaria) and western organisations in the voluntary sector which support their work. The aim is to develop a better understanding of these forms of trans-national inter-organisational working relations in the context of management practice, knowledge transfer and learning, and civil society building by the voluntary sector.

Further objectives are to:

- Critique and challenge predominant literatures which emphasise directive, 'top down' relations between Bulgarian NGOs and their western partners in the above-specified contexts, given the transformational socio-economic environment of Bulgaria and the changing relations within the European Union as it becomes a fully-fledged democratic country.
- Construct a new model of inter-organisational partnerships supportive of organisational development by framing and describing organisational learning issues taking place in Bulgarian NGOs. The impetus for constructing an organisational level typology is the assumption that there is a link between the nature of individual learning and the nature of organisational exchanges. Both involve an evolving, staged, and goal-oriented relationship between partners, which reflects the inter-NGO knowledge sharing and exchange in an East-West dynamic.
- Assess possible implications revealed by a new partnership typology focusing on knowledge exchange, in terms of the role of a new member state of the European Union, where civil society and NGO development are being given increasing credence in meeting the challenges of a wider Europe. This includes reflecting on lessons for transition countries and their organisations which are replicating and reworking models of organisational practice from abroad.

The primary research question is:

**“To what extent does an inter-organisational relationship typology emphasising underlying knowledge transfer, knowledge sharing, and learning processes, offer a useful approach to describing an evolving voluntary sector in a transition context?”**

Further research questions are developed around three themes (learning, voluntary sector, transition contexts) and the three projections developed from the initial case study and reading around the mentoring literature (actor, context and knowledge). Looking at the (1) knowledge transfer and learning which goes on within the (2) voluntary sector in a (3) transition context, the research sets out to look for evidence of a “supportive organisational learning typology”. If observed, it should lead to the construction of a learning typology for inter-organisational support arrangements in transition settings. Emerging data from the cases underlie the evidence, guided by the conceptual framework and three projections based on relevant literature strands. In addition alternatives are identified in terms of fit with existing literature to address findings, suggesting further research directions.

A number of literature strands contextualise the research question and therefore its implications. Some literature on transition studies is included, particularly where this is relevant to studying the voluntary sector and NGO realities. Then the review looks at works on the organisational context of the sampled cases, including organisations in transition, voluntary sector research, and country-specific discourse on the sector transition. The focus is provided by the selected literature which refers directly to the core of the relationship, i.e. organisational knowledge sharing, organisational learning, inter-organisational partnerships and the collaboration literature, both relevant to the voluntary sector and beyond. These inform the conceptual categories which guide the fieldwork, alongside selected mentoring literature concepts from career guidance, workplace education, and counselling fields.

The research explores the emergent elements of a *supportive relationship for organisational knowledge sharing and learning*, where the exchanges between selected organisations located in contrasting institutional settings. The Bulgarian NGOs are seen as the actors involved in the organisational development, the process and content of knowledge being acquired, translated, adopted, and/or adapted and the sector-specific, national, and international context. The emphasis is on *organisational practice*, i.e. how acquired and co-constructed knowledge is invested into and enacted by everyday practice in NGOs delivering their services.

The research unfolds into a multiple case study following a qualitative approach, where data is explored under the tenets of grounded theory. The fieldwork took place over four months between 2008 and 2009 in four transition country-based NGOs in Bulgaria. Organisations were sampled on the basis of their established relationships with western NGO partners. Accessing the organisations has had implications with respect to political sensitivity; asking respondents to comment on their current partnership and its

learning potential, where the partner is also funding their activities, poses a methodological and ethical challenge. Ensuring that there is no sense of evaluation and “checking up” on the partners and their work is seen as essential to accessing genuine respondent views. With the exception of one of the cases where access was seen to be essential to understating the NGO’s work, this has resulted in data being collected only from the Bulgarian side of the partnership which limits the partnership perspective.

Two of the NGOs are a part of an established international structure determining their activities and services, and two are independent, operating under partnership projects. The decision to take samples from both formal branch and independent NGO structures is based on access issues and developments in the first two cases. This resulted in two independent organisations accessed in Phase 1 (2008): BARDA specialises in regional development and support for SMEs across the country, and Animus works in trafficking prevention and psychological support for victims of violence and trauma. Two organisations which were part of formal international structures were accessed in Phase 2 (2009): SOS provides family and child-centred support and UNAY is a volunteer-based youth section of an association promoting the mission and goals of the United Nation.

In the research analysis, case data coding first generates a number of case themes and key concepts for each consecutive case (within-case analysis). The four within-case analyses represent multiple ‘maps’ describing the issues faced by a developing voluntary sector in transition settings. Cross-case analysis generates a taxonomy of concepts developed around the three projections - actor, knowledge, and context.

<b><i>Core Projection</i></b>	<b><i>Emerging concepts (general dimensions)</i></b>	<b><i>Description</i></b>
<b>ACTOR</b>	Organisational Presence (self-perception and self-assessment) (identity presented to others)	Related to structure, content, and quality of practices, the process of ‘cultivating’ and/or ‘assuming’ an identity (individual/organisational)
<b>KNOWLEDGE</b>	Learning/Information-handling/Knowing (instances of learning) (learning from partners) (learning from experience)	Related to processes of adapting/adopting knowledge; types and modes of knowledge production; modes of sharing and handling information
<b>CONTEXT</b>	Embeddedness (in statutory sector)(in the practitioner community)	Related to belonging to a practice-based community in the sector; relationships with the institutional context locally and internationally

**Table 1 Cross-Case Summary: Case findings against the literature-based projections**

Six concepts and eleven dimensions are related to the core categories, the latter structured around concepts derived from the literature strands. The ‘organisational’ versus ‘professional identity’ dimension relates to the emphasis given to the level of expertise in performing NGO practices

(knowledge and qualifications) and the degree to which individuals are prominent as professionals belonging to a practice (e.g. international professional body) as opposed to belonging to the organisation. Another key concept is 'organisational presence', referring to the NGO structure and purpose, embedded in the services delivered, activities carried out, the way in which these are structured and their core activity focus i.e. the basis for legitimacy and accountability of their practices.

The characteristics of an organisation's engagement in a partnership-based relationship with a learning or knowledge transfer element are the potential embodiments of the relationship, which appear as 'knowledge production' (the handling of information by gathering, analysing and disseminating, and the primary type of knowledge for 'developing' or 'reporting'), learning practice (with an 'adapting' and 'adopting' distinction), and knowledge sharing modes (distinguishing between reliance on home and international networks). Finally 'embeddedness' and 'credibility source' are the context-related concepts with respect to a relationship-based development in the cases, respectively addressing the strength of institutional engagement in the home country and the reliance on home versus international expert community when carrying out NGO activities.

An overreaching theme across all three projections is 'professionalisation' or developing organisational 'expertise', embodied at individual, organisational, and sector levels in the constructed cases. This is considered key to approaching organisational mentoring as a partnership model in the sector. That is, if mentoring is the theory-based concept found in the literature as underlying a supportive relationship between NGOs, professionalisation could be seen as an observed practice accounting for a more self-driven development mode which factors in, but is not exclusive to, East-West partnerships.

The primary contribution of the research is the framing of NGO partnerships with respect to their knowledge and learning support for developing organisations. As to the implications for practice in the field, the framing is can be used as a tool for informing potential partners about each other along the outlined dimensions, i.e. in terms of their complex information and knowledge practices, their organisational identities, and their contextual factors. Specifically, mentoring is seen as a possible model in its appearance as a course of developing and managing a dual credibility that addresses both international networks and local embeddedness platforms. Secondly, the cases present professionalisation (expertise development) as a practice and trend across all sub-sector cases, based on the perceived need to become a more independently operating organisation.

A second contribution of the research is in the generation of concepts and dimensions from the resulting taxonomy seen to reflect existing literature strands, whilst being pertinent to the framework. Namely, situating the cross-case analysis in the existing knowledge and voluntary sector literature, the concepts 'adapting' and 'adopting' of partner strategies, activities, and identities relate to existing models of 'translation' (e.g. Czarniawska & Sevón 2005). Contextual dimensions addressing institutional embeddedness can be traced to both issues arising in global civil society network

membership literatures and to managerial learning research. So can issues of balancing partnership engagement and situated learning, both making use of networks for organisational development. Respective literatures offer possible future research alternatives for situating findings and renegotiating the resulting taxonomy.

Third, the researcher believes the cases provide some evidence of learning practice lending itself to developing "organisational mentoring" as a model describing partnership for development for the third sector in particular. This is observed most strongly in Case 2 where the NGO has a supervision model in place on an individual and organisational level enabling professional development. This model aids their work in trafficking prevention, helps the organisation develop strategically, whilst at the same time aiding the development of individuals within the NGO irrespectively of the organisation's needs. Such a professionalisation-g geared mentoring model would be an alternative to the top-down model based around development needs found in the development literature, or collaborative one based on shared goals to be found in the collaboration literature in the sector.

Reflecting on the learning and research challenges, the researcher feels that the fieldwork has been a significant learning experience with respect to analysis and methodological exploration of technique and decision-making. It has led to a shift away from the partnership context of the interexchange to the larger learning context for the transition organisation's activities. This has been a result of the attempt to enrich the theme pool for the potential typology by continuously adding on literature that reflects the continually developing themes in the analysis. At the same time re-situating findings in relevant literature fields and has been limited as a necessary step to the inductive approach to building theory from cases rather than relapsing into theory testing. This does not preclude further attribution of findings to existing work and it is believed that the rich fieldwork and analysis presented here has a prolific potential to be re-contextualised in the future.

The thesis comprises the following chapters:

**Chapter One** *This chapter outlines the research focus and objectives, introducing key definitions and discipline settings. It introduces the research trigger case and provides a brief matching between emerging themes and selected mentoring literature which aids in delineating the themes to be explored further in the literature review sections. The section concludes with the development of conceptual categories which provides a brief positioning within literature on NGOs in transition settings.*

**Chapter Two** *The chapter presents the Literature Context introducing key literature strands with selected contributions which inform the formation of the research question and the research rationale as to the structure of data analysis. This includes existing works on transition from economic and socio-political texts, texts addressing the organisation in transition, and texts on the voluntary sector in a transition context with an emphasis on Bulgarian sector development.*



**Chapter Three** *This chapter focuses specifically on those Literature strands addressing the learning and knowledge issues in a partnership context, with relevance to the highlighted issues around NGO development in transition settings, set out in the previous Chapter. The chapter begins with the central element of the research question, the partnership and collaboration literature as it applies to the voluntary sector. Other texts refer more directly to the core exchanges in an NGO partnership - typologies on organisational learning, knowledge transfer, and knowledge creation. It concentrates the relevant literature strands into a more targeted conceptual framing driving the fieldwork and data analysis processes. The resulting framework is presented at the end of the Chapter.*

**Chapter Four** *The Methodology chapter begins with an outline of the development of the research design, refining the research questions, and the multiple case study approach. Then it moves to the implementation of the research methodology in the fieldwork. This includes the processes around case access and some of the details on coding and concept development from themes appears here. Extracts from the research diary, reflections and challenges are presented for illustration. The writing is in first person to convey researcher presence and process of reflection in the fieldwork. Grounded theory techniques are discussed in detail for each of the cases including memoing, open coding, axial coding, concept forming and category forming based on theoretical sampling. In addition the chapter presents different data types explored in the fieldwork with respective coding methods, establishing key links between case themes and subsequent concept developments.*

**Chapter Five** *The Empirical Data chapter presents the case study reports based on the fieldwork conducted in four NGOs. Case profiles include information on each organisation, the data used and overall fieldwork experience. Themes for each case are explored in detail before the chapter concludes with a summary of emerging themes and key concepts for each case. The chapter is written in first person to convey researcher presence and process of reflection in the fieldwork. Within-case analysis for each case is presented with a reference to the initial conceptual framework.*

**Chapter Six** *The Analysis chapter examines in detail the findings for each of the cases along the three framework projections – actor, knowledge and context. Each case is given in the context of selected data excerpts and analysis steps. This provides a traceable logic of how concepts emerge from the data through a continual interplay between data and coding into themes, concept enrichment, metaphor engagement, and referring back to the core categories in the conceptual framework. Finally the cross-case analysis process is presented demonstrating how main categories, concepts, and dimensions emerge across the four cases. This produces a taxonomy which informs the initial conceptual framework. Interpretation of each concept and dimension in the taxonomy is provided with examples from each case study.*

**Chapter Seven** *The Discussion chapter draws together the main analysis threads linking them back to the initial conceptual framework. It also links threads into discussions beyond the taxonomy as a first attempt*

*to relate emergent themes and concepts to the wider literature reviewed. Typology developments are discussed and selected conferences attended during the course of the research are proposed as a further relevant context for situating the discussion on implications of research findings.*

**Chapter Eight** *This chapter summarises the contributions and implications of the research, reiterating the main theoretical punch lines. Future research directions are suggested. Research limitations and reflection on the role of self in the study are noted reiterating the research as a learning journey with future research ambitions.*

## Chapter One: Research Context and Development of the Argument

*This chapter outlines the research focus and objectives, introducing key definitions and discipline settings. It introduces the research trigger case and provides a brief matching between emerging themes and selected mentoring literature which aids in delineating the themes to be explored further in the literature review sections. The section concludes with the development of conceptual categories which provides a brief positioning within literature on NGOs in transition settings.*

Since 1989 Eastern Europe has been experiencing political and economic reform of significant magnitude. The region's countries, distinct in their history and transition experience, have become a 'living laboratory' for learning about management theory and practice as part of the profound institutional changes taking place there (Child and Czegledy 1996). From a practice perspective, these are locations for unique cases overlooked by external decision-makers when attempting to "make things work". Tempted to explore what is being left behind in this process of undocumented practice in a time of change, the researcher conducted a single case study on a Bulgarian NGO in 2004 as part of a Master's dissertation. The case study research examined a Bulgarian NGO's implementation of values and goals into practices (Bogdanova 2004; 2006).

One of the under-developed aspects in the case was the Bulgarian NGO's guided relationship from a very senior UK organisation operating in the same field. Findings diverged from conventional accounts of developing NGOs' dependence on developed counterparts and largely did not reflect more recent scholarship in Eastern European contexts which describes local NGO relations with external supporters. Instead it was considered that the case study findings characterised the inter-dependency between the two organisations as more alike to a 'mentoring' relationship with the mentoring organisation having an interest in the mentee's progress. An example of what could be described as a relationship based on organisational support and knowledge sharing had occurred.

Based on the case findings it is assumed that where organisations have access to well-established organisations in other countries and offer tangible, intellectual and moral support for enhancing organisational effectiveness and capacity building, a more supportive type of relationship occurs. The research impetus was therefore to explore this notion of a supportive partnership for organisational learning and knowledge sharing and to model the exchanges between partner organisations located in contrasting institutional settings.

Negotiating between the East and West to create new understanding is a political encounter and each side will have its interest close at hand when searching for common ground. Whilst academic research to date may be limited in explaining the interests embedded in eastern and western cultures, it

nevertheless bring to light shifts in thinking regarded desired outcomes. These shifts can be expressed in the debates from “moving our way” to “moving to a new direction”. It is suggested that the current literatures in this respect are incomplete insofar as the nature of trans-national NGO relationships are becoming increasingly complex and that at least in some settings, these relationships may be better characterised as a kind of knowledge sharing partnerships rather than one-directional activity between “helper” and “helped”. The goal of this partnership is assumed to be one around equipping transition partners to move towards being effective actors, i.e. the emphasis is on knowledge applied to enhancing organisational practice in NGOs delivering their services.

The trigger case provided the grounds for the research objectives and main research questions driving the thesis in two ways. First, it outlines some of the key themes around developing a voluntary sector organisation in a transition country with the support of an international partnership. Second, it provokes questions on the processes of learning and knowledge sharing taking place within a relationship between organisations in the voluntary sector. Both lead to the exploration of the literature strands which inform the conceptual categories leading the fieldwork process of data-collection. Some of the key findings in the trigger case and how these set the stage for conceptual category development are outlined below.

### **The Research Trigger Case – Delineating Themes**

The two organisations in the case study have their own history of emergence and development. The RSPB is over 100 years old and started out as an action against plumage trade. Today it is the largest conservation organisation in Europe with £50 million income per year, over 1 million members, 13,000 volunteers, 1440 staff, and 182 nature reserves. It works on policy-influence, habitat conservation, research and international programmes. The RSPB is a sector titan in the UK and has the support and recognition of a substantial part of the country; it is internationally recognised and arguably, desired as a partner by the voluntary sector anywhere in the world. Starting from a different set of goals, the BSPB is established in 1988 with an already wider goal - bird protection and biodiversity conservation. It is incomparably smaller with 22 staff and 800 members, 5 regional offices and 2 conservation centres. It is still Bulgaria's largest and the only one managing protected areas. Activities are the same as those of its partner, i.e. conservation, advocacy, education and international involvement. Despite the respect from institutional actors it has gained, at the time of the research the BSPB is not as recognised and respected by the public as the RSPB.

What links the two is the shared mission and values around bird and nature conservation. The legitimating body for recognising this mission as a global goal is the BirdLife International conservation partnership, under the guidance of which the RSPB became a partnering organisation for sustainable development of the younger BSPB in 1994. The RSPB finances some of the activities and provides its

time for sitting in and setting strategy together with their partners. The assistance also involves workshops for BSPB employees aiming to developing diverse skill such as financial management, personnel management, and good governance. Both organisations are partners in the same overarching organisation, invited separately based on their achievements, although one is clearly more experienced and has greater capacity to carry out its goals.

Nature conservation is an example of the civil society building for the progressing of economies, transition and non-transition, towards sustainability, therefore the highest priority of both NGOs. It is closely related to the advocacy and advisory activities of the organisations since most of the conservation action in the field takes place on a second parallel level of governmental and international policy-making (national laws, international conventions, EU directives). BSPB works for the drafting and implementation of action plans for globally threatened species found locally, which have to be submitted to the Bulgarian Ministry of Environment and Waters. It is active in the European ecological network NATURA 2000 of the EU, whose specifications need to be completed for granting the country accession to the European Community. The involvement of BSPB in this program is the link between the NGO, the institutional environment at home and international partners. This way, there is a double responsibility to local and global nature conservation activity, which arguably means that at least two civil societies are being built.

Despite their contrasting profile in terms of age and capacity, the BSPB continues to be an independent organisation partnering to, rather than a branch of, the RSPB since it was established and functions independently as a home-grown organisation. Nevertheless, under the recommendations of their international regulating body BirdLife, the RSPB assists the BSPB with various supporting activities. This poses the question what kind of “partners” they may be said to be.

Responses from both sides point to a collaborative partnership and mutual respect. A comment from RSPB’s “side” states: “We don’t have an imperialistic attitude towards our partners and don’t see things that way ... RSPB does not attempt to change a partner’s culture but to work within it using its potential...”.

BSPB are recognised by the partner mostly for their commitment, their “incredible talent and intelligence”. This recognition is combined with the “shared international set of values and standards” as a conservationist organisation to form a strategy which the RSPB has in assisting their partner:

*“...our partnership is about identifying targets and setting objectives together, not the means, as that is left to them [BSPB] as a unique organisational culture. What matters is that we reach the same targets”.*

A BSPB commentator from the central office:

*“...we are recognised and respected by institutions we work with on the basis of our professionalism and especially on our partnership with BirdLife and RSPB. We were lucky too [referring to the history of BSPB] - from the very beginning of our existence, our strategy was close enough to that of an organisation with enormous experience [the RSPB], which allowed us to come together”.*

Other comments show a positive regard, like “they give us advice”, “they never tell us what to do” and “their support is invaluable”. However, perceptions of self-identity diverge within the BSPB judging from the difference in a comment made by a central office respondent on “being a respected actor” compared to an active volunteer perspective of BSPB being “RSPB’s child [sarcastically]”. That leaves the question as to the inequality between the two in terms of experience and capacity and how that influences the values and behaviour of the people in each organisation.

Another important theme in the findings unfolds the deeper aspects of their relationship - that of the experience and maturity of BSPB as perceived by the RSPB. On the question of what the central problem behind BSPB’s difficulties was, and the mechanisms were needed for improvement, one RSPB respondent working closely with the Bulgarian NGO at the time, comments:

*“... it is the willingness to take on new different ways... BSPB is not mature yet...going through cycles is what creates the experience needed; it’s about learning, consistent openness to new ideas, having knowledgeable top people and hard core supporters”.*

Interestingly, this is not pointed out by the respondent as the weakness of BSPB: “The weakness of BSPB is a subset of the cultural differences – they argue, there are serious personality conflicts causing real difficulties unlike in the UK where mechanisms would sort individuals’ problems out.” A specific example is referred to: “...meetings take longer in Bulgaria; in the UK we discuss beforehand and meetings are for finalising things”. From the other side, the BSPB speaks of ‘people with strong personalities’ and ‘people with active positions’ as those who make things happen in the organisation. They are “...those who push their opinion through...have an opinion on critical issues and actively participate in all aspects of BSPB activity”; “...strong personalities set the priorities, especially in decision-making at meetings”. A mixture of positive and negative regard of these actors can be sensed which makes BSPB’s self-perception hard to pin down.

In the context of the political and economic difficulties Bulgaria faces, the BSPB shows to be having a difficult time carrying out its mission. Their goals vary from the more technical aspects of working for bird population sustainability in the regions of the country to the more complex processes of advocacy, both heavily tangled up in the larger transition context.

Having been in this relationship for more than ten years now, the RSPB respondent is confident when expressing his expectations as to where the BSPB would be in the future. "...BSPB is not going to be the RSPB of Bulgaria". This self-assured statement once again raises the issues identified earlier about the lack of clarity as to whether maturing comes with time and experience. Whatever the case may be, there is a clear direction towards sustainability in this relationship, away from dependency, or at least top-down dependency. The RSPB respondent continues:

*"70% of the financing BSPB get from sources other than us. RSPB is a safety-net for BSPB, not a core organisation they are dependent on. I expect them to develop into a medium-size organisation within the next ten years."*

However, there is a sense of paternalism in the response of the western organisation when confronted with the question on the difficulties BSPB was facing with setting priorities, likely to be related to the strategy the two organisations set together:

*"There is a new process of objectives prioritisation for BSPB... We have worked together on strategy development for five years now and objectives follow from that...they need time".*

It is perhaps a sense of protectionism and justification of a legacy the RSPB may need to pass onto its younger partner.

Upon reflection on case findings a number of observations are made with respect to the relationship and its developmental capacity. These are the basis for what themes are to be expected in the fieldwork as well as what literature guidance would be most fitting for constructing tentative conceptual categories.

First, both sides in the partnership present a collaborative rather than an imposed method of working together in partnership centred on a shared mission and shared organisational values. The feeling was that the relationship was not "burdensome", where the RSPB respondent rejected the possibility of an "imperialistic attitude" towards partners. Second, the workshops and advice provided to the Bulgarians by their UK partner aimed to develop their management skills to meet the goals of the BirdLife network, of which both are equal members. On the other hand RSPB has an 'our goals, their way' strategy in managing the relationship with their Bulgarian partner. This may be evidence that organisational legacy is being passed onto the Bulgarian partner by means of collective strategy development activities. At the same time there seems to be a discordant self-perception on organisational identity, where diverging opinions are expressed by referring to the partnership. Interestingly, identity appears as an element of the partnership and what it provides.

Finally, there was awareness from both NGOs that the context in which the BSPB operates is not the same as that of RSPB. This calls for reinterpretation of the existing knowledge that the RSPB shares and/or transfers. Defensiveness is observed in RSPB regarding the efforts they made to transfer their

knowledge to the partner. This could be read as a form of self-reassurance that the transfer of experience is beneficial to the BSPB and will yield the desired outcomes. It remains unclear whether this is a matter of the generative needs of RSPB reproducing their knowledgebase and meeting their international objectives, or reluctance to face the uncertainty of what this transfer will produce on Bulgarian soil. A double responsibility to both local and global context is thus a paramount theme. Within this theme nests the issue of the transition country NGO reaching maturity as a contested matter of culture versus time, also evident in the findings.

### **Initial Case Themes and Conceptual Categories**

The cross-NGO relationship in the trigger case takes place in a country undergoing major socio-economic changes, a location which has remained largely unexplored. This means that exploring questions around learning and knowledge is seen as a theory-building opportunity. Rather than testing established theory of learning or looking for embodiments of described partnership models to be found in the third sector literature, the research aspires to map out by what means and through what processes NGOs are learning to be agents of change in Bulgaria. This has two main components: (1) **the process of becoming organisations**, i.e. learning about NGO practice and gaining awareness of being civil society enablers, and (2) **the learning channel(s) for this process**, i.e. the partnerships with their Western counterparts seen as critical by the third-sector and transition literature.

The need to explore both components simultaneously necessitates developing a complex conceptual framework for carrying out the fieldwork that would reflect a dynamic perspective of the learning/knowledge exchange taking place within a partnership. The element “organisational agency” constructed in a developing sector, and the element “transitional context” influencing NGO practices, also needed incorporating in the framework. Professor Harrow’s reading of the initial case study suggested an orientation exploring the learning relationships with an emphasis on the different levels of the organisations’ development. Revising case findings around what was seen as a largely constructive, knowledge-sharing, inter-organisational relationship, the researcher began working towards a theoretical construct around ‘mentoring’. This was supported further by the appearance of the notion “mentors” in key research publication by Child and Czegledy (1996) *Managerial Learning in the Transformation of Eastern Europe* (ibid.:173), though it was not developed into an organisational framework.

The transition dynamics of the organisation’s external environment is a type of setting where it is expected that a less experienced actor would need to develop their organisational capacity, skills, and position sufficiently to become an effective actor in an institutional context. The transition element is significant here as the link between the individual, organisational, and institutional context of a civil society building project, eighteen years after “the changes”, as they are popularly referred to in Bulgaria.



According to the Home Office's Active Community Unit (now the Office of the Third Sector), mentoring is

*"...a one-to-one, non-judgemental relationship in which an individual mentor voluntarily gives time to support and encourage another. This relationship is typically developed at a time of transition [emphasis added] in the mentee's life, and lasts for a significant and sustained period of time"* (2001).

The discussion on mentoring is found in the field of career guidance, workplace education and counselling, usually taking place within the organisation and to the organisation's benefit. Mentoring involves experts (or individuals with advanced experience) passing knowledge to the usually younger protégés, a supporting exchange within a highly personal bond of mutual satisfaction, to the outcome of psychological development (Daloz, 1986; Kram, 1985; Aryee *et al.*, 1994). A mentoring relationship usually takes place within the organisation and to the organisation's benefit, where skills, knowledge, and guidance for career advancement is provided to individuals looking for professional development. An East-West inter-organisational partnership assisting organisational learning and knowledge exchange can be seen as a relationship with similar elements to those described by the mentoring literature. Brought to an organisational level, links with individual mentoring raise questions which further structure the research rationale, the research questions for the fieldwork, and provide some of the scaffolding for the conceptual categories guiding data analysis at later stages.

For example, Gibb (2003) asks the question about how to mentor, the first type being in favour of mapping and formalising activities to the effect of meeting the organisational aims under a managerial guidance, while the second favours the holistic approach to a complex environment considering that everything is interconnected and seeking to understand the links. Similarities to the process of an assisted organisational change with support from an external organisation can be sought here. Mentoring purpose issues address the divide between liberal values in favour of "promoting humanistic ideals through improved psychological development", and conservative values, which ascribe a "continuity of the status quo [in] replicating behaviour patterns" to the mentoring function (Gibb 2003: 46). Another key text in mentoring, Clutterbuck's framework brings a multi-dimensional perspective of a trust-based relationship based on the various roles of the mentor as a coach, networker, counsellor, facilitator and guardian, each relating to the self- or career- promotion in a directive or non-directive manner (ibid.: 1998). Brought to an organisational level, this distinction relates to questions about the motivations behind and direction of assistance in organisational development. In the case of NGO development, this translates into who is building civil society in Bulgaria? For whose benefit and with what results?

Kram (1983) introduces the notion of mentoring phases and how the relationship between the mentor and protégé transforms with time on the basis of their needs and organisational circumstances. It shows that the relationship transcends the practical managerial approach focusing on the use of mentoring, as

the deeper psychological effects signal the need for a more holistic approach to this type of bond, linking it to sociology and psychology disciplines. Applying the 'phases' concept on an organisational level, in the initiation stage of the relationship the mentee is likely to seek relationships that provide opportunities for resolving the dilemmas posed in early career years.

This can be observed in the trigger case study between the BSPB and RSPB via their membership in BirdLife. According to the findings, the RSPB assist the younger organisation in resolving their management and planning dilemmas but do not advise them on *how* to implement the plans in relation to the cultural and institutional context. This raises the question of whether the experienced RSPB is helping, when and why? In the case of keeping a hands-off rule to allow for initiative and cultural contextualisation, is the organisation contributing to the Bulgarian partner's difficulties in establishing themselves locally? Is this deliberate or unintended?

In mentoring, when the mentee feels more autonomous, s/he will no longer look to the mentor for the same kind of support. In the case, RSPB and BSPB show to be aware of their progressing relationship. There is also an apparent move towards greater sustainability of the Bulgarian NGO (financial dependence reduced to 30% and subsidising assistance on planning and managerial skills). However, when applied to the case of external NGOs mentoring other NGOs in their indigenous environment, the phase aspect of mentoring is perhaps in need of modification to account for the autonomy existing throughout the relationship. It can be argued that because the two NGOs are independent actors, the BSPB preserves a certain degree of autonomy in its practices, making the relationship more peer-like from the very beginning rather than reaching that state in the redefinition stage of Kram's model. Does this vary with the degree of interdependency?

Finally, the external mentoring of NGOs in transitional environments is bound to reach a point of exit when the maturity of the organisation and self-sustainability reaches adequacy. As relationships transform, there is a move away from the transferring knowledge and sharing of experience to developing an organically grown civil society, as a mix between the external assistance and the local agents' own experience. Returning to the case findings, if the organisational weaknesses of BSPB are a matter of cultural difference (derived from national culture), whereas maturity is a matter of gaining experience over time, does maturity come with time or adequate guidance? Or is cultural "hindrance" stronger than time and the efforts of either partner? What does that indicate for the future of transitional countries assisted externally?

## Developing Conceptual Categories

This initial exploration of developing a mentoring framework as a conceptual construct for data collection and analysis has undergone transformation by presenting it to different audience groups. It was first discussed at the Voluntary Sector Studies Network (VSSN) seminar in LSE London, where it received the feedback of voluntary sector academics. They advised looking in different directions for insight and tying themes together. For example, they pointed out that the *what* of knowledge exchange in the mentoring pair is more important than the presentation suggested, due to attempts to emphasise the *how* of knowledge exchange. Also the issue on what was received by both sides in the partnership was seen to be underreported – what does the ‘mentor’ learn from the exchange? Parallels were drawn with the agenda of distance learning, crucially implying that the mentoring concept lends itself to other disciplines and thus may benefit from integration with these.

The mentoring framework was also presented at the EIASM Organisational Change in Eastern Europe conference in Lithuania 2007, to a very different audience – international participants, many of which working in East European countries on organisational change-related academic projects. The presentation was delivered as a Doctoral proposal with an appeal for comments on all aspects of the research. The audience unanimously emphasised that I should avoid reinventing the wheel in creating a new typology of learning and knowledge transfer, i.e. “there are enough frameworks out there already”. Some suggested the researcher started from the organisational development literature whereas others thought the idea was closely related to strategic alliances literature beyond the realms of the voluntary sector. This heightened the importance of integrating research and literature focusing on learning and knowledge outside that of mentoring, which needed closer examination, categorisation, and possibly matching to the mentoring idea.

Proposing a mentoring relationship as an assisted and learning-centred organisational development framework alone is, therefore, considered insufficient to capture the vast learning and development agenda of the voluntary sector in such turbulent and sector-specific conditions. Moreover, the trigger case questions presented above are not exclusive to the mentoring literature. Instead they traverse a larger literature body - that pertaining to knowledge transfer, organisational learning, networked learning, and other partnership and collaboration-based knowledge exchange and creation activities. For example one questions is whether the legacy of knowledge and experience of the expert matches the knowledge receiver’s need for support in a local context, found in Kostova and Roth (2002). The authors explore institutional pressures on multinational companies who struggle to balance global integration of competitive capability with local adaptation. Another is whether and when knowledge sharers leave when there is no more generative return for either side, explored in evolutionary partnership models and research on exploitation in strategic alliances in the corporate sector (e.g. Waddock 1989; Rothaermel & Deeds 2004).

Partnership and knowledge-related literature is in itself insufficient to account for some of the context-specific issues, considering that the voluntary sector is a part of a civil society development agenda. Here policy and international relations make more appropriate candidates as research fields to draw on with regards to theory. Irrespective of the motive behind the support, supportive relationships for organisational learning in the voluntary sector is a process of developing multiple civil societies where the needs and interests of different groups are not necessarily based on complementary goals. This poses an overarching question of who bears the responsibility of building a civil society in transition countries.

Historical accounts of the rise of new voluntary and community organisations within one country under the aegis of established organisations which then “let them go” may be seen as akin to mentoring. This seems especially the case in the settlement movements in the UK and the USA, with their multiple independent organisational offspring (Harrow 1987; Carson 1990; Glasby 1999). Fowler (1998) calls for the need for “authentic partnerships” in international development NGOs, which may be seen as call for inter-organisational model beyond notions of “transferring best practice” (e.g. Clark & Geppert 2002).

The language of mentoring nevertheless appears to be intuitive for describing partnerships where inter-organisational NGO relations are not traditionally top-down and a new model may be necessary to reflect new conditions. A case in point, Bulgaria is now a member of the European Union and not considered a developing country by institutional actors, which may preclude “development” programme logic underlying assistance through NGO partnerships, at least from within the EU. This raises an interesting point about data outliving its position within a literature strand of field and the limits of literature relevance to data undergoing re-contextualisation. Further research in this area can be sought with relevance to institutional approaches to field re-definition (e.g. Suddaby *et al.* 2007).

To recap, who engages in these relationships, what this engagement entails, and how the context influences the process are all issues receiving attention by the mentoring literature and need further unpicking with established and appropriate theoretical tools. Contributing to organisational development by building a relationship-centred model on knowledge, the research draws on the work on the sociology of knowledge by Berger and Luckman (1966). It reviews relevant literature strands and integrates them around the focus of relationship mapping, where directions for further conceptual category developments are set accordingly.

This comprises three general categories of questions to guide the fieldwork and data analysis. The *actor projection* is regarded as focusing on understanding the (1) agents of learning/practice, the organisations engaging in the exchange and ultimately driving the transition process. Research on organisational actors in the voluntary sector is deployed here to develop a better understanding of sector agency (e.g. Narozhna 2004; Edwards & Fowler 2002). Secondly, the *knowledge projection* refers to the (2) content and process of learning/knowledge sharing about organisational practice, i.e. what is transferred, how

much, by what means etc. Here the research draws on the more recent explorations of how ideas travel internationally by Czarniawska and Sevón (2005) and on various strands exploring notions of knowledge and learning in partnership settings (e.g. Child & Czeglédy 1996; Shipton 2006; Clark & Geppert 2002; Eden & Huxham 2001). Lastly, the *context projection* corresponds to the (3) institutionalisation aspects of learning/ knowledge sharing about organisational practice, or what institutions influence the process of organisations acquitting practice-relevant knowledge. This projection is informed by the transition literature on a macro level (e.g. Lavigne 1999; Berend 2003; Burawoy 2002). Finally, the three projections were subsequently found to be congruent with the significant issues posed by seminal research on exploring transition from a managerial learning perspective (Child & Czeglédy 1996).

The emphasis of the questions in the field falls on the knowledge sharing and learning dynamics taking place in the relationship between voluntary sector organisations with different levels of experience, as applied to the overall organisational work, demonstrated in their everyday practice as sector agents. This aspect has not been sufficiently explored by the development and transition literature appropriated by the field of voluntary sector studies. In addition, the literature on learning and knowledge transfer does not sufficiently address the knowledge recipient's perspective in a relational dynamic particularly in transition country contexts.

Moreover, the aspect of a partner organisation being assisted in progressing towards greater expertise prompted a return to the mentoring literature, namely to its applicability to developing an organisational typology around the emerging learning and knowledge components. A further review of the findings in the trigger case and reflection on themes in the four new cases, suggests a possibility of a "mentoring" as one possible type of learning-centred partnership.

The argument contends that for the voluntary sector in transition context, as the early relationships transform into more balanced exchanges, there is a move away from the transferring of knowledge and models to developing a "new type" of civil society, a hybrid between the "mentor's" own knowledge and assistance and the "mentee's" experience and culture. The fieldwork is a process of documentation of this sector transformation, where it is debatable whether transfer, translation, or invention takes place with regards to organisational agency. The analysis of fieldwork data results in a systemic articulation of this dynamic. The systemic articulation is an organisational-level taxonomy, which aids the reader in understanding the processes of sector transformation.

## Methodological Underpinnings

In seeking to methodologically situate the research rationale emerging from a single case study, the research question by its nature is a “what if” rather than a “now what” question, giving it theory-oriented rather than problem-oriented standing (Weick 1992). In the context of the transition reality of Bulgaria as one of the newest members of the EU in need to quickly organise its institutions and operations on all levels to comply and benefit as a member, the relevance of this research to practice is an important factor to consider. In this vein, choosing anything but a problem-oriented approach for conducting management research may seem an academic whim, at the least, and unhelpful at most, to organisational actors in Bulgaria, who deal head to head with management realities in the sector. This poses a challenge, namely, that the goal of building a model has to also be a useful way of describing a relationship in the field. This led to the decision to have grounded theory as a methods and analysis approach guiding theory-building, where it is seen to be an appropriate strategy for addressing an under-researched field and location, as well as addressing the complexity of the topic (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Eisenhardt 1989).

Based on the outlined above, the primary research question is set as:

**“To what extent does a classification of inter-organisational relationships emphasising the underlying knowledge transfer, sharing, and learning processes, offer a useful approach to describing an evolving voluntary sector in a transition context?”**

It is justified to question why theory-building should be the approach to looking at how organisations develop in their own transitional (read “unstable”) environments, especially considering that the context is a cross-disciplinary field. It implies that collectively the research question components inter-organisational relationships, knowledge transfer, learning processes and voluntary sector development in transition settings comprise a rich pool of respective literature. Moreover, it would follow that existing organisational change theories or adaptive capacity theories, for example, should be highly relevant and applicable to organisational realities in transition countries that are moving towards democratic socio-political systems and free market economy, making theory-building redundant.

Nevertheless, theory-building is a worthy task for one particular reason with respect to the research topic. The destination of a country in transition, as both context and process of Bulgarian voluntary sector development, is unclear. Applying theories derived elsewhere could be seen as forging a superficial explanatory framework. Weick (1992) makes the following statement on the purpose of theory-building, which is seen to be in defence of refraining from applying theories developed in the West to a transforming Eastern European context:

*“Theories [...] not only represent the territory but, when taken seriously, may enact and construct the territory...In the case of organizations, if the map is not the territory, that may be the fault of the territory and not the map...” (ibid.: 173)*

The research question supports the objective to construct and evaluate a model as a useful map for perceiving supportive inter-organisational learning. “Useful” is understood to mean providing a better description of the fields and contexts under study. It is not meant in the sense of providing a framework for organisational self-awareness and relationship management for the participant organisations themselves. Such output has not been attempted as it would have compromised the theoretical development of a single mentoring framework. Nevertheless the importance of participant’s input brings the notion of ‘transparent research’ to the discussion with respect to outlining research objectives and outcomes.

Milofsky (2000) defines ‘transparent research’ as a “methodology in which the people who are targets of a social science research project are also participants in data collection, analysis and report writing” (ibid.:62). The researcher’s own assumptions about the nature of research require that they respond to this notion; the participants are seen to be (at least to a large extent) the source and agent of learning and the way in which support is deployed. In the tradition of symbolic interactionism guiding grounded theory, individuals are believed to be self-aware and their social interactions create meaning which guides behaviour (Heath & Cowley 2004). Therefore, as a self-aware agent, participants are important in constructing a model for a better understanding of a reality that is foremost their own.

However, the final outputs in this research have not been co-constructed with respondents as this would have resulted in four independent case-based frameworks compromising a single cross-case framework approaching organisational mentoring. Furthermore research outputs cannot be said to be applicable to organisational contexts for participants’ own learning purposes at this stage. On the other hand, the interview process is seen as an opportunity for participants to reflect on the learning that takes place within organisations.

The underlying assumption relating the theory-building ambition to empirical relevance by means of epistemological choices is expressed by Eisenhardt (1989) in that it is the “intimate connection with empirical reality that permits the development of a testable, relevant, and valid theory” (ibid:532). The rationale is to build on the experience of qualitative research, where grounded theory confronts an underexplored nature of NGO activity in Bulgaria in an interpretivist tradition<sup>1</sup>. Notwithstanding the guiding mentoring framework, the research is inductive in its epistemological position, i.e. there is no set

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<sup>1</sup> The interpretive paradigm as outlined by Burrell and Morgan (1979) is one of four sociological paradigms. It seeks to explain the stability of behaviour from the individual point of view, where the researcher observes the subjectively created world as an ongoing process.

model prior to data collection in the field which has been imposed on the findings for interpretation. However, the research also has a deductive foundation element with the envisaging of a 'mentoring' framework for the purpose of understand learning and knowledge instances on an organisational level, where predetermined mentoring elements are explored prior to the fieldwork. The inductive design has an interest in what is happening in the field; the deductive is looking to apply conceptual categories derived from the literature for to data analysis.

The research explores any supportive elements in the interaction and exchanges between organisations, portrayed by interactions between people and artefacts pertinent to learning, knowledge, experience and development as a voluntary sector agency. The ontological position assigns significance to organisational practice, expressed by Czarniawska (2001) as the following:

*"[Practice] created its own rules in each instance of its use; it favours verbs over nouns; it focuses on relationships rather than attributes and it employs performative definition, which means that the understanding of things depends on their use"* (in Clegg et al. 2000: 1107)

With respect to practice, a further insight to conceptualising 'usefulness' as a research outcome is found in a statement in *A Mathematician's Apology* (1940), where the author reflects on the value of mathematics as a pure and applied discipline and the relationship between the two. He states that both disciplines deal with structures and patterns and the relations between their constituents. Patterns found in the physical world cannot be described exactly as patterns in pure geometry. He notes:

*"The geometer offers to the physicist a whole set of maps from which to choose. One map, perhaps, will fit the facts better than others, and then the geometry which provides that particular map will be the geometry most important for applied mathematics."* (Hardy 1940:37)

Thus, it is believed that conducting research from within the fieldwork and without imposing existing models to explain NGO activities and development in the context of existing supporting relationships, would result in authentic descriptions, at best, as a map (or series of maps) with the potential to offer explanations in the future.



## Chapter Two: Learning and Knowledge in NGOs in Transition Context I

*The chapter presents the literature review, introducing key literature strands with selected contributions which inform the formation of the research question and the research rationale as to the structure of data analysis. Strands include work on generic transition from economic and socio-political texts, texts addressing the organisation in transition, and texts on the voluntary sector in a transition context with an emphasis on Bulgarian sector development.*

### Transition and Transformation Contexts

For the researcher, giving 'transition' a location is like identifying a dead body. That is, the detachment with which a process is usually approached disappears beneath the deeply personal encounter. A proper introduction to Bulgaria's transition from communism to capitalism would ideally be anchored to an historical analysis of the regime and its institutional elements, accompanied by a discussion on the cultural and sociological particularities of the people embodying the institutions in question. This would make for a lengthy distraction from the field of studying partnerships in NGOs. Instead it should suffice here to assume that transition is a simultaneous change on multiple levels and across fields of work, a system-wide collapse, a creative destruction process. This implies that old ways of solving problems cease to be legitimate and new ones are established by ruling institutions.

All transitions are not the same but their landscapes are similar. The subject of economic and political reform in Eastern Europe since 1989 has been approached as "transformation" by the field of organisational learning and development. This is introduced most notably in the special issue of *Organization Studies* with Child and Czegledy's (1996) forward:

*"We employ the term transformation to depict what is happening in Eastern Europe; others may use the same term in a normative sense to what they think should happen there... it is easy to elide the two. Transformation implies a process of change from which new forms will emerge." (ibid.: 171)*

In the research presented here, these new forms of interest are NGOs as representatives of the voluntary sector and of civil society, as part of new institutional realities for Bulgaria.

In their work on post-communist transformation of European nations, Bideleux and Jeffries (1998) point out that "the democratic model ignores the fact that institutions and cultures precede decisions rather than follow them" (ibid: 607). This draws attention to the importance of cultural and institutional determinism in the process of change.

*"The first priority of the post-Communist states in the Balkans and East Central Europe was quite rightly to create or restore formal democratic institutions, rights and procedures. However, the*

*formal provisions to this effect only became secure in so far as they were accompanied and/or followed by a vigorous development of civil societies with liberal and multi-cultural 'civic' conceptions of the nation-state. By definition, however, 'civil societies' could not simply be created or co-created 'from above'. Creatures of the state tend to remain dependent upon and subservient to the state..."*

(ibid.:550)

Yet the path which Eastern Europe has had to follow has been in place for two centuries. Changes at that time of European Renaissance after liberation from foreign occupation could not have been more similar to descriptions of changes in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Speaking of "transitioning" countries to the model of the West in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, Berend (2003) writes: "They could adopt Western ideas and copy the legal systems, laws, and institutions of the West. They could invite experts, court investors, import skilled workers, and buy modern technology" (ibid.: 90). Of the more recent 20<sup>th</sup> century transition, Bideleux and Jeffries (1998) speak of a crisis of confidence in democratic changes on both sides. Eastern Europeans doubt the "seriousness of Western helpfulness" and the other side doubt the Eastern Europeans' "ability to make good use of freedom" (ibid.:553). More likely, the ideas about what transition to the western ways should entail has remained the same, rather than the process itself.

Following conventions of research under what Blokker (2005) calls 'transitology' group studying socio-political and economic development in post-communist Europe, 'transition' is taken as convergence towards the (West) European standards. It is a country moving towards development, away from socialism's planned and towards capitalism's free market economy. This definition is at the same time a criticism of the same-brush tarring which he claims has taken place in transition studies:

*"Transition studies have been too occupied with assessing the progress of convergence of post-communist societies towards a European standard, instead of critically engaging with enlargement as well as exploring any diversifying implications of the transition process and EU membership. In the approaches towards modernization and social change in Eastern Europe (commonly referred to as 'transition'), that emerged after the collapse of the communist regimes, the normative affirmation of the Western modern project has been a diffused but mostly unproblematized element [...] Membership of the EU implied the end state of the transition and stipulated the necessary steps to move away from the socialist past."*

(Blokker 2005: 504)

As it will become clear, the research aims and methodological approach speak to Blokker's call here for focusing on the diversifying implications of the transition process. Reflecting on how one could operationalise suggested concepts into research questions, the researcher is convinced that tracking East-West relationship elements such as "seriousness" of western experts and NGOs in Bulgaria "making good use of freedom" is not a feasible task. Nevertheless, these claims and observations on transforming institutions pose questions of a higher order, e.g. what is the purpose of partnerships formed in the name of

developing a third sector in a developing country. Moreover, the process of transition appears as a matter of concession between two sides which may not be able to always see eye to eye.

Berend (2003) provides a discussion asking the reader to consider how history and societal change inform bias around setting directions for development. The author's exploration is an insight to larger political and cultural changes in Central and Eastern Europe in terms of cross-cultural and institutional dynamics, in a historical period predating socialism. It reminds readers that there were values, culture, and a process of nation building before the arguably overstated democratisation wave following the changes in 1989. Alongside erecting cultural institutions and cultivating a strong national identity through art, nation-building in the Balkans included associational activity which is at the heart of the so-called civil society (subject to definition addressed later on). For example, the establishment of (male) Balkan coffeehouses in the 16<sup>th</sup> century during the Ottoman rule, the first Bulgarian scientific society founded in 1865, and the importance of theatre and literature before and shortly after the uprising and liberation in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

These were all part of institution-building and "cradle for the cultivation of new historical myth" based on a Western model, that of the German romantic national ideology (ibid.: 78). An interesting point is that in Western Europe such cultural and nation-building developments had taken place organically, as an integral part of developing institutions. In Central and Eastern Europe, on the other hand, this process was planned, a means-to-an-end approach of starting with western ideals and applying them for nation building purposes, i.e. essentially a reverse engineering process. Berrend writes:

*"Romantic "longing" and "dreaming" took on a very specific meaning in Central and Eastern Europe: longing for the achievements of the West, freedom, and liberty; and dreaming of a just society and a new community that included the entire nation – in short, becoming an equal partner of Europe "* (ibid.:43)

The implication here is that elements from the West were taken literally or translated directly into "attainable goals". Also, ideals were implemented the "wrong way around", starting out without the supportive elements in place to conduct sector-specific activity typifying a civil society. Assumptions can be made here as to the success that could be expected of such process reversal for the development of any field or sector in a transition setting. This stands up to a more optimistic statement made by Child and Czegledy (1996) regarding what may be taken as premeditated transition rather than open transformation. They say that "[t]ransformation is open-ended with the results substantially depending on the balance of relevant forces bearing upon the process" and that "transformation is likely to be fundamental and far-reaching, and as a result can be expected to take longer to accomplish..." (ibid.:171).

As an attempt to reconcile more open with more deterministic views of transition and to move on to field-

specific notions of NGO developments, the research approaches transition as a reinvention of institutions.

Institutions here are defined as “systems composed of regulative and cultural cognitive elements that act to produce meaning, stability and order” (Scott 2003: 879). Institutional theory emphasises the role of institutions in transition economies surrounding organisations in shaping organisational as well as individual behaviour, providing the rules of the game, thus binding organisations to systemic imperfections (e.g. Scott 1995; Hoskisson *et al.* 2000). A less deterministic perspective on organisational response is one where organisations make strategic choices rather than responding to institutional constraints. A case in point being the trigger case introduced earlier, this is observed where NGO membership in the global nature conservation network BirdLife International creates a platform for inter-organisational partnership. This participation becomes an additional field of practice to that at home where indigenous NGOs can develop into institutional actors via their interaction with other network actors. The strategic choices perspective allows for envisaging the case of third sector organisations as seeking transcending their “Bulgarian situation” by taking part in an international network which shares the NGO’s goal. This is a key element in the conceptual framework necessary for guiding data gathering.

An institutional approach is congruent with the case of nation-wide migration to a market economy. The interim or even end result of transition can be argued is a mixed economy in which some of the former system elements are carried on and some pieces of the desired system are missing. For example the missing elements are often a well-functioning state administration and infrastructure in the case of Eastern Europe (Lavigne 1999). Returning to the context of state failure introduced by transition experts, guided NGO development is very much justified as a rational response to the ineffectiveness of the state in general. State institutions possess a largely unfavourable reputation amongst its citizens associating their ineffectiveness with a reliance on bureaucratic mechanisms and paternalistic policies (Uphoff 1993). Third sector development as addressing state ineffectiveness is an ever more reasonable assignment in transitional economies where state institutions are associated with high levels of systemic corruption and organised crime, as in the case of Bulgaria (Grødeland 2005).

A mixed economy is not a product combination of the best of the western conventions and eastern traditions. Rather, it is described by Lavigne as “mutant” and incoherent with the new or old systems where the missing pieces are substituted by “pathological fillers” like insiders’ control, organised crime and corruption (ibid.). Burawoy (2002) writes on Russia’s unsuccessful transition to capitalism a decade after it began in the early 90s:

*“Like the neoliberals who inspired Russia’s exit from communism, Polanyi assumed that transition meant transformation. Today the experience of many Third World countries, as well as of Russia, testifies that transition not only does not lead to transformation, but it*

*actually stimulates its opposite, in the case of Russia what I have called involution. The Chinese case suggests, however, that state socialism can support the foundations of a thriving market economy, by incubating the state-society synergy that Polanyi took for granted. Russia lost this opportunity because it fell victim to a programmatic destruction of the state administered economy, as if destruction itself were sufficient for genesis.”*

Burawoy's analysis points to an absence of institutional structures, namely, a strong state capable of regulating production efforts and providing protection from market forces. The result was a “Russian society turning inward, abandoning socialist institutions and reconstituting itself as a disarticulated aggregation of social networks deployed around the strategic manipulation of resources” (Nugent 2002: 47). Here it is worth noting that although transition has taken its own course with variations in each of the post-communist European states, overlaps do exist and overreaching frameworks for understanding these are relevant when approaching knowledge and learning dynamics. Common elements of transitioning economies are, amongst others, the failure or inadequacy of state institutions and the resulting alternative nature of a country's social networks and their use of resources. The researcher assumes with some conviction these elements are present in Bulgaria's “mutant” transition narrative and play a key role to its third sector development agenda.

In transition, change takes place everywhere simultaneously and at a fast pace. This chaotic process seems to be reflected by theory emerging from development practice. Looking at Bulgarian academic research on the effects of transition, Chavdarova (2007) claims that what is observed in a transitioning society is a reconfirmation of well-established values as a coping mechanism to the resulting anomy, as well as responding to the emerging unfamiliar situations by behaviour change rather than by value change, i.e. going through the motions. This echoes Child (1981) who claims that global convergence of managerial practices takes place on an organisational but not on an individual level (in Miazhevich 2009). In contrast to Child (1981), in his research on rural development programmes in Bulgaria, Serbia and Croatia Alexandrov (2007) observes that adaptive changes take place mostly at an individual level but hardly affect deeper levels of (shared) values and beliefs. This change can be considered as a kind of a ‘shallow adaptation’.

Value-based management discourse on organisational culture suggests that values need to be embedded in the organisation guiding its behaviour and providing a basis for evaluating success (Deal et.al. 1982; Alveeson 1991; Pettigrew 1990). In turn culture influences the values held which affects behaviour. Under this assumption, some authors have argued that ‘actual culture’ and ‘desired culture’ need to be looked at comparatively as respectively representing cultural practices (behaviour) and cultural values (Alas & Tuulik 2007). The authors suggest that change in societal practices starts with organisational practice, whereas others argue that practice shows that change starts with the individual (Cassar et al. 2005).

These questions on the location and degree of change are important for determining the significance exchanges and arrangements between organisations potentially have in the transition process. There seems to be a lack of clarity in theory as to where change should be observed by researchers and implemented by practitioners. The distinction between actual and desired culture is key here as it speaks to the organisation's efforts to construct itself as an institutional actor through organisational identity.

Contrary to the negative connotation of the deformed institutional actors resulting from transition, on an organisational level, hybrid-type organisations are also sought by academics as alternative, competitive organisational varieties. They are valued as having the capabilities to adapt to turbulent environments, as well as reflecting the complexity of multiple stakeholder demands on organisational performance. An example is the 'social enterprise' form, a hybrid organisational model encompassing organisations that combine characteristics from both co-operatives (employee owned business enterprises) and non-profits (voluntary third sector) (Defourny 2001). In this sense it can be argued that "mutants" too are a sort of hybrids, which contrary to Lavigne's view, could have a positive connotation for transition countries, i.e. as in mutant super-heroes with 'superpowers' acquired as a consequence of an unusual transformational encounter.

As literature on hybridisation grows (e.g. Billis 2010), research produces mixed results in terms of reassurance for what capabilities and outcomes are favourable in this process. For example, comparative research in the field of developing economics think-tanks in Eastern Europe reports that hybridity as a kind of collective knowledge creation process, is not present (Avramov 2007). It reports that "eastern economists consider themselves as simple theory-takers from the West" in that the motivation for western messages and models to go East appears to be based in a re-exporting strategy. 'Hybridity' here is defined not as a cross between cultures and intellectual traditions across West and East, but instead as a mix between competing imported models from the West which are hybridising without the participation of eastern counterparts. These two hybridity types are possible forms for the voluntary sector where partnership plays a key developmental role.

Before the research can proceed to hone in on the elements of the inter-organisational relationship, further unpacking of the voluntary sector is necessary. This involves both existing sector definitions as well as themes specific to the voluntary sector in Bulgaria.

## **The Voluntary Sector**

Against this backdrop, observers from both the West and East concur on the weakness of civil society in Eastern Europe. Measured in terms of organisational membership and activity in civic groups by society (e.g. volunteering, activism, etc.), the disintegration of civil society, social anomie, distrust and apathy is what

characterises these post-communist polities (Petrova & Tarrow 2007). The early and mid-90s witnessed the creation of new organisations, where some grew out of interest groups predating the collapse of communism, and others out of the international assistance supporting particular transition agendas (ibid.). The authors contend that “a rift has splintered NGO movements across the region, accentuating new and old hierarchies and privileges and forcing aid-dependent groups which might otherwise work together, into a competitive relationship” (ibid.:78).

It should be said here that arriving at a shared terminology of organisational types in the voluntary sector within global ‘varieties of voluntarism’ is difficult. For the purpose of this research, the widely accepted term NGOs is used which reflects its use in Bulgarian legal terms, referring to organisations not affiliated to government and with a non-profit ‘ideal aim’ (‘nepravitelstveni’ and ‘organizacii s idealna cel’). The definition of the voluntary sector as a population from which the sample is drawn is set by Salamon and Anheier’s (1996) International Clarification of Nonprofit Organisations. They set out the five basic features of the sector – organised (institutionalised), private (separate from government), self-governing, non-profit distributing, and involving voluntary participation (ibid.: 2-3). NGOs in this classification are categorised according to their activities into twelve groups: culture and recreation, education and research, health, social services, environment, development and housing, law/advocacy and politics, philanthropy and voluntarism, international, business and professional associations/ unions, and other.

The literature on NGOs is wide in scope with development at the heart of the organisations’ function. They are seen as the embodiment of civil society, i.e. the arena of un-coerced collective action around shared interests, purposes and values<sup>2</sup>. In theory, its institutional forms are distinct from those of the state, family and market, though in practice, the boundaries between state, civil society, family and market are often complex, blurred and negotiated. These organisational types are generally thought of as participatory, community oriented, democratic and a necessary component of a blossoming civil society by promoting communication, providing the ground for activism and pluralism (Edwards & Hulme 1996; Mercer 2002).

As the assisting hand and watchdog of an ineffective state, NGOs are seen as important in building a civil society, the latter being a sign of building democracy, at least as perceived as an indicator by external actors. From within the state in question, however, NGOs may be generally distrusted or misunderstood, or at best, they are ignored as not being of first priority to a transforming country (Crotty, 2003). The presence of western countries in the affairs of developing countries has been a main point of interest in research in the sector as the contentious point in determining the role of NGOs. Some are more optimistic in believing that NGOs make a difference in their turbulent environments, while others make a bold distinction between ‘compliant’ and ‘independently thinking’ NGOs (Townsend *et al.*, 2004).

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<sup>2</sup> Centre for Civil Society, London School of Economics [http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/CCS/what\\_is\\_civil\\_society.htm](http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/CCS/what_is_civil_society.htm)

Experience has been bitter in trying to import the civil society concept and its models created in the West to a different socio-cultural environment in Central and Eastern European countries (Wojnarowski & Jefferies 2000; Pinnock 2002). This is largely due to lacking commonality among what the tools for change and desired outcomes are, and what the operational concepts mean for both sides. An important example is the question on the role of NGOs where literature points to a divergent intellectual discussion about what civil society means (Narozhna 2004). While in the West the conversations are about definition of NGO roles in relation to institutional frameworks, in the East the conversations are more pragmatic – they are about accountability and effectiveness in NGOs that are striving to justify themselves to external funders and internal customers (ibid.). This has a bearing on the organisational practices which receive attention via the channels of partnerships, i.e. what learning and knowledge transfer targets as a subject.

We encounter another negative reading on hybridity on an organisational level provided by Narozhna (2004). Here we find an element of transition-partner participation in the hybrid formation in the voluntary sector. The work explores civil society development in the Ukraine where local actors re-interpret western structures and ways of operating, a type of practice mutation, when transferred across these eastern borders. Keeping in with what lies beneath the process of transition, she argues that “[...] the Western-type of civil society is in fact the product of a relatively lengthy and unique social evolution in the West. When applied in societies with distinct cultural, socio-economic and political characteristics, it has dramatically proven to be inadequate” (ibid: 244-245).

Narozhna argues that western assistance has shaped a façade for the existing regime and its structures in the Ukraine leading to the emergence of new types of NGOs known as ‘grantoids’, or grant-eaters. These organisations’ activity is aimed at benefiting personally from western grants using the logic that if the West wants to spend money on assistance, these NGOs can “help” them. Their redefined understanding of ‘assistance’ to the West legitimises their self-serving practices by free-riding on social interests while at the same time maintaining an oligopoly in the sector through protected insider networks (ibid.).

Research on East-West incompatibility over what civil society building should entail, also points to ineffectiveness on part of western practices. Crotty’s (2003) work on the Samara Environmental Movement in Russia brings to the foreground the mismatch between the type of assistance the international Soros Network and the Dutch Milieukontakt were offering and the real needs of the region. The conclusion is that little was done to mobilise society and address non-participation of the passive local population and, instead, assistance was mostly technical and lacked contextualisation (ibid.).

The existence of NGOs in transition states is usually heavily dependent on donor money and regulation from abroad yet they are accountable to national legal frameworks and need to demonstrate their representativeness to local constituencies. Understandably, most of the NGO literature focuses on the



undesirable effects of external control through funding of large (international) NGOs or direct investment by setting up western NGOs in the East (Maren 1997; Micklethwait *et al.* 2000). The vast research on development NGO has looked at the North-South divide and has concluded that NGOs are domesticated to the agendas of the dominant institutions. Criticism of NGOs suggests that a top-down rather than bottom-up manner is common especially in more dependent countries. In practice this means NGOs act as project implementers rather than change-inducers, failing to live up to their reputation of being a patron of civil society (Vivian 1994; Farrington & Bebbington 1993; Zaidi 1999).

Implications for knowledge transfer follow, as supported by research in this critical literature strand - the materials provided to partner organisations in the East are simplified, repetitive, technical, and do not address the learning issues concerning skills and professionalism with appropriate learning approaches. In a word, NGOs are not performing well due to inadequate learning support. From the “receiving” side, home-grown alternatives may be missing and drawing on lessons from the West is uncritical. These are all points to implement for the questions in the fieldwork.

However, some have argued that from the mid-90s onwards there came the realisation that building civil society was not about pouring money into the country to set up certain types of NGOs based on and directed by western ones (Wojnarowski & Jefferies 2000). Today NGOs in transitional states are increasingly set up by local activists rather than by international or foreign NGOs, favouring the establishment of a more representative image and making them more ‘contextualised’, using Mercer’s (2002) concept. Similarly to the management discourse in transition, academic research in the voluntary sector may therefore be signalling a shift in practice away from “moving our way” towards “moving to a new direction”. This shift may be suggesting that West-East relationships in certain settings may be better characterised as more interdependent rather than co-dependent, with negotiated rather than top-down activity taking place between “helper” and “helped”. A fundamental point here, this implies partner empowerment at the heart of the learning and knowledge transfer taking place within this partnership.

One concept of interest found in the development discourse with respect to partner empowerment deserves more attention - ‘capacity building’. Various meanings and uses of capacity building as a notion are discussed at length in Harrow (2001). It is generally employed in mapping sites for action in terms of increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of governments (*ibid.* 2001). It can refer to the role of international NGOs which are increasingly seen as intermediary agencies in the development of organisational resources (Bennett 2000: 179). Importantly for this study, capacity building involves a network of relationships and is concerned with collaboration in society through the development of NGOs with external support (internal document of the New Economic Foundation 2001). This emphasis on networks is explored subsequently.

## The Bulgarian Voluntary Sector

The civil society development in the country has largely been overlooked by external commentators. Internationally published research on management issues in the Bulgarian voluntary sector (e.g. Pinnock 2002; Scheinberg & Mol 2010), and even more so on the history and state of the sector as a whole, is limited (Taylor *et al.* 2009; Valkov 2009; Gavrilova & Elenkov 1998; CIVICUS 2003). Despite recent trends to locate civil society's development locally as literature suggests, indigenous NGOs in transition countries are still mainly funded from abroad often through a local foundation, a transnational programme (often through the European Commission) or projects. In Bulgaria, the most prominent examples of large funders include the Open Society Foundation<sup>3</sup>, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, and USAID<sup>4</sup>.

Analysing the third sector, various authors describe Bulgarian NGOs as a "...refreshing alternative to the stifling bureaucracy of government". But it is not exactly a new alternative, as NGO activity is said to have historical traditions dating from the philanthropy of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the Ottoman Empire (Pinnock 2002: 235). Philanthropy is central for the setting up the first voluntary sector type, "chitalishte", or local cultural centre for promoting literacy and cultural activities. The very early civic engagement on setting up these institutions comes before the country's independence and from outside the borders of Bulgaria, led by patriotic intellectuals beyond the reach of a transitioning state apparatus at the time. In a sense, the sector and civil society has historically developed from the outside, by eastern actors enlightened by Western ideals.

In a review of the Bulgarian history of civil society organisations, Gavrilova (1998) writes of this Renaissance period of nation-building after liberation from Ottoman rule in 1878:

*"for the very first time in the hierarchy of family-kinship and religious values a priority appears – education... simultaneously identified as valuable for the community common advancement) and for the individual (personal prosperity). But even more significant is the fact that the community is setting up institutions which are to satisfy this newly recognized need."*  
(ibid.:11)

These are the civil association that make up for the lack of state institutions. The first types of organisations emerging at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century are those related to education and culture, followed by organisations for civil rights and protection, such as the occupational organisations, women's movement, minority groups, regional development assistance groups, etc. In the 20s and 30s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the

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<sup>3</sup> Open Society Foundations were established by billionaire philanthropist George Soros for the promotion of education under the principles of democracy. It started its broader international activity in 1993 with the provision of millions of dollars for humanitarian aid during the wars in former Yugoslavia and moving into assisting Central and Eastern European countries to "transform into democracies" (<http://www.soros.org/about/history>). Their stated mission is to "to build vibrant and tolerant democracies whose governments are accountable to their citizens" [http://www.ngo-monitor.org/article/open\\_society\\_institute\\_osi](http://www.ngo-monitor.org/article/open_society_institute_osi).

<sup>4</sup> Involved in the establishment of the Bulgarian Centre for Non-profit Law advising on the legal framework of NGO operations.

country gradually develops a legal framework encompassing the activity of the sector, which undergoes centralisation as each activity is headed by governing public sector institutions (ministries). On the issue of sector development during socialism Gavrilova (1998) writes that “the totalitarian political system not only does not reject civil organizations, but it cherished a very special interest in them treating them as a main means to engage social powers” (ibid.:13). Eventually, the state institutions usurp the independently-formed civic associations and largely prevent any independent associational activity.

Today the Bulgarian voluntary sector is again seen as under construction, highly underdeveloped, and a grey area of operation, arguably as a result of government subsuming its activity during socialism. More recently research cites the characteristics of the Bulgarian NGO sector as attributed to the historical development of the country. It is presented as tainted, exemplifying frail emergent ideas of non-governmental action and corrupt use of non-governmental forms in the aftermath of communism (Taylor 2009). Examining the project documents for data on Bulgaria, it appears key national characteristics in a historical and cultural context imbue the Bulgarian case with little hope and much pessimism with regards to the lacking conditions for the emergence of civil society and non-governmental action.

Historically, the country is presented as underdeveloped and centralistic (throughout the 1,300 years of the country's existence) and captured by “collectivistic mentality” of the new bourgeoisie when capitalism first begins at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It presents a society ready to give up to totalitarianism to the Soviet influence after WWII, a regime incapable of generating knowledge (prior to 1989). Explaining the newly emerging middle class after the changes as born within the state apparatus inherited from socialism without bloodshed, the authors claim this means the values associated with liberal reform are largely absent. The questions raised earlier on where real socio-political change starts and whether organisational activity and behaviour precede individual value changes, are relevant here. These are important details in the narrative of re-inventing institutions in transition countries and the implications for what identities are being constructed in the voluntary sector by the channels of NGO partnerships with the West.

According to their analysis, at least a part of these “new” (recycled?) political and business elite are seen as the spokespersons for civil society by the public in Bulgaria. Returning to the fluid notion of ‘civil society’, these NGPA reflections on the sector's path-dependent emergence imply a definition of ‘civil society’ similar to that employed in the Enlightenment, where the bourgeoisie and civil society are synonymous (Cox 1999: 6). This is a very different notion to that used widely by commentators referring to Tocqueville's conceptualisation of civil society in the context of American democracy. The latter focuses on the spontaneously forming associations by people united by a common purpose as a counterforce to the majority and ruling state, thus placing importance of the proliferation of associations as a sign for civil society (ibid.). Without siding with either of the two conceptualisations of civil society, the research is cognisant of the presence of multiple Western definitions of how the sector is envisaged.

In 2005, a brief from the Bulgarian Centre for Non-profit Law emphasised that here NGOs need to be informed, encouraged, trained and promoted; in other words, all aspects (or capacities) are in need of considerable investment (Dimov 2005). Elsewhere, the sector is criticised for being financially dependent, lacking the power to influence business, lacking the skills to involve communities in their work and perceived as elitist by society, due to their assumed position as the voice of the people without the people's engagement (Andreeva *et al.* 2005). These views are concurrent with those on the compliant NGO sector, with the additional element of 'distrusted elite insiders' and their engagement with key institutions.

Definition ambiguity leads to difficulties in capturing the state of sector development. Compared to transition countries geographically closer to the West, Bulgaria is seen as far from a successful integration with developed nations in Europe with respect to a whole spectrum of indicators (Adam *et al.* 2005). The factors presented in Adam *et al.*'s (2005) heuristic model, amongst which 'civilizational competence', may be reinforcing this 'tardiness' view of the country by overlooking organisational work of the sector in particular. This multi-dimensional concept comprises of entrepreneurial spirit, civic presence, intellectual exchange of ideas, etc. surmounting to capacity for adaptability developed over time of a culture. This indicator captures the voluntary sector but reaches beyond it too. Meanwhile literature also reports the "signs of a budding civil society" as a quality which may not always be reflected in the formal structures of the voluntary sector, where civic activity reaches beyond NGOs (Popov 2007).

The verdict is remains - the general public doubts what NGOs can achieve, and therefore doubt the importance of developing a third sector as a statement of democracy and change. The researcher sees this as a problem of conflating organisational and sector-wide legitimacy, where the agency of NGOs has suffered as a result of ambiguities in evaluating a fuzzy notion of civil society in transition.

One publication in particular sets out the indicators and evaluation of the Bulgarian NGO sector – the 2007 USAID report on NGO sustainability. Returning to capacity building as one of the operational development terms, the notion appears in the sustainability report. Capacity here refers to the need to strengthen the administrative capacities of organisations responding to a changing donor environment as Bulgaria as it moved into complying with EU standards for state-funded projects (UNSAID 2007). The report evaluates the country's NGO sector on a number of indicators, including that of organisational capacity. It is related to the "ability to comply with standards for transparency and accountability, as they recognize the need to develop as competitive organizations" (*ibid.*:78). The increasing role of external experts in this process is also mentioned in this section as a positive trend. This seems to fit with other definitions of capacity on efficiency and effectiveness of institutions in developing countries.

Concurrent with observations by USAID on capacity for NGO sustainability noted earlier, comparative research under the heading Non-Governmental Public Action Programme, sees the European Commission as a meta-governance mechanism for development in Bulgaria. It is presented as hub where Bulgarian civil

society intellectuals reside and from which they derive their authority. Reporting on a Bulgarian case, Pinnock (2002) argues that indigenous organisations have to speak with the jargon of democracy, integration and participation if their application is to receive attention from the European Community PHARE funding programme. The institutions of the Commission seem to be heavily implicated as actors for NGO development and are expected to make an appearance in the fieldwork.

In conclusion, the discussions on civil society definitions with respect to targeting organisational development has a bearing on where the accent should fall when talking about developing sector capacity. Is it on the proliferation of certain types of NGOs, clarifying their roles in society, or enhancing their skills and improving practice? Petrova and Tarrow (2007) suggest that a distinction should be made in defining civil society with respect to participation and relational aspects of activism, giving more importance to “transactional activism” i.e. the ties among organised actors and between them and other institutions (ibid.: 79).

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As stated earlier, the research aim is two-fold: first, to explore the process of becoming an NGO actor capable of operating in a transition context by mastering practice and second, to explore the learning channel(s) for this process, i.e. the partnerships between Bulgarian NGOs and their Western counterparts. With the first part informed by the transition and sector development literatures, developing the second part takes place within literature addressing the partnership and collaboration element of NGO practice with a focus on the *what* and *how* of this partnership dynamic. This is presented in the following section which looks at partnership and collaboration as channels for knowledge transfer and learning, as presented by existing research and theory.

## Chapter Three: Learning and Knowledge in NGOs in Transition Context II

*This chapter focuses explored the literature strands addressing the learning and knowledge issues in a partnership context, with relevance to the highlighted issues around NGO development in transition settings, set out in the previous Chapter. The chapter begins with the central element of the research question, the partnership and collaboration literature as it applies to the voluntary sector. Other texts refer more directly to the core exchanges in an NGO partnership - typologies on organisational learning, knowledge transfer, and knowledge creation. It concentrates the relevant literature strands into a more targeted conceptual framing driving the fieldwork and data analysis processes. The resulting framework is presented at the end of the Chapter.*

### Partnerships and Collaboration in the Voluntary Sector

The voluntary sector literature seems to be less concerned with understanding NGO 'relationships as processes' and more with investigating NGO partnerships' purpose, the actors involved, legitimacy of organisations and accountability to their stakeholders. For example, Martin and Miller (2003) explore large scale inter-organisational networks for international assistance in Bosnia-Herzegovina from a relationship perspective. They name the "top-down", "co-operative and co-ordination relations" between external donors and local NGOs in their conclusions, but their rather blunt "co-operation and co-ordination take time" lack the descriptive quality necessary to understanding how they work or why they fail to do so. Moreover, this type of approach may be less relevant when inter-organisational relationships are being developed between organisations with closely shared values and aims, irrespective of the funding dependence in place. A closer look at partnership types beyond those observed by sector-bound research therefore seems appropriate.

Partnerships are formed for the purpose of improving organisational performance, i.e. be more effective, efficient, or produce desired outputs, such as our knowledge economy's highly valued 'innovation'. They are studied in various forms and settings – between profit and non-profit actors, as government policy initiatives within a single sector, and movements such as building a global civil society amongst others (Huxham 2000; Seitanidi 2010; Salamon *et al.* 1999). The collaboration literature in particular has mostly focused on defining collaboration features - success factors, stages, organisational and partnership dimensions (Cigler 1999; Osborne & Murray 2000; Cordero-Guzman 2001; Snavely & Tracey 2002; Huxham 2000; 2003). A proliferation of terminology and lack of clarity about these jointing-up processes have been noted: " 'partnership' and 'alliance' figure frequently in the names of these structures, but phrases such as 'collaboration', 'co-ordination', 'co-operation', 'network', 'joint working' and 'multi-party working' are often also used" (Huxham 2000: 339). The setting and field defines the characteristic of what is carried out under these structures.

In contrast to the features approach to collaboration, Knight and Pye (2004) explore 'professionalisation episodes' of 'network learning'. The authors emphasise that networked learning relates to learning *by* groups of organisations, not by individual organisations or learning within networks, which is more suited to the "complex, dynamic, uncertain and diverse qualities of interorganizational networks" (ibid: 487). Eden and Huxham (2001) choose to explore 'negotiation episodes' for reaching common goals, and come up with ten categories of group attitudes and behaviours, such as the 'spying organisation' milking other group members, the 'imposed-upon group', the 'disinterested group' etc. These two episode approaches to looking at collaboration allow for a more nuanced picture of what is going on in the collaborative learning process, which is suited for the dynamic transition setting. Therefore, the features vs. episodes approach to conceptualising relationships in collaboration and learning is sought in the literature exploring global NGO partnerships.

Edwards and Fowler's (2002) collection provides insight on key management discourse applied to the sector, including strategy, NGO life-cycles, organisational learning, managing change, and cooperation structures. A features approach, the typology on network structures defines member association, federation, and partnership as key cooperation structures, each performing a different way of convening, information provision, networking, advocacy standard bearing, and brokering (ibid.: 175-176). Similarly, Mintzberg *et al.* (2005) provide a typology of associations, based on whom they serve (themselves or others) and whether they perform an advocacy function or not. They all rely on networking between cooperating individuals rather than impersonal control and arm's length transactions more typical of government structures.

A more episode-focused approach is evident in a typology on relationships formed to carry out global campaigning (Jordan & Tuijl 2002). It differentiates between cooperative, concurrent, disassociated and competitive, where the differences between relationship types are observed in the objectives pursued within the relations, information flow, review of strategies and level of political responsibility (ibid.:108). This framework brings the nuances of NGO relationships to the surface, presenting them as not always functioning as intended. In the context of EU policy-making, transnational NGO networks have been described as semi-formalised arrangements with a more co-operative mode of working than transnational networks (Bugdhan 2008). This gives them 'interfacing' (communicating policy to local level and informing the network on local issues) and 'shopping' (negotiating with decision-makers at key forums) functions. As a collective, they have the power to influence various actors in the policy-making process, an expectation which actors in transition-country NGOs on a mission to build civil society, would probably have when joining such networks.

To recap, NGOs utilise various available structural *arrangements* (western), for achieving their *objectives* (local) guided by organisational *values* (adapted locally?) to carry out assigned *civil society* functions (adapted locally?). Ultimately, existing NGO partnership typologies present structures enabling independence, empowerment, and participation between individuals, who take shelter in, or wear the

armour of, their organisational entity. A significant part of what and how is carried out within these arrangements is knowledge and learning about organisational practice. Based on this literature strand, the research takes a dynamic approach to collaboration as it allows for a more nuanced picture of what is going on in the exchange process, thus being better suited for a transition setting for third sector partnerships. This approach sets a negotiation-type framework of interactions, bringing the nuances of relationships to the surface, exposing them as complex, not always functioning as intended. This is based at least in part on the difficulty to find a balance between multiple goals, difference in opinions and definitions as sited in West-East civil society discussions.

In the context of cooperative arrangements, the significance of learning through collaboration has grown. We are reminded that although debated, the notions 'knowledge acquisition' and 'knowledge transfer' are common currency in this field denoting learning from and with one another (Huxham & Hibbert 2008). Both continue to feature as core activities in a changing management and policy context for economies and their institutions, which are either following in the direction of more experienced counterparts or sailing uncharted seas.

### **Learning and Knowledge in NGOs**

Clearly the literature on learning and knowledge transfer, especially within network structures, is relevant to the sector's 'capacity building' agenda but does not appear to have entered the scene fully. With respect to NGO work, McFarlane (2006) offers insight to the degree to which the development field has incorporated learning and knowledge issues. He summarises research work in the area as "exploring questions on how knowledge is managed, created and shared" giving specific attention to how knowledge and learning are "conceived in development" and "produced through organisations" (ibid.:287-288). The author claims the latter are largely neglected in terms of rigorous analysis and critical perspective in mainstream development writing. A cited mainstream development is the reimagining of the 'field of development' as building the institutional capacities of organisations from all sectors to acquire the right knowledge and manage it effectively. This is carried out by a World Bank initiative from the mid-90s.

A further distinction to what Child and Czegledy's (1996) make between what is likely to be important to keep and what to unlearn in transforming societies in Eastern Europe, the approach differentiates between 'knowledge about technology' and 'knowledge about attributes' i.e. technical know-how and tacit qualities related to quality (ibid.:291). Countries are then urged to address gaps by acquiring, absorbing and communicating knowledge and expanding education. ICT features in the World Bank's approach to delivering on these goals, where groups and individuals exchange ideas and collaborate on the basis of internet-based networks. McFarlane goes on to argue that the rationalist approach taken by the Bank has not allowed for moving towards a 'learning organisation' approach. By being paternalistic rather than allowing for a two-way learning process, the Bank's view of developing countries has kept them from further



development. Exploring barriers to learning in Hungarian management context with self-reported experience, Simon and Davies (1996) point that locals see expatriate managers as having colonialist attitudes. This was coupled with a mishandling of a vulnerable social identities of the Hungarian managers by the outsiders. The authors hold the view that Eastern European countries and their “people can be characterized as having a lack of clarity concerning their own values” and that new social categories have emerged in these contexts creating ambiguity as to roles to fit new realities (ibid.:277). Translated to an organisational level, this raises the importance of examining how organisational identities adapt to new environments, or their “response strategies when coping with complexity” (Staber & Sydow 2002). Is this process still going on after more than a decade of adjustment?

The concept ‘adaptive capacity’ appears in the literature with relevance to organisational knowledge in a context of uncertainty in transition settings. Staber and Sydow (2002) distinguish between efficiency-centred adaptation and adaptive capacity as organisational response strategies when coping with complexity in turbulent environments. They argue that most organisations reactively look for a best fit to existing contingencies (adaptability), which may undermine their ability to cope with uncertainty, i.e. their adaptive capacity. Adaptive capacity is relevant assuming that the dimensions present in the empirical context include uncertain future state of the environment, open organisational structure and all types of learning taking place. It combines structures as well as practices rather than looking at them separately. Sector-specific literature is found on adaptive capacity of international NGOs in terms of their ability to respond to change (Timmer 2005). The author develops a typology of adaptive capacity arguing that there is no one best approach to being able to adapt to change.

There is a direct reference to the research questions set out for the case studies on the interactive element of learning with support from western counterparts, i.e. how much is negotiated and reinvented in the process of practices moving from one location to another. Staber and Sydow (2002) claim adaptive capacity “aims less at improving economic efficiency than improving the ability to learn, to act reflexively, and to maintain or transform social structures and processes” (ibid.:412). Respective question for the research agenda are formulated: Are there elements of reflexivity in the West-East exchange and interaction or is it a reactive adoption on part of the transition partner? That is, does transforming take place for the content in the process of learning and adopting practice?

Considering an approach more tailored to the field of development and transitional countries of interest in this work, the work of Clark and Geppert (2002) on ‘management learning’ and ‘knowledge transfer’ approaches and issues in transforming societies make an important distinction which is not evident from the capacity-building and organisational development perspectives. They draw attention to familiar notions closing gaps in the various literature strands. For example, they bring attention to perceptions of knowledge transfer and learning as one-way processes with western sources as ‘teachers’ and Eastern organisations as ‘learners’ copying best practice in order to survive (ibid.: 268). This resonates with literatures on NGO

partnerships noted earlier, pre-empting this image of organisational realities in transition context. Two types of processes take place in the cross-organisational encounter: transferring existing knowledge across borders and cultures on one hand, and learning on the other hand, which involves producing and creating new ways of thinking and new knowledge (ibid.: 264). Both need to be addressed to understand NGO high-engagement partnerships. Such approaches to knowledge and learning as practiced and collectively constructed are reflected in the choice of research methods used and importance placed on what to consider in observations, interviews and document analysis.

Evidence of applying learning theory to NGO context also appears in Edwards and Fowler's (2002) where the authors' reflection on learning for development make a distinction between information and knowledge, stating that NGOs often confuse one with the other. "The goal is not to store up information about the world, but to change it" is a statement followed by a reference to the importance of reflection and learning by-doing (Schön) and a conclusion that it is more important that organisations *do* learn rather than try to learn effectively (Edwards & Fowler 2002: 333). Asking what kinds of learning NGOs should invest in, the analysis reflects on differences between participatory learning in the field, project-based learning, policy and advocacy-related learning and visionary thinking.

### **Venturing Beyond NGOs for Knowledge and Learning**

Outside of the presented context of (limited) NGO-related learning and knowledge research, it is a challenge to scan the field of knowledge transfer and organisational learning probing their relevance to transition context, NGO partnerships, and respective capacity building/organisational development agendas. The decision on how to approach this is directly related to the ontological and epistemological positioning of the researcher and the research design. An appropriate definition of 'knowledge' is first sought for with respect to accommodating the complexity of NGO partnership elements in transition settings and the focus on organisational practice (i.e. how acquired and co-constructed knowledge is invested into and enacted by everyday practice in NGOs delivering their services).

Barbara Czarniawska's (2001) approach to fieldwork centres on practice when addressing conceptualisations of 'knowledge', making it an appropriate and appealing starting point for knowledge exploration. Her fieldwork on consultancy as bounded by the social constructionism paradigm after Berger and Luckmann (1966) emphasises the importance of the respondents' views on knowledge, informing the methods and data sources to be used in approaching the fieldwork.:

*"The 'salient properties' of knowledge in the constructionist perspective construct themselves: they depend on how it performs, on its usefulness and beauty as judged by its users. Such use is highly personal, it varies from one situation to another, and it does not transcend its time and place."*

(Czarniawska 2001: 255).

Apart from the appropriate methodological underpinning and knowledge definition fit, her research on translation of ideas is seen to be particularly relevant to NGO partnerships and knowledge transfer (Czarniawska & Joerges 1996; Czarniawska & Sevón 2005). The authors contend that a practice or an institutions cannot travel so they must be simplified and abstracted, then embodied or objectified before they can move across space (Czarniawska & Sevón 2005: 9). Asking what puts translation of practice into motion, they draw on the notion of shared desire, and asking what forms it takes they suggest imitation. Here the link to NGO as builders of civil society is self-evident as previous sections have raised the relevant points. In asking what is considered worth translating, the answer is fashion, raising an interesting question about whether there are more fashionable causes NGOs stand for, which get funded and thus travel more easily across nations.

Research based on the translation and idea-travel argument by Czarniawska & Sevón (2005) has dipped into the sector already. Looking at six non-profits in the US, Hwang and Suarez (2005) describe how practices are translated through two artefacts embodying the ideology or organisations - the activity of making strategic plans and websites. This is congruent with Scott's (2003) institutional carriers, one element of which was 'artefacts'. It is also in tune with the development literature, for example in McFarlane(2005), who proposes a definition of knowledge encompassing a more dynamic approach to counter rationalistic notions and make way for translation of practice. He suggests Gherardi and Nicolini's (2000) notion of knowledge – situated in systems of on-going practice, relational and mediated by artefacts, acquired through communities of practice and negotiated (McFarlane 2005: 293).

'Evolutionary partnership' models suggest that over time an organisational relationship reaches maturity and broadening of the purpose in successful partnerships (e.g. Waddock 1989). The dynamic approach to developing knowledge-ability over time demands dynamic models of knowledge sharing and transfer. One can argue that over time, the organisation becomes an expert, more experienced, more skilful, and/or professional. Each of these concepts can be traced through the literatures, where some are more fitting for an organisational level of analysis, whilst others only make sense on an individual level.

A distinction between "amateur" and "professional" is found in voluntary sector research. Hwang and Powell (2009) observe that highly educated and motivated individuals increasingly view their work as professional (i.e. deserving dedication and commitment) in a context of expansion of formal as opposed to informal organisation. Distinction between different levels of professionalisation is "at the heart of nonprofits' identity and culture", they claim (ibid.:289). Most recently, research into environmental activism in Brazil shows that professionalisation of activism has taken place stimulated by the availability of new resources, cooperation with government institutions, transnational alliances (Alonso & Maciel 2010). The authors claim that this process is conventionalisation of activism, with a preference for negotiated relationship with the state and a firm-like organisational profile with expert staffing, technical specialisation and management activities (ibid.).

Another approach to professionalisation to draw upon addressing the question of when knowledge transfer is the mode of engagement with experienced partners and when knowledge creation takes place instead. Research on knowledge creation in professional organisations (Robertson *et al.* 2003) compares organisations in different institutional settings (professional) exploring the effect of institutional contexts on the knowledge-creation process. Centring on the “bounded nature of a profession’s knowledge”, the authors build on the link between knowledge creation within the organisation and wider knowledge claims of the profession. Though not addressing the voluntary sector, this research work is relevant with respect to the processes of knowledge handling as part of what institutional theory emphasises - “the role of actors who are transforming and maintaining institutions and fields” (Lawrence & Suddaby 2006).

As a separate point of entry into the literature on learning and knowledge, the research uses Shipton’s (2006) typology of organisational learning. It is a useful frame situating the discussion on organisational knowledge enabling partnerships as it categorises the existing approaches and research according to research aims and unit and level of analysis. It therefore allows the researcher to initially evaluate the place of the proposed research within structured boundaries of the organisational learning field, which provide focus at later stages of data analysis and typology-building (re-embedding in existing literature, looking for overlaps, considering rival theories, etc.).

The ontological and epistemological underpinnings of the research favour a social constructivist perspective. This points to ‘situated learning’ as a theory examining ‘knowing’ rather than ‘knowledge’ (Cook & Brown 1999). It speaks to a particular reading of the research question i.e. *how* western knowledge is invested into everyday practice in Bulgarian NGOs, with a focus on process and user-defined practice. Situated in Shipton’s individual learning quadrant within organisational context (descriptive perspective), this approach assumes context shapes what is learnt and how, and social engagement provides the context for learning, giving rise to a collective identity (*ibid.*).

The notion of collective identity appears again in the work on ‘community of practice’, which is relevant here with its interest in the processes guiding group member interaction in sharing and producing practice-specific knowledge. Cox (2005) differentiates between the various contributions to the theory on communities of practice. Lave and Wenger’s concept (1991) relates to situated learning and peripheral participation for newcomer learning, stressing it as a continuous, engaged, and identity-forming process. Organisational learning is a unified view of working, learning and innovation (Brown & Duguid 1991), where the organisational setting and improvisation around new understanding and problem-solving is central. In Wenger (1998) the focus is on social identity, participation and the dilemmas to the individual of their multi-membership of different communities. The different notions inform possible interpretations, e.g. of whether Bulgarian NGOs understand the knowledge gained from their partnership with western NGOs as being used for generating solutions to novel problems, and less about the reproduction of existing knowledge.

...

The organisational learning and knowledge-related literature has gradually encroaches on the search for inter-organisational relationship model for the third sector development in Bulgaria. Literature strands have grown to include some adjacent research contributions outside the realms of the disciplines outlined, which inform the analysis and reflections on the on-going fieldwork.

Some strands have not been used to inform the data collection stage but were referred to for the purpose of analysis as supplementary contexts. An example is a particular approach to dealing with transition country research and hybridising effects of cultural exchange in management practice, found in Miazhevich (2009). It looks at the hybridisation of management culture by applying Lotman's model of cultural dialogue to oral narratives in business discourse in her research in Belarus and Estonia. Originally based on literary text (western romanticism influences in Russia), the model identifies four stages of dialogue process of 'translation' between transmitting and receiving cultures where (1) texts are imported keeping their origin, (2) mutual restructuring takes place of imported local texts, through translation and adaptation, (3) the imported idea is transformed and embedded, becoming local, (4) the imported text is dissolved in the receiving culture becoming original (in Miazhevich 2009: 186-187). The research shows parallels to how post-Soviet practitioners receive capitalist norms as embedded in their attitudes, and the congruence present between new empowering culture of the present (carried out in 2005) and the native autocratic-bureaucratic culture of the past (before 1989). It argues that the divergence and convergence of national cultures to globalising processes are more complex than it has been assumed in earlier culture shock theories, as seen by the overlapping of the four stages in observed management culture discourse.

The focus on the role of text in Miazhevich has led to a methodological response, referring to the importance of examining texts as agency in organisations (Cooren 2004) which relate to NGOs' learning and knowledge practices (Carlile 2002). Carlile (2002) explores the problematic nature of knowledge in practice as a 'boundary object', localised, embedded, invested within and shared across functions in organisations. In this sense knowledge is structured in practice through artefacts that individuals work with, such as numbers, texts, and tools which they manipulate to some end. According to Cooren (2004), texts have agency in organisational settings where not only humans do things but so do their nonhuman counterparts. Using Searl's speech acts as a framework and previous literature on the agency role of machines and tools, Cooren (2004) explains how texts are appropriate and attributed by individuals (like an employee using the notes he has taken) to perform organisational functions, listing what acts texts can and cannot perform. For example, a memo can 'inform', a document can 'confirm', a seal can 'testify' etc. which is expected to appear in the fieldwork as company documents – they 'outline' NGO functions and goals, 'instruct' on how to carry out a particular service for beneficiary groups, 'evaluates' whether the organisation has fulfilled its obligations to a high standard, etc.

## Towards a Conceptual Framework

Having outlined the various strands of literature and how they informed the research process, the various layers and trigger case initial categories of questions are integrated to form a conceptual framework which underlies the case fieldwork, guiding the questions asked from the data.

Some of the encountered models in the literature are found to encapsulate a dynamic view of relationships between organisations in term of their exchanges. They seem particularly tempting to integrate with emerging themes from literature and test in the fieldwork. Dynamic models of knowledge transfer in particular meet the criteria with what Pfeffer would call 'good' theory – a “parsimonious, testable, and logically coherent” representation (in Eisenhardt 1989: 548). In this case, this means encapsulating both learning dynamics and a changing level of expertise in organisations. However, the importance of the respondents' own articulation on practices relating to knowledge acquisition relevant to NGO practices and the opportunity to build understanding from grounded concepts is a commitment to resisting set models. Therefore the development of conceptual categories from the literature strands is *to guide* data gathering and analysis, rather than categories as table columns to fill with data collected in the field. These are summarised next.

Out of the discussions in the transition literature comes the understanding that there is undoubtedly both a push and a pull for change in transition countries from institutions across all sectors and fields of activity. Yet there seems to be a lack of clarity in theory as to where change starts and a lack of agreement in practice on the right place for planting yielding change. If anywhere at all, agreement is on the general direction of change. Lavigne (1999) concludes that the transition countries in Europe know where they want to go and that everyone is now in the same boat (ibid.: 280). Comments from EU programme officers working with “new Europe” display an attitude of “they are all moving our way”, implying that an overall western principle-based practice is the desired outcome of the transition (Pinnock 2002). This however does not address the question on the agency and process of change. In other words, what are the mechanisms of determining what is kept and what is discarded in the process of transformation or hybridisation, whereby sector institutions are (re)invented?

The field of organisational knowledge management asks the same question: “What existing knowledge, ways of thinking and practices, managers and others should be encouraged to unlearn and what should be retained as a valuable basis on which to build a superior level of competence” (Child and Czegledy 1996: 174). The authors begin to address this by distinguishing between knowledge which retains its validity, mostly techniques of explicit knowledge, and that which needs to be adapted or tacit, associated with experiential knowledge (ibid.). Whole traditions of researching the area of knowledge and learning in this sense has evolved in the time Eastern Europe transition has also progressed. Existing knowledge management perspectives designed to address country-specific business discourse may not be

reflecting the dynamic taking place in the voluntary sector per se. For example, one view would be that the optimal result of cross-organisational partnership would come from the pooling of local and internationally based knowledge with continual adaptation and re-negotiation between the West and East to create a new culture (Camiah & Hollinshead 2003). This would require that all parties are open to and capable of negotiating outcomes, a process of power struggle which affects them in incommensurable ways.

The transition literature and institutional theory stimulate reflections on the research questions around the possibility of interdependence in partnership and the underlying knowledge and learning dynamics characterising this international exchange in the sector. In addition to how an institutional approach is congruent with transition to a market economy, institutions are important to the discussion in their capacity to create the conditions for organisational action. Scott (2003) discusses the process in which institutional elements move from place to place and time to time via different types of institutional carriers. These are symbolic systems, relational systems, routines, and artifacts (ibid.: 879). Identifying such carriers and the institutional elements of the voluntary sector within partnership arrangements is one way of approaching the *how* and *what* of recreating and transferring NGO activities internationally.

Identifying institutional carriers comes close to focusing on the learning and knowledge functions in a partnership between NGOs, and yet does not provide the framework to capture the relationship within which transfer takes place. As this is of paramount interest to the research, questions are drawn from the partnership and collaboration literature as well. What is a typical negotiation process of what is transferred in the process of knowledge transfer or sharing, where the participating institutional actors (or organisation) have different levels of expertise in the field? Are there signs of 'mutation'? How are they demonstrated by organisations? Is the transfer adaptation or adoption of practice or a combination of both? Which (if any) leads to a permeation of values and at what level (individual, organisational, sector-wide)? Can this be said to be adequate for instilling lasting change in the desired direction for these sector-specific actors we call NGOs? Some of these questions become questions for the field while others remain a higher-order issues which can only be addressed through discussion on findings from the field.

The hybridity discussion raises relevant questions here about institution-building in the voluntary sector across different transition countries. Are NGOs as institutions with all of their complexity and misgivings simply re-exported through partnerships? As Narozhna suggest, the sector is not beyond exploitation of the need for new ideas and solutions in the East, assistance from the West can be a false pretence legitimising self-serving practices by insider networks in transition countries. At the same time, it is possible that networks maintaining their self-serving practices is all that NGOs *can* (or should ) be in the end, especially as seen in by other NGOs or institutions competing for the same limited resources of Western "assistance" or funding. As Pinnock (2002) observes in the case of Bulgarian NGOs applying

for funding, in order to make concepts relevant for them, NGOs reinterpret western values to suit the local context to varying consequences. The notion of translation and reinterpretation of practices is of interest here especially as it comes to clash with NGO legitimacy.

With respect to key themes in the voluntary sector literature, the researcher avoids the oversimplification of power struggles with “either or” outcome in a dualistic positioning of NGOs as “agents” or agency of democratisation. The research takes the position that the nature of the relationship between NGOs in the West and East creates a dilemma for the less developed countries. If not caused by it, it is made worse by the fact that the existence of NGOs is heavily dependent on donor money and regulation from abroad. At the same time they are increasingly accountable to national legal frameworks and need to demonstrate their legitimacy to local actors. With a shift towards contextual approach to studying and working with NGOs, organisations are expected to be engaging with various institutions locally. This is expected to have consequences for the organisation’s direction of development, including the knowledge transfer taking place within the partnership.

The literature suggests international actors are faced with the task of building of a civil society in the presence of a lacking common definition, where getting things done in a transition setting may be overpowering the resolution of pre-existing misunderstandings about the role of voluntary sector organisations. Alongside the element of reinterpretation of values to suit local context, themes on conflicting views on NGO roles and goals are important for preparation for the fieldwork.

In the case of Bulgaria in particular, the literature supports the assumption that the relationship between NGOs in the two regions would create a difficulty for the developing partner. This is based on claims that the host organisations are heavily dependent on funding, regulation, and one-way learning, from abroad whilst having to act with legitimacy and authority in a local institutional context. Moreover, the dismissal of the country’s potential for sector-development found in current research is disturbing, particularly as it is based on determinism and historical misrepresentations. The research task at hand is not to address historical inaccuracies. However, this highlights the importance of resituating research on the dynamics of organisational partnerships back in the transition discourse, in order to speak to the possibility of building new institutions in a collectively re-invented sector by western and eastern experts.

Lastly we come to the elements of interest in the partnership itself. An episode approach to looking at collaboration is applied, providing a more nuanced picture of what is going on in learning process, which is better suited for the dynamic transition setting. NGOs operate in networks and alliances, from which they gain their legitimacy and clout in terms of influencing other actors, especially when working with government institutions. Alongside organisational memberships in networks, “networking between cooperating individuals” is sought in the data as a channel delivering knowledge and learning to organisations. The difference in expertise is another central feature which the trigger case raises, bearing on the negotiation



between the more and less knowledgeable NGO, and the expectations each side have on the process and outcome of this.

The notion of professionalisation as forming an expert knowledge group (or identity) is of interest here as this is a goal which NGOs in transition Bulgaria are likely to be seeking through their partnership engagement. It is also an end point of transition where the developed partner will no longer need assistance from a more developed counterpart. This brings to the fore the formation of an organisational identity as on with agency, expertise, and ability to influence its institutional context, as an outcome of partnership engagement, whether this is an intentional outcome or not. As seen in the trigger case a developing partnership over time may be expected to reach a point of maturity, or level of expertise, as theories on learning suggest. This however may not be attributed to skills acquisition, and may not be reflected in sector capacity indicators reaching certain levels. Instead, as suggested by the professionalisation literature, the maturing of NGOs may be related to the ageing of institutions representing the sub-fields which make up the voluntary sector. That is, for change to take place on a field level enough time must have passed to accumulate, create and define sufficient "expert knowledge" in the field.

The notion of creating a field is elaborated in Berger and Luckman (1966) with their notion of legitimation on institutions. It is a process which takes place the self-evident character of the institution cannot be maintained and need to be justified when transmitting the institutional order to a new generation (ibid.: 93). This produces new meanings that serve to integrate existing meanings of an institution (or field), which translated to NGO practice development, means that the way NGOs operate is legitimated on an established sector level in Bulgaria, rather than being exported there from the western field of practice. This raises the question whether the Bulgarian voluntary sector has developed sufficiently or it is still in the process of habituation of its actors, the NGOs learning their roles. The habituation process involves embedding patterns of activity into a stock of knowledge taken for granted by an entity becoming aware of its role in an institutional order (ibid.: 55).

With regards to the learning and knowledge literature appropriated for the framework, the most important distinctions seems to be between explicit and tacit knowledge, or know-what and know-how, which are useful for identifying the subject of learning and knowledge sharing in the partnership, as well as the process by which practice is translated (artefacts and translation mechanisms). When teaching or learning about what practical and ideological work underlies civil society-building, what is relevant from theory that if possible at all, tacit knowledge is difficult to code in order to be shared (Nonaka & Konno 1998). Notions of translation, interpretation, adoption and adaptation of ideas and practices also appear as central to transfer of practice, confirming their importance to the framework as they have already been introduced as part of the NGO literature. Finally, it is encouraging to encounter the same model with juxtaposed interpretations across different studies in the field. Communities of practice in one reading are places for generating solutions to novel problems and in another, places of reproducing

existing knowledge, echoing the issue raised about change in transition contexts in the management learning field. This shows that the knowledge and learning literature is still in development about its own conceptual categories, justifying theoretical exploration in the thesis.

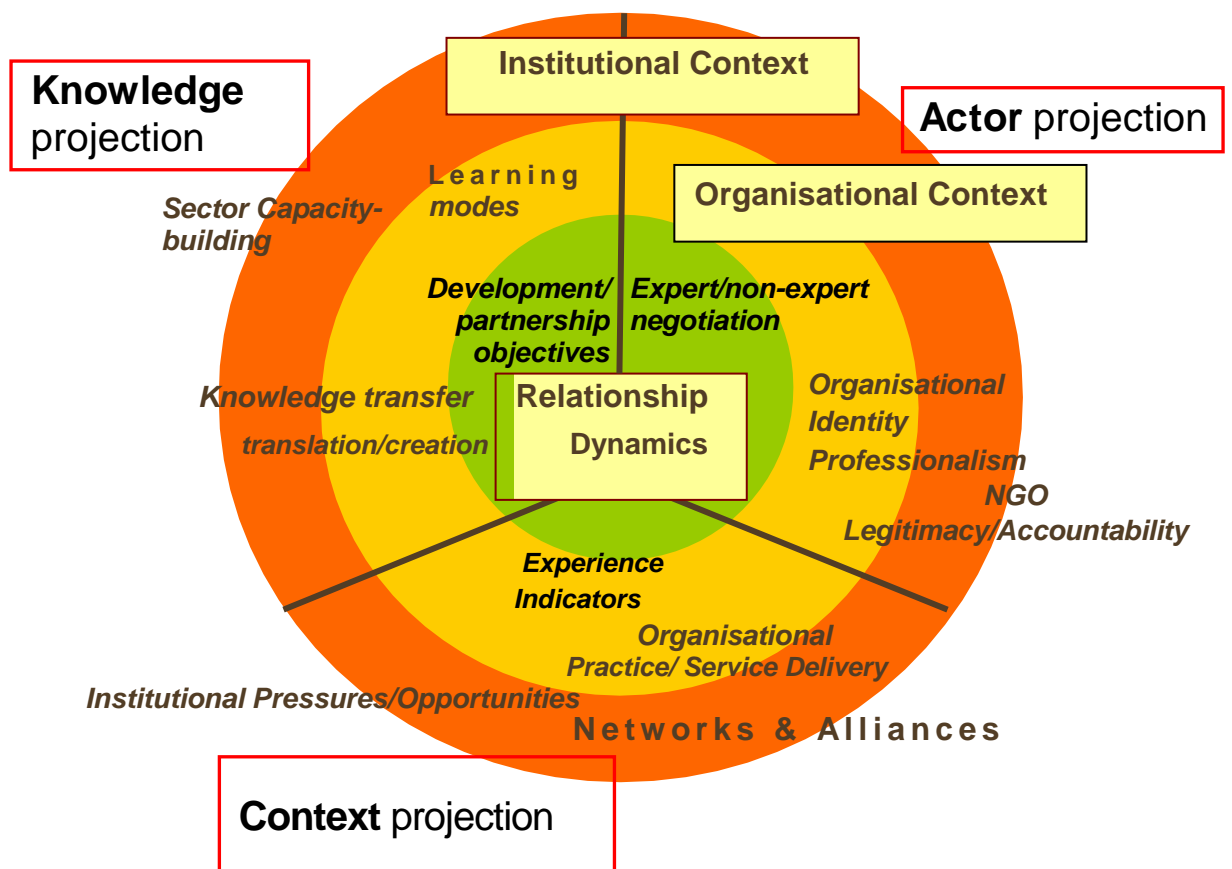


Fig. 1 Conceptual Framework for modelling inter-organisational relations supportive of organisational learning and development

The diagram presents a conceptual framework integrating key literature strands around the conceptual categories they speak to. It has three 'platforms' on which the relationship between NGO partners, engaging in collaboration and knowledge sharing modes have meaning: relationship dynamic (central), organisational (middle) and institution-wide (outermost). Placing the relationship at the centre of the dynamic, findings are expected to speak to key concepts and themes relevant to each of the platforms. Secondly, the three projections are three categories of questions about what has been framed as the main aspects of the partnership as highlighted by literatures and concepts discussed. The projections are (1) the construction of an organisational agency/identity in its transition environment (actor projection), (2) the knowledge and learning which takes place within this engagement (knowledge projection), and the institutional forces which are relevant to this knowledge dynamics (context projection). For example, a central questions under the actor projection is:

**How does the negotiation between expert and non-expert NGO relate to the organisational identity in the Bulgarian organisation in the context of the organisation maintaining its legitimacy to institutions at home?**

This is a question asked of the data in the fieldwork, with "negotiation" being the central concept for the relationship level, "organisational identity" central for the organisational level, and "legitimacy" on an institutional level. These have been introduced in the literature strands. Once the data is gathered along these lines, additional conceptual categories are used to analyse data further (e.g. "professionalism" and accountability to international partners). An example of this follow-up question for the one set above is:

**Does this negotiation relate to their level of professionalism in the context of being accountable to their partners internationally?**

The questions for the field are outlined in detail in the Methodology chapter. The listing of concepts appearing in the diagram for each platform is not exhaustive and there is no relationship or dependence assumed between concepts as variables, across the platforms or across the projections. The diagram is a mapping tool rather than an explanatory framework. The layers are in line with established conventions on level of analysis when conducting organisational research (Pugh *et al.* 1963).

## Chapter Four: Methodology

*The chapter presents the logic behind and process of data collection in the field. The discussion on research methodology begins with an outline of the development of the research design, refining the research questions, and the multiple case study approach. Then it moves to the implementation of the research methodology in the fieldwork. This includes the processes around case access and some of the details on coding and concept development from themes appears here. Extracts from the research diary, reflections and challenges are presented for illustration, and the writing is in first person to convey researcher presence and process of reflection in the fieldwork. Various grounded theory techniques are discussed in detail for each of the cases including memoing, open coding, axial coding, concept forming and category forming based on theoretical sampling (Corbin & Strauss 2008; Goulding 2002). In addition the chapter presents different data types explored in the fieldwork with respective coding methods, establishing key links between case themes and subsequent concept developments.*

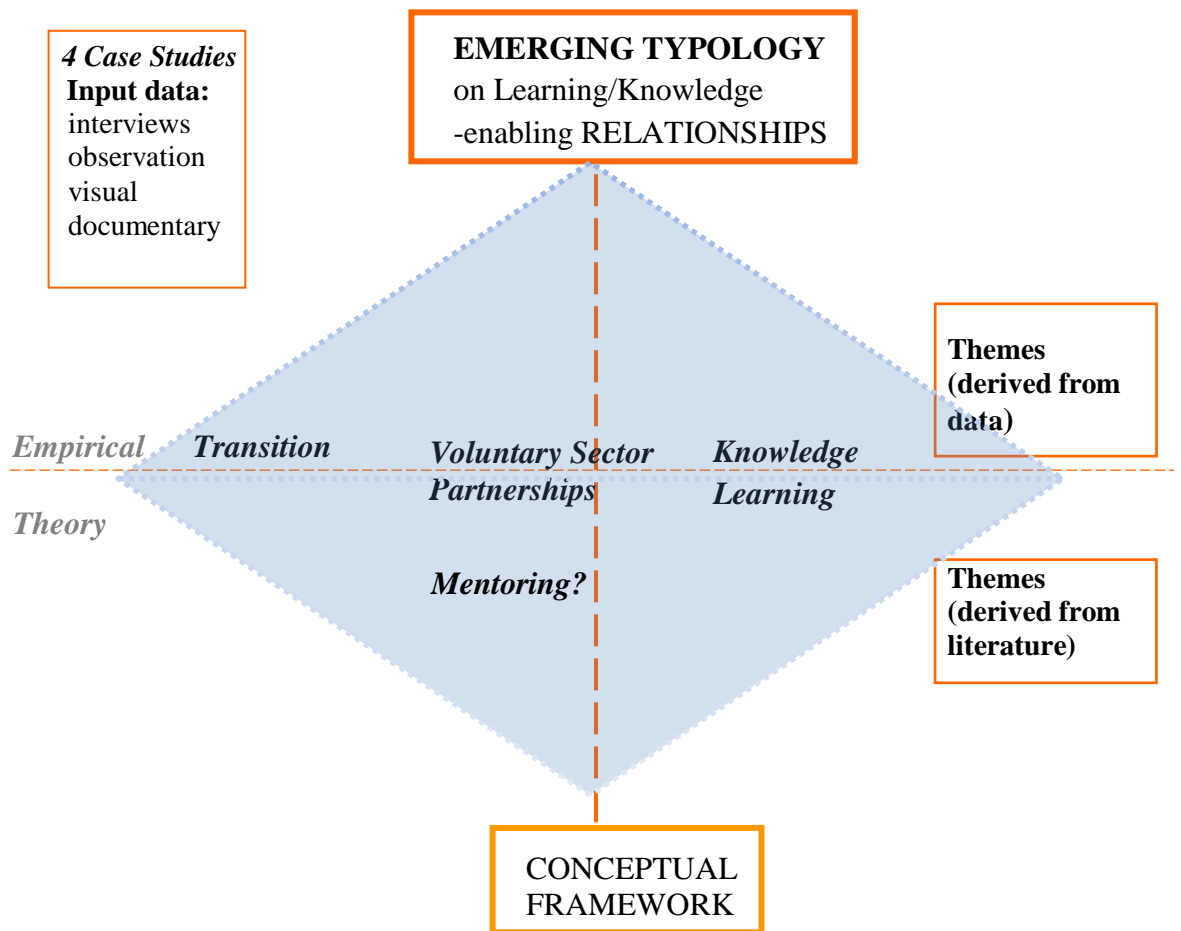
### Research Design and Rationale

In light of the breadth of the initial research question, two processes were expected to take place throughout the preparation stage of the research. The first is analysis of the research question through its deconstruction into management themes. These have been outlined in the literature review presenting some of the relevant management themes, organisational learning theories, and voluntary sector models, all inhabiting a context of transition country undergoing socio-economic changes. These guide conceptual and thematic contexts for data collection and analysis. The research then looks to generate a rich description of the phenomena of interest and subsequently, a theoretical construct, by applying grounded theory approach. This approach is seen to be an appropriate theory-building strategy here, where its aim is “to explore basic social processes and to understand the multiplicity of interactions that produces variation in that process” (Heath & Cowley 2004:142).

The fieldwork is conducted in a scoping manner where a hypothesis, or previously existing model, is not sought to be tested in the field. Rather, a new “model”, or classification (typology) systematising emerging findings, should emerge in the research process. Initially it was planned that synthesis of the data into thematic fieldwork-based papers would form the pillars or chapters of a new theoretical construct (critical essay integrating the chapters) converging in a new framework for a cross-disciplinary field of learning/knowledge-handling between NGOs in transition settings. Consequently, it was seen reasonable that single-case papers be abandoned for the benefit of concentrating on cross-case analysis with the aim to produce a more rigorous typology. Finally, based on reading of grounded theory and typology critique (Doty & Glick 1994; Suddaby 2006) the researcher realised that the final output is likely to fall short of a typology given the limited sample and that taxonomy (classification scheme) instead is the more feasible outcome of the thesis at this stage.

The following diagram shows schematically the relationship between the rationale base, the methodology, case location and relation to theme and outputs. The constructed emerging conceptual framework from the literature is figuratively “folded” over onto the empirical side, where findings from the four case studies have generated their own description as an emerging typology.

In the planning process it is envisaged that the “print” of the organisational knowledge sharing and learning support framework (conceptual framework) would find a fit with the empirically led grounded theory output, based on the case studies. If not a good match, there would be at least a “bad match” which would still be investigated with respect to a fit between theory and what is found in the fieldwork as representing theory in practice.



**Fig. 2                    Research Rationale**

### **Research Questions**

All research questions are guided by the three projections in the framework above and aim to inform three primary interrelated disciplines. i.e. the data looks at the (1) knowledge transfer and learning which goes on within the (2) voluntary sector in a (3) transition context. The objective is to describe this interplay in a systematised way using “mutually exclusive and exhaustive sets” (classification scheme) which fall within the conceptual categories as delineated within these three broad disciplines (Doty & Glick 1994: 232). This could result in constructing a model (typology) for inter-organisational support for knowledge exchange in transition settings, which would require that “multiple ideal types each representing a unique combination of the organisational attributes determining set outcomes” (ibid.). If neither of these schemes are possible to construct, the alternative would involve finding a fit between case themes loosely relating to the three projections with the corresponding existing literature on (1), (2), and (3) and commenting on the relevance to future developments of the sector and inter-organisational relationships.

Questions of inquiry (Level 2) guide the questions in the field addressed to the respondents (Level 1), i.e. the verbal line of inquiry. Level 1 Questions are designed to be open-ended as each of the respondents will have their own interpretation of the issues posed. This is seen as guiding the discussion rather than a strict schedule based around the literature themes. The first phase of the data collection looks at the following Level 1 research questions, which have been revisited continuously over the course of the fieldwork (2008 - 2009) in response to issues around the centrality of the partnership in the context of the Bulgarian NGO's practices. Follow-up on the emerging themes from interviews and reflection on data has also led to revision of questions asked of all types of fieldwork data.

### ***Level 1 Questions guiding interviews and overall data collection***

#### ***Actor projection:***

Q.1 *How do the organisations develop through their relationships in terms of their:*

##### *1.1 Identity:*

1.1.1 Who are the acting agents on an organisational and individual level in terms of the roles, activities and responsibilities?

1.1.2 What is their organisational self-perception according to the individuals working there?

1.1.3 How do individuals interact with each other internally in terms of organisational culture and behaviour (for case organisation)?

1.1.4 What roles and responsibilities are assumed by individuals in the process of working in a partnership between the two organisational actors?

##### *1.2 Level of professional experience or stage of organisational development:*

1.2.1 What characteristics do they display in their professional relationships with external stakeholders?

1.2.2 What characteristics do they display in their formal and/or informal relationship with supporting partners?

1.2.3 What is the difference between the levels of expertise between the two partner organisations?

##### *1.3 Legitimacy and accountability in their own institutional environments:*

1.3.1 How do the responsibilities and roles of the organisation at home affect the relationship with their partner?

1.3.2 What institutional pressures from the socio-political environment present a challenge to the supportive function of the relationship?

1.3.3 Facilitators of the supportive function?

**Knowledge projection:**

Q.2 *What is the nature of the knowledge transfer taking place within the relationship on an relationship, cultural and institutional level?*

- 2.1 What kind of support is provided to the case organisation through existing approaches and tools?
- 2.2 What counts as “knowledge” to the Bulgarian NGO and for the partner organisation and why?
- 2.3 What are the drivers in this process?
- 2.4 In what way is the professional experience of the supporting organisation translated into “support” to the receiving organisation?
- 2.5 What is lost/gained in the process?
- 2.6 How does the organisation use (types of) knowledge?

Q.3 *What (if any) organisational learning taking place within the Bulgarian organisation (on these three levels)?*

- 3.1 What is the nature of the learning experiences attributed to the partner’s support as perceived by the organisation in each of the priority areas of their work?
- 3.2 Learning experience in non-priority areas?
- 3.3 What combined learning outcomes are attributed both to the partner and other sources of knowledge?
- 3.4 Is there any newly created knowledge in the “interaction” process?

**Context projection:**

Q.4 *What are the cultural and/or institutional influences on the relationship?*

- 4.1 What specific circumstances regarding the role of NGO in its environment reflect on the learning relationship directly or indirectly?
- 4.2 What specific pushes of the voluntary and political sector trends in each of the organisational settings influence the learning relationship?
- 4.3 How do the cultural differences between the partners influence their relationship in relation to the knowledge transfer and learning?
- 4.4 What do the changes within the culture of the Bulgarian partner signal in terms of the needed knowledge transfer and/or organisational learning from the western partner?
- 4.5 What is the understanding of “reaching maturity” in organisational terms for both partners as regarding the knowledge employed and support offered? Where is the cut-off point for the supporting relationship?
- 4.6 How does the knowledge transferred influence the position which the organisation takes in society in Bulgaria?

The outlined questions were designed to provide ground for building a typology on the supportive learning relationships mapped in the cases. The expectations were that they be analysed and then synthesised



into integrating questions, informing the three themes: organisational learning/knowledge, voluntary sector development, and socio-economic transition context. In the fieldwork process the researcher found there to be overlaps in the Actor and Knowledge projection with respect to the interactions with institutions, which are reflected in the similarity in the questions 1.3 and 4.1/4.2.

The questions of inquiry (Level 2), the “mental line” of inquiry about the nature of the relationship guide the questions in the field (Level 1), which the research methods follow, i.e. the “verbal line” of inquiry (Yin 2003). This is not an exhaustive definition of the methods which are employed here, as observation and visual methods are included. However “verbalising” will take place at least on a description level in the recording and analysis of the findings. According to Yin (2003) Level 2 questions are integrating questions, addressing the individual case. These are: *What is the nature of the observed inter-organisational relationships in terms of power dynamics, learning approach, knowledge content, exchange process, direct and residual outcomes? To what extent does the organisation model its external and internal management practice on their partner organisation and with what results?*

Level 3 questions address the pattern of findings across multiple cases. Arriving at an answer to these would suggest a typology has been achieved. These are: *What kinds of support are on offer and what kinds of (inter)dependency relations occur for each kind? What are the dependencies visible in the typology in respect to the features present?*

Level 4 refer to the whole study, i.e. the implications of the typology of shared learning relationships for management practice, including the grand scale goal of the voluntary sector to build civil society in an East-West transformational context. These are: *How do relationship types affect knowledge transfer and learning between NGOs and is this a useful tool in the tasks of civil society capacity building, nationally and internationally? What accountability and legitimacy issues arise from the relationship types in the process of building of civil society in a country changing towards an EU regulated status?*

The data sources used follow in the tradition of ethnographic and interpretivist approaches (Mason 2002) as guided by the tenets of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss 1967). The ethnographic approach allows for first-hand experience in the setting (e.g. observation) whereas the interpretivist approach suggests that the sought understanding of the unit of analysis is constructed by the participants rather than existing in a set and readily available form (e.g. interviews) (Mason 2002). The unit of analysis is knowledge transfer dynamics on an organisational level, where this dynamic encompasses both the subject of learning about practice and the channel for learning about practice. Although the subject of learning is sought inductively from respondents and data, the general definition of “organisational practice” sets out tentative categories. These are (1) what services can be delivered (2) how they can be delivered, (3) the underlying philosophy to the service provision and (4) the internal management practice which supports these activities (including both organisational structure and processes).

Diverse data sources are used to inform a forming qualitative data set, each one with their strengths and weaknesses as suitable to the outlined research questions. The collected data serves as the basis for theory-building through alternating phases of continual data input and continuous analysis. As outlined by Mason (2002) and Yin (2003), these include:

- direct observation – of meetings, office activities, conversations by individuals
- interviews (semi-structured, unstructured) – open-ended to interpretation of the outlined themes above
- documentation of organisational activities – administrative documents, letters, agendas of meetings, reports
- physical artefacts (visual data) – manuals, tools, physical space in organisation, photographs

The inter-organisational exchange are examined using multiple methods from the host country (Bulgaria) and possibly partner country depending on access to a current or past partnership, the intensity of the relationship and the activities therein, and the level of engagement of organisation with the research. Multiple data sources together with reflexivity provide triangulation<sup>5</sup> for greater construct validity (Yin 2003). Triangulation refers to Using multiple sources of evidence is one of the tactics used to increase construct validity in case study research, one of the criteria for evaluating case study research in a way “encouraging convergent lines of inquiry” (Yin 2003: 32)

Turning to the notion of reflexivity, it refers to “examining how the researcher and intersubjective elements impinge on, and even transform research, has been an important part of the evolution of qualitative research” (Finlay 2002: 210). Considering the justification difficulties faced by qualitative research, reflexivity is employed for enhancing research “trustworthiness, transparency and accountability” (ibid.: 211). For Watson (1994) the researcher’s adoption of “internal realism” is a reference point for reflexivity, describing it as a balancing act between the objective and subjective ontological position in interpreting the influence of the perceiving actor-researcher. Internal realism is a combination of accepting an objectively existing subject being researched and a subjectively interpreted one, a relationship between the perceived nature of the studied subject (in this case actors shaping the organisation they inhabit) and the researcher’s own process of research ‘crafting’ (ibid.).

## **Research Data and Methods**

Each of the outlined Level 1 and Level 2 questions assumes a different method or a number of methods to be used. For example, the question “2.1 What kind of support is provided to the case organisation through

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<sup>5</sup> Using multiple sources of evidence is one of the tactics used to increase construct validity in case study research, one of the criteria for evaluating case study research in a way “encouraging convergent lines of inquiry” (Yin 2003: 32)

existing approaches and tools?”, can be answered by interviews with individuals working in the Bulgarian organisation, but also through document analysis of the records on provided materials, observation of the organisational behaviour in terms learning patterns, visual data on the support materials etc. Mason (2002) provides a useful planning tool for associating the developed Level 1 questions to the methods and thinking about the justification of using these and issues which may arise (ibid.:27-30).

In addition to the type and combination of methods for the given research question, the methods applied would have to reflect issues dependent on where and how the support, organisational learning, and knowledge transfer interactions take place, (e.g. learning process as a visit, seminar, on-line communication, manual, etc.). These considerations are reflected by Mason (2002) as the levels of integration of multiple methods (ibid.: 34-36). For example, direct observation would be used for the interactive encounters between the two partners (if any), whereas in the Bulgarian office, there may be conversations between the researcher and a number of individuals on the organisational relationship issues, using unstructured interviews Mason (2002) provides a useful planning tool for associating the developed Level 1 questions to the methods and thinking about the justification of using these and issues which may arise (ibid. 27-30). It is adapted here for reflecting on the interaction between each of the research questions and corresponding data sources and methods (Table x). The last column reflects on the practicalities and ethical issues which may arise with the data type, such as access issues, interventions from either my or the organisation’s side, and consideration for data contamination, etc. Some reflections with corresponding literature on learning from the fieldwork, which took place after data collection, are indicated.

Research Questions	Data Sources and Methods	Justification	Practicalities and Ethical issues
1.1.1 Who are the acting agents on an organisational and individual level in terms of the roles, activities and responsibilities?	<p>Interview: direct question</p> <p>Observation: visual data (photographs, maps, drawings, office space, logos, etc.)</p> <p>Documents as organisational profiles</p>	<p><i>Identifying the organisation as a distinct actor with agency is necessary if it is to be bestowing with the ability to develop a relationship</i></p> <p>Individual members are considered active agents of organisational learning (Huysman 1999<sup>14</sup>); need for accessing of their views directly on 'organisational practices as identity' (Czarniawska 2001<sup>15</sup>)</p>	<p>Could have one or more potential partners, active or non-active, different degree of engagement with organisation (see Table 2)</p> <p>Access to partner organisation?</p> <p>Requires sensitivity with politics between Bulgarian and partner organisation – confidentiality clauses?</p> <p><b>Cross-level fallacy<sup>16</sup> between individual and organisational identity?</b></p>
1.1.2 What is the organisational self-perception according to the individuals working there?	<p>Interview</p> <p>Observation: visual data</p>		<p>Flexibility and uncertainty leading to lack of structure in interviews - requires more specific questions for interviews depending on the organisation's mission, activities, culture once I gain access and establish rapport</p>
1.1.3 How do individuals interact with each other internally in terms of organisational culture/behaviour?	<p>Observation: interaction with</p>	<p>Visual data as organisational aesthetics representing organisational identity</p>	<p>Difficult to observe everything - selective interpretation of researcher; reflective recording and analysis is crucial</p>

**Table 2 Research Strategy planning: Questions and data type justification (after Mason, 2002)**

<sup>14</sup> In Esterby-Smith et al (1999) – based on the approach used in the Masters dissertation with the pilot case.

<sup>15</sup> In Clegg et al (2007) – added after the fieldwork as a reflection on the centrality of the 'practice' side of the learning/knowledge elements in the partnership.

<sup>16</sup> After Rousseau (1963) – added after the fieldwork as a reflection on the direct data versus analysis of data required for Level 1 questions.

1.2.1 What characteristics do they display in their professional relationships with external stakeholders?	partner (attending meetings)  Documented communication (emails, minutes)	(Warren 2008);  Documents 'act', making a statement of identity (Cooren 2004)	Access issues – not be allowed to be present when they interact with stakeholders; Relying on external representation of organisations (news coverage, public opinion) which may be biased
1.2.2 What characteristics do they display in their formal and/or informal relationship with supporting partners?		Observing interaction as social construction of identity.	Access issues – may not attend meetings with partners if the relationship is not active at the moment <b>Cross-level fallacy between individual and organisational identity?</b>
1.2.3 What is the difference between the levels of expertise between the two partner organisations?	All available methods	Documents as records of interaction representing the characteristics of agency  Triangulation by combined	Potentially a leading question- assuming an understanding of levels rather than types of expertise. Measurement and categorisation difficulties – use definitions from literature? Compromising grounded approach?
2.1 What kind of support is provided to the organisation through existing approaches and tools?	Documents: artefacts of support  Interviews: organisation reps, possibly with partner reps	<i>Describing varieties of support as the 'what' and 'how' of the relationship (leads to types of knowledge and knowing of importance to the NGO)</i>	Prior knowledge of partner approaches has an influence on interpreting organisation documents as artefacts Expected conflicting interpretations of both methods to interpret existing approaches – reconciliation methods? Interpretive bias?
2.2 What counts as “knowledge” to the recipient NGO and for the partner organisation and why?	Observation	Documents as artefacts of support and knowledge = 'polysemic artifacts' (Hwang & Suarez 2005 <sup>17</sup> ); 'boundary objects' (Carlile 2002)	Differentiate between “knowledge” and “knowing” is important (from literature) Might not have access to partner's views (no mentor perspective limits research to one-sided view) Measurement and categorisation difficulties – use definitions from literature? Compromising grounded approach?

**Table 2 (continued) Research Strategy planning: Questions and data type justification (after Mason, 2002)**

<sup>17</sup> In Czarniawska and Sevón (2005)

2.3 What are the drivers in this process?	Interviews Documents		
2.4 In what way is the professional experience of the supporting organisation translated into “support” to the receiving organisation?			Language difficulties in translation and interpretation of concept Measurement and categorisation difficulties – use definitions from literature? Compromising grounded approach?
2.5 Anything lost and gained in the process?	Interviews		Highly interpretive by researcher: reflective recording and analysis is crucial Stronger bias with reliance on only one method? <b>Cross-level fallacy between individual and organisational identity?</b>
2.6 How does the organisation use the (types of) knowledge?	Interviews  Observation of practice/activities  Documents: records of applying knowledge		May not have access to actual practice to observe Highly interpretive by researcher: reflective recording, detailed coding Language difficulties in translation and interpretation of concept Measurement and categorisation difficulties – use definitions from literature? Compromising grounded approach? <b>Conflating analysis question with Level 1 question for data access?</b>
3.1 What is the nature of the ‘learning experiences’ attributed to the partner’s support as perceived by the organisation in each of the priority areas of their work?			<b>Conflating analysis question with Level 1 question for data access?</b> Highly interpretive by researcher: reflective recording, detailed coding
3.2 Learning experience in non-priority areas?			Language difficulties in translation and interpretation of concepts
3.3 What are the combined learning outcomes attributed both to the partner and other sources of knowledge?			

**Table 1 (continued) Research Strategy planning: Questions and data type justification (after Mason, 2002)**

3.4 Is there any newly created knowledge in the “interaction” process?			May on have access of project outputs from both ends of the partnership
4.1 What specific pushes of the voluntary and political sector trends in each of the organisational settings influence the learning relationship?			
4.2 How do the cultural differences between the partners influence their relationship in relation to the knowledge transfer and learning?	Observation: interaction with partner (attending meetings)		Potentially a leading question- assuming and imposing differences as present <b>Conflating analysis question with Level 1 question for data access?</b> Evoking cultural stereotypes in individual responses
4.3 What do the changes within the culture of the Bulgarian partner signal in terms of the needed knowledge transfer and/or organisational learning from the western partner?	Interviews: both sides of NGO representatives		
4.4 What is the understanding of “reaching maturity” in organisational terms for both partners as regarding the knowledge employed and support offered?			Potentially a leading question- assuming a signalling need for knowledge is present <b>Conflating analysis question with Level 1 question for data access?</b>
4.5 Describe the cut-off point for the supporting relationship.			
4.6 How does transferred knowledge influence the position which the organisation takes in society?			Language difficulties in translation and interpretation of concepts

**Table 1 (continued) Research Strategy planning: Questions and data type justification (after Mason, 2002)**

In addition, particular issues to address through data sources and methods depends on access to a current or past partnership, the intensity of the relationship and the activities therein, and the level of engagement of organisation with the research. Some examples of this are summarised in the following table (Table 3), which integrates Higgins and Kram’s (2001) characterisation of the mentoring relationship with the practical issues which may to arise in the field.

	<b>Methodological considerations</b>	<b>Single Intensive</b>	<b>Single Non-intensive</b>	<b>Multiple Intensive</b>	<b>Multiple Non-intensive</b>
	Relationship characteristics (Higgins & Kram 2001)  Potential focus for questions?	(traditional) -Mutual respect -Trust -Sharing -Redundant information	(receptive) -Weaker support -Passive protégé	(entrepreneurial) -High trust -Acting on behalf of protégé -Collective provision of wide-base information	(opportunistic) -Passive protégé; not seeking -Open to all supporters
<b>Corresponding Methods for fieldwork and reflexivity</b>					
<b>Active (current) relationship</b>	-Focus on change is crucial -Collaborative interaction with respondents -Reflexivity in reporting to participants	Observation	Observation	Interviews Observations	Interviews/ highly interpretive
		Interviews BG  Partner interviews	Interviews BG	Power in knowledge transfer; Control issues; Data overload	Focus on what they create; Translation of knowledge crucial; collating
<b>Past relationship</b>	-Memory-based post-rationalising -Emphasis on interpretation -Not change oriented	Documentary (records of interaction) Interviews BG; Partner interviews; Visual data constructed	Documentary (records of interaction)  Interviews BG	Documentary (records of interaction) Interviews BG; Partner interviews; Visual data constructed	Identify knowledge artefacts in organisation, reconstruct their history

**Table 2**      **Matching expected partner interaction modes to methods**



As data is qualitative and highly interpretive and in addition to the grounded theory approach which creates codes from the data for analysis, the distinction between collecting data (excavation) and generating data (construction) is not clear (Mason 2002). Taking a single photograph is an interpretation – making a choice on the subject, the location, the context, the angle, what expression to capture. What is visual and how it is visualised are two separate data types (ibid.). Overlapping of data will most likely take place, when an interview becomes a transcript (document), or when an interview conjures images representing ideas, thoughts and emotions, which may be captured in a sensory rather than linguistic sense (drawings). As in the case for other methods, the decisions on what to use and how will depend on the situational predisposition to the research for each case upon each visit.

## Multiple Case Study Research

Drawing on the trigger case, a multiple case research strategy is employed to further explore the tentative framework. In this sense, using Mitchell's (2000) differentiation between types of case studies on the basis of their use, the cases are 'plausibility probes' i.e. "used specifically to test interpretive paradigms which have been established by previous cases" (ibid.:173). Multiple case studies and grounded theory in data analysis operationalise the conceptual framework. In describing what case studies feature as a method of investigation and interpretation, Stake (2000)

writes:

*"... descriptions that are complex, holistic and involving a myriad of not highly isolated variables; data that are likely to be gathered at least partly by personalistic observation; and a writing style that is informal, perhaps narrative, possibly with verbatim quotation, illustration and even allusion and metaphor. Comparisons are implicit rather than explicit. Themes and hypothesis may be important, but they remain subordinate to the understanding of the case."* (ibid.:24)

There are four case studies in the research design constructed on Bulgarian home-grown organisations working with a West European partner, responding to the criteria for selecting an appropriate number of case studies for capturing the complexity of data necessary for theory-building (Eisenhardt 1989: 545). Multiple case design is seen as appropriate for data collection and description of the relationships between organisations in my research. The rationale for this decision is based on replication logic (Yin 2003), i.e. looking at the organisational relationships in more than one setting for comparative purpose in the attempt to find a pattern which will lead to constructing a model (typology).

The logic underlying comparison in multiple cases is discussed in Hammersley *et al.* (2000) who reflect on social researcher on opiate addiction in the 1930s as a demonstration of analytic induction in action as an interpretation of comparative method:

*"Starting with information about a few cases of addiction, he developed a hypothesis that fitted those cases. He then collected and analysed further cases, and this forced him to reformulate the hypothesis. He continued the investigation until additional cases no longer*

*required him to revise the hypothesis; though he notes that new data may yet stimulate further revisions to the theory in the future” (ibi.:246)*

This is the logic underlying the move from a trigger case, where themes lead to the conceptual framework, to the new sample of NGOs. They are the new triggers for revising the hypothesis that a mentoring type is appropriate for capturing the complexity underlying NGO partnerships in transition context.

## **Case Sample**

The definition of the voluntary sector as a population from which the sample is drawn is set by Salamon and Anheier's (1996) International Clarification of Nonprofit Organisations. A second component of this definition is the legal framework definition in Bulgarian legislation governing NGOs as set by the Non-profit Act, effective from 01.01.2001. According to this framework a legal non-profit can freely determine the means to achieve their goals set out in their charter. Non-profits can carry out additional economic activity only if it is connected to the main activity for which they are registered and using the revenue to achieve the objectives set in their charter. The scope of their activity is defined in the statutes or instrument of legal non-profit entity (i.e. charter) but by law, they do not distribute profit.

The literature on types of NGOs with respect to their relationships with a more developed partner takes an evolutionary approach to organisation's life cycle and distinguishes between self-generating start-ups and externally assisted intermediary organisations (Avina 2002). The author notes that the latter “mirror their parent organizations in most if not all regards” in some instances whereas in others they develop their own aims and methodologies independently (ibic.128). This indicates that a differentiation between independent and dependent NGO emergence is insufficient to guide expectations of their practices, even the most fundamental ones. Furthermore, recent research on the sector in Bulgaria presents another dichotomy of the third sector emergence. It present the sector as composed by state-funded NGOs from socialism around social services, on the one hand, and the new professional NGOs established after 1989 around newly emerging problems and unmet needs, on the other (NGPA, personal communication).

These distinctions have informed the case sample in addition to Salamon and Anheier's index. Most importantly, the decision to include NGOs who are part of formal networks was based on the logic of comparing case themes around learning and knowledge within both formal and informal arrangements. The four NGOs were selected and prepared in two stages over the two data-gathering periods, each consisting of initial selection, contact, and follow-up to negotiate the fieldwork procedures. Theoretical, non-random sampling is applied in order to focus the effort on finding useful cases on the basis of generally defined conceptual categories from existing literature (Eisenhardt 1989; Phillips & Pugh, 2006).

Criteria specific to the research question for selecting cases have been developed to address the suitability of the organisation to the developed conceptual categories. They include the following:

- Potential case organisations are defined as part of the voluntary sector (specified above)
- Availability of substantial, non-financial support from a western organisation in the same field of work or with similar goals to a Bulgarian NGO
- Visibility. The presence of the organisation (web presence or participation in documented and reported prior research) was considered to signal their active status in the sector and therefore on partnership level, though some may be omitted with this assumption.
- Independence of the organisation receiving support (established and functioning separately from partner or other body). This criterion formed the two-by-two case selection over the two fieldwork periods. Many of the “established” organisations in the field showed to have strong links with an international body or were set up as a branch of a global network. This was seen to be essential to understanding the variation across formal and informal exchanges pertinent to learning and knowledge as part of varying networks.
- Relationship(s) of mutual benefit with partner organisations. This is measured as shared mission and objectives with other organisation(s) which they are “working with” (loosely defined concepts of “partner” and “working with” at this stage which is not in conflict with the tenets of grounded theory approach)
- Diversity of experience – due to years of existence, type of work, number of successful projects and/or scale of projects
- Diverse locations and European Union proximity – geographic location and EU association, socio-economic and political context

In the planning process, each case pair was selected to represent a different sub-sector of the voluntary sector in Bulgaria, i.e. one working for rights issues, a business association, community organisation, etc. Other initial criteria for selecting organisations were related to their fit with the mentoring literature as applied to the trigger case, including perceived mutual benefit from both sides in their joint activities, perception of learning experience occurring as a result of the interaction between partners, and acknowledged difference in level of work experience. This criteria was relaxed as a result of access limitations and literature expansion.

Four organisations were initially selected from a 2005 report on the Bulgarian Civil Society CIVICUS/Balkan Assist as well as from email correspondence with a consultant in the field of EU funding for organisational development in Bulgaria. All of them were located on the web and briefly examined in terms of their self-reported mission, history, activities, and structures. They all have their head office in Sofia, Bulgaria, which is a practical location in term of access feasibility.

The first organisation is BARDA – a decentralised non-governmental umbrella organisation of independent regional development agencies and business centres in Bulgaria. It showed to have a good broad regional recognition and acceptance and a multiple project partner for bilateral and multilateral organizations implementing regional development and SME support programs. This NGO was considered to be

promising given its business interests as the focus of its work, the fact that it offered training as part of its service and handled a database for organisational development in the country and internationally. Finally, being a part of a larger network EURADA (European Association of Regional Development Agencies) was seen as a potential case for rich relational elements in their international partnership.

The second case organisations considered is Animus Association Foundation, selected from the CIVICUS Report on the Civil Society index in Bulgaria (Andreeva et al. 2005). The NGO defines itself as a non-governmental, non-profit organisation created to help victims of violence. The team of the Foundation consists of clinical psychologists, psychotherapists, and social workers. Animus Association develops its work and activities in rehabilitation for victims of trafficking, psychological support for children and women who have experienced violence, as well as lobbying, networking and prevention activities on an international level. Having had no previous contact with the organisation, the preliminary research for suitability was based on their website and related online activity. It was not clear if they have been “under the wing” of a western organisation but the website content promised a number of leads to international partners. What was considered interesting was the direct reference to their engagement with the process of “mentoring” other organisations across Bulgaria in setting up of crisis/trafficking response centres. This implied the presence of an ‘action learning’ and ‘knowledge transfer’ elements in their activities, creating the right environment for exploring a number of the set research questions on the value of a learning support relationship.

Two potential cases considered initially but later rejected were BCAF, the Bulgarian member of the global network of CAF (Charities Aid Foundation) organisations, and Workshop for Civic Initiatives Foundation (WCIF). CAF is headquartered in the United Kingdom working towards the development of sustainable charitable sector by providing services both to organisations and to donors. BCAF is active in transferring models from CAF experiences in UK and elsewhere and adapting those to Bulgarian traditions and practices. This was considered a direct reference to ‘knowledge transfer’ and potentially fertile ground for learning-centred partnership modelling, despite it not being established independently. The work theme of WCIF on the other hand was community development and capacity building, a substantial sub-field of the voluntary sector. An interesting focus is the provision of training for “learning organisations”, which again has the knowledge transfer element. The two organisations were dropped due to no response to initial access contact (see Appendix A for details on correspondence with case gatekeepers).

In their place, two other organisations were selected. The first is SOS Children's Villages which was selected from the 2005 CIVICUS report as an example of an externally established organisation part of an international network structure SOS International, an umbrella of Associations working nationally across the world. It started its work in Bulgaria in 1990 when the organisation signed an agreement with the Bulgarian Health Ministry. The NGO provides alternative care for children who cannot live with their biological families. It was considered important in that it would demonstrate the difference in knowledge transfer in a formal structure between an expert to a non-expert in the field. An element of expertise traced in the umbrella

structure is its own research and development unit, The Hermann Gmeiner Academy. This is described by the NGO as a “place of encounter and education for the staff of SOS Children’s Villages”, and a “place for the exchange of expert knowledge”. It was hoped this would feature in the case. It was clear that the Bulgarian partner would have been “under the wing” of a western organisation, nevertheless, there were reasons to believe that this type of activity had existed in the country prior to the transition period. It was hoped that elements of this organisational identity carrying over its socialist past into the western engagement with an Austria-based international network, would transpire in the case research.

The last case study NGO is the youth section of the United Nation Association, chosen as a convenient case after failing to secure access to others. Personal contact with one of its senior members allowed for information on the NGO’s activities and access to data, prior to selecting it as part of the sample. It is hoped that the international links with the World Federation of United Nation Associations will provide the necessary criteria for knowledge exchange and partnership, whilst the context of the organisational work in the field is substantially different from the other three cases. The work centres on implementation of methods of civic education supporting goals and principles underlying the work of United Nation institutions. The work is carried out via the network of school and university clubs, categorising the NGO as falling under three categories in the Salamon and Anheier Index - education, politics, and unions. The youth clubs set up in schools across the country have the status of associated member groups, making this structure close to that of BARDA. At the same time the NGO activities are expected to be more centrally dictated under an internationally consolidated agenda of promoting human rights, protecting diversity, children’s rights, poverty alleviation, etc.

The planned field procedure involved contacting the organisation and receiving an informal agreement to the research taking place, where I provided an outline and all other requested documents by the participant organisation. The participant organisation named a contact person for communication with the researcher throughout the whole period on all practical issues, arising difficulties and changes:

- the overall position of the organisation towards the research objectives and methods
- the availability of interviewees
- the availability of working space in the office (no computer or materials needed as they will be the my own responsibility)
- the possibility of attendance of meetings/seminars/etc. between the organisation and its partner or internally
- general assistance

The hours of work I conducted were negotiated case by case, depending on the availability and work load of the organisation. Generally it was expected that within the 3-5 weeks of data collection, I would:

- visit the office three days a week within the hours of office operation
- conduct the following data collection activities in the organisation -

- conducting interviews with individuals (audio recording and/or note taking)
  - reviewing documentary data of the organisation and its learning materials, processes, and activities;
  - attending internal meetings (if appropriate and relevant to the research)
  - attend training sessions, meeting, activities relevant to learning and knowledge transfer with the external partner organisation(s);
  - observing office dynamics relevant to the research questions;
  - generating visual and other data
- engage in the office work if that is seen to be appropriate by the organisation's management

The number of people interviewed was expected to depend on the organisation's time and availability. A maximum number of employees, volunteers and managers were to be invited to take part in the first phase of qualitative interview process alongside the observation period in the offices in Bulgaria. The intention was to accumulate as much data from multiple data sources on the outlined research questions addressing the organisational learning, knowledge transfer and supportive relationship from their partners.

As the sample of organisations included diverse activities and areas of work, the learning/ knowledge/ support types were expected to differ in each case. In the case where at the time of the fieldwork the organisation had a strong supporting partner organisation which they rely on extensively, this partnership was chosen as the focus of the inquiry. In another case it was expected that the engagement would be on a network of partners or peers, which would mean that the relationship model would be based on multiple rather than on a single relationship. The conceptual framework and methodology is open to accommodating such differences in NGO relationship engagements.

## **Data Sources and Research Tools**

The fieldwork data includes images, organisational texts, and interview transcripts all based on memories both those of respondents and mine, of the organisation as it was at the time of the fieldwork and leading up to then. These come together to form the case story, within which codes and themes are both components of the story as well as recognised findings to be interpreted into meaningful analyses.

According to the framework on knowledge as a boundary object proposed by Carlile (2002), "objects" are collections of artefacts that individuals work with, create, measure and manipulate, whereas "ends" are the outcomes demonstrating how objects are manipulated to some purpose (ibid.: 446). Using this approach to define texts as objects, texts have been described as "...inscribed artefacts that in some shape of form capture, codify and/or represent some other, often tangible, object(s) to facilitate interaction across different social worlds" (Oswick 2009: 1). In the fieldwork these are mostly understood to be an organisation's manual, methodologies in use, training guidelines, articulations of philosophy and objectives, and archives of seminars attended. All of these can all be applied as tools to reach an

“outcome” of organisational activity (a new project proposal, training materials based on the archived guidelines for providing training) but at the same time, they embody learning within partnerships, as evidence of the same.

Apart from embodying organisational practice, documents were interesting for the language used for their construction and implications of that construction for informing the image of that NGO for external actors (including myself). This relates back to the NGO as actor, one of the core conceptual categories, set out to explore the organisation’s identity and presence in the sector, interacting with other such actors. A conceptual construct emerging from the fieldwork around document data and informing the actor category is therefore the ‘anatomy of the brochure’ seen to be, as the metaphor suggests, an extension of the body of the organisation<sup>24</sup>. Another is the bookshelf and cupboard in the office containing the documented ‘life’ of the organisation in various printed and digital forms, filed away at the back or kept at the top of the pile, some factual, others over-exaggerated or even understated.

When using documents as data a differentiation should be made between those documents “found” by me in the office and those presented *to* me by the organisation’s gatekeepers. Had it been the other way around, the data sequencing may have resulted in a different picture of NGOs in the cases. Three of the four cases use both presented and found documents, the most interesting contribution of the difference between the two being the case of Animus.

Throughout the case fieldwork, I was handed key documents by the contact individual in the organisation which served as a source for initial overview of the organisation’s image, activities, and performance. These varied across the cases: in the case of BARDA, the Director and I together made an initial selection of projects that would be suitable to the study on the basis of “knowledge-sharing” content relevance and “significance of interaction” at the time of the project-based partnership. We selected four projects which continued to be the underlying structure of my fieldwork at BARDA throughout the data collection process. Amongst these I looked different types of text - the project brochure, project descriptions, and project reports. Digital project data included a DVD and website content which were used as data but mostly for developing further questions for interviews.

In the case of Animus, I did not set out to collect information or conduct interviews on the basis of projects. From the start the organisation was presented in the form of departments or areas of work during the entry interview. I was given the freedom to read from any text found in the NGO’s indexed library situated in the Administration room, open for internal use (the bookshelf texts). Different types of text-based documents were included in the data set. These included analysis reports, annual reports, brochures, conference and seminar proceedings, textbooks, general subject books. Additionally access was granted to the project materials and I looked through these “scaffolding texts”, which were used and recycled in preparing the training materials and presenting the NGO to external stakeholders. I had a private view of these texts on two occasions, looking through the cupboard found in one of the therapy session rooms on the top floor

(the cupboard texts). For SOS, a variety of texts were considered - brochures, newsletter publications, general practice guidelines (internal), practice guidelines from other organisations (external), project-based guidelines, internal website documents, and external website texts. The high control level in this case fieldwork meant I had to request specific documents and could not select freely or browse around the office on the basis of justifying my research interests (Appendix B for detail on documents used in each case).

As part of the reflexivity of the qualitative methodology undertaken with this work, the research involves the keeping of a research diary as a reflection and data collection tool which will also serve as inform the chronological development of the thesis. In Finley's (2002) terminology of reflexivity the research diary is used for "intersubjective reflection", i.e. tracking the research process in terms of relating to others in the role of a researcher. A diary is also used for "introspection" – as a mirror revealing values and beliefs and researcher's related emotions and thoughts to the interviewing experience (Nadin & Cassell 2006). The entries the diary were made upon every visit to the organisation and to contain notes, descriptions, other representations (visual, written) on things like how interviews take place and what the "bigger picture" looks like after this experience. The diary was not an official document presented to the participants or secondary investigators for the purpose of evaluating the results of the research. It is in fact a type of data - it is a constructed account through interpreting other data.

The diary is a chronological record of the field work creating a memory bank with details of what occurred then, what I thought and felt at the time. The diary was a place of initial data coding using colour codes whilst in the field for:

- issues significant to the RQs – these were *invivo* or assigned codes on emerging case themes
- issues needing further probing – case themes of interest for further questioning beyond the current data work; repeating issues (case-specific and cross-case)
- issues related to observation data – notes, memos, researcher ideas emerging, metaphors, impressions, etc. not related to codes
- issues of high importance to the NGO (coded with respect to the respondent-centred approach),

The diary contains 200 pages of notes, codes and memos on fieldwork experience. Beyond being a memory bank, it has been used for analysis with initial codes guiding within-case reflections and further layering of interview data to develop case themes (more detail in Chapter Six).

## **Interview Process and Developments in the Field**

The key to valuing the respondent's inputs as carriers of insights about the NGO practices is their organisationally-defined and defining function, i.e. respondents are the *practitioners who embody the practice of the organisation* as do their *discourses presented in various documents and organisational artefacts*. As expected, the interviews display a multi-dimensionality of depth, breadth, and direction of



development. Steering and unexpected turns are seen as central in all interviews and conversations; issues of 'importance to the framework' were at times juxtaposed to issues of 'importance to the respondents'. Finding a balance between the two has been a constant struggle when engaging with the data at all stages of the research. This includes interview data, where the reconciliation between the two has been framed as issues of importance for the re-conceptualisation of the research.

The length of interviews conducted in the two phases of fieldwork varies from 30 minutes to 1.5 hours. Most were recorded and transcribed for analysis at various stages after their taking place. Where I was not able to record them, they have been treated as *conversations* rather than interviews; notes were taken with varying detail, depending on memory, level of focus, and the time available given the intensity of the conversation. Less engagement with the interviewee on my part allowed for more note-taking on what he/she was saying, and vice versa, although both are seen to be significant contributors to the process of co-creating data. The conversations and interviews are equally important and have been based on a similar interview schedule. More importantly, both interviews and conversations tended to drift away from the set schedule. The reasons for this tangentialism are highly relevant to the validity and reliability of the data so clarification is needed. Two justifications for how the interview process transformed over the four cases are provided, the first taking a within-case approach and the second a between case view.

### ***Power negotiation and steering by both parties***

The organisational actors are assumed to be the ultimate 'controllers' of their perception and understanding of organisational knowledge and the effect of the partnerships on their organisation's work, which is the primary concern of the research. This means they are often the ones in control of the interview process itself which in some cases was inevitable. For example, M.'s proactive approach has made her a key respondent in SOS even though I was assigned another individual to guide me through the organisation. This is based on (1) her in-depth knowledge on subjects which she thought would be in my interest to understand in detail; (2) her critical perspective on issues to which the previous three interviewees were less reflective and/or willing to comment; and (3) her willingness to take me along on two business trips in the country where I can witness practice-based learning and knowledge instances. Her personality of a no-nonsense, and even cynical actor, have also created an expectation that she would give the "real" story without couching it in the correctness I was expecting to receive given this was a formal NGO partnership.

In other cases leaving control on the table was a deliberate move on my part where I was not sure how best to proceed, as was the case for some of the Animus interviews. This was a result of the stark contrast of Animus compared to the first experience in BARDA. With Animus everything seemed in order, under control. Furthermore, their professionalism at times intimidating, disallowing me to ask anything at all of the respondents, including my own questions. Yet elsewhere, more notably in SOS, I found myself trying to push respondents out of the old-fashioned 'school teacher' mode of exchange where they seemed to feel they had to give the "right" answer. 'Control' is therefore considered to be a matter of responsibility

of the individual in acting out their professional role, for both sides in the interview. Although numerous factors exert themselves on the respondents' professional behaviour and response (character, cultural, political, or other institutional influences), their disentangling from the organisation-relevant responses in the interviews is beyond the scope and goals of the particular research and the methods applied here.

The negotiation of control in the interviewing process has been taken on board when assigning significance to interview findings, mainly with the use of memos signposted in interview transcripts as 'warning' signs for too much influence. Nevertheless, it is difficult to judge whether a stronger push on my part, resulting in a significant response, is to be considered as important to the theme and concept development for the case as a 'natural', untried for revelation by the respondent. Another question which remains unanswered is whether more controlling and well-versed respondents have amplified their contribution to concept development.

### ***Data development across cases***

As a result of the participant and contextual factors influencing the interview process, relatively stronger and weaker interviews were seen to have resulted in terms of data quality. Navigating between the emerging themes from the first conversation in Case 1, I try to elicit a more structured response steering the discussion back to the initial research questions after having wandered off into details about the NGO's everyday reality. This at times results in leading questions and assumptions about the respondent's views. As a consequence the interviews in Case 2 were less structured and guided, resulting in "free fall" conversations. Overall the respondents stayed on the track of discussing learning processes, knowledge artefacts, the importance of reflection on experience etc., all leaning towards the anticipated research questions.

After an initial access and understanding is gained of the significant NGO activities, interview schedules designed around the Level 1 research questions were modified for each case to address issues on a more practical level. Significance here is meant in the sense of relevance to issues around learning, knowledge, information exchange, partnership-based work, etc. (derived from the initial Mentoring framework). For example, after an initial conversation with the Director in Case 1 and studying key documents (case one), the initial structure of the interview schedule changes to refer to emerging issues in such a way so as to stay on course, yet be more specific (Fig.4).

<p><b>1. Initial:</b> What is learned (positive/negative) from working with partners?</p> <p><b>Emerging:</b> What was the positive or negative experience from this first international project [named project and partners]?</p>	<p>1. The question branches out from a general “learning from partners” theme into initial work, subsequent work, distinguishing between different partners, etc. Also, there is an implication in the way the question is stated that learning from working with partners has an <i>experiential</i> focus to it rather than a explicit learning focus (more about the experience than a result-oriented endeavour).</p>
<p><b>2. Initial:</b> What do you understand by 'learning' and 'knowledge' as it applies to your organisation's work?</p> <p><b>Emerging:</b> In the CD there is a category 'mentoring' and one called 'training' – can you tell me more about them, their meaning?</p>	<p>2. Again there is a distinction introduced in the learning/knowledge discourse. Instead of asking for the respondents to define what it means to them (which was done elsewhere in the interview), the question identifies instances of learning in the project documents presented, that is, identified in their practice. This way the respondents have something specific to develop in their analysis rather than feel that they have to come up with a definition (this proved to be a problem in some interviews, where the question was seen as difficult, abstract, and/or just not related directly to practice).</p>
<p><b>3. Initial:</b> What is the benefit of learning from partners on your organisational practices?</p> <p><b>Emerging:</b> How are your colleagues from the Plovdiv RDA coping with the further development of this project at the moment?</p>	<p>3. The question is about moving on from single project output to longevity of learning from partnership-based projects. It gauges a sense of continuity from one project to another, which may or may not be the outlook taken</p>

**Fig. 3** Developing questions for interviews

## ***Reflection on interview challenges***

Regarding my skills present at the start of the fieldwork I am certain that going into the field, I must have taken previous experience of conducting interviews in the UK with me, together with some instructions stemming from the qualitative research literature. These were not recorded formally in the research diary - it is hard to make explicit such tacit knowledge. Instead, a reflection on the importance of skill is presented in the fieldwork, mostly in the cautionary notes which appear later in the transcript as memos. At that stage however, it is a little too late to warn yourself of asking a leading question, pushing too hard on some line of inquiry, or not following up a crucial statement which needs more probing. Rather it is a case of the steep learning curve in preparation for phase two, where the interviews with SOS and UNAY representative provide a chance to 'get it right this time'. Inevitably, the richness of data and relevance of key themes emerging in the first two cases are seen to be non-replicable in the data generated in cases three and four.

Making up in methodological improvement over time may not guarantee data richness, but it may help towards data 'extraction'. A point made in my diary prior to beginning at SOS (phase two) reads "No point to ask directly about knowledge – [they are] preoccupied with work; must "extract" the information from their activity". This seems as though I am about to ask the questions which would provide a pre-conceived answer sought to what the NGO understands by knowledge, that is, at odds with the inductive approach. Nevertheless, 'extracting' describes the process of data coding which is what happens once data moves to analysis. To what extent, then, can coding, or assigning categories and concepts to specific data, be said to be 'extracting' information from the data? This issue is address in the Analysis Chapter and illustrated with fieldwork examples.

It seems the term is especially accurate in describing the process of dealing with axial coding and concept forming, where open codes are seen to form patterns. In fact, patterns are elusive and they appear and disappear within rich, sometimes uncontrollable and contradicting data. If one is lucky enough to spot a pattern, extracting may be the best way of proving they were actually there. In my photograph collages, which were coded simultaneously for within-case and cross-case data, were one of my 'extracting' methods for patterns.

A number of near-unrealistic expectations are placed on the researcher reading case study literature prior to their own journey into the field. For example, on the desired skills of the case investigator, Yin (2003) writes: "A person should be unbiased by preconceived notions, including those derived from theory." (ibid.: 59). The researcher is convinced that some of these expectations are misplaced and misrepresented, such as the researcher's qualities believed to be the factor determining the quality of the interviews, as opposed to the level of experience. I observed a 'catch-22' situation here with respect to time. Namely, there was a pressure to select and collect data on priority questions *before* the questions have been formed, the latter depending on the ability to determine which issues are important to the interviewee which becomes clear only the course of the interview itself. Then there is the constant question of

language awareness, what is meant by what is negotiated on both sides, which in my case proved to be an issue even for a native speaker. Away from the native land for ten years, I have surely missed the breadth and depth of the constantly developing language as new ideas that are planted on a transition-country soil, regardless of my cultural and language awareness of a perceived 'insider'.

Context aside, some skills are seen to be present though they have probably developed over the course of the research rather than prior to its commencement. For example, an inquiring mind *during* data collection as well as before and after the collection is a skill the literature claims that the researcher should possess (Yin 2003: 59) and has been observed. This has shown to be crucial in the case for gaining access to, and co-creating, data. The recordings bear witness to a considerable change of confidence as well as a growing flexibility in asking the questions over the course of the two fieldwork phases. For example, a difficult question which has led to a lack of clarity or confusion (recorded in the transcripts or diary) is followed by a 'creative restatement' of the question in later interviews, or those where I felt more focused.

Another skill picked up in transcripts is the ability to steer away from an unproductive direction midway through a line of inquiry. Upon revisiting the recordings, my tone when asking questions is different for different interviews, largely due to the rapport established between interviewer and interviewee. Apart from self-conscious researcher skills applied in the interview process, events and behaviours seemed to have taken place during the interview without my awareness. For example, I 'mirror' the formal language and cautious approach to formulating responses displayed by a particular interviewee in the way that I cautiously phrase my own questions. The respondent was a representative of a UK government institution in the field of regional development, who felt very responsible for phrasing the government's position on European Union development issues which were key to that particular interview schedule.

On another occasion, I mirror the enthusiasm I pick up from another interviewee when I discover that we are actually in a similar situation regarding our place in the organisation. On sharing our hopes about what we want to achieve there, I launch into exposing my hopes for the research findings arriving at a full scale knowledge transfer project in the sector between western and Bulgarian actors, which came as a surprise even to me. This unexpected exchange takes place in two of the interviews, which I realised only after listening to the recordings. Far from being a skill, my instinctive response to mirror was a way of identifying with the non-Bulgarian respondents who were somehow involved with Bulgarian NGOs, struggling in their own way and for their own purposes to understand them.

An example of notes taken during an interview I was not prepared for fully (UNA Youth professor Fileva, in her faculty office at the University) recorded in the research diary follow:

"At the start: PHARE – national network youth clubs: "culture of peace" Balkans issues in 1999?...."people were excited that they could make a difference...didn't like what was happening, Belgrade part of the network", "UN, they (didn't?) wave the flag then..."

When the time came for using this information to inform the NGO's sense of identity as perceived by its own organisational actors, a lot is left to the imagination to fill in the missing sections, read between the lines and write out the unwritten implications. This paragraph has taken the following shape in the case description:

*“Significance of the PHARE funding programmes are cited as the roots of UNAY's activity, under a network type of engagement for youth clubs promoted by the EU in the region. In that context, Bulgaria was seen to belong to the Balkans - with Yugoslavia's war in the 1990s and the resulting 'culture of peace', the need for youth participation in 'making a difference' was timely.”*

The “UN waving of flags” part of the notes is omitted due to the cryptic diary entry. It could have been a great miss on my part in terms of recording a key event in the UN's international structure support for the development of UNA Bulgaria, or the lack of such support. This would have been a key finding in respect to my research focus on *partnerships and their supporting function*. An additional difficulty is the different point of entry for each of the respondents who did not set their UNA stories in the same historical perspective. Thus the flag waving question had to be abandoned as it did not come up again in the interviews. In the end this is my own mistake - if I had recoded the details in a more precise manner at the time, I would have a better answer on the question now remaining.

### ***Types of questions: 'entry', 'probing', 'bursting', and other questions***

Following the original research questions and respective interview schedule developed to address these, a number of interview schedules were adapted to the original to suit the various contexts in the case fieldwork. The context diverged in terms of the following characteristics, relating to the structure and content of the interview questions:

- the initial distance and the change of distance over time, between me the NGO representatives
- the amount of time available for planning the interview schedule in detail in advance of the actual interview
- level of prior knowledge on the issues of importance to the organisation, positively related to the ability to address them in the interview schedule
- the degree of relevance of these issues of importance to the research questions

The experience carried over from the first fieldwork to the second, i.e. the learning curve of asking good questions, has had an important place in the reframing of the schedule. Here is an example of ‘probing’ and ‘developmental’ questions added to the original schedule, resulting from experience in the first phase where some of the questions needed more work to become clearer to the respondents. Changes in the interview schedule for Case 3 is presented, the left-hand column presents the questions considered for the interview schedule, on the right are the reflections on how the questions have been developed:

### Interview Schedule Questions Revised

1. **ORIGINAL** What in your work constitutes “knowledge” and how is it used/applied in practice?

2. **PROBE** Is there a difference between what you and your partner understand as knowledge?

3. **PROBE** What are the “channels/conductors of knowledge” in UNA BG, the people who are undergoing training and know how to train others?

4. **PROBE** What do you learn from your partners outside BG which you do not learn from your practices in the country or with local partners?

5. **NEW** With the gathering of experience, what are you better at and what do you pay more attention to before as an organisation?

6. **ORIGINAL** What is the UNA's position in the UN family network – degree of independence /interdependence in planning and implementing activities?

7. **NEW** Is the UNA youth respected in the sector in BG?

8. **NEW** What is the significance of the UN “brand” for the organisation when it is working locally? You are specialists in the field without the UN as well...

9. **NEW** Does the organisation feel competent enough as a partner with external organisations? Equal in the partnership?

### Reflection on changes (start of last case fieldwork)

1. Not sure this question is productive or necessary (see Clive's comments on probing for terms)– “give me a definition” is neither theory nor practice-based (see responses from SOS on the use of documenting as accountability vs. the creation of new services outside the partnership model). Use “indirect responses” instead through probing (2-4)

2. Talking about differences between UNAY BG and another similar organisation may be a better approach to understanding how it is defined

3. Leading question? Defining Knowledge/learning as embodied in the people doing the work.

4. Leading question? Defining learning in the question, as something you do with different partners in different ways.

5. ‘Experiential learning’ is significant in all other cases – test for cross-case significance without singling the term as a method or type of learning. Concentrate on development instead, practical experience.

6. Depending on the limitations of knowledge on the partnership relations? May drop; talk about local network interdependence.

7. Wide entry question, generally “Identity” category – perception by others, contextualisation, links to expertise level and/or quality of relationships with other actors?

8. Introduce the concept of ‘brand’ as another entry question to talking about identity

9. same as above

Fig. 4 Reflections on interview question revision

An example of a 'bursting question' in one of the less revealing interviews, where the rapport was not felt to be established, is given below. It takes place midway through the one-hour interview with one of the senior members of SOS who has been there since its establishment in 1991. She talks to me mostly about the international structure and processes within the partnership, after being told by the gatekeeper that my research is on partnerships. After I start asking questions on the multiplication of strategies across NGO nationally, rather than about the relationship with the Austrian office, she asks what my research is about more specifically and I feel the need to provide some assurance. I do so, revealing some of my sampling decisions for the case, and end with a jocular overstatement about 'abandoning' of the Bulgarian NGO by their partner. I use the opportunity of seemingly over-exaggerated language, which provokes laughter most likely due to the bold comment on my part amidst a rather descriptive moment, to ask a more daring question. The question alludes to the future of SOS Bulgaria in the context of the larger sector trend: as western partners are moving on (and out) what is left behind as a future development option for the Bulgarian NGO?

**respondent:** ...And what made you interested in SOS specifically?

**me:** Well.. SOS is one of the few NGOs which come up in the limited research reports on the sector in Bulgaria. After which I have gone into the website of SOS, I know this may sound like a strange criteria but.. some of the websites of NGOs have not been touched for a long time, whereas the SOS one looks very professional, which is an indicator for ....the quality of the work with international organisations. If the site content has not been translated in English...or another language for example, the relationships with the partners have probably gone cold. But most of all, there was a report from 2005 on the Bulgarian sector where only about 30 NGOs are listed one of them is SOS. Apart from that I have collected information on how other organisations which are independent from their partners and I thought it would be interesting to compare those with organisations who have been set up with help from abroad, who are still pushing forward and doing well.. and have not been abandoned to deal with things alone...

**respondent:** They haven't abandoned us [laughing]

**me:** Perhaps they have been pushed in that direction.. as I understand it...?

**respondent:** Ok...

**me:** We spoke about multiplication of the model with your colleague [Nina], applying the SOS model elsewhere in other fields...

**respondent:** Yes, realistically, the small family home which is now being presented is actually the formula we are applying in our youth homes with the teenagers.  
...

...as in "now I understand what you are doing here" which is relieving, but not willing to comment on the last issue raised

As I quickly press on with the multiplication question as to give a positive connotation to the matter of "future development", and perhaps reassured by the fact I have already spoken to my gatekeeper about this first, the respondent shows a willingness to continue with this line of inquiry.

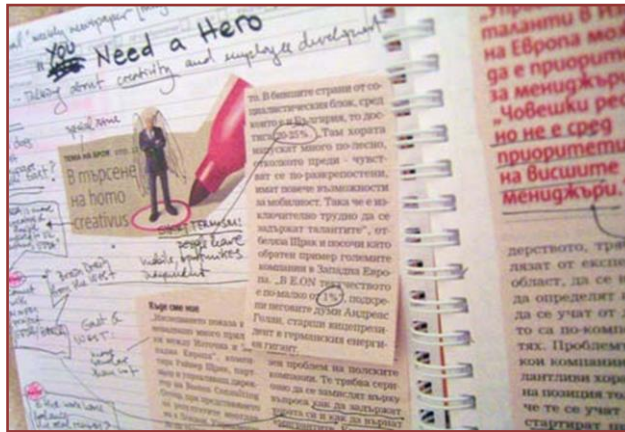
**Fig. 5 Case 3 Interview excerpt: On the provision of assurance**



## Reflexivity Tools

Two reflexivity tools were used – the photo-journal and media print scrapbook. The photo-journal comprises a collection of photographs taken in the two phases of the fieldwork pasted into a book, the respective captions describing what the images refer to written at the time of the photograph being taken, and the notes added afterwards as a reflection on various strands of data relevant to the reflections and the image, telling of the case as a whole. It is a visual medium and a tacit reflection practice, relating to aspect of organisation theory, thus bridging the fieldwork data with the process of analysis (e.g. the symbols employed in the organisation and in my own reflections on the organisation's practice) meaning of relationships and activities of the selected NGOs in their social environment.

The scrapbook is a reflexivity tool part of the research objective to make a contribution to methodology



contribution through creative documentation. It is inspired by a learning technique explored and applied on the Management program at Cass Business School, which I took part in, the 'reflective sketchbook' as a reflection tool for management practice. The scrapbook is a "live feed" in capturing snippets of discourse which provides Bulgarian daily life context at the time of the fieldwork.

**Fig. 6** Excerpt from the scrapbook showing a reflection on issues related to management and how they are handled in an article in a popular periodical (*Capital*, May 10-16, 2008).

The scrapbook comprises cut-outs from newspaper and magazine articles which I make in an attempt to immerse myself in the daily mediated sphere of Bulgarian events, opinions and perceptions. The topics are directly and indirectly relevant to the work of NGOs. This is a testament to the 'no such thing as a blank canvass' by using this space as a canvass where a pastiche of issues is pasted, showcasing part of what is influencing my thinking about the Bulgarian multiple realities contextualising the fieldwork data and the organisations.

This is not an exhaustive archive of all that has influenced me as a researcher at the time. Cultural heritage, current family and friends influence, past experience as a 'native' all have their bearing. It is, however, a 'recent influences' archive at the time of the fieldwork that are meant to draw me closer to the practitioners' daily context. These rather than other thoughts are amplified by the process of reading, cutting, pasting and analysing, thus made 'louder' in the daily research work, silencing other thoughts which may be deeper, older, and stronger.

In the example given (Fig.7), the articles addresses creativity and employee development (special issue) "*In search of Homo Creativus*", stating that the "problem of employee turnover is purely Eastern ... where it

reaches 20-25%” compared to the West where it is less than 1%. It alludes to a problem of balancing work life with personal life which local companies should start thinking about. It goes on: “People don't leave companies, they leave their managers” alluding to the problem of leadership in Bulgarian companies. My various notes on the scrapbook pages read “BG needs strong leaders!”, “you need a hero”, “West compared with East – more similar than not”, etc. and “BARDA's Harvest project” linked to one of the key headings - “HR is not amongst the priorities of top management”.

On one level, the scrapbook helped me situate my case findings in a larger yet still a “native” management discourse, albeit from a less than reliable source (privately owned newspaper with an untraceable agenda). The BARDA respondents' opinions found in the case interviews and conversations with third parties seem to be supported by the article - employers are reluctant to train their employees if it means losing money and time as employees leave easily. In BARDA's case, this theme is important: the key to their NGO existence resides in training employees within regional development projects. This gives support to the opinions expressed by the key respondents, a backing which although not necessary in terms of veracity (opinion has no claims to truth but to representation) is useful in terms of contextualising their opinion in local management beliefs, or myths. There is a limitation to this kind of use of the scrapbook as the extent to which one can draw inferences about local management myths about the labour market, or any context for that matter, on the basis of popular periodicals.

An interview in BARDA raised the issue of the “unwillingness of managers to train their employees in SMEs”, which was later restated to potential UK partners in a meeting. On a third occasion, this unwillingness had made BARDA turn to students instead as users of training materials originally interned for SME employees. The article seems to tie the strands of data into a meaningful theme.

On another level, later on in the cross-case analysis phase of the research, I read the same scrapbook entry differently. The work of NGOs as organisations may be undermined by management commentators, such as those writing for *Capital* newspaper, given this strong emphasis on individual over organisational development. Supported by western experts including INSEAD, the article gives importance to a western trend where “the Americans believe less and less in the long-term career development seeking top managers outside the company”, the UK following closely in their footsteps. If Bulgaria were to be seen as followers of these countries as implied by literature, it risks overemphasising the importance of the individual to the cost of organisational goals and strategies.

## **Towards Analysis**

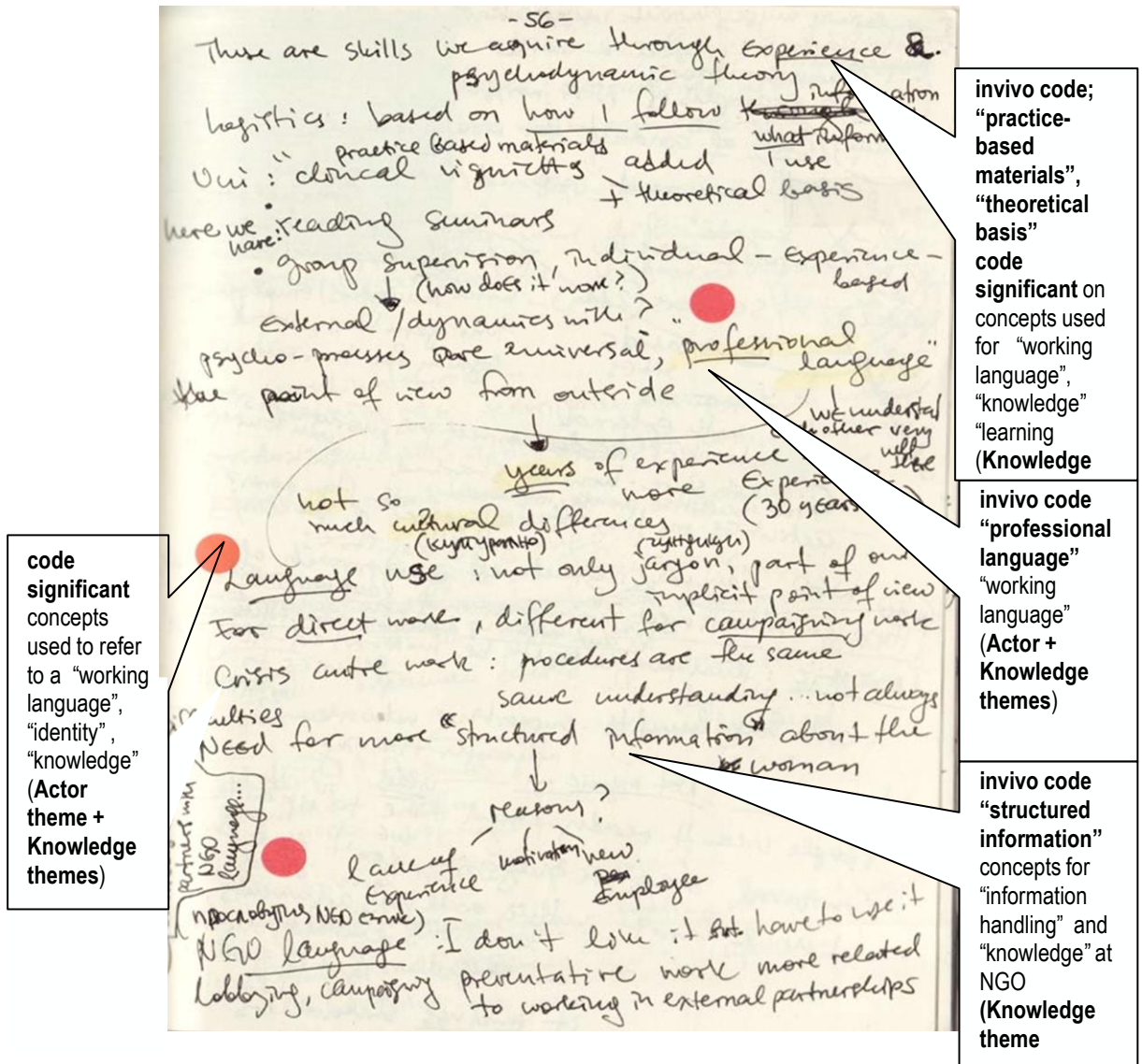
### ***Initial coding and diary entries***

Case studies are seen as snapshots of organisations in time and place. This contrasts with definitions present in the methodology literature, reviewed in Tight (2009), where they are defined as strategies rather than methods, designs within specific locations, capturing the complexities entailed. The presentation of findings and reflections on their relatedness in the analysis section (coding, developing categories) are therefore also seen and presented as “snapshots” of my conceptualisations. These are based on the image of the organisations both initial and in-depth, based on the exposure to the different data types, and on the memory of the research experience as documented with the research diary and other research tools. In this chapter the discussion moves towards making sense of the findings, addressing the initial conceptual framework guided by the research questions.

The codes from the diary (initial coding) and interview transcripts (annotation) were used throughout the different stages of the fieldwork and analysis, excerpts of which are presented below. Some coding and memoing has taken place for the visual data as well, presented with excerpts from the photo-diary. The excerpts are illustrations of the data transformation, from notes and reflections on an interview recorded as diary entry to initial coding and code elaboration i.e. from data collection to the process of analysis.

Let us look at an example of this transformation. In an Animus interview with a psychologist-practitioner working in the NGO, (Fig.8) we find the initial codes for the responses, as well as for issues emerging from the interview noted at the time as important or interesting. Immediately a gap becomes evident between the planned theoretical framework and its practical application as a semi-structured interview schedule. In my experience throughout the fieldwork, it has been difficult to distinguish which responses potentially relate to which theme from the three based on the conceptual framework. Naturally, this is a function of the interrelatedness of the actors, their knowledge application at work and the environment within which this takes place, reflecting a familiar dichotomy between content and process of work. Translated to the coding process, this means it is difficult to assign codes within the specified main categories.

The three initial categories of codes used in the diary are constructed in reference to case themes - significant, probing, and important to NGO. They develop into sub-themes related to main categories. The *invivo* codes<sup>2</sup> are assigned to initial significant codes – ‘working language’, ‘approaches to learning’ and the ‘understanding of knowledge’. The significant codes in a sense lie between the detail of *invivo* codes (respondent-led) and the Framework themes (researcher-led) and need to provide the descriptive richness needed to address the research questions.



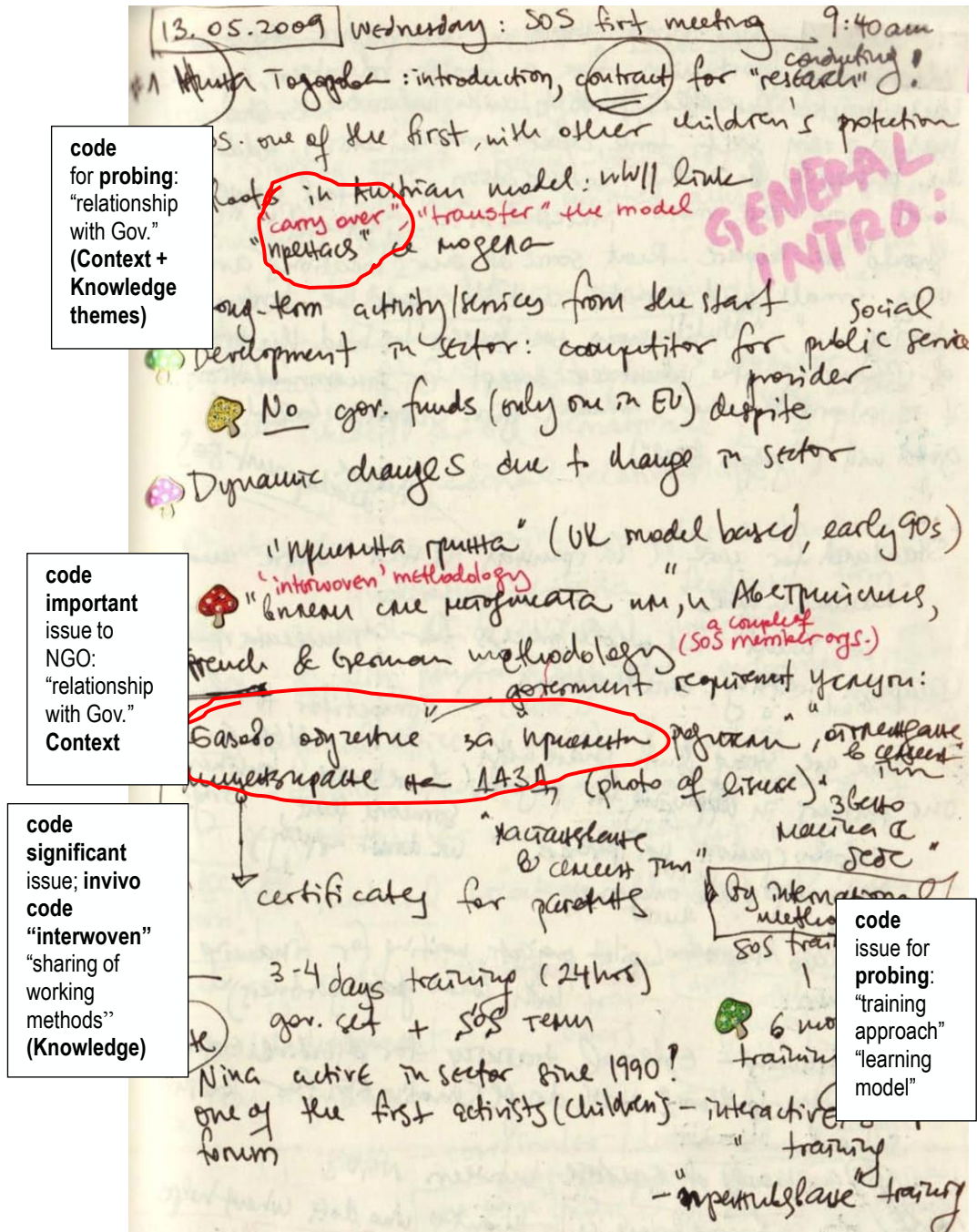
**Fig. 7** Diary entry Case 1: Example of coding

Interview notes from Animus interview N9 (19/08/2008) recorded in the research diary. Codes and sub- themes are fluid categories, transforming into each other as they merge and reproduce with more data coding. 'Code significant' contains codes directly related to the three categories, whether they are invivo or assigned.

For example, the invivo codes related to the acquisition of skills (under the Knowledge main theme) are 'experience' and 'psychodynamic theory', which are related work and 'practice-based materials', as well as to university and 'theoretical basis'. One can guess that the relationship between the codes and sub-themes is logical – for the respondent, skill acquisition is related to work-based experience and university qualifications based on theoretical knowledge acquisition. The interview transcript is needed to address the exact relation between codes and themes. However this is not significant at this stage for responding to the Level 1 knowledge projection question on the nature of the organisational learning taking place within the Bulgarian NGO. What is important is to generate more codes and assign them to 'significant' codes enriching the category. The language, terminology, and contextualised instances in the response are the richness of the data.

Another invivo code appearing here is 'structured information' (Fig.8, bottom right) is related to the significant code 'information handling' in practitioners' work. In terms of which Level 1 questions are addressed, 'structured information' may be assigned to significant codes 'understanding of knowledge', however, it may be merely collected data which is stored or used to produce reports as statistics, in which case it may not be perceived as 'knowledge' by the practitioners. Therefore, from a theory-building point of view, there is a need to separate 'information-handling' from 'approaches to knowledge'. The codes relating to information, are need further development i.e. contributions by other data sources.

In another example of diary coding (Fig.9) we observe the process of locating the different types of codes as they relate to the Framework, alongside notes taken during the first Case 3 interview.



code for probing: "relationship with Gov." (Context + Knowledge themes)

code important issue to NGO: "relationship with Gov." Context

code significant issue; invivo code "interwoven" "sharing of working methods" (Knowledge)

code issue for probing: "training approach" "learning model"

**Fig. 8 Diary entry Case 3: Code types**  
 Interview notes from Case 3 interview N1 (13/05/2009). Three initial categories of codes appear relating to case themes - significant, probing, important to NGO. They develop into sub-themes related to main categories

A note on the page General Intro is an indication that this first interview could be used to structure the case profile and theme development in a chronological order. 'Significant codes' directly become the richness of data around pre-selected themes from the conceptual framework (question-led). The category of codes 'important to NGO' are emerging issues (respondent-led). 'Probing codes' refer to issues which require further investigation (negotiated). Any of the three can also be 'invivo' codes whereas otherwise they are 'assigned' by the researcher.

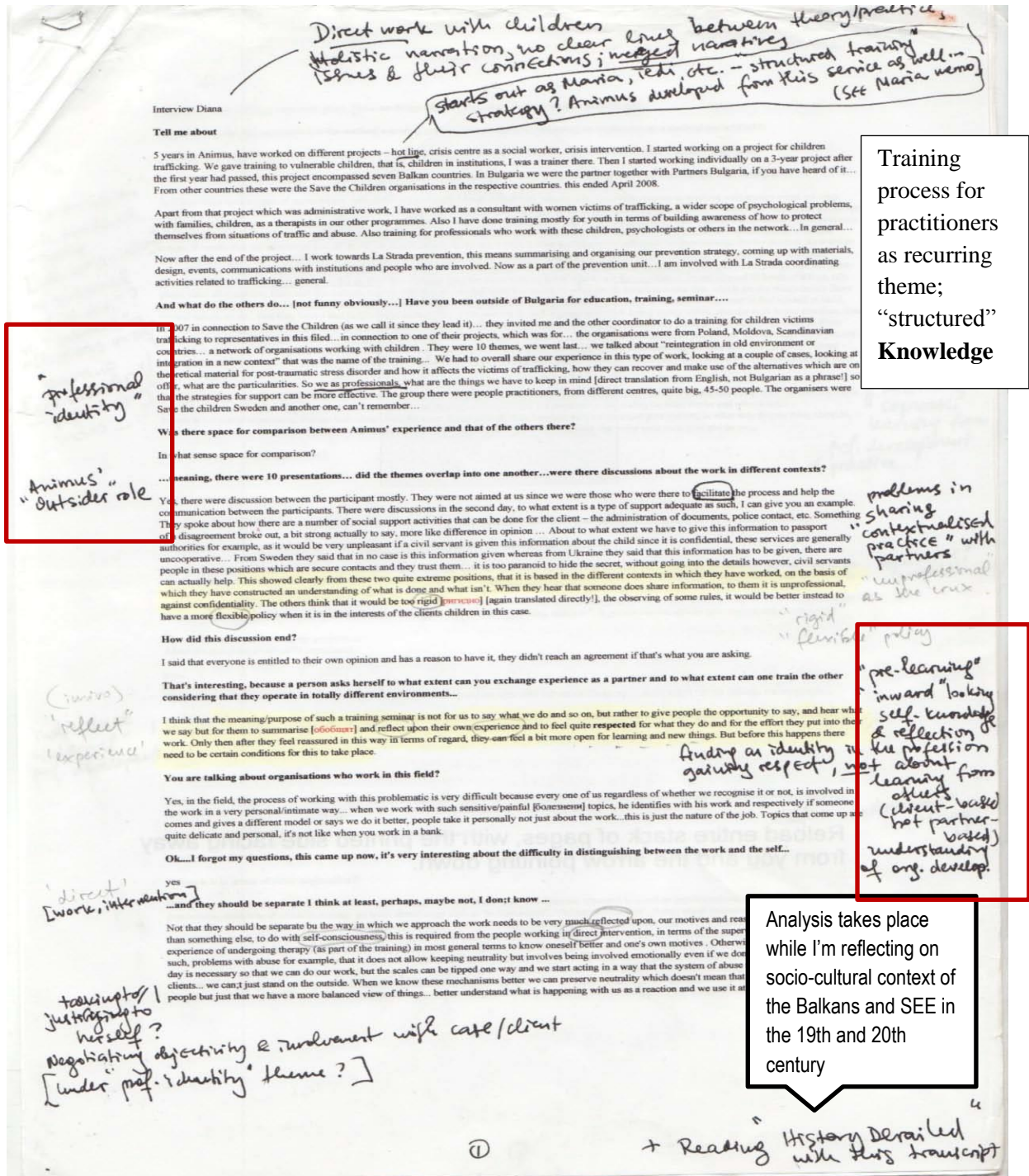
For example, the *invivo* codes “transfer” and “carry over” are considered interesting as words used to describe how the Austrian model of the westerns partner has been applied in the Bulgarian NGO, alongside “interwoven” used to refer to foster care methodology from the UK, Germany and France. The later bleeds into the concept of “foundation training” for family-type care provision in line with Bulgarian government regulations, which is seen to be an important issue to the NGO and a recurring theme later in other interviews. This sets an important context for model adoption and knowledge transfer as one about local, rather than international, accountability and legitimacy.

Here we see how a code for further probing relating to ‘training approach’ and ‘learning model’ is noted in the first interview conducted in Case 3 (the NGO is SOS), which will later reappear in other Case 3 interviews. These codes refer to the sub-theme of training SOS mothers, seen as a significant human resource element in the unique Children’s Villages model for care provision. Although this theme is not related to learning between NGOs or training of NGO practitioners, it is relevant to how the Bulgarian NGO understands issues of learning and training relevant to their work, and embodies them in its practice. Furthermore, if there is any resemblance to the case of Animus, there is a relationship between the internal learning (client-centred philosophy of learning upheld by the NGO) and the organisational learning (Animus’s own learning behaviours). Here a cross-case comparison is tentative for deciding to code the SOS interview notes in the diary, based on the experience from the first phase of the fieldwork the year before.

Another interesting note is the *memo* of a comment made by the respondent on their experience in the field since 1990. The diary entry shows an interest in this fact, noting that the respondent has been working in the sector since its inception after the change of regime (the start of Bulgaria’s transition period), which predates the establishment of SOS as an NGO. This is seen as a memo on the importance to remember that organisational learning about how to provide child care services existed before the NGO model and that this individual learning experience and perceptions overlaps with organisational understanding. This is not a finding directly related to any of the research questions but a note to explore this idea or at least to be aware of its bearing on the case findings.

### ***Secondary coding: Interview transcripts***

The second type of coding employed in the analysis is the interview transcripts annotation. It is secondary as it is further removed from the immediate concepts than initial coding; here my reflection on the material is involved when generating sub-themes. The following format of data is observed here (Fig. 10). The annotations are a place where recurring themes across interviews are noted as emerging. In the example below, “structured” training process is noted as recurring, which is a relational description of the type of training practiced in this NGO.



**Fig.9 Case 2 Interview: Annotation example**

*In vivo* codes are circled in the text indicating language richness (initial coding), whereas memos and codes appear in the margins as sub-themes which relate back to the Level 1 questions. For example “inward looking” is indicated rather than directly referred to by the respondent

A note appears recalling an important external influence on me at the time, the literature being read at the time of reflection on the themes. In this example, the literature discusses the development of Balkan national identity under the influence of romanticism from the West in the 1800s (Berend 2003). Key



annotations made in this script note the theme of professional development and the difficulty in separating it from organisational learning, as well as “finding an identity in the profession and gaining respect, [it’s] not about learning from others [for this respondent]”. The reflection that the sub-themes on forming a professional identity based on a western model and theory (psychoanalysis and the Case 2 western partner, the La Strada Network) may have developed under the influence of the literature on national identity formation under western influence, is an example of documented in discussions on objectivity and qualitative research.

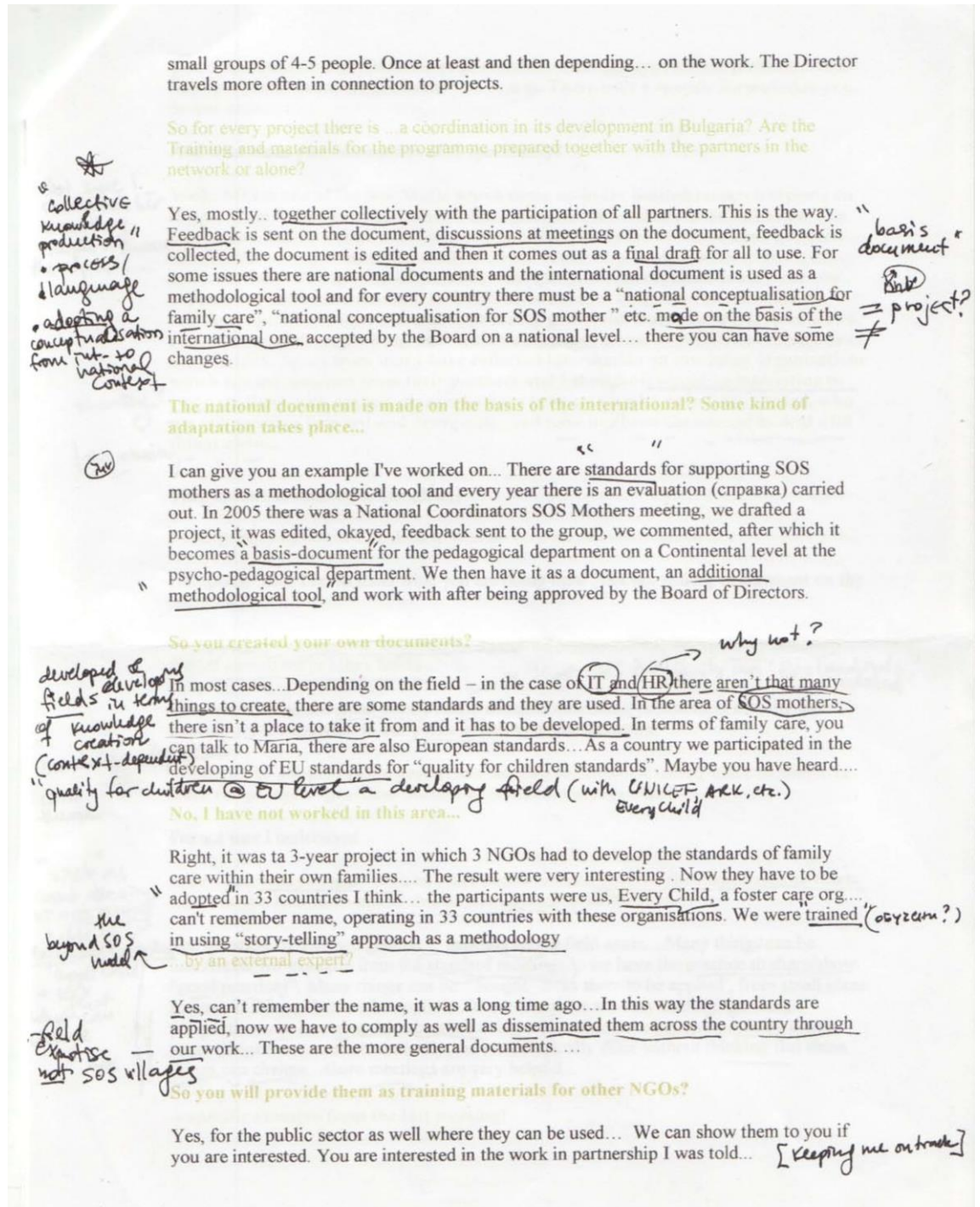
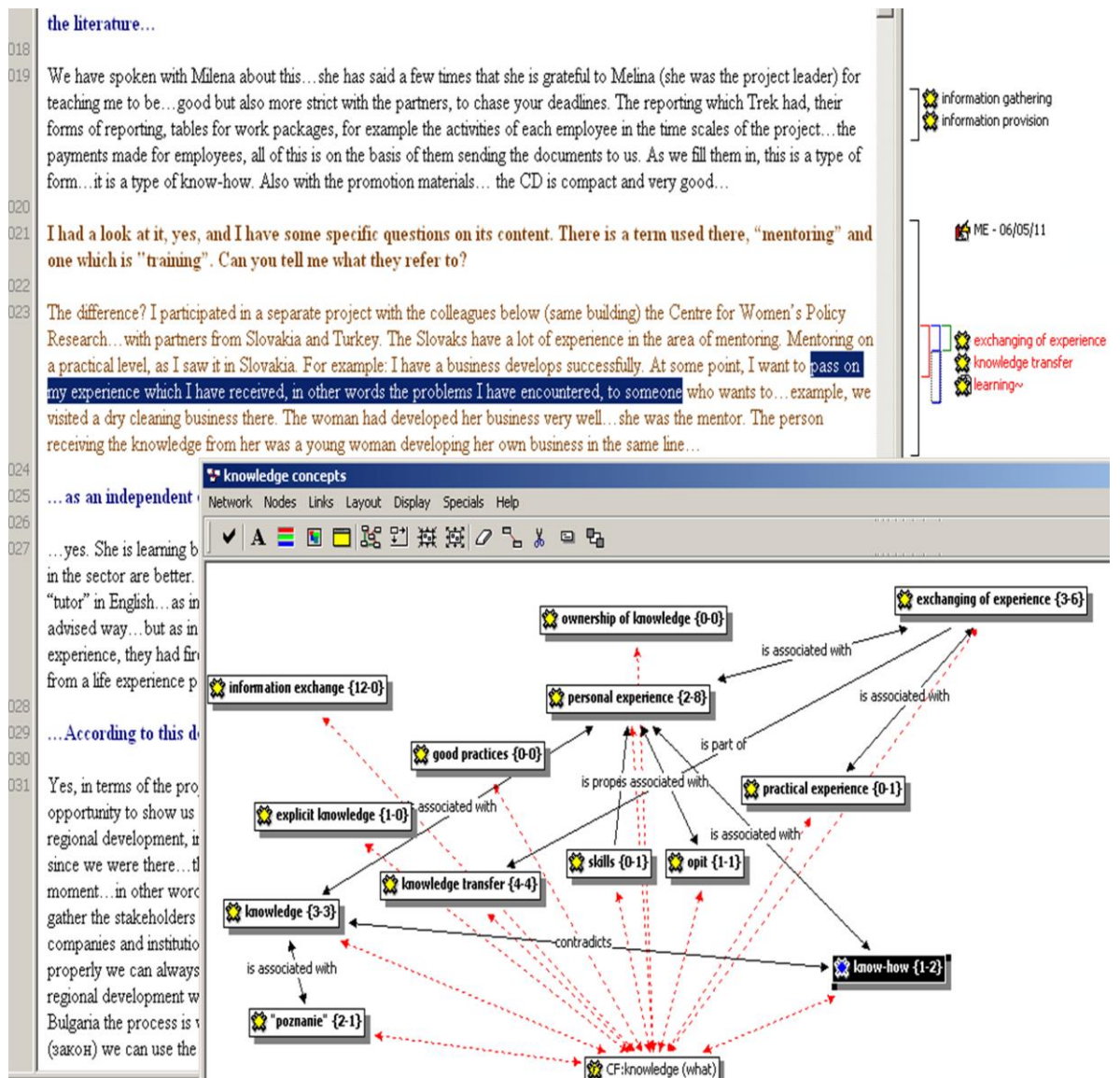


Fig. 10 Case 3 Interview: Annotation example

In this example annotation reveals that there is more conceptual development when the data flow with difficulty (i.e. interviewee needs a lot of prompting). A note of caution here is that every word is precious and could be over-interpreted in order to generate the ‘necessary’ concept and arrive at sub-themes emerging from the first two cases.

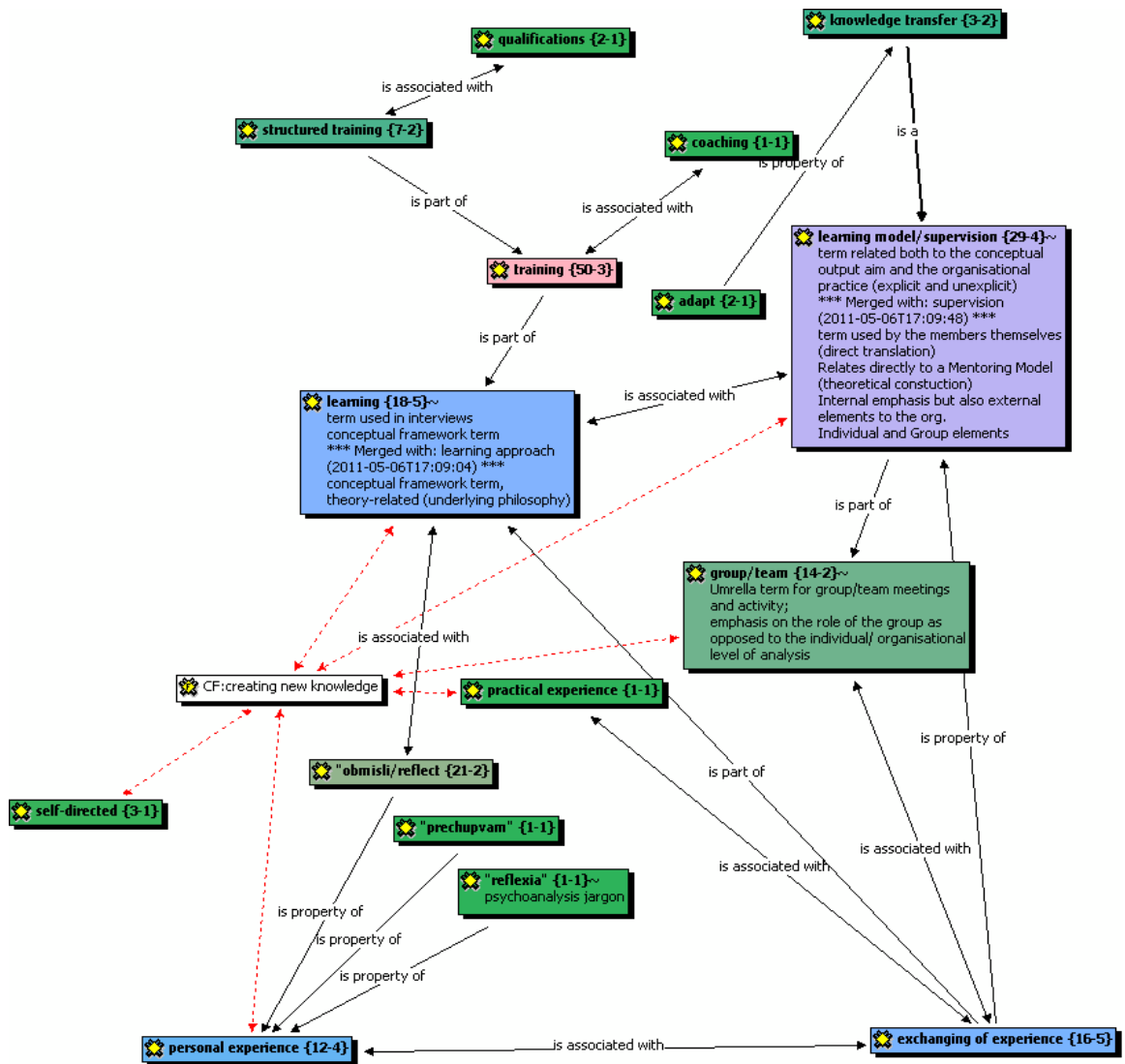
## Atlas.ti: Coding interviews for concept development

The last of the three coding methods employed in the research involved the use of qualitative analysis software Atlas.ti. In addition to the annotation and initial coding methods, the software was used as a third method to sift through some of the richest data contained in the interviews. The benefit of using Atlas is primarily that it combines a mind mapping visualisation with assigned codes to text, aiding concept development. Fig.12 illustrates the use of Atlas.ti for coded an interview and the developing network of concepts related to the use of “knowledge” by the respondents.



**Fig. 11 Case 1: Single Interview excerpt coding with Atlas.ti**  
Codes relating to experience, information, learning and knowledge (margins) and a network of concept development for “knowledge” showing the relationships between the codes related to the knowledge context. The first number next to the code in the network diagram represents the number of quotations where the term appears in the transcript, either as *in vivo* code (directly used by the respondent) or assigned by me. The second denotes the embedding of the code in other codes, i.e. how many other codes in the transcript are connected to the one in question.

In the case of NGO in Case 2 in particular this has proved to be useful in coding across the interviews for locating and comparing recurring sub-themes and their interrelatedness. A selection of six interviews has been entered for Atlas.ti coding to assess the additional value to data-handling compared to using coding through interview transcripts, content analysis of documents and diary notes, memos and codes. Assigning codes, merging, and developing them further with the help of the software is a route to reaching a point of saturation for concept-development (Corbin & Strauss 2008). Concepts are mapped in relation to each other leading to further reflection on what the interviews “contain” on the significant sub-themes.



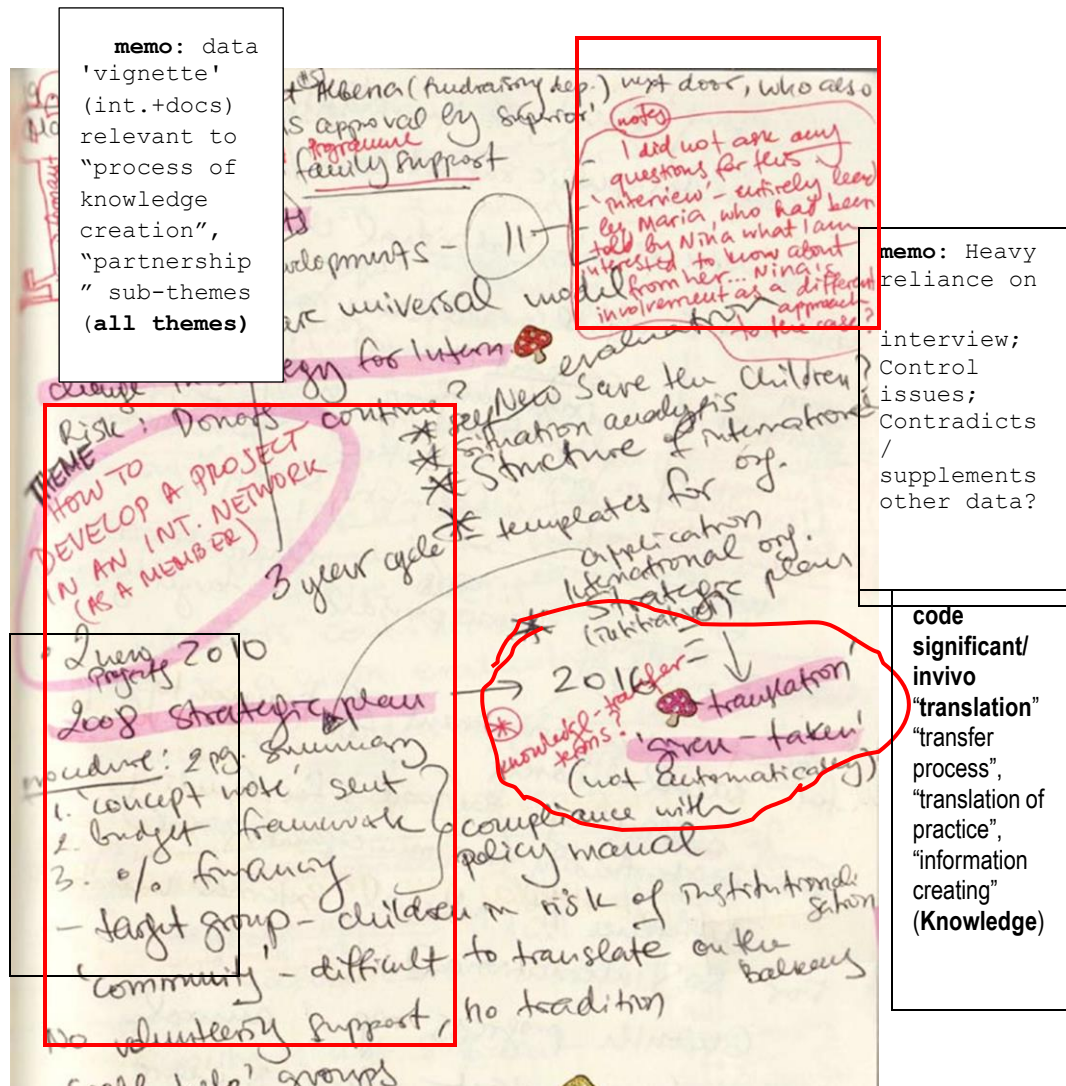
**Fig. 12 Case 2: Atlas.ti Concept Family Network**

“Training” and “learning” and “learning model/supervision” are the codes with the largest number of quotations and strong embedding. Experience features as a central concept with “personal experience” and “exchange of experience” codes appearing at the bottom ends of the network and 28 individual quotations in total associated to the two codes, as well as a number of codes related to these (some reflecting the language used to describe the nuances of how personal experience is understood by respondents). The emphasis on personal experience partly due to the nature of work in this particular NGO – psychoanalysis expertise assumes in-depth knowledge of what experience entails (link to the properties of personal experience in green ‘reflect’, the psychoanalysis term ‘reflexia’, and the Bulgarian word ‘prechupvam’ which means to break or transpose light).

All codes display connections sought to group codes into clusters addressing the issues of importance both to respondents and to the researcher. A learning model involving group learning/supervision as a structured training approach appears in Animus; it can be related to the theory-driven concept “knowledge transfer” (Fig.13 top right). This code is not derived from the responses but is assigned by me, with low quotation count but rephrased as “learning model”). In addition, the code family (CF) “creating new knowledge” shows the birth of a cluster which relates codes *axially* (again assigned by me, amongst red arrows) (Corbin & Strauss 2008).

### ***Memoing: Memory of research experience***

According to the grounded theory approach, *memos* are a type of written record containing the products of our analysis which could be used in a number of ways, open data exploration, making comparisons and developing a story line being some (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The approach states they are meant to force the researcher to work with concepts rather than with raw data and thus become storage of the interpretation of data at different stages. Much like photographs, then, memos store and interpret at the same time. It could be argued that “memoing” the moment in analysis is like capturing the point where the researcher's mind and her experience in the field meet. This is key to developing the story line in the case based around emerging issues, observations, findings which become visible through memoing. *Elaboration memos* and *memo for developing story line* are used for this purpose. An example is seen below.



**Fig 13 Case 3: Diary entry 'Vignette' data for developing a story line**

Interview notes from Case 3 interview N4. A memo (left) noting an opportunity to develop this as a vignette in the case description (a particular story line form) – clustering various data around a project development process, with both international and independent elements of learning/knowledge, translation issues (note “community difficult to translate on the Balkans) and knowledge transfer (code significant on the right hand side).

The project development process as told by the key respondent, who has a great deal of control over the interview as well as over the disclosing of data on current practices and changes taking place in the NGO, becomes a vignette form of case description and analysis. Here the analysis appears to be taking place within the context of the storyline of the case, beyond noted words and on a page in a transcript. Though it is in initial coding style, there is a need to bring in the documentary data to fully understand the project development process in SOS as one embodying the knowledge and learning moves by the NGO in its partnership context. The interview response becomes a part of other evidence and data, i.e. data triangulation emerges as a process in the analysis. In fact, this instance alone as memo-ed in the diary could have been the framing of case three.

However case three is rich in other types of data as well, which leads to the rejection of this tempting framing option. Such is the observation of a live ‘knowledge transfer instance’ between an international

network colleague, the Bulgarian NGO head office representative (key respondent in the example above), and a locally based service provider (Fig. 15). Here two important changes have taken place in terms of analysis progression – relating different types of codes 'internal information handling' (important to NGO category) to 'learning modes' (significant category) and the noting of a cross-case theme development (bottom right). As in the vignette example above, this is a sign of entering the interpretive mode, where coding grows beyond the single data source to a case-wide and cross-case interpretation of code-enriched themes.

The image shows a handwritten diary entry on lined paper, divided into sections by pink boxes labeled 'NEW FOLDER' and 'SUPERVISION FOLDER'. The text is written in black ink with some red annotations and underlines. The entry discusses meeting frequency, meeting content, and supervision procedures. Annotations include 'Repetitive', 'Repeated questions', and 'M. starts to ask why have they signed, did they do a schedule, what they have to add, proving that there is a SW in working hours'. A red box highlights a note about 'AUTHORITY, inappropriate internal audit'. Three code boxes are overlaid on the text:

- code important issue to NGO**: "knowledge transfer/ learning", "management" "work process" "information handling" (Knowledge)
- memo**: Significance of dynamics of observed "knowledge sharing instance" **sub-themes** "identity", "cultural context"
- Code significant**: "learning mode", "formal training"
- code important issue to NGO**: "systemic learning" **cross-case issue** (Knowledge)

**Fig 14 Case 3: Diary entry 'Anecdote' data form based on observation with significant code development**

Visit to a local family support provider in Radomir, associated to SOS BG. A Polish colleague from a partner in the network is visiting for a knowledge exchange on setting up this kind of support in Poland. Excerpt from observation of the three way exchange between Poland (A), Bulgarian HQ (M), and local provider reps(SW) as a live 'knowledge exchange' instance.

An interpretive move in the grounded theory approach to analysis is a *summary memo*, where the content of several memos is synthesised (Corbin & Strauss, 2008: 120). It is seen as a transition to the final analysis phase, the integration phase, where categories (underpinned by the main concepts) are linked around a core and refined for theoretical construction (ibid: 263). This stage is observed at different times according to the research tools used. In addition to the diary, photo collages for each of the four NGOs have been useful for working with different types of general codes and moving from memos towards a summary memo composed of not yet fully-developed concepts. It frames each case and draws common themes across all cases.

**Summary memo on Case 3:**

*NGO 3 has elements of both interactive and interpretive modes. Experience from the differences between the cases a point of reference for this balance? "Organisational space" theme is central for the "identity" category; illustrative contrast between the conference experience and branch visit ("knowledge production site", "know-how repository", "knowledge transfer instance" concepts for "knowledge/learning exchanges" category), where the most revealing part (instance significance?) was the travelling between the two, outside the formal organisational structures.*

Photographs have been used as a memory aid to recalling what happened in the field. One might argue that using a research diary, a written record, is sufficient to perform this task. However in my experience translating fieldwork experiences directly into words in a diary is "on the fly" and the depth is sometimes lost. The image revives the feelings and thoughts at the time and also stimulates ideas about the organisation time after time beyond the ones born out of the first encounter. Herein lies the challenge of the photograph as both a memory storage and as interpretation device - photographic records could be seen as a replacement of memory for an invented, i.e. interpreted, experience in the field. An example of a storyline memos and summary memos written while comparing photo collage elements is given:

**Memo for developing a story line on Case 1:**

*NGO 1 is my reality anchor – I see the organisation in action with a variety of partners [experience category] (local contractors, international, potential and current partners), see a "knowledge product" in its projects [artefact] and hear their strongly expressed views. An interactive mode of research where the data relevance to core questions is explicit [balance and transient frame categories].*

This reflection on the significant of the case for further case work is based on overall feel (re)created by the photo collage and sets the style of the case description. Images include a Socialist realism mural in one of the photos of a university visited, blurry images of people in motion convening or travelling to conduct work, the stamp for handling project documents more efficiently, etc. There is photo-emphasis on action, realistic depiction, difficulty and banality of day-to-day existence, all of which make up the case story line.

**Data exploration and elaboration memo on Case 2:**

*NGO 2 remains an abstraction throughout – the distance from their sensitive area of work means having to base the meaning of their work on the symbolic representation of office space and artefacts, even though the content of their work is derived from textual artefacts and personal perspectives. Interpretive mode is stronger.*

The interpretive mode means it is possible (and necessary) to experiment with the data. In the case of Animus, for example, I have written a poem on the organisation based on photograph captions and used drawings elicited from one particular respondent. The aesthetic mode of research reflects the aesthetic experience in this NGO throughout the fieldwork there. It is also captured in the photographs but more importantly, consolidated with appearing in the interview with the Director: “You may have noticed the look of the office...the effort we put into making this place feel like home”. This provokes a reflection on the use of photographs in the analysis.

A photo tells (reminds me) of the organisation that was when I was there, only then and there. But it can be reinterpreted a number of times by using initial memos, subsequent memo changes, reflections on individual and on cross-case photos. In this sense photographs are an instrument of memory but they should not be an invented memory, a falsification of what happened. Is it possible to store data separately from storing memory of the experience? This question remains unanswered but poses a new challenge for further reflexive research beyond this thesis.

The coding for the learning and knowledge category, the essence of the relationship, was initially planned to take place in the form of a repertory grid. However, upon entering the fieldwork it became clear that that such a neat way of organising data would not be feasible. For example, on determining “code properties”, it would be difficult to locate the origin and determine adoption/importing of what was learned since the researcher had not been present at the time learning took place (with the exception of two instances in Cases 1 and 3).

Code category	Code properties – function and use/ origin and embeddedness				Code identification		
	Internal	External	Level of adopt	Level of import	Explicit	Implicit	Rep.
Language used - Training - Supervision - Database update							
	Code properties						
Dialogue generated by the NGO							



## Glossary

### Instance

An observed expression of a practice, idea, terminology relating to themes sought in research questions

### Episode

A certain period of time when an instance was experienced and recorded

### Source of code identification

Person, document, certain period of time of observation where the data was derived from

### Explicit code identification

Found in interview, stated in document clearly

### Implicit code identification

Derived from interview, doc., observation by researcher interpreting statement/ episode

### Rep. code identification (repetition)

Repetition of code in multiple incidents, both within a single source and across multiple sources

**Table 4 Repertory for Learning Instances: Characteristics and examples**

## Visual Data and Visual Methods

Photographs were used for a number of reasons. They were first included in the methods tools as a fall-back strategy in case not enough data was collected in the insufficient time frame for the NGO visit. A quick capturing device would hopefully save the detail which I would probably miss otherwise, hence it being a mnemonic tool for first impressions of organisational settings, e.g. buildings, office space, locations of the organisation. Upon reflection, some of the photographs were seen to be in the style of photojournalism reporting on an event or place visited, whereas others were used to remember and reflect on (with captions and annotation using a photo-log software) organisational artefacts. The latter include items such as documents, images and office objects seen to be symbols of ideas which might be relevant to the NGO's attitudes and practices relevant to learning and knowledge work. These were "fabricated" with my interpretation and were seen as probing into issues.

After the fieldwork, photographs were assembled into photo collages for each organisation providing overall impressions of the four cases comparatively. This is a research tool used writing the case narrative as well as for analysis. It is comprised of one group of photographs taken during case work with selected document excerpts related with links, post-it notes, memos, and comments containing ideas, concepts and explanations as to the relationships between data types collected in the case fieldwork. The collage is a qualitative data exercise of seeing the organisation *and* the organisation's themes and concepts as a whole, literally one picture of the organisation with its complexities.

In the collage, images of fieldwork experience were used to stimulate a main storyline when writing the case. Other elements in the collage were images of key reflections on significant data artefacts, which

became the initial source of emerging themes, recurring themes within and between organisations. Clearly different photographs have led me to different questions, reinforcing the problem of finding a starting point to the writing process. I was compelled to revisit the whole set and to select ones that are intuitively meaningful, telling of the experience and the findings but also of what I was thinking at the time. Following the 'winnowing' metaphor (Ely *et al.* 1997), I start separating the photographs which function as data, i.e. contain the organisation's activities (text from books, brochures, manuals and seminars) from the rest which function a research device (record of what I observed and did in the field). The focus is on the latter as potential starting point for writing.

These are roughly 70 images for which various questions continue to emerge, some about the narrative, other referring to the style I am looking for in describing my experience with each organisation. Are there overpowering ideas that were captured or emerged whilst in the field? Are there metaphors that "happened to be there" in the frame which matched the interview data collected the day before? What is the value added by this photograph considering the availability of other data sources on this issue for the organisation? These questions are a familiar struggle of tracking and defending the process of building theory from case studies as scientific or at least replicable, considering that data collection and analysis frequently overlap.

By asking questions above I engage with the data as to provoke a written form, where the questions provide a structure to either writing in some narrative form or conducting analysis. Respectively, some questions lead to a case structure forms of writing while others to grounded approach of handling data. The interrelation between the two takes place when cases are used to develop theory and when cases are based on qualitative data analysis (Eisenhardt 1989). One question in particular illustrates how the use of photographs in the fieldwork fits here: "Why did I take the photo: is there something "captured" in the frame or did I "put" it there with my mind?" The question prompts a closer look at what is in each frame taken.

The elements/subjects identified in the photograph are labelled as organisational artefacts, individuals, locations, and my own experiences. These are the potential focal points around which a construction of a case for each NGO as a set of stories and descriptions would be possible. They could be translated into the "elements of narrative" borrowed from literary theory's contribution to researching and writing about organisations – act, scene, agents (characters), purpose (themes) and agency (dialogues, rhythms) (Czarniawska, 1999). These elements are part of a conceptual visualisation of the data, known also as a diagram.

Warren's (2008) work on aesthetics and the empirical in organisation studies and Sontag's (1971) *On Photography* are amongst the texts which guide reflections about the use of photographs in the fieldwork, and more specifically in the writing process. According to Sontag (1971) "[photographs] fill in blanks in our mental pictures but never explain anything ... they are an invitation to deduction, speculation and fantasy"

(ibid.: 23). With respect to qualitative methods set out in the research design, discussed later on, this comments prompts a reflect on the difficulty of keeping at a safe distance from the invention of case studies (as in 'fantasising' them) and issues around using photographs in conjunction with other data collection methods as a reflection tool. At the same time, qualitative research remains questionable in terms its claims to representation regardless of the use of photographs. It may be that the parallels between the critique of photography and that of qualitative research are strong enough for a multi-disciplinary approach to theory development around triangulation with visual methods to be useful. This closeness is seen in Sontag's following comment:

*"What is written about a person or an event is frankly an interpretation, as are handmade visual statements ...Photographed images do not seem to be statements about the world so much as pieces of it, miniatures of reality that anyone can make or acquire"* (ibid.: 4).

A kind of morphing of the photograph into a concept to be expressed in language has been explored in *conceptualism*, the art movement which deliberately blurred the distinction between language and art by presenting art as an idea (Joseph Kosuth's *Clock* 1965 where the artist presents a real clock, a photograph or a clock and a text on time, asking why the photograph is art but the object isn't and whether art is functionless). The image here is an object as well as text and the artists' intention and spectator's response are central as are the different modes of representation. This interrelationship between image, object and narrative is explored by Warren (2008) in her research on organisational aestheticisation, where photo-elicitation of her respondents and aesthetic ethnography (researcher personal experience) are employed as methods for engaging with the aesthetics of the workplace.

In *Prosthetic Culture*, Lury (1998) discusses the meeting point between photography, memory and identity. It centres on the significance of the image for understanding self and the relationship to photography as a technology of visualisation, the imperative of visibility in our reality. Here embodiment, consciousness and memory are considered to be the components of an individual - a plausible history of ourselves is necessary to claim status of individual, and a memory of an intimate story makes us an authority on our past (Abercombie 1986 in Lury 1998). Narrative techniques are needed to establish a continuity of consciousness and memory, in this case, a narrative co-constructed by the organisational members, the camera and the researcher.

The immediacy of the photographs as memory of the experience, together with the structure provided by the frame categorisation introduced earlier can provide a tangible point of departure in the difficult start-up stage of writing. For instance, artefacts or individuals can be such a point, accumulating gradually into a variety of artefacts within a single case, which then turns into a structured cross-case comparison around a single category.

In the instance of abundance of data sources, there is an opportunity for 'layering' from all data types on each theme. This is not only a matter of data availability. Layered themes allow for focusing on how a

variety of viewpoints inform a single theme from different contexts (e.g. different interview excerpts on the same question illustrating convergence/divergence) or for the complexity of data informing a single theme (e.g. organisational text on partnership principles layered with interview excerpts on enacting partnership principles, and a visualisation of partnerships within one organisational setting).

As a particular data form, photographs present a challenge of moving between observation, analysis and forms of writing, without a clear logical order. An example of using photograph captions to stimulate reflection on the overall experience in the field-work, initial impressions 'frame' the organisation. A poem is constructed from photograph captions, taken in chronological order and selected to reflect interesting and important impressions (at the time). This also brings an awareness of the limitations of photographs to tell the evolving story alone as more and different data sources are compiled (interviews are seen as crucial in this case, without them photographs tell a different story). Used in this way, photographs contain a "first layer memory" of the organisation in my mind, one not burdened with the subsequent overpowering influence of interviews. In a sense it allows for layers of meaning to be kept separate which seems to aid transparency when analysing with grounded theory method.

Ely (1997) discusses different types of narrative forms and literary devices in writing qualitative research - anecdote, vignette, layered story, pastiche, metaphor and poetry to name a few. An anecdote is an event that took place in the field or that respondents recount as an event they witnessed. A vignette is a compact sketch used to introduce characters and highlight particular themes. Layered stories and pastiches are combinations of perspectives around issues to give a fuller picture, over time, from different angles. Metaphors and poetry are discussed somewhat separately as structures which aid in "establishing relationships between what is known and something we are attempting to understand" (ibid.:113).

The decision to use a particular writing form has a pragmatic element. It depends on the availability of data sources and the experience in the field, reflected in the photographs. Despite attempts to balance the data sources as required in triangulation, some of the cases have involved more first-hand observation of how the organisation conducts its daily work. Others have involved reflecting on what the presented documents contain or what interviews reveal on particular issues of importance to the researcher and/or respondent. For example, there was a lot of direct experience in Case 3. At some point I am sent to collect, sign and stamp a contract between UNA and the UNDP for financial support from the latter to the former, presenting myself as a volunteer from the NGO substituting the expected Director. Here photographs are used to explore a metaphor on a cross-case theme within a larger sector-related context, as well as to present an anecdote on the ad hoc volunteering experience (within-case write-up).

## Chapter Five: The Case Studies

*This chapter presents the four case studies which are structured with consideration of their development in the fieldwork, as well as of the guidelines from literature. A summary includes the case profile with information on the NGO practices, the partnership arrangements which have played a role in the sampling, the fieldwork overview with data-type specifics (number of interviews, emphasis on types of data, access issues etc.), followed by a summary of key themes and concepts emerging from the case narrative description. The case study proceeds with the themes in more details where a cross-case symmetry in case structure is not superficially imposed, although some sections are similar given the researcher's general approach, methods, and Level 1 research questions consistency. Case studies are in chronological order following the two phases of research (Case 1 and Case 2 conducted in 2008, Case 3 and Case 4 in 2009). Summaries for each are integrated in Table 4, setting them comparatively along case themes and key concepts. The chapter is written in the present tense and in first person to reflect the use of the research diary and the experience as it took place, conveying the 'realness' of the fieldwork.*

	<b>BARDA</b>	<b>Animus</b>	<b>SOS</b>	<b>UNAY</b>
<p><b>Case framework Themes</b></p>	<p>1: Project work and development of a knowledge based – archive of experience and certified expertise  2: International partnerships united by a common framework producing a shared knowledge base (the EU level playing field)  3: Talking to the practitioners responsible for project management  4: Organisational space: symbols of organisational identity</p>	<p>1: Expert-led project work and development, specialised service provision – growing experience and knowledge  2: An international network of experts united by a common cause and approach, producing a shared knowledge-base and defining a profession  3: Talking to professionals responsible for direct work, policy and prevention  4: Organisational space: symbols of organisational identity, self-discovery and empowerment</p>	<p>1: An established international model in flux: expert knowledge developing and changing around policy and practice  2: International network and a cross-sector network of experts united by a common cause and approach, defining practice  3: Talking to the experts responsible for direct work and policy  4. Organisational space: symbols of organisational identity and self-reinvention</p>	<p>1: An established international model: future experts in training, platform for development  2: Member of international networks united by a common cause and approach (UN family, youth NGOs)  3: Talking to the volunteers responsible for running of the operation  4: Organisational space: signs of identity, fluid sporadic existence</p>
<p><b>Key Concepts:</b>  Knowledge exchange &amp; Learning instances</p>	<p><b>Artefacts:</b> documented outputs and documenting tools  <b>Training insitu</b> – partnership-based learning/training (international project development practice)  <b>Ownership of discourse</b> on the organisation's purpose and practice – literal translation, figurative implementation</p>	<p><b>Artefacts:</b> documented learning, training and expertise  <b>Supervision model:</b> towards a model for learning/training (mentoring glimpses)  <b>Ownership of discourse</b> on the organisation's purpose and practice – a fully developed language</p>	<p><b>Artefacts:</b> documented 'good practice', accounting for services provided  <b>Redeveloping a model</b> for care provision: towards a change in existing practices (development strategy)  <b>Ownership of discourse</b> on the organisation's purpose and practice – defined strategy, co-defined practice</p>	<p><b>Artefacts:</b> documented 'dormant' archive of training and networking  <b>Evidence of training</b> – sporadic learning networks for implementation in local projects  <b>Ownership of discourse</b> on the organisation's purpose and practice – individual interpretation of a supranational discourse</p>

Table 5

Case summaries: Themes and Key Concepts

## Reflections on Fieldwork Experience

The methodological difficulties in the fieldwork with BARDA stem mostly from the lack of experience the interviewing and observing an NGO in a Bulgarian context. This is partly to do with the cultural connotations as well as with an unexplored sector, a lack in lessons for draw on for engaging in fieldwork. How much would they be willing to share? What level of inquiry would they would be comfortable with? Do I follow up my entry questions with probing questions or wait for them to reveal as they gradually feel more comfortable with my own presence? These uncertainties at times lead to a lack of selectivity of information to concentrate on, i.e. any information given by respondents is seen as valuable if they are willing to share it.

This somewhat hands-off approach at times resulted in a diversion from the initially set questions as respondents took control of the interview and told me about what *they* think the key issues were. The unexpected closeness with the two key respondents meant being psychologically and emotionally involved, at times partial when listening to their accounts, perhaps even tempted to paint a one-sided view of the actors in the sector, especially regarding the 'unproductive' Bulgarian institutional. This appears in the diary entries as my subjective experience, one which needs attention when interpreting the information given in the interviews and conducted observations.

The closeness with the two key respondents has meant being very involved and at times partial when listening to their accounts, perhaps tempted to paint a one-sided view of the actors in the sector, especially about a (widely accepted as) infamous Bulgarian institutional context. Also, there were expectations (perhaps mine more than theirs) that there would be some voluntary work involved as a form of gratefulness on my part for their openness and granting of access.

Case 3 and Case 4 were conducted simultaneously due to financial and time constraints, allowing for a single trip (May 13<sup>th</sup> 2009 start of SOS entries, May 25<sup>th</sup> 2009 start of UNA Youth entries). Key individuals were not present for interviews and meetings did not take place due to timeframe overlapping with summer holidays, limiting the observation data. The learning experience from the first phase, together with the different types of organisational relationships with international partners, have influenced the data-gathering expectations for the second batch of cases.

The learning experience from the first phase, together with the different types of organisational relationships with western partners have perhaps informed the data-gathering expectations, as noted in the diary entry at the start of the SOS fieldwork. Retrospectively, had there not been the serendipitous encounter of a key informant, with whom I spent a considerable amount of time outside the office, the hands-off approach would have led to a deficiency in data richness. Regarding the third point, being a branch in an international network with a centralised authority in Austria, my expectations were that the pressure of compliance would influence the level of exploration of self-directed learning, generating new

ideas and contributions by the Bulgarian NGO. Contrary to expectations, I found an opportunity to ask about the alternatives to the established model from the international HQ, again, on the basis of the key respondent's revelations. In fact, this became the focus of the case and the richest finding in terms of contribution to the framework.

As in the case of Animus, there was a considerable lack of control on my part over the process of data-gathering in SOS, especially as I was assigned to an individual who would coordinate my data gathering, who also presented me with an agreement of confidentiality to sign. As noted in a diary entry at the start of the SOS fieldwork before reaching the office on day one, I have a different predisposition towards the internationally- coordinated SOS representative for Bulgaria.

- Expecting the most formal organisation in terms of culture and relationship with their partnership  
- Resigned to whatever they give me in terms of access/docs/info (every bit counts)  
- Not as free to speak my mind regarding not relying on foreign knowledge, creating new ways, not replicating (as with Animus)

The interviews present an interesting sequencing effect on the development of the case. They start off very formal with a supervised interview (a gate keeper is present at the interview with another employee). Later there is a breakthrough with the significant contribution by a key respondent working on the new SOS projects. I spent a considerable amount of time outside the office thanks to her proactive stance, giving me an opportunity to step outside the formal boundaries of the NGO, literally and metaphorically. This relationship was the key to accessing rich data – documents on processes within the international structure of Kinderdorf, project-related material, observations of a knowledge transfer instance in on location between a Bulgarian SOS structure and their foreign colleagues, and observations of cross-sector national network meeting on a new project, part of the SOS strategic development direction.

The last interview was conducted on the same day as an interview with UNAY volunteer, a symbolic mark of the boundary blurring taking place between the two cases. As I was already in a cross-case themes mode of thinking about the build-up of case findings, this was timely. The interview was over coffee after work, far from the SOS HQ and its formal bearings, where I had the opportunity to sum up and probe all the emerging points from previous interviews and observations already gathered. This case was the only one with a completed, though informal, exit to match the formal entry. With the contribution of the formal and informal side, the inside and outside of the organisation's boundaries and the neat entry and exits, this case is the most complete. In contrast, the others seem to have left significant space for re-entering the discussion with respondents and data.

Nadejda Stoicheva, Director and co-founder of Animus, 2009 interview in her office. An important interview! The founder is the only source of the initial ideas and roots of the organisation as a philosophy and vision for development. (1) The supervision element as part of the "professionalisation" in the field, (2) Tavistock and La Strada links, (3) children's issues and (4) knowledge transfer strategic directions appear here as reoccurring themes as with the rest of the interviews (cross-recurring). A willingness to speak on behalf of the organisation is visible as opposed to most of the other interviews, which stress on the personal opinion of the interviewee as a distinct, self-scrutinising voice



# 1. Case Study 1 - Bulgarian Association of Regional Development Agencies and Business Centres (BARDA)

## 1.1. Profile

The Bulgarian Association of Regional Development Agencies and Business Centres (BARDA) is a decentralised umbrella non-governmental organisation comprised of independent regional members and focused on the development of regional economies and the SME sector. It was established in 1997 by seven RDAs with the support of EEC/ILO/GTZ<sup>2</sup> as part of the framework of the Vocational Training and Measured for Employment Promotion Programme. At the time of the fieldwork it has 22 members and is managed by a Board comprised of representatives of its member agencies. The member agencies have representatives from local government, chambers of commerce, local business associations, employment offices, and vocational training institutions. The coordination office in Sofia supports the achievement of the Association's mission. This was the location chosen for most of the field work. One members RDA was contacted for interview and the annual meeting of the umbrella organisation was partially attended for further observation.

Nationally and regionally BARDA cooperates with ministries, state agencies, donors, and other public and private organisations on the design and implementation of the regional development policy, SME support and economy restructuring, implementing bi- and multilateral projects with its own know-how in these areas. On an international level, it is a member of the European Association of Regional Development Agencies, representative for Bulgaria in the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, amongst others. In terms of its activities, it presents itself as a "project partner", a "partner for establishing business contacts", a "network of support structures" for SMEs, a "network for providing research", and a "network for fostering economic enhancement".

In accordance with the research focus on the role of partnerships for organisational learning and knowledge acquisition/transfer, I select some of BARDA's ongoing and completed projects with significant partners with the assistance of the key respondent, BARDA's Director. Two individual and one group interviews with BARDA representatives are conducted with reference to the research questions and using the projects as explicit instances of knowledge-related partnership activities.

<sup>2</sup> European Economic Community/ International Labour Organisation/ Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit. GTZ (German Technical Cooperation) is a primary financier of BARDA (government owned corporation), working towards the promotion. There is no mention of BARDA on the GTZ website under any project – they claim to work only with Bulgarian government institutions.

One organisational partner in particular is considered as significant to the organisation's overall work and is included as a data source in the fieldwork<sup>3</sup>. This is the East of England Development Agency (EEDA) based in the UK. An interview conducted in London with an EEDA representative and live project observation in Hemel Hempstead UK are added to the fieldwork conducted in Bulgaria to augment the case on this significant partnership. Another data source included are notes taken at two meetings between BARDA and potential partners from Germany and the UK.

### ***Case Themes***

- Project work and expert knowledge artefacts
- International partnerships united by a common framework producing shared knowledge-base (the EU level playing field)
- Talking to the practitioners responsible for project management
- Organisational space: symbols of organisational identity

### ***Key concepts***

- Artefacts: documented outputs and documenting tools
- Training in situ – partnership-based learning/training (international project development practice)
- Ownership of discourse on the organisation's purpose and practices – literal translation, figurative implementation

<sup>3</sup> EEDA is identified by BARDA as a "strategic partner". Prior to the fieldwork it was expected that a member from the EURADA network would emerge as a suitable partner to examine.



**Note:** The photo-collage contains data and visual memos the fieldwork captured as a documentation of experience and reference to individuals, artefacts, contexts and conceptual reflections. These are referenced as case themes, developed in the case findings below, and key concepts, developed further in the case analysis. The discussion presents the two in a shared case context, reflecting the nature of qualitative research experience in the field.

## 1.2. Describing Presence

Walking along a dark and stuffy corridor, the office is through one of the doors of an administrative building. A small room, two desks, two women in their early to mid-30s, the project coordinator and Director of BARDA Association. They are my key respondents for the next month. Files and binders in a cupboard near a small window overlooking a side street and café. A cupboard with DVDs and brochures which read 'Working in the East of England' are the first thing I notice from the doorway. This turns out to be the 'product' of one of the project lines mentioned in the first interview with D. later that day. It is also one of the key points in the



case in terms of the NGO's activity through their partnership with the western organisation and the knowledge transfer and learning involved. A compact and functional space contours the body of an NGO compressed by financial strain, heavy workload with what seems like insufficient capacity, somewhat unfit to be a national umbrella organisation.

Later I have my first informal conversation with M. "I don't learn anything from the Bulgarian projects" is one of the first things I record in my diary. I ask about who they work with and learn that EEDA are their "favourite" partner and have been in a relationship for over two years. She mentions the project for language skills (HARVEST) as an excellent one. They are at the final stage and have a visit planned for this week to meet with the commissioned partners who are working on the project materials, a University in Plovdiv. I am invited too. The case prospects show to be very promising - the international partner has been identified, no hesitation as to whether there are more contenders for this post. There is also a live project to observe in situ.

Two fieldwork moments remain as an imprinted image of BARDA in my mind which has tilted my view of organisational identity. The first is D. saying "if I die I will come back to haunt them, they won't get rid of me that easily". The second is D. photocopying a document in the small room across the hall with the original being blown every time she lifted the lid of the machine making D. squeeze behind the machine to pick it up and repeat (the copier could only do one page at a time). In my diary I have written: *A sad combination of a resigned administrator in the grip of a technical malfunction, who wants to be cast as a rebel hero type in my little case story.*

### **1.3. Project-Based Existence - Filing for a Partner**

A major project for BARDA is MINEM – *Meeting information needs for migrants*, led by their strategic partner EEDA. Building on the success of MINEM and a pilot information portal, EEDA launched the National Information Portal for Migrant Workers in 2009. A consortium of specialist organisations in web design and development, marketing and migrant worker issues are a part of the portal. The objective is to provide information to migrant workers, employers and service providers through a single portal on living and working issues, such as housing, employment rights, and access to public services. The project is funded for three years with support from the European Social Fund and Department for Communities and Local Government.

This shows how a project becomes a stepping stone towards securing more funding for the leading partner. For BARDA, it is another feather in their cap and good prospects for more work with EEDA in the future. Project HARVEST (2006-2008) is led by EEDA and financed by Leonardo da Vinci (ended that September). The objective is to create a language skills capacity audit as a tool for enhancing SME development in an enlarged internal market, removing barriers to internationalisation. The goals are to provide a platform for professional language service with providers and strategic partners in East Europe

(Bulgaria, Poland, Hungary); to develop an interactive road map for all partners; to provide pilot training with two stages – a two day workshop and 12 week language course using materials developed by academic partners in these countries. According to the Leonardo da Vinci application, some of the key materials are to be adapted from templates from previous EEDA work (CILT materials) and applied to conducting language audits in partner countries. This project is in its final stages when I arrive, with language materials being developed and tested and the final meeting

According to the RLN website, the BioCulture project (2007-2009) aims to raise the competitiveness of SMEs in the life science sector that are active in international research and development or have customers and suppliers overseas. This is achieved through the creation of language and culture training resources. In other words, it is a follow-up on HARVEST but applied for another industry. The same coordinator is leading the project as well and being a reliable partner, BARDA is a partner here too. This time however they are not considered as able to contribute in terms of content. Because the coordinator organisation does not see Bulgaria as a country which has biotechnology SME activity, the BG partner is given appropriate project activities - dissemination and project coordination. Both are not related to actual SME needs audits, analysis and materials development. This looks more like the project 'admin' work and there is a sense of demotion for BARDA following the HARVEST experience. A successful follow-up of HARVEST, the project leads to a sense of "superior attitude" towards the BG partner organisation by the UK counterpart. This leaves a BARDA representative feeling insulted and angry, but perhaps more importantly, it poses some questions about the nature of these international partnerships and their ultimate results as seen by the UK side as well.

In the interviews, the two BARDA respondents refer a number of times (with admiration and perhaps even with envy) to the difference in financial support the two partners receive from their government (the UK partner received £65 million at the time of the research). What is not emphasised by respondents is that BARDA is an NGO whereas the UK partner is a government agency. An interview is conducted with an EEDA representative, the project coordinator working most closely with the Bulgarian partners, to get a sense of the other side of the relationship.

The UK respondent presents this point of difference from an organisational learning angle when asked what the projects provide to each organisation:

"What we learn [from EU projects] is high-level things, like implementing national lifelong learning strategies which you don't have in Bulgaria. BARDA need to learn about the subject matter, what regional development is about in practice via the projects... Most of what we do has started at a national level and we implement it"

The knowledge exchange and knowledge created through the projects is what justifies the partnerships, it is what the EU funding it set out to support. This is referred to as creating "a level playing field" as the UK partner explains. All partners benefit from the projects but in different ways. For example, in the MINEM

project on economic migration, a sensitive issue to a receiving country like England, the project outcomes are a demonstration by the UK partner to their government that actions in tackling the migration problem are being taken. In the other partner countries, the materials are seen as information available to outgoing migrants. This raises questions as to the extent of regional development BARDA can claim to be contributing to, based on the framing of project outcomes with complex and political agendas.

The UK respondent comments on this point as well:

“BARDA make their best efforts to tell people about how other EU countries manage systems in development. [I wonder if this is what keeps them going]... I consider myself to be committed to the EU, I think they are as well – they want to see their country prosperous, it's about the personality... It's about how people feel regardless of the work they are doing”

#### **1.4. Project Life: Basis for Learning, Knowledge Exchange, Experience**

Further informal conversations lead to the impression that project production is the line of work at BARDA and its lifeline. In an interview with D. we explore the project-based evolution, which is revealing as to what is valued in BARDA with respect to learning from partners through project engagement. This includes knowledge transfer, information use, and knowledge product development, since the NGO's project involvement roughly cater to their service provision function for Bulgarian SMEs, namely, to their information needs. The terms 'knowledge transfer' and 'learning' are treated with care when asking questions without predetermined definitions, by negotiating meaning with respondents in the process. Emphasis is placed on “learning used in practice to deliver your services”.

The first project is with a Greek consulting organisation on promoting socioeconomic development through ICT for SMEs. I ask *what has been preserved as knowledge from the project after its end*. Recurring utterances in the first few minutes of interview transcript include the following (as they appear):

***Know-how** received about **project implementation**; opportunity to adopt [б3аумсг6аmе] from them; forms of **reporting** (using) protocols; all types of documents needed (for the implementation of a project); **communication** (the form of communication); how to carry out meetings; advanced planning for **deadlines** (be strict with the partners, chase your deadlines); quality of promotion materials...*

Retrospective project data is useful in the context of layering the themes in the case. However, being able to observe a live project development is an opportunity for me to generate observation data, which I welcome by gladly accepting to take a trip with D. and M. to visit one of the local subcontractors BARDA are using in their HARVES project with EEDA.

A senior member of the Management and Economics Faculty at the Food Technologies University in Plovdiv (UFT) has been commissioned by BARDA to coordinate the preparation of language materials for project Harvest with EEDA. I am told that she is hard to reach and difficult to control in terms of service delivery. There has already been a four month delay in the preparation phase, involving the language needs audit and drafting of training materials<sup>7</sup>. Now the testing phase is on the way and BARDA has not received any information on who the tutors conducting the training are nor who the participants involved are. The Director is apparently gate-keeping the knowledge and control of the process within her territory, despite BARDA providing all of the funding. The details of tutors and participants are necessary for preparing the contracts required by the leading partner in the project, EEDA.

Despite one of BARDA's RDAs being located in Plovdiv, the girls are making the three hour trip themselves. I learn that the Plovdiv RDA has not done enough to facilitate the project implementation so they'd rather deal with the issues themselves. It seems the relationship with this member of the BARDA network is fragile. Once at a meeting in Poland on some project, the Plovdiv RDA has spoken against the Sofia office shifting the blame for a glitch in the project. In addition, the Director at the Plovdiv RDA is on the board, giving him the upper hand on issues of accountability to international partners. As the coordinator of Bard's umbrella body, D.'s job depends on the board's decisions – there are obvious conflicts of interests at play within the NGO governance structure. To me this revelation regarding the multiple reasons for the trip is an insight to the organisational identity. There is lack of trust and personal interests within the NGO overriding the organisation's purpose. This causes a disturbance to BARDA's performance and potentially damages their image held by partners in terms of accountability for delivery on project activities.

Accountability issues are not the only front on which BARDA faces the constant challenge of keeping appearances. Legitimacy issues crop up as well, most notably with the independent RDA directors who appear to work in their own interests rather than merely for BARDA's collective benefit. Securing a project funded by a national body in Bulgaria can take place by application by the "right" organisation, which may or may not be a BARDA affiliated RDA. Some of the project managers within the agencies have their alternative delivery channels for public procurement of services. There is no obvious legal barrier to applying from multiple channels, certainly no moral barrier either.

Despite this, BARDA are sought and trusted externally, by EEDA and other foreign partners, as the multiple project collaboration exemplify. Perhaps this is due to administrative oversight and controlled responsibility given to the Bulgarian partner, resulting in completed EC-funded projects and a good track record of engagement with European agencies for the UK's government institution. The commitment to and delivery of the project proves to be a key to longevity and success. This is echoed in interviews with both D. and M. What is valued in completing is securing an organisational image of a "serious<sup>8</sup>" partner, which is necessary to be considered for further work.

Apart from image, the ultimate material result from completed projects is a track record of completed works, a 'repository of knowledge' on the broad topic of regional development. It covers a range of issues such as ways of enhancing employment for the elderly, delivering business skills training for people with disabilities, the process of national strategy planning for migration, and how to conducting research for language needs for the food industry sector. Some of these material artefacts are documented processes whereas others are readymade materials, both having the potential to be reapplied in BARDA's own teaching, for reference and/or planning to clients (SMEs) and less knowledgeable partners (government institutions). What becomes interesting is what is used once part of the repository, how it is applied, to what extent learning from projects is transformed or transmitted and to what immediate and non-immediate effect.

I speak to the Plovdiv branch project coordinator and Director for further insight into the learning across the NGO, where I expect evidence of cross-pollination between Sofia and the Plovdiv office would surmount to evidence of applying the accumulated knowledge from international partnerships.



The photograph is a representation of real-time, experiential learning by the NGO carrying out their knowledge sharing project.

The university subcontractor carries out the product testing of the language tools they have developed for SMEs. They have used the UK partner's materials as format and reference. The element of improvisation by the Bulgarian NGO is the actual adaptation of the concept of beneficiaries from SMEs to university students, legitimised by perceiving the students as "most likely be representatives of SMEs in the future when they graduate". The possibility that the students are learning Italian as specialised for food manufacturing so that they can migrate to Italy, is not discussed.

### 1.5. The Project Brochure – The Marks of Learning



An example of the blurred distinction between outcomes and outputs when projects cross national borders is the translation of project 'outputs' in the brochure – it turns into project 'products' when translated from English to Bulgarian. The Harvest project objectives are to create a learning platform of cultural and professional language skills tailored to an industry



to boost competitiveness. Nevertheless, there is an inescapable materiality to the nature of the work done under the impressionable title “holistic approach to the regional vocational sector-based training”. This is embodied by the production of the audit, the roadmap, the materials and the materials testing.

The ‘anatomy of the brochure’ is like the NGO passport to the world of partnerships. It gives information to the reader of the NGO activities, past partnerships, and subject of expertise. The importance placed on the brochure on the other hand speaks of the project-based existence. Moreover it is a demonstration of the way knowledge is adopted, adapted, copied, referred to, translated, etc. In this example, we have a preliminary brochure at the start of the project, naming the partners involved, the funding body, the project goals and expected outputs. Later, the photo on language materials testing above becomes a part of a second output-related brochure, which summarises what has been achieved, though it looks very much the same as format and information.

I look at the MINEM brochure materials produced from both sides and notice a striking similarity in the structure and design between the UK and Bulgarian versions. BARDA’s brochure is shorter (two pages as opposed to the seven pages in the EEDA brochure), with the findings with less emphasis on recommendations compared to the EEDA version. The research informing the materials is based on a more modest and cumulative methodology approach in BARDA (54 interviews with various groups of former and current migrants, embassies and foreign investors working in the country, the latter of which are arguably not relevant to the migration issue) compared to EEDA (four focus groups in the Midlands with different migrant groups typical for the areas). The resulting recommendations in the text seem to reflect a capacity issue accounting for the difference in quality between these outputs. EEDA’s well-supported emphasis on the need for language tuition and information provision for incoming migrants has a strategic purpose for the NGO judging from other EEDA projects I observe during my fieldwork. The same cannot be said about the general bullet point recommendations in the BARDA brochure, such as: “to apply innovating tools for eliminating the obstacle to the mobility of workers and their families in the labour markets”, “...the Bulgarian policy and the institutions in this sphere should be subject to a thorough analysis, in view of the poor functioning of the labour market in comparison to other counties in the region”.

Retrospectively, I see this comparison as reflecting the weight of the project (or lack of it) for BARDA as an actor in the sector working with government stakeholders in the field of regional development.

### **1.6. Evidence of Organisational Development and Learning**

Towards the end of the fieldwork, the subject of ‘organisational learning’ comes to the fore through a learning-centred project undertaken with new partners. As part of my participant-observation at BARDA, I

have offered to volunteer for them as a gratitude for their generosity towards my fieldwork. I am assigned a task to translate some of the methodology materials for this new project, VISIBLE. It involves nine EU partners participate, funded under the Lifelong Learning Programme 2007-2013 of the Education and Culture DG, EC with an Italian RDA as leading partner. The project aims to develop the competencies of project managers working in regional development as part of their non-formal learning activities (such as networking, resource management and communication). The output is set as a methodology of validation of non-formal learning based on case histories and shared between European development partners as a project management competency tool.

The cases are written on the basis of a case history template disseminated by the lead partner. It asks the PMs to describe and reflect on situations they face in their daily work and what they learn from them. I am to translate these reflective accounts which have been filled out in Bulgarian by the project managers, part of the BARDA RDA members. This gives me insight into what is understood as learning by the organisation's actors individually, described in their own words, within the context of their experience. In addition, this is direct access to what is produced as learning materials within projects on the topic of learning.

At the core of the template is the Visible Competency Framework, a document distributed with the template as a reference guide. In the small print at the bottom of the page I make out that it is the product of one of the partners in VISIBLE, ECLO. They are the European Consortium for the Learning Organisation based in Belgium. Their expertise is in management training areas such as leadership, knowledge management, change, the learning organisation etc. Their members are predominantly executive training and organisational consulting companies largely based in the UK. It is a matrix outlining the seven horizontal competencies of the project manager and their description at each of four levels – networking, results orientation, organising, communication, decision-making, methodical approach and problem solving. In the description at the top of the template there are instructions to filling out the form and comments on the uses of this learning tool. It prompts the PM to be honest and thoughtful about their difficult experiences as they can be a better source of learning than the easy ones. It suggests that the template may be used as a basis for the PM's discussions with their managers demonstrating that they are working on levels three and four of the chosen competency elements. Finally, there is an announcement that some of the content is to be used to develop role play exercises to be shared amongst the partners, allowing for 'isomorphic learning' or "the opportunity to learn from what other organisations/individuals have learned without having to go through every experience yourself".

In the Background section of the project website, a statement on the motivation behind the project reads:

*"When a job position belongs to a clearly recognizable European context, not linked to any identifiable learning certificate, implies continuous improvement of competences (with*

*particular reference to the horizontal ones), validation of non-formal learning becomes a priority.”*

<http://www.visibleproject.eu/visible-progetto-dettagli.aspx?path=,7&id=17>

Further into the text the authors recognise that over the last decade a number of trans-national development organisation teams have developed around EC funding streams. They have come to collaborate under ‘mutual recognition’ unrelated to an identifiable learning certificate. This seems to be a great opportunity to launch a new or developing project management informal learning framework, the development of which has been left undisclosed, by a consortium of (mostly UK-based) consultancy companies. There seems to be little interest in the actual learning which occurs through managers’ experience, or at least these accounts do not feature in the final outputs. Rather, the project involves direct application of a pre-designed template by one of the partners, assigning competence measures on project managers’ activities, via widely accepted methods for sharing experiences (collection of case histories, creating role games). This leads to a test bed for validating the proposed competency frameworks and at the same time provides a crash course in project management, with emphasis on organisational learning. As a result everyone is happy and rather productive.

### **1.7. Emerging Themes**

Each of the key themes around issues corresponding to the research questions and of importance to respondents and the organisation are discussed briefly in turn.

The organisation appears to be leading a project-based existence. The projects are a collection of snapshots of the NGO's, like a family album of who they are, what they've done, when and with whom. With consideration to the research questions, what can be inferred about their knowledge and learning practices is that they take place within the context of project processes and artefacts. These are the documented and oral recount of the project processes and the analysis of the project products and materials (outputs).

The nature of project engagement is financially driven which makes ‘learning’ secondary in terms of importance for the organisation at best, given the NGO's limited capacity. It is however still necessary to the extent that it aids the gaining of project competence in view of future application. Demonstrations of surface learning exemplified by certificates and tangible project outputs are prevalent. Nevertheless, an awareness of the need for learning-based orientation is evident in one particular interview with the Director.

Evidence of learning from projects is found in the brochures, materials, and project planning and project delivery processes. The accumulation of a number of projects on a variety of issues could be seen either as proof of diversity of competencies and good working relations with others, or as a lack of focus in

regional development strategy for the NGO's activities. This begins to develop the theme of the content of learning and knowledge and its perceived value.

In terms of the interviews and observations carried out, the organisation has taken on a problem-centred tone. For example, there is a lack of a common identity shared between the various offices and members, as well as internal conflicts between individuals who don't seem to be working towards a shared goal. This has an effect on the information which is shared, retained, transformed and embedded as knowledge or not. Other recurring problem-based accounts refer to the context within which the NGO functions, namely the hindrances from external parties (government institutions featuring heavily). There are implications that this organisational discourse may be reflecting the voluntary sector's problematic identity and/or the environment it inhabits in as a whole.

Partnerships are frequent (often names of current partners are forgotten due to sheer volume and relative unimportance) and precarious (disappointment with partner behaviour is common), reflecting a project-based existence, usually taking place within loosely defined development networks. Participation is based on word-of-mouth recommendations by ex-partners and their experience with the candidate. There is a long-term, semi-stable relationship with one strategic partner (defined by the respondents in the interviews). The relationship is complex, encompassing contradicting features, such as:

- 'trust', based on past projects and the motivation to secure EU funding
- role-modelling in a context of UK's level of experience compared to BG in matters of regional development
- implied inequality in distributing project tasks
- complex agendas underlying the motives for project collaboration across borders, crossing into an institutional level of NGO activities

According to interviewees, the relationship is the main channel through which the NGO gains experience in good practice for delivering projects, providing for their clients' needs, and working towards a regional development strategy.

## 2. Case Study 2 – ANIMUS

### 2.1 Profile

Animus Association Foundation describes itself as an organisation working in support of survivors of violence. It was founded in 1994 as an independent women's NGO acquiring the status of a public benefit organisations in 2001. In 2004 Animus became a co-founder of La Strada International, a European network of nine independent NGOs working for the prevention of trafficking women. The structure of the organisation is governed by the Board of Directors which meets biannually. The executive organ consists of two Directors who are assisted by the programme committee, which meets for weekly discussions on current matters and decision-making related to the work of the organisation. The project programmes which are managed by the experts working in the organisation (psychologists, social workers, administrators and volunteers).

The NGO's mission states: *Healthy communication among people and gender equality in Bulgarian society*". Its goals are to develop psychotherapeutic services and programmes offering professional support; to establish social attitudes of tolerance towards difference and non-tolerance towards violence; to popularise the values of psychodynamic psychotherapy; to encourage women's development; to promote democratic change Bulgarian families implement projects in support of vulnerable groups; and act as intermediary between the state institutions and NGOs coordinating their efforts on the problems of violence against women and children. Its activities fall under three categories of current projects:

- (1) direct psychotherapy work and social support,
- (2) working in the community via lobbying, advocacy and prevention together with the establishment of a network of partners (nationally with like-minded women's NGOs and internationally under La Strada) and
- (3) training of specialists and dissemination of the model of work on principles of good practice in working with survivors of violence.

The direct work is mainly carried out in the Centre for rehabilitation, counselling and psychotherapy (their central office in Sofia) where there is a department for adults and recently, one for children. This is where support is offered to individuals overcoming traumatic experiences, psychological counselling and psychoanalysis, where couples can receive psychotherapy as well. Services for children and young people include similar therapy under the psychodynamic approach, where support is extended to families and relatives (family therapy) who are preparing to take children for institutions, and there is an empowerment programme in place for children leaving institutions and those being adopted.

In addition to the Centre, there is a hotline service for contact for those who need support and a Crisis Centre for emergency accommodation across the road from the main Animus office. The Animus Training Centre, established in 2000, has delivered training for over 3000 participants from NGOs, government

institutions, service providers, etc. who work with victims of trafficking and violence. In addition, Animus provides a postgraduate qualification in partnership with Sofia University - "Foundations of psychoanalytical practice with adults and children", providing training under collaboration with specialists from the UK, France and Holland (brochure).

As the field work was carried out in the summer, some of the practitioners working in the NGO were on holiday or were on leave, including both of the founding Directors. Nevertheless, eleven<sup>1</sup> interviews were conducted with a number of practitioners, including one volunteer from a Swiss NGO on a six month project visit in Animus. Observation took place "from a distance" due to the sensitivity of nature of the work with beneficiary groups. Nevertheless, I attended a weekly meeting and inhabited the office, looking through manuals and literature, and conducting individual interviews with key practitioners.

### ***Case themes***

- Expert-led project work and development specialised service-provision - experience and knowledge over time
- An international network of experts united by a common cause and approach, producing a shared knowledge-base and defining a profession
- Talking to professionals responsible for direct work, policy and prevention
- Organisational space: symbols of organisational identity, self-discovery and empowerment

### ***Key concepts***

- Artefacts: documented learning, training and expertise
- Supervision model: towards a model for learning/training (mentoring glimpses)
- Ownership of discourse on the organisation's purpose and practice – a fully developed language

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<sup>1</sup> An additional interview was conducted the following year in 2009 with one of the Directors



**Note:** The photo-collage contains data and visual memos the fieldwork captured as a documentation of experience and reference to individuals, artefacts, contexts and conceptual reflections. These are referenced as case themes, developed in the case findings below, and key concepts, developed further in the case analysis. The discussion presents the two in a shared case context, reflecting the nature of qualitative research experience in the field.

## 2.2. First Impressions

'Animus' is a Jungian concept meaning strength and potential. It is meant to represent the "unconscious in the woman's soul". This is perhaps embodied in their logo as well – a woman flying on a broom, referencing the female protagonist in Bulgakov's classic novel *The Master and Margarita*<sup>2</sup>. The two female founders of Animus, describe their motivation to join forces with the following:

*"...the professional interest in the problems of women survivors of traumatic events as well as the challenge to establish a service for women - psychological counselling, which never existed before, but most of all - the fact that we were different from others. We truly believed that*

<sup>2</sup> In the story, Margarita turns into a witch after making a pact with the devil in order to save her lover.

*we were able to make our dreams come true.”*

(Animus website, History: par.1)

The process of setting up is difficult and the founders experience a rejection at first (not specified by whom exactly or in what form). This is followed by a decision to work in their “professional community to convince people in our ideas” (ibid.). The Open Society Fund features as the first official supporter of the project, followed by Civil Society Development Foundation, Mamacash, Democracy Network Program whose support led to, respectively, the establishment of the first permanent unit for work violence-related issues, a programme for institutional development reaching across the country, and for identifying good practice criteria in mental health for women in Bulgaria. In an acknowledgements-style history page, the organisation mentions in chronological order the Staples Trust, Charity Know How Fund, the American Embassy, NOVIB/ MATRA, La Strada, and Sofia Municipality, each helping Animus to develop further in securing their presence and/or expanding their services to include additional areas of work. The progression follows from working with women victims of domestic violence, to training on using and managing a telephone help-line, counselling, social programs, lobbying and prevention activities addressing women-trafficking.

The collective effort is believed to have led to the launching of the [Centre for Rehabilitation of Women, Adolescents, And Children Victims Of Violence](#). This is their HQ, the Sofia office, where I arrive at 11:30am to meet the person who has arranged my fieldwork, M., herself a practitioner in Animus at her final stage of a psychology-related PhD in the UK. I arrive on the 28<sup>th</sup> of July, not a great time of the year to find and talk to people about work. First impressions are more than positive, according to my memory and diary entry:

*Great office!!! Beautiful interior + flowers and birds chirping in front of the office! Nice touch...done with love.*

The diary entry continues with a list of publications I have noticed on the bookshelf in her office, whilst waiting for an informal chat<sup>3</sup> with M.

*“International Journal of Psychoanalysis, 2004-2006 Penguin Dictionary of Psychology, OSCE National Referral Mechanism ...I am given three brochures – 2 general and annual report, very professionally looking [...] first glance at docs. Financed by all kinds of foundations and bodies – 15 projects for 2007...”*

Based on my experience with Barda I anticipate that the documents will be a key component of

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<sup>3</sup> Basing the strategy on the assumption that looking at someone's bookshelf is a way of knowing what they are like, I adopt this in my data collection methods as a hybrid between photographs and document data (shelf-snaps) to refer to later. This may be an interesting entry into what influences the organisation has had in their approach (theories and authors), where they have been (seminar and conference-related publications), and even some indication of a learning/knowledge acquisition strategy they've adopted from existing models documented in the texts. Animus has its own library indexing system for their text resources, which is referred to in the interviews as a source for individual learning by the practitioners.



understanding the structure and justification of the organisation's activities, as well as the networking aspects of their coordinated work. However the most revealing part of their approach, where issues of their self-perceptions, reflections on knowledge, approaches to learning, and intricacies of their contextualised practices, would come through the conversations. Later I find that the snippets of documents I've collected from Animus are useful in more than one way.

M. is in her early 30s. She is the coordinator of La Strada network-related activities and Project Manager for lobbying activities. Strangely, it turns out we'd met at the University of Warwick back in 2004 and being a doctoral candidate herself, she shows an understanding of my situation as I restate my purpose loosely based on previous email exchange. Before we have a chance to talk, I am told the weekly meeting is about to commence, a great opportunity for me to meet everyone and get a sense of what Animus does. The team meeting is held on the ground floor of the three-level house. They are all between 20 and 40 years old, casually dressed, sitting around a small coffee table with a bowl of melon, forks, and fruit juice glasses. I am introduced by M. to the thirteen girls as a researcher on NGO management and I state my purpose, asking if they would be so kind as to offer me some of their time for a one-on-one chat about what they do in the organisation. Smiles and some nods follow and I feel quite relieved despite the gaze of so many confident-looking psychoanalysts. They present themselves as well, one by one and I note their role and name in my diary drawing. The main scaffolding of the organisation's project work becomes evident as each of the participants report their news at the meeting, which has started.

One of the women seems to be leading the discussion as they all take turns and share their bit of the informal agenda based on their individual activities in the last week. The coordinator is M2. (the one in the jeans and pony tail) - later I learn that she is a more senior colleague heading the Animus Training Centre. I find out more from the "Training Centre Animus" brochure funded by the MATRA programme by the government of Holland under the project "Institutional and programme development". The centre is established in 2000 though the training experience and practice of the organisation have a history dating almost from its foundation in 1994. An achievement in the organisation's history is noted as the "dissemination of experience" to other similar organisations across the country including both Animus branches<sup>4</sup> and independent organisations (History, Animus website: par. 2).

In the meeting, N. who works in the Animus Crisis Centre accommodating victims in need of a place to stay, reports on nine centres across the country. She stresses that there is a need for training in all of these centres giving a summary of the observations made on the projects, conditions of work, and future outlook for each. Another member attending is translating into English for a non-Bulgarian colleague. V. (the smiling one with short hair) is a Swiss volunteer in Animus developing projects for trafficking awareness. The translator is T. (sweet voice), reporting on the distribution of materials on buses and trains as part of the transport network campaign project where volunteers have been successfully recruited.

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<sup>4</sup> The branches structure is not explicit in the reports or any of the documented information on the NGO's work

Some of the Animus campaigning material looks rather professional with a strong emphasis on image, appearing on all of their printed brochures, some stickers, even a beer mat prototype which is the essence of V.'s awareness project. I come across a sticker in a tram later that month, evidence of T.'s report on the success of their campaign roll-out. Some of the awareness materials I pick up during my fieldwork do not have the Animus logo printed, but that of La Strada, under the financing of another organisation all together (brochure MTV Exit). The awareness-related work at least seems to be an international collaborative effort where the NGO seems to function both under its Bulgarian name and its international association as the trafficking prevention European network.

D. who works with M. on trafficking projects, reports on match funding requirements for two potential projects with government social service institutions, as well as a meeting with a Western investor. This individual is in the process of buying property in a town in Northern Bulgaria and has plans for future regional development (no organisation name is recorded). M. adds that he has ideas for regional development through social capacity building and is bringing in some Western practices – how business invests through 'corporate social investment. This is quite far from the trafficking mission on the work of Animus and yet in a context of insufficient government funding and donors leaving, it seems this is regarded as an issue of interest at least to some of those attending the meeting. Noted as an issue to pick up later in the interviews.

Another aspect of their work is their children's programme which has been growing significantly in the last few years, which is D.'s domain (the one with the critical expression), also at the meeting. Trafficking in children is a problem addressed on an international level - just one of the projects for the 2005-2008 period appearing in the Annual Report 2006 show that significant funding is provided by the OAK Foundation, Sida, and the Norwegian government. S. (the confident one in the bright red dress) works with domestic violence-related issues related to children. I notice that both women state their professional qualification as 'psychologist' as they introduce themselves, whereas others mention their activities domain in the organisation (such as 'coordinator for the hot line'). Another note for the diary and something to return to later. M2 concludes the meeting with the training centre updates, announcing that there is a new Excel table for the training projects on violence and prevention. Most of the Animus practitioners are involved in the training as experts delivering the interactive workshop/lecture sessions.

Looking back at the diary entries from the meetings I notice something for the first time. A question raised by D2: "What is our co-operation with the IMF, the policy and border control?" Another question noted in the diary is "are we a part of a national network of NGOs and are there new NGO contacts". Together with the meeting's unstructured agenda, these questions make me think that the structure of organisational practices is based on the European Commission's principle of subsidiarity<sup>5</sup>, i.e. everyone digs their own

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<sup>5</sup> In a European Community context, subsidiarity means Member States remain responsible for areas which they are capable of managing more effectively themselves, while the Community is given those powers which the Member States cannot discharge satisfactorily (European Parliament)

garden patch. This is not quite as simple and as the recurring themes in the interviews begin to form, a more co-ordinated and unified operation emerges as the NGO's image.

The organisation's management approach seems to work, at least according to their annual reports and the impressive HQ office. The building features in the 2006 Annual Report where the Centre underwent renovation and reconstruction allowing for an expansion of the service provision in the community. Animus received financing from seventeen named sources<sup>6</sup> in 2006 and fourteen in 2007, with a healthy cash flow and positive income statement increase from 71,000 to 73,000 BGN. The overall impression being that the NGO is doing quite well and is good at what it does, or at least one of the two.

### **2.3. Member of the La Strada Network – Learning, Training, Experience Exchange**

The organisation is very clear on its views on which aspects of trafficking are within the remit of their work and those that are not. Upon visiting a key organisation document, these principles reflect the underlying philosophy of La Strada which is a European network against trafficking in women, headed by La Strada Association based in the Netherlands. The network booklet presents at length the network approach, how it has developed and its methods for sharing information and developing service provision. More than just a face for funders based on project effectiveness, the booklet includes examples of working on the ground and issues faced by member organisations.

In an interview with M., I find out about the nature of association between Animus and the La Strada Programme. It is perceived as a philosophical framework, not only on paper, but also in the interviews, where I track the consistency in the language respondents choose to talk about it. In discussing the relationship between Animus and their network partners I hear a perspective on the uniqueness of identity despite the belonging to a larger community of experts.

**M.** “The unique thing about us is that we are psychologists that got together and have psychotherapy expertise. The programmes we've developed are different and perhaps unique compared to the other La Stradas. They are more social work-related. ...But the consulting and therapy work is something, I hope it doesn't sound too narcissistic, we are the people who have been recognised within the La Strada network in terms of our direct work with victims, as ... we are one step ahead of the others...”

According to the founding Director, there is a closer relationship with one particular organisation than the rest. This is La Strada Holland

**N.** “We have a good relationship with everyone, but there are moments when we have different tasks. We like each other the most and there is love with La Strada International in Holland. We are working on a project with the Dutch government on financing of the MATRA programme for developing a national referral mechanism for trafficking victims.”

<sup>6</sup> As the funding of the organisation is not a central theme in this study, details on financial information is not provided

The network develops internationally irrespectively of who is donating and which projects are active. In the beginning (1994) there was a Dutch and Polish organisation, four years later Animus joined as the Bulgarian member. In 2000 the older members chose a 'baby' to train (Animus chose a Macedonian organisation). Over a period of three years Animus consults them on all matters of activity and management, until they became a stable and equal organisation-member of La Strada.

This network development has an organic and replication element. La Strada Holland feature as the original "coach" organisation to Animus, though the term used to describe them is not consistent as in the case of the La Strada Programme. The Dutch helped in establishing the basic principles, organisational philosophy, and the three operation elements – policy, prevention and direct support. Animus still develops its practices in these three directions, though some other NGO network members of the have chosen their own course.

In M.'s view, "It is not so much training as it is coaching, a current consultation process for all sort of problems, training is not in terms of lecturing". This is true for both the relationship between Animus and the newer member in Macedonia as well as for the continuing relationship between Animus and the Dutch NGO. In the interview with the key moderator between the international network and Bulgaria's Animus, it becomes clear that the Bulgarian partner are no longer considered 'learners' as they were at the start. Today each organisation is on its own in developing in the way they decide according to their needs, but there is elements of 'experience exchange'.

In 2004 La Strada International is set up, which is a type of supporting function to the network . Until 2004 this was an informal activity after that it becomes more institutionalised. This international association participates actively in lobbying on a European and global level and represents the position of the nine organisations. It is structured with an assembly comprised of the national coordinators of all La Strada programmes which is the General Assembly. They make the decisions and the secretariat of La Strada International implements these decisions – they have to do with capacity-building, developing of a shared strategy from these independent organisations on the basis of their shared goals and objectives.

#### ***2.4. NGO Development Strategy - From Trafficking to Therapy***

In an attempt to understand how the organisation perceives its own role in terms of their practice and service-provision beyond the official statement on the website and profile brochures, I ask about what strategy lies behind the activities and services undertaken. These are impressively presented in the two Annual Reports for 2006 and 2007, but some do not seem to reflect the immediate trafficking priority to Animus. For example, family therapy, foster care support and working with the psychological need of children, seem to be a different course of action, perhaps more related to extending the reach of the psychology profession rather than to trafficking prevention. I ask whether it seems to lack a consistency

and may be overlapping with other organisations' work, which seems to be received as an accusation<sup>6</sup>. The response is adamant - the structure is comprised of a number of projects related to working with a specific client base, addressing different aspects of a *complex* type of problems, where different directions are engaged aiming for a holistic care for the victim. The projects are seen to complement each other "... like a puzzle making the whole picture".

The direction for strategic development in this organisation is convincing from another perspective as well, given their statistics on trafficked women who have been accepted in the Centre. In a publication under the La Strada Programme Bulgaria, presented at a second round table conference with key Bulgarian institutions working in the field, Animus states that 16% of the women were enticed into trafficking with the promise of a better life and work abroad and another 16% were sold by their relatives or partners. Clearly issues of empowerment, financial security and gender equality, and family stability are areas where prevention efforts must focus in addition to the direct work with clients in need of psychological support.

Networking with other NGOs can be seen as a well-supported goal as well in the statistics – 58% of the victims have reached Animus through referral by other NGOs, according to the same source. This ties in with an interview on a mapping project taking place at the time of my case work where a country-wide initiative for sizing the subsector of victim support is underway. In an interview with M2, I find out that this NGO has come a long way in developing their sector-wide role via the provision of training for other actors, and is more ambitious than ever.

### **2.5. Professional Identity – Experts-In-Training**

The notion of knowledge exchange appears without prompting in the interviews. One example is from an interview with the founder, who speaks about the approach of the international network as one integrating knowledge transfer in its philosophy.

"There is a great exchange of knowledge between nine countries, between the years 2001-2003 we helped to include the office in Macedonia. Everyone had the goal to find and support a close [geographically and culturally] organisation and to transfer their knowledge. Then we were working with Open Gate Macedonia, we still do... La Strada continues to be a European network carrier of this knowledge... and to provide information, development of this field, lobbying on a policy level, [and] safe return of victims..."

The interviews point to the fact that that the organisation views itself as hosting experts in the area of psychotherapy. Evidence of this is being invited to provide training for NGOs in the Ukraine, Moldova, and Belarus who are also working with trafficking victims. This approach is seen as different from providing

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<sup>6</sup> This leaves me feeling as though a cultural misunderstanding has taken place, quickly followed by a self-reprehension for transference of my lack of interviewing skills. After all, I am in a psychoanalyst's office.

direct support, where in the training process, Animus try to pass on their expertise to the receiving NGO in a way that it “supports the knowledge they have already”. In one particular interview, this is seen to be a more advanced approach to that developed by their Western partners:

“Animus adapts foreign knowledge to the needs of Bulgaria and the needs of the region (Eastern Europe). What we are doing is taking from the Western knowledge and learning from it. We are also learning from the organisations which we are training. It is a complex process. In our training for Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus we created a better system than [that of] our Western partners, by firstly developing a needs evaluation, we started from the recognition that they have a particular approach in their own context and that it would be difficult to develop a universal approach given contextual particularities”.

Throughout all interviews I ask about the individual learning of each practitioner. Having found this to be an entry to talking about their unique experience it is not surprising that learning is consistently cast as one “from experience” in all responses. It is also based on organisational rules and psychodynamic theory strictly applied when working with clients and flexibly employed when training organisations. On an organisational level it transpires that although working with psychological trauma is their main expertise, the NGO is developing capacity-building skills for the sector as a whole.

**M2** “There will be an article at the end of the programme reflecting on the *general principles and standards* (общи принципи и стандарти) extracted from the programme. As a whole... The training is a year and a half, 5 modules, once every 3-4 months . There is self-study as well, article reading, applying models in practice, consultancy opportunities. Our team is flexible depending on the participants and individual themes. The first one was on trauma. Then there was a need for training on working with clients with alcohol dependency and psychological disturbances. When we are not an expert we invite our colleagues who are to participate in the training.

There is a networking approach to providing training and services where professionals in the sector meet and collaborate on the same projects. A far cry from the competitive approach observed in BARDA.

Although the services provided take place within a larger NGO network, the expert identity is central. “*Professionally we belong to the psychodynamic school*” (History, Animus website: par. 3). All practitioners are fully committed to their career development, largely by engaging in individual and group supervision. The individual supervision takes place outside the NGO for each of the training practitioners (junior and senior), whereas the group supervision is a part of the work which on the cases Animus takes on.

D. I've been going [to supervision] for the last 2-3 years to see [a senior therapist] for the individual cases. It has been a ...period of creating a working relationship, which works overall. He can tell me some things which I haven't thought of myself or did see, or some questions I might have we think how to approach them, sometimes... I tip towards a relationship ...I become more negligent or disengagement... A person can sometimes miss it and another may see it. Especially the relationship between the team ... I say it's delicate, we are people...

The group supervision inside Animus is regular, the approach is interactive, and it is supplemented by lectures (theory-based reading material) tailored to the experience in the field (a live case is discussed between junior and more senior specialists within the organisation). The sense of tailored learning appears to be linked to the supervision learning activities.

Based on recurring responses on the supervision process I ask directly about the process of transferring knowledge, feeling reassured that the respondents would not feel pushed into giving the “right” answer.

**Researcher** *Is it possible to transfer this knowledge and expert position to the partners without the formal training you are doing, a course they can go to or something?*

M. It would be difficult because our modules have been developed related to the context in the region. Our colleagues have trained in Tavistock<sup>7</sup> (UK) on working with trauma for example, the Boston Clinic for trauma work. The psychodynamic approach also came from the US, from different experts linked to New Bulgarian University. When our NGO was created they trained us. But then this approach is adapted to our context and the concrete practice, our Eastern European context especially working with trafficking victims . There isn't another training programme which is specifically about this context.

**Researcher** *Is the Bulgarian context the same as the Eastern European context?*

M. The distance is less compared to UK-Ukraine. We understand the mentality. There are individual differences too which we are not aware of, hence we try to empower (овластяваме) them as much as we can so they become the experts in that context. As others have empowered us in the past. Empowerment has to do with all of our practices not only the projects to do with trafficking victims and women's rights. To be a subject you need to be and to act has to be empowered – to develop internal and external resources to act.

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<sup>7</sup> Referring to the Tavistock Clinic and Tavistock Institute, the former being a prominent psychiatric clinic in London founded in 1920 and the latter a charity focusing on group relations

## **2.6. Documented Existence and Artefacts of Expertise - Ownership of Discourse, 'Borrowed' Texts**

The document-based data used in the case is crucial in constructing an understanding of the NGO's practices, their underlying philosophy and approaches, core activities and reflection on these. The texts are held in the Animus office where I often have the time to wander and read. I am provided with main texts as supplementary clarification around what we had discussed in the interview. Also I am invited by a senior therapist to look into the training manuals cupboard where I scroll the eleven core training manuals and practice guides used in the services planning the training for various client groups.

That is, there is a rich and growing learning archive based on developed materials over the years from both experience and external engagement with international partners under the La Strada Network. It is used for developing new materials for training other NGO, including training services provided for institutions in the public sector. The important element is the level of adapting which takes place in altering these artefacts, where the specialist language of psychodynamic theory, women empowerment, and victim survival is present in the Bulgarian texts, but does not sound imposed.

For example, the statistics used in the materials are relevant to the Balkans and Bulgaria, rather than using generic world figures. The discussion on ideological basis for viewing trafficking and prostitution as economic issues is justified within a context relevant to a Bulgarian reader and this text is seen again and again as the "introduction" to papers which have been given at conferences in Bulgaria and used in training manuals. This is found elsewhere too, in the La Strada Facts and Figures publication, written in English, under Chapter Four: *"...over recent years new approaches have been developed, broadening the definition of trafficking and beginning from the point of view of the women concerned, thus moving the focus from moral positions to working condition and workers' rights"* (ibid.:49).

## **2.7. Emerging Themes**

In terms of organisational identity, Animus presents itself to me as being a harmonious, healing, crafted environment– an authentic space. The nature of the work is reflected in the organisation as a metaphoric space; everything I see and hear takes on this created meaning, which reflects an aspired reality, how things can be (in the Animus universe) as opposed to how they are (in a Bulgarian setting). This seems both a deliberate and organic process of creating an organisational identity. There is an emergence of the concept of organisational artefacts and their part in creating the identity of the NGO and the sector.

Turning to the documents, there is a difference in the texts to those encountered in Barda. These contain deeper messages and meaning, a manifesto-type discourse of organisational purpose and organisational beliefs, rather than only being proof that they run projects. Some are academic-type texts with evidence of higher level information handling e.g. conducting original research, data collection and analysis and



implications for professional practice in working with the specific beneficiary groups and implications for policy. Conference materials evidence an international experience exchange between organisations and experts from the east and west, beyond a one-off partnerships, implying a networking approach to looking at collaboration.

The international framework of La Strada is an established vital structure of support and identity, perhaps constituting roots for organisational mentoring (without imposing the term onto respondents). Particularly the group supervision model together with the individual supervision practice are both examples of structured training practices, demonstrating a coherent individual and organisational element to NGO learning and expertise development.

Research and analysis are part of Animus strategy and organisational development appearing in a number of the NGO's activities. It may be a basis for service provision to institutions, securing funding, or evidence of it being a 'learning organisation'. With regards to the mentoring framework, this type of interaction with partners is what they may be moving to at the moment (as mentors of Moldova and Ukraine). There seems to be an underlying structure in the La Strada philosophy which this type of independent but deep type of engagement with sharing of experience and learning at the core, with an element of competence development on how to provide services for beneficiary groups as an NGO. This would have evolved organically over time as organisational competence and confidence set in, but perhaps it would not have been possible without their international partners in La Strada in Holland who gave them a foundation for work in the field.

...

This case is very different from the first. Regarding the NGO's partnerships with the West, I reconstruct the organisation from stories and materials found in the office as I am not able to observe their interaction directly. The NGO's roots, development strategy, and the learning processes involved are retrospective and based on documented data and recounted instances in the interviews. This makes the case organisation-centred rather than partnership-centred, shifting the research questions away from the partnership and towards the interpretations of learning and knowledge as practiced by the organisation.

### **3. Case Study 3 - SOS Children's Villages**

#### **3.1 Profile**

The Children's Village model is the brainchild of Hermann Gmeiner, founding the first village in Imst, Austria, as a response to the needs of children who lost their families in WWII. Every child has a 'mother' (employed and trained as a member of the organisation), brothers and sisters (a limited number of assigned children to a mother), who live in a house where all houses form a community (the village with supportive elements such as education and healthcare). This provides a supporting, loving environment catering to the

needs of children so that they can enjoy a happy childhood and learn to participate in society. The organisation claims its mission and goals observe the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and its mission states: “we build families for children in need, we help them shape their own futures and we share in the development of their communities”.

Registered in 1991, SOS Children's Villages Bulgaria is a member of the SOS International, an umbrella organisation with 133 affiliated national member associations worldwide. The umbrella has the tasks to ensure that the basic principles of the organisation are observed by its members, to provide educational and administrative guidelines to its members, and support them in their work. General Secretariat is its executive head and the International Senate is its board (20 members). The General Assembly convenes every four years with 115 members attending and taking part in the decision-making process.

In addition to the villages set up in the country, SOS Bulgaria launched a family strengthening programme in 2007 offering support to families who are at risk of abandoning their children and enables children to grow within a caring family environment. Together with local authorities and other social service providers they operate as social workers using a growing diversity of foster care models beyond the founding SOS village –e.g. youth homes for older children and temporary family-type homes which are integrated in the community rather than located within a village. Model changes signal a global shift in strategy based on a child-centred approach encompassing a wider range of social care arrangements, as well as a local shift in strategy towards a more locally-embedded funding model. Thus, organisational change is a key focus in this case with an interview about a pilot project, its development history, and observation of its presentation to other sector actors form a case layered story.

The case marks a move in the research strategy towards examining an NGO functioning under an established formal partnership, as an alternative collaboration type to the independent partnership in the first two cases. The data collection process includes five interviews with members of the HQ from different departments including senior positions, except with the NGO's Director. Additionally some informal discussion took place with key respondents, including a conversation with a colleague working in another NGO in the same field who participated in the conference. Observation “from a distance” together with “insider information” has allowed for different perspectives to come together in this case, a less homogenous organisational voice than in the first two cases. Two main observations were also part of the data - knowledge transfer instance with an SOS partner visiting from Poland looking for advice on setting up a project and attending a practitioner-based cross-sector conference where SOS presents a pilot project for a small family home, a new service they were developing at the time.

### ***Case themes***

- An established international model in flux: expert knowledge developing over time
- International network and a cross-sector network of experts united by a common cause and approach, defining practice

- Talking to the organisational actors responsible for direct work and policy
- Organisational space: symbols of organisational identity and self-reinvention

***Key concepts***

- Artefacts: documented 'good practice', accounting for services provided
- Redeveloping a model for care provision: towards a change in existing practices
- Ownership of discourse on the organisation's purpose and practice – defined strategy, co-defined practice



**Note:** The photo-collage contains data and visual memos the fieldwork captured as a documentation of experience and reference to individuals, artefacts, contexts and conceptual reflections. These are referenced as case themes, developed in the case findings below, and key concepts, developed further in the case analysis. The discussion presents the two in a shared case context, reflecting the nature of qualitative research experience in the field.

### 3.2 First Impressions

This case entry is a formal process. My contact asks me to sign an agreement that I will not write anything which could damage the organisation, which is followed by a general introduction to the work of the organisation, the official story of who they are and what they do in Bulgaria. With respect to understanding who the organisational actor is, I have a sense of blurred boundaries between the SOS villages model and the general social care provision in the country. The latter is the area of expertise my contact comes from (she has recently joined SOS). As expected, the interview presents the international partners favourably, which I note in the research diary with phrases such as “mutually enriching” referring to the exchange of experience between the structures of the international network. With respect to knowledge transfer, there have not yet been any cross-border projects initiated by SOS Bulgaria, though they have participated as partners on an international level.

SOS interviewees have the tendency to delegate which question should be answered by whom (e.g. stating “it’s better that I ask x for this”). This possibly reflects a perception that they are not best qualified for answering particular questions, or do not want the responsibility for sharing information on the issue. At the

time, I interpreted this as being in a highly structured organisation with clear lines of responsibility and task allocation with a formal culture. This influenced my subsequent approach to the interviews and observations. But is it a reflection of the international factors involved in being a partner in a global network or does it reflect local factors, like the approach of the Director or the heritage of social work in Bulgaria?

I am taken to the ground floor meeting room and handed the brochures, the standard form of formal entry into the organisation as in the first two cases a year earlier. N. tells me “this is just an office – you should see our real work” referring to the youth home which is also situated in Sofia. It is a relatively recent development as a place where grown children from the villages end up, allowing them to be more independent and better integrated into city life. I am somewhat surprised that she does not offer a visit to the villages instead, since they are the pride of the organisation as well as its founding model of work and trademark.

The second interview takes place with the presence of the contact person who oversees the process, making the experience uncomfortable for both the respondent and me. Though there is little interference from the overseer, who jumps in to show me photographs of the first village couple and their children which is an innovation and move away from the village model towards a more family-type support, I expect the official line of SOS development to be restrained in terms of content. The notes in the diary here refer to the mention of working guidelines, principles and standards, the criteria used in giving feedback from the central office in Vienna, and knowledge creation being interpreted as feedback criteria jointly drafted by the Bulgarians and their Austrian colleagues. Despite my attempts to open up the conversation beyond the formal reporting style, the respondent wants to “finish saying her bit”. Nevertheless, there is a strong message that things are changing for both SOS Bulgaria and SOS International in terms of the model of service provision, which emerges later in another conversation and observations at a cross-sector conference where a new SOS approach is presented to practitioners in the field.

Later on the balcony I have a cigarette with the newly hired corporate funding employee who has recently returned from the US after eight years. He is currently working on finding which US and UK models can be applied in the Bulgarian context for funding. I note that the language he uses to describe the main activities of the organisation is the same as that of the information I find in a printed article in one of the brochures, implying the highly formal style and/or shared sense of identity in SOS. We discussed the limited structured support for fundraising for the sector in the country. In terms of funding I hear the usual story for the sector

**A1** “Businesses mostly want to fund projects or to support us in finding out own resources. Not many are interested in funding core activities. Support comes from Kinderdorf (Austria HQ) for the villages; this is a per cent of our activities. And sponsors what to see who they are sponsoring and fund children on an individual basis”

Lines of authority creep into the conversation when I ask to see some papers which would back up the difficulties in funding. A1 does not feel authorised to provide me with these and his supervisor needs to be consulted (on annual leave at the time).

### **3.3 Established Identity – The Village Model**

Complexity in the structure inevitably reflects the learning and development taking place in the NGO with dual allegiances - as part of the international SOS network and as part of the global-local professional network linked with various other child care structures. In the last interview with an advocacy representative in the SOS team I learn about the matrix structure operating in the organisation, which accommodates the space for the NGO's relative 'independence' from Austria due to the need to comply with national standards.

When I ask whether there is any difference between the Bulgarian village mode and the International one, the response makes me wonder about a possibly convoluted NGO identity. One respondent confirms there is a difference, stating there is now a couple (rather than a mother) as a unit of care provided to children in care. Also there is talk of villages "without fences" integrated in the city rather than a separate village. This approaches a family-type care model, something distinct from the village model developed by Gmeiner after WWII. Another service developed is a centre where mothers can receive support.

"In Vienna there is such a village for two years now, with a service centre and provides child-centred care services to the whole community – psychological support, consultations, social care, etc. At some point this will happen in BG as well."

From this discussion, I am left wondering how this kind of rather generic social care service provision will continue to be branded as SOS. It seems this is more fitting for a statutory sector (social care) not to mention all child support and family support NGOs (Save the Children, Every Child, UNICEF operate in Bulgaria as well).

**Res.** *Maybe some of your partners are working on similar activities... but don't have an SOS-like strong organisation behind them with a global outreach. What, if anything, does membership to the international network bring you which differentiates you from your colleagues (other NGOs)?*

**A.** First of all, the know-how which we have taken from them. When we started there was no social system here, the first years were very difficult to... introduce this activity and for us to establish ourselves as an organisation, and if we didn't have the "know-how" and confidence that this has worked in other countries it would be very hard to win the trust, which was hard as it is, having the support and confidence..."

The other element besides the "know-how" is the financial support which SOS Bulgaria had in the

beginning of its existence. The perceived goal of the international organisation at the time by my respondent was evident in the initial contract the organisation signed with the (then) Ministry of Health and Social Policy. With a written agreement, SOS International guaranteed the building of the village as a demonstration of this type of care; from that point onwards the country host would take over and run this model, replicating it if it corresponds to the local needs.

“Currently we are probably in this transition phase, in which ...we want to become more independent in terms of the know-how and the funding”.

### **3.4 Information and Knowledge Artefacts**

As expected in the context of a formal partnership there are work guidebooks with rules and standards which dictate the way the NGO operates. Each department in SOS is structured by the guidebook which includes the principles and standards and every employee's work rests on these and is evaluated on their bases.

**A.** “There are criteria, it's not about some subjective interpretation by somebody.”

The formal relationship within the global structure translates into formalised processes of handling information, materials for training, monitoring and evaluation, drafting of proposals for new project development, even for engagement in the process of strategy development (see Appendix for documents reviewed). M.'s account on the differences between Bulgarian and non-Bulgarian approach to the process of arriving at an agreement within the network, which becomes a document and a standards for compliance, is insightful to differentiating between information and knowledge. There seems to be a clear differentiation between the related process of knowledge creation and information artefacts, which circulate in the relationship and are most significant a point of NGO practice.

**M.** “Once something becomes a document/policy, you have to comply, there is no way around it [zaduljitelno], whether you like it or not there is no choice about it, whatever you thought. From now on, sorry mate, you have to comply. No one stopped you to say something earlier [referring to the process of drafting a procedure for reporting activities under a project as a two-way process between organisations within the network]... Instead it's 'I wonder when they'll come to check', 'Let's do it like we know and the worst that could happen is they'll tell us off when they come' [about Bulgarians reflecting about a Vienna HQ visit]... 'Let's take the money and when they come we'll explain'. No one wants you to explain! They [Vienna] say send me document A, B, and C. If you don't – no money! Very simple... and painful”.

### **3.5 Knowledge Transfer Instances**

On May 21<sup>st</sup> I am invited to travel with a member of SOS Sofia to visit a local office (branch) with another visitor – representative from SOS Poland who will be implementing a similar project in her country. The visitor is interested how the local branch carries out their work in working with families in need of support, one of the activities the SOS offers outside the village model they are mostly known for. This is the third international visitor to the Centre in Radomir.

Waiting for the bus, I learn from M. about how family strengthening work is carried out. 70% of this (essentially) social work involved here is documenting what is said and done for the beneficiary as a matter of accountability to observe national legislation under the Inspectorate for Social Work and the Child Protection legislation in the country. SOS International procedures for reporting seem to be not as demanding in terms of time and specificity as the national legislation is for the Bulgarian NGO. Compliance with indicators set in legislation at home creates more work than evaluation for international funders by their criteria. A difficult balancing act according to M. is the matching between the two, which seems to be more like doing things twice in terms of everyday practice, rather than a policy-level integration between the two. Nevertheless SOS BG is also working on that policy separately, informing government on international standards as part of an alliance with other NGOs in the area, which will have an alleviating effect on their work in the future, it is hoped.

As we arrive at the branch in a small provincial town not too far from Sofia we are greeted warmly in a small office. Three women inhabit a cosy room decorated with photos, cards, brochures, stuffed animals and children's drawings. WE proceed to drink coffee as a discussion develops between the local hosts who talk about their daily operations and processes involved in providing the services to families, while the Sofia SOS intermediary translates to the Polish visitor in English. I note a central role of documents in dealing with social services and government institutions. A part of this has to do with security – all children's profiles are kept in a cupboard in paper form instead of in digital form (I see three computers are available) due to security concerns. There is a SOS International database which was being created for collecting report on this work from all members, but it has been "dragging for two years and then stopped" due to administrative and technical difficulties and now Bulgaria has created its own formats for recording client details, all on paper.

The visitor is most interested in how to work with institutions, how to organise the documents outside those required within the SOS International processes which are already familiar. She receives a step-by-step best practice outline with examples of documents related to each process, from the host. The Sofia intermediary uses the visit to ask about internal compliance issues, where I sense there is a clear line of authority between the HQ and these SOS affiliated former social workers, which it transpires, have been drafted into the structure given the better payment and conditions of work.



Following this trip I am given an opportunity to attend a conference organised to present the organisation's new strategic direction of development and their new project development at pilot stage. M. is my key respondent again and we drive out across the country with a member of UNCEF Bulgaria, a partner organisation in groundwork and policy development in the field of social support for children. In the car the two women engage in work-related gossip, another term for networking, during the two hour trip. I later have the opportunity to speak to the very experienced UNCEF rep about my work:

N. "There are very few real NGOs in the field. Most are counselling specialists who have an interest in keeping the clients in need of services rather than closing a case of family support. Not only in the field but in the voluntary sector as a whole..."

SOS Bulgaria starts the presentation with an overview of their 60 years of experience. The conference is successful with over 30 people representing various cross-sector interested parties in the new project for providing family-type care, a step beyond the village model and outside its fence, where the families and child support are integrated into the community. This kind of work is the future in terms of funding from local government bodies who are looking to address social issues in their district. The pilot has been a success so far and in the process of handing over operations to the statutory sector, a move which is received sceptically by M. with respect to longevity. UNCEF has the microphone next and talks about their methodology for working with biological parents. The conference is an open forum for discussing change and good practice, sharing methods, and aligning indicators for measuring success. There is one foreign guest in the audience who has been working in Bulgaria in this field for nine years. Later in the coffee break I hear her say to a group of sharing practitioners "It is the government attitude and practices that is making your work pointless".

### ***3.6 New Identity – Independence and Co-Defining Practice***

One question in particular broke the conversation path away from the formal reporting style of what the NGO does – the question of what is left up to the organisation in terms of deciding and planning operations, its independence from the Western HQ. This revealed as a changing and complex process. One respondent in particular was key to unravelling what seems to be a large scale organisational change process in great detail later on in the fieldwork. As a whole however and somewhat surprisingly, in contrast to the 'official SOS story' approach I experience early on in this organisation, there are different voices coming from the respondents in terms of how they experience working in the organisation. Crucially, respondents' views differ on the power relations with the International HQ in Vienna in terms of structure and governance.

It seems that despite the clear lines of authority, complex reporting and training structures, and financial dependence, there is confidence for going solo in terms of knowledge and experience. This comes across

in one of the more 'balanced' interviews where the respondent has seen the development of the relationship over the years but is neither too quick to dismiss the traditional village model nor too complacent in her responses:

*Res. Can you function without the support of SOS International, when we exclude the financial support for the sake of argument...as a competent organisation in the area of social care services, regardless of whether you are under the SOS name, again I come back to this... in terms of experience and competence... Do you think you can exist independently?*

S. If we didn't have financial problems... At this stage, yes. We have enough experience gathered, and know-how...

*Res: Level of independence of SOS BG in comparison with some other members of the SOS International network?*

A2 "[...] we have the option to develop, in compliance with national characteristics, to provide a number of different services/activities. You have seen what we do... In some countries, for example, the accent is on supporting the family, in others it is not needed to that extent. In Poland for example until recently there was no programmes in support of family, because their social care structures have decided that family orientation services would be more effective."

This interweaves with how information flows between the various network structures with regards to organisational activities and professional practice. This raises the organisational identity question, where SOS is both an actor in the sector locally and a member of the international SOS network, with parallel but not necessarily coordinated development of professionalism in the field of supporting vulnerable children. With regards to recurring themes, a layered story emerges from diverse responses and is accompanied by convergence between responses on particular issues. For example, there is a case of "unrealistic expectations" held at the office in Vienna in terms of setting the overall strategy for the network of partners currently. The collective mission for the whole SOS network does not seem to reflect the local difference in capacity, but is interpreted locally by SOS experts working in Bulgaria. Respondents noted that things will not change on an international strategy level to reflect this local difference, implying that it is up to local actors to adapt this strategy to fit local context.

The density of the issues within and across interviews makes this a difficult case study. Learning, identity and structure are 'told' as versions of each other by respondents, signalling a highly developed organisation experiencing the complexity of change at the stage of organisational development I walked into.

### **3.7 Emerging Themes**

Talking to the organisational actors responsible for direct work and policy, there are multiple voices of organisational identity, relationship with partners, and knowledge/learning issues in contrast to the largely homogenous voice of Animus. In addition, organisational space has taken on a diversity of meanings in this case. The documents are again seen as symbols of established and guarded organisational identity, such as the old brochures and the Gmeiner books. Other spaces relate to my interpretation of NGO identity, learning, and partnerships - the closed plan office space and the gatekeeper N. who is also present at my first interview; self-reinvention metaphor (watching the SOS Village and SOS Nadia Centre pilot in the film at the conference); the metaphor of organisational change (driving to Veliko Tarnovo); metaphor of knowledge transfer (Radomir visit with the Polish visitor).

The NGO seems to have a stable and clearly defined relationship within the SOS International umbrella structure, with formal reporting to Austria and designated roles within the complex departmental structure of accountability. The structure goes beyond the implied west-east subordination divide – it redefines geography with its own logic of international department operations, with the respective levels of autonomy, procedure and interpretation of how to apply methods in local contexts. As in the case with Animus, the partnership is not accessed directly so describing it in detail is limited, having only a one-sided observation.

In terms of knowledge base and learning approach in SOS, the existence of the Gmeiner Academy as a research institution signals an availability of a rigorous knowledge base for training and development of NGOs. Nevertheless, the Bulgarian organisation maintains an information and experience sharing relations with their colleagues in terms of expertise, who in terms of funding dependence are also potential competitors. UNICEF and Save the Children (amongst others) are a source of learning and calibrating practices, but also, a source of research (e.g. the publication materials found on top of the pile being used in the office by the key project manager, with the unfinished SOS manual in translation at the bottom). These are their partners on the ground who know the field and also deal with the Bulgarian legislation, the first point of accountability when carrying out activities, especially those related to new strategic developments. In terms of contextualised, embedded learning to the local context, perhaps they are more key partners than SOS International.

The NGO has seen a recent change in strategy which both reflects that of the International model but local factors as well. The organisation is moving on, away from the Gmeiner village model to an 'embedded' service provision approach and a less international funding strategy. SOS Bulgaria is creating and applying for projects where working with local authorities is a strategy allowing integration of SOS children into local communities, hence integrating SOS service provision into the national budget. This is both a consequence of, and factor for, sustainable funding strategy with less dependence on international funds.

An embedded approach is critical as funding from the SOS International is said to be diminishing over time. This further perhaps explains a shift to “networked partnerships” away from the founding bilateral partnership. International network and a cross-sector network of experts united by a common cause and approach, defining national practice and a professional group of experts, who may be less loyal to their own organisational strategies than to the whole professional development agenda. If one Western partner organisation decides to close down operation in the country, the opportunity to move into or set up another one on the basis of professional standing and network membership, is available.

It is almost too neat a dynamic given the research questions: the established international model is in flux, with local expert knowledge developing over time and within wider professional networks beyond the partnership. Albeit having international origins, these expert networks are embedded locally and nationally advising and procuring government social services. The professionals themselves have acquired the knowledge over the years throughout the transition changes (UNICEF being one of the most senior and enduring and Ark one of the newer less resilient models). With regards to the relevance of findings to a mentoring model, there is a new directions seen in terms of research focus – distancing from ‘learning from partner’ towards “learning from networks of experts” and “learning from experience” could lend itself to a networked mentoring approach. Potentially this type of interaction may be related to a concept like *community of practice* rather than to organisational mentoring?

## 4. Case Study 4 - United Nations Association Youth (UNAY)

### 4.1. Profile

The UNA defines itself as an NGO conducting non-profit, public benefit activities. It is a member of the World Federation for UNAs and has over 120 members, including diplomats, experts in international relations, teachers and lecturers as well as representatives of NGOs ([www.una-bg.org](http://www.una-bg.org)). The mission is to unite the Bulgarian community in support of the UN, “supporting the UN goals and principles towards securing international peace and security, understanding and development as part of international cooperation between nations, upholding human rights and freedoms” (UNHCR publication). UNA is an active participant in the implementation of “alternative methods of civic education in the spirit of the UN” mostly carried out via the network of school and university clubs. The clubs have the status of associated member groups and work on one or more of the key areas of the international structure – human rights, environmental protection, public health campaigns, and those promoting regional and world peace.

A list of around 100 projects and participations are presented in on their website as an archive of activity over the last eleven years since its establishment in 1999. Amongst the projects presented on the NGO Activities page [UNA website] are the first “Model UN- the case of Kosovo” simulation game carried out in Bulgaria (1999) and the educational project for school clubs set up by the UNA - “Civic Education in the Spirit of the UN” (1999). Some projects aim to popularise the UN decisions and conventions on their goals and priority issues (human rights, refugees), others focus on development and implementation of the respective teaching tools on these priority areas. In 2002 the first youth volunteer projects appear as part of the school clubs network developing across the country. Funding for these projects has also been cited, mostly associated with the UN family structures like the UNDP, UNHCR, UNESCO as well as MATRA and US development programmes, later joined by the Bulgarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The Youth section of the UNA was established in 2003 within the UNA framework of activities, sharing the Association’s mission and values for “nurturing civicness in young people in Bulgaria”. The clubs conduct activities related to popularising the ideals and principles of the UN amongst young people, spreading the word in an “interesting, interactive, and attractive way”. The target group for the youth section are graduate level students, 18-30 years old, who are recruited as volunteers and eventually run the UNAY projects for new youth members. The main structure for the youth activities is the Student UN Clubs which are integrated in Bulgarian universities across the country. The youth section is presented as “one of the most active units in the Association, providing young people with the opportunity to participate in international projects, conferences and seminars, to be part of Model UN simulations on a national and international level, to participate in campaigns such as the Bulgarian young delegate UN and a number of other social events and campaigns addressing regional and national problems” (UNA website). On an international level, the section is a part of the World Federation (WFUNA-Youth).

Over the two-week period available for fieldwork, I conduct three interviews with volunteers running the youth section and two conversations with the UNA Secretary General and the office coordinator. No observations of direct work were possible, partly due to the simultaneous data collection in SOS and UNAY which made scheduling difficult, and partly due to the sporadic activity of the UNAY itself. Documentary data was collected and analysed as in the other case studies while spending time in the NGO office, mostly alone. There was a unique opportunity to take on the role of a volunteer and be a part of the UNAY (participant observation), an experience which helped me arrive at some of the insights to their fluid, even virtual presence.

### ***Case themes***

- An established international model: future experts in training, platform for development
- Member of international networks united by a common cause and approach (UN family, youth NGOs)

Talking to the volunteers responsible for running of the operation

- Organisational space: signs of identity, fluid sporadic existence

### ***Key concepts***

- Artefacts: documented archive of training and networking
- Evidence of training – sporadic learning networks for implementation in local projects
- Ownership of discourse on the organisation's purpose and practice – creative individual interpretation of a supranational discourse



**Note:** The photo-collage contains data and visual memos the fieldwork captured as a documentation of experience and reference to individuals, artefacts, contexts and conceptual reflections. These are referenced as case themes, developed in the case findings below, and key concepts, developed further in the case analysis. The discussion presents the two in a shared case context, reflecting the nature of qualitative research experience in the field.

#### **4.2. First Impressions**

The entry to UNA is literally through the Journalism and Media Department of the Sofia University where I find professor Fileva, the Secretary-General of the NGO. I have been directed to her for access to the organisation's activities by my initial contact, a volunteer and founder of the youth section. Although he is the initial contact for the case and one of the key respondents in the interviews, entry via a senior colleague is the appropriate entrance. Professor Fileva is also his dissertation supervisor for his Masters. I wait outside the office as a student would, and feel like it's

1998 again waiting to find out my exam results, before I left my home country.

I take notes for this meeting which I had not planned as an interview, concentrating more on following the project names and the appearing storyline rather than in any of my questions from the tentative plan. The professor tells me that “it’s all in the brochures which we will see later in the office” which I note as I remember how similarly we started out with Barda a year ago (diary notes 25.05.2009). In the research notes I later find the name Making Commitments Matter, a German initiative and current project later to reappear in three interviews with the volunteers for UNAY. Another one is the new European Parliament youth delegates who are being selected after a successful run by the current delegates, including my initial contact. Model UN and education initiatives are also there – the diary reads “peer-to-peer education in schools” and “human rights” as “focus of NGO work”. This initial meeting promises a project approach to the case as a natural format, similar to Barda.

We discuss the UN family organisations, the role of the UNDP, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the existence of UNA. The Ministry provides minimal funding for office expenses and salary for one employee, keeping the place running. Some support comes from the UNDP as well, which I later have the privilege to learn about from up close. As with many of the organisations in the sector in Bulgaria, the Phare funding programmes are cited as the roots of UNAY’s activity, under a network-type of engagement for youth clubs promoted by the EU in the region. In that context, Bulgaria was seen to belong to the Balkans region, and given the Balkan turmoil of the 1990s with Yugoslavia’s war, “the need for youth participation in making a difference was timely” (interview notes). The UNA exists on a project-basis as other NGOs and the Ministry is a shoulder to lean on when project flow dries up.

Before the meeting with the professor, my key contact has informed me that the UNA would be celebrating ten years in September 2009, though later on in another interview, I find out that the idea for having an association promoting the ideals and objectives of the UN has officially been around in Bulgaria since the 1940s. The NGO certainly seems to have a more complex history and status than that of other NGOs - their independence as an association, created under an intergovernmental body rather than a grass-roots movement, and funded by the national government in Bulgaria. A later interview with a key UNAY actor (transcript section) illustrates the curious independence of the NGO from their ideology head-quarters:

A. “And since we don’t receive any money from the UN... we are an NGO which is not related in any way to the UN as an international organisation. I mean it is established with goals and ideals to support the principles of the UN. [The UNA] was established exactly with the idea of promoting the country’s accession.”

*R. It’s strange that it is not financed by the UN in some stable way...because you are working for them in a way.. I mean for their cause.*

A. “ I am also surprised...”



It is difficult to distinguish between the work of the Association and its youth section UNAY. Talking to the professor I have a strong feeling that the youth section is a source of pride for the UNA as its more active version. The Secretary-General of the UNA herself hasn't had the time to work on organisation -related issues lately, being Head of faculty at the University since 1999.

“UNA has been my work since 1994. There has to be someone to take on the work, to develop the strategy, run projects, which take time and dedication... There are three generations and the youngest ones are students who want to get paid work [UNAY members are all unpaid volunteers]... The older ones are lecturers like me, working in four or five universities across the country and have no time”

The UNAY volunteers I interview in the following weeks elaborate on the involvement issue. One of them tells me that “the youth section has an hour of presentation time at our general meetings whereas the UNA has fifteen minutes...we're very active”. I also ask about the funding strategy and weight of the association and its youth section:

“Being an NGO helps a lot, we can apply for funding in many places. At the same time we are partner to many institutions in Bulgaria and we can rely on their support. With part of people in ministries and other institutions we are one phone call away from making things happen... [...]We have weight...but not in term of a heavy institution backing us up, but in terms of trust...We're not just some branch of the organisation [the UN family structure]”

The office administrator, who also teaches on projects with the school clubs, adds an important element to this perspective:

“Project development is the way forward from now on, especially now that the UNDP Commissary is leaving this year”.

There is a sense of uncertainty about the future of the organisation and according to the professor; it is based on contextual factors beyond the UNDP:

“[We] used to be active when there was money, but then people had arguments and when there is no motivation, it all dies out. There were Hungarian and Polish partners... Austria was active, seeing itself as the West-East link since they entered in the EU later... Now Bulgaria has set its goals, national structures are expected to coordinate this work with developing its sector... but they have not realised this. There are priority countries with Diaspora like Armenia, Macedonia, Moldova, where partnerships are yet to be fostered to take this work forward...”

The professor decides to take me to the office which is walking distance to the University. On the way I hear about some of the difficulties in the UNA (or what I managed to hear while crossing a busy boulevard in the centre of town and continuing town some streets, trying to remember how to get there again for further visits). Apparently one of the key activities of the youth section, Model UN, has been “taken over” by

others, who had an argument with UNA volunteer(s) and now are running their own simulation game from a separate site as a competitor. The rivals have apparently appropriated a key know-how due to their “different culture [being] more aggressive in getting funding than us”. I don’t sense a grudge in her voice, the rivals’ attitude is attributed to being “interested in getting a job [rather than] in international affairs”, seen as understandable behaviour. She doesn’t believe they will manage to sustain this in the long run due to their unprofessional attitude and aggressive manner, exemplified in their reluctance to give feedback on their outputs to the UNA, even though they’ve used UNA’s name to get funding for their work.

This is an interesting point and I make a mental note about the understanding of organisational culture and professionalism code in the sector. I hesitate to ask any more questions about this despite some important questions emerging here about securing the organisation’s work, replication of activities it offers as a service to its stakeholders, the importance of key individuals involved in this conflict and their role in context of learning and collaboration, etc.

### ***4.3. Locally Embedded International Cause***

As with all other cases, the brochures of current and older work are the business card presenting the organisation. Some of the printed material I am handed is from the International Labour Organisation, a project publication for working in the school clubs. ‘Educo’ is mentioned as a model for developing materials for working with children in schools, Compass is another prominent source which appears used in developing human rights materials. It seems information from other organisations is central and the professor decides what seems relevant and useful to my case. Discrimination, non-violence, migration issues are projects the NGO has worked on, and the school clubs involvement is cited as the most active element. Human rights ideology is at the core of the clubs.

F. “The project for that was written by the director then, who didn’t have experience but put on the tie and did it”

I ask whether I can have a look at the original project but it turns out the computer was stolen and there are no traces of it.

Anti-discrimination and human rights are the most popular themes for UNAY’s work which later is recounted in interviews with two key volunteers, citing the two along with green projects as the future direction for the NGO’s development. The activities take place in schools all over the country, and the clubs appear as pinned badges on a map behind the administrator’s desk in the office. I learn that the NGO runs a mentoring programme as part of their education activities where university students and older kids pair up with children of ten and eleven. Fileva mentions that there is an element of integration of minority groups in running these education programmes, emphasising that there is engagement with schools for Roma children. “These activities are more important for

educators than the kids” the professor says.

At the office, which is a studio flat in the old centre of town, Fileva and I look at the screen of the administrator's computer, through the files for projects and various communication documents. UNA is a member of a Platform for sector development, a forum of active voluntary sector organisations in Bulgaria. The professor scrawls through emails of people in the Platform mailing list talking about which NGOs they represent are still active, which ones “were good but died”. SOS is mentioned here as part of ODA, and “one of the good ones”. There are over a thousand unopened messages since May 2008 in the Inbox and low activity in the last two weeks. Clearly capacity is an issue. An entry in the research diary reads ‘I feel like I'm about to start working there rather than being an external observer. She gives me access to the PC and all info, even offers to give me the keys to the office! (25.05.2009)’

As I think about the platform for developing the sector being another case I wish I had time for, the professor reflects on the fate of the UNA in the context of financing from the West:

F. “We should be one of the most active now in the new projects, we've have been around from the time of the Western money... Now that the Western money has gone and the EU projects are here, other smaller organisations are in the game, some regional and local ones, not the ones that were already established...”

With its multiple-project education activities, the organisation works towards its main goal - increasing the public's knowledge about UN as an organisation and more specifically the focus on human rights, equality, and discrimination-related themes. The UN is not a partner, therefore, and it is not a network. Rather, it is an ideology from which principles of civic education stem around recognisable themes. Project multiplication through loose rather than stable partners is a prominent organisational trend – last year's project with a Palestinian youth organisation is this year's application for a project with the youth people in Hungary. The active individuals in the youth section are the project initiators and leaders. If the theme is of interest to an active volunteer in the NGO, if they can get supporters from within the other members, and if it fits with at least one of the wide-ranging UN goals, it is a potential direction of development, project work, and learning.

With my stay at the UNAY, an interesting theme in the case emerges, that of measuring the achievement of the organisational goals. This is set against the members' participation in international projects, where there isn't a single organisation named as strategic partner or source of learning and support for continuing development.

A. “What we achieve is hard to measure... the people who are our target group, that is the university students, to motivate them to learn more about the UN and its topics....[for example] we celebrate some international day and we go around explaining to people what it's about and what we are fighting for, we give out some brochures and hope that something will stick, will stay with them...”

There is a distinction between evaluation of activity which would be carried out for a donor from the way the activities are evaluated here. Here participants' views on whether a particular training has had an effect or not is the measurement. A campaign activity has had an effect if it brings more followers to the youth section, people who want to find out more and get involved. Another goal achievement measure is the extent to which contacts are kept with the individuals met at international seminars and whether this contact leads to collective project work.

#### **4.4 Translatability of Texts and Practice**

Amongst the materials I am given are a pack containing the eight UN Millennium Goals and a pack of on “*Children at Risk and their Right to Education: Notes for the trainer*” both in Bulgarian and on glossy A4 printed pages. These are described as “great materials” which are used widely in UNAY’s work. Some of the materials the professor looks through she describes as “propaganda materials”. A book titled “*Star of Concord, A Permanent World Council*” by a Bulgarian author printed in English, of which I see a few hundred stacked at the bottom of the bookcase. This reminds me of the publication stacks in Animus – how important is the ownership of texts as opposed to the use of texts by others? Another publication reads “*60 Years of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights*” and “*The people's right to self-determination*”, both authored by the UNA's prominent President-Diplomat. The academic elements is evident in the NGO, as in the case of Animus and in contrast to SOS, which seemed to rely on practitioner manuals. Barda, on the other hand majored in project outputs; I have ventured into cross-case analysis on the theme of developing organisational texts.

Adopting material from organisations outside the UN family network seems to be a widespread practice. The volunteers collect materials through their trainings, participation in networks, and project work with partners.

**N.** “We constantly run around all sorts of seminars and trainings and collect materials, also we know where to find materials when needed. There are four or five sites ...which have developed toolkits”

As with the other cases, I am not able to observe the process of materials being developed or adapted in situ. It seems translation takes place not only on a local level for the Bulgarian club, using materials from key sources, but on a worldwide network level as well. The Making Commitments Matter initiative (international project involving UNAYs worldwide) is one of the live projects the NGO is taking part in. According to a PR and accounts volunteer, it is an exercise of the youth associations “translating the whole documentation, work, and activities of UN into a more accessible, popular and youthful language”. I examine the CD content for this project available in the organisation’s library.

Interviewing A. before I leave for the UK, I find out she gets a lot of the ideas from the website of the Council of Europe. Another active volunteer, a previous youth parliament representative who has taken part in the annual UN meeting in New York (established UNAY individual!), has published a project online on human rights based on the Council their *All Equal All different Education* pack. The Council is a part of the European Youth Centre in Budapest [online]. Also, the materials developed under the Council include the COMPASS materials which I am shown in the office by the professor who rates them highly. This is the manual on human rights education with young people, designed as the main tool suggesting different ways and directions for human rights education in formal and non-formal educational settings. This recurring element leads me to believe there is coordinated approach to the materials and sources used in the organisation for developing practices and furthering individual learning.

#### **4.5 Volunteers - Organisational Information Rooted in Individual Learning**

The UNAY functions “more like a network than an organisation with a formal structure”. Being an association as well, I ask about the way they manage their membership base and the response is one with quiet resignation – payment for membership is a real difficulty. As it is on an individual basis, the UNAY looks towards widening the circle of their volunteers without pestering them too much about membership fees. They act as individuals and are described as “operating as independent military units but within something bigger, centralised”.

The UNAY's international activity described mostly as youth-related seminars and training participations, which started in 2006. The UN family organisations do not support its youth association sections directly, but there is an affiliated mechanism for self-organisation for these NGOs. They come together under a world network which aims to promote the UN mission and goals, the World Federation of Youth Associations. The use of the WFYA network is for keeping each other informed on their activities:

- I. “As far as our membership in the World Federation<sup>1</sup>, we should partner with each other much more than we do. Out partnership consists mostly in the exchange of information.”

When asked what this would entail, the answer is the obvious setting up of a collective data base, on a European Federation level and then on a world level. This is not envisaged as being any different from keeping track of who's done what, but with a systematised collection there are two related benefits noted by the respondent. “We don't have to reinvent the wheel and hot water every time...[and] so that we use the experience of all sides”. Before I could ask why such a rudimentary partnership output has not been created, self-reflection reveals a self-critical note:

- I. “...we ... are a bit unreliable in this respect [laughs]..as well as some others [partner organisations]. Because when you are engaged in some work you are left with little time to “write it up”... It's tedious to go back, at least for me it's a big burden.[...] [There is ] surprisingly

little collaborative work internationally with partners, considering we are a member of the World Federation, mostly information exchange. Who did what type of information. We've had a long standing ambition to create a database for the European associations and then the on a world level, so that we don't have to rediscover hot water and the wheel every time, to use each other/s experience, but we are a bit un-serious, as well as others. When you've completed something it's tedious to go back and describe/report it with months between....”

#### **4.6. Beyond the Organisation - Future Experts in Training**

Two quotes from later interviews put into perspective what the professor referred to as the UNA's 'propaganda' materials.

- A. “It starts in the school clubs with the little ones, nurtured from a young age, who then come into the youth section and become volunteers and run the projects.”
- N. “People are not aware of EU goals, what's to say about the UN ones. So the idea is to popularise things. We work with people who want to learn. These are mostly students in school and university students in early years.”

Hearing these statements on recruiting followers and securing the NGO's continued existence I think that this could have easily been a project about getting into any other type of club rather than specifically a UN-based one. Volunteers converged on a shared understanding that individual learning takes place through organisational activities with a clear personal development at the core. Personal interest is what decides which activities are taken on by volunteers. The organisational boundary seems to be actually around the ambitions of individuals to develop certain and not all strands of activity; as they grow from kids in schools to youth in university, individual involvement is related to furthering that individual's career. In the cases I encountered, careers included politics, human rights and PR, all of which were not outside the mission and goals of the wide-spanning UNAY promoting wider engagement of youth in general.

The knowhow of the organisation lies with its Model UN simulation expertise. Based on an international model shared across WFUNA members it is replicated on a local level and highly popular.

N. “It's a game where you simulate a UN organ for a particular case and the participants are the countries who discuss the case according to the rules of the actual UN, following the exact procedures. The idea is that you have read, you know the position of your country and be able to defend it regardless of whether you agree personally or not. The format is exactly the same as the actual procedures... In the international models there are many promising, serious, prospective people who in time actually become people in these real UN positions”

F. “Model UN is a “thank you” to the volunteers... it gives them a certificate, which helps on their CV when they're applying abroad for work...”

Even within an organisation-based model, these comment echo my reflections on the prevalence of

individual-centred organisational activity, identity and learning instances.

#### **4.7. Emerging Themes**

The documentary data is central in the case in terms of reflecting UNA's work and projecting the image of the UNA to the world. Much like the other three cases, the brochures on the completed projects are the licence to operate of the NGOs. So is the documentation on conducted training, such as the certificates and programme materials for project management training provided to those working in the UNAY. The materials presenting the UN goals and objectives, officially cited as guiding the UNA activities overall, are the founding and underlying principles for its projects. On the other hand, the training materials mostly in the form of international education tools, form UNA's expertise for delivering their services to the beneficiary groups. Finally, the documented Model UN and school club activities are a testament to the organisation's know-how.

Based on conversation and interview accounts, UNAY is a 'sporadic NGO', erupting into life only when there is a project, money, ideas and the right network to bring people together for a collaborative effort. This model consists of a supportive 'core' which keeps the organisational presence tangible, despite it becoming dormant at times, and an active 'mantle'. The core providing support are the school clubs across the country conducting educational programmes around the principles of the UN, such as freedom, equality, eradication of poverty, human rights, and environmental issues. The active mantle is the youth section project activities, who recruit their members mostly from the school clubs, 'bring up' their own.

It is difficult to distinguish between UNA and its Youth section – the activities of the latter make it the 'pride of UNA' where the section keeps the association active. The fluid, unstructured nature of their operations is accounted for in the interviews as well, and considered by respondents as a positive aspect of a flexible organisational culture. The youth element in the culture comes across as a justification for some of the challenges faced at UNAY. For example fund-raising is seen as "boring" and therefore a weak part of the operations, report write-up on project outcomes are seen as "tedious" because it requires going back to something you've completed already, etc.

Most of the active UNAY volunteers are Bulgarian university students who are pursuing a career in politics, international relations or related disciplines, therefore their work in the NGO is key work experience and networking exposure creating future career prospects. Volunteers are the ones who not only support and promote the UN goals through their work at UNAY, but who also *become* the organisation whenever they have the opportunity to develop a project. The opportunities depend on availability of funding, a policy window for a particular issue espoused by the UN goals, maintaining the motivation necessary to work on the project, seeking your own partners internationally and conducting all tasks, assuring accountability. In this sense, it is questionable whether an organisational unit of analysis is maintained in a case where the

individual actor becomes the organisation only sporadically.

The significant NGO activities ground the training and learning instances as well, occurring both independently and within the UNAY formal international network of which they are a member (WFUNA). UNAY has focused on their Model UN simulation, the empowering element of the Bulgarian representative election for taking part in WFUNA, and partnership-based projects like MCM. On an international network level, partnerships are formed and sustained mostly for the purpose of 'information exchange'. Learning activities taking place within the network membership are virtual (MCM online training) and physical, where the capacity to participate in seminars and project meetings outside the country determine the project selection made by Bulgarian volunteers (geographical proximity is decisive).

Outside the network, learning is self-directed.

Locally, the dissemination and implementation of teaching tools is based on 'adopted' materials mostly from international education sources (e.g. role play games). These international approaches (Council for Europe's Compass materials) are popularised through the school clubs and university clubs networks, mostly in their original format, translating the values and principles of the supranational institutions directly to a Bulgarian audience.

'Copying' across contexts can be seen as uncritical, however, 'adopting' in this context is not. The NGO exists on the principle of embracing the values and goals of the institutions that produce the educational tools and methodologies, rather than taking the explicit knowledge base regardless of its fit with local context. Although ideologically the UNA has presence since 1948, the translation of approaches and principles is seen to fit naturally into other concurrent processes such as accession, harmonisation, and implementation of practices which have been taking place since the beginning of the transition period (e.g. NATO and EU membership processes). This raises important questions about the concept of 'transition' and the activities and practices allocated to such a generic domain under the guise of diverse political agendas, which may or may not be related to the agendas of education or those of 'civil society'.

### **Within-Case Theme Framing**

Photo-journal entries are used to illustrate the within-case summation process of the NGO data themes. They contain a photographic component, caption from the research diary from the fieldwork and reflection on image (printed), and further reflection on the relevance in the context of the whole case (handwriting). It is a pastiche type form-creating process described as 'braiding' or "the mingling together in writing of various aspects of thinking" (Ely *et al.* 1997: 106). It is a combination of visual data, memos, reflections on already winnowed themes from case reports, and recalling codes from other significant case data, all approaching the formation meta-themes for concept development.



Following each braiding, a figure frames the emerging themes and key concepts for each case along the projections. They are arranged so as to relate to the three core categories which guide the conceptual framework. Although framing of themes and concepts remains unique to each case, the narrative line of the case boundaries gives way to the need for cross-case symmetry in approaching the cross-case analysis.

In Case 1 this includes aspects of BARDA's disjointed identity as related to the scattered RDA offices on the map of Bulgaria (map found on the central office wall), reflecting organisational activities based on competitive self-serving approach to contract bidding for service-provision projects. Implications for how to envisage this case as part of a developing voluntary sector in Bulgaria are alluded to with the quote from the interview with the Director– "BARDA is a mini-copy of the state of the whole country". The photograph is a metaphor for the NGO's existence based on the "running on faith comment" (printed caption), symbolised with an Orthodox icon hanging on a thumbtack.

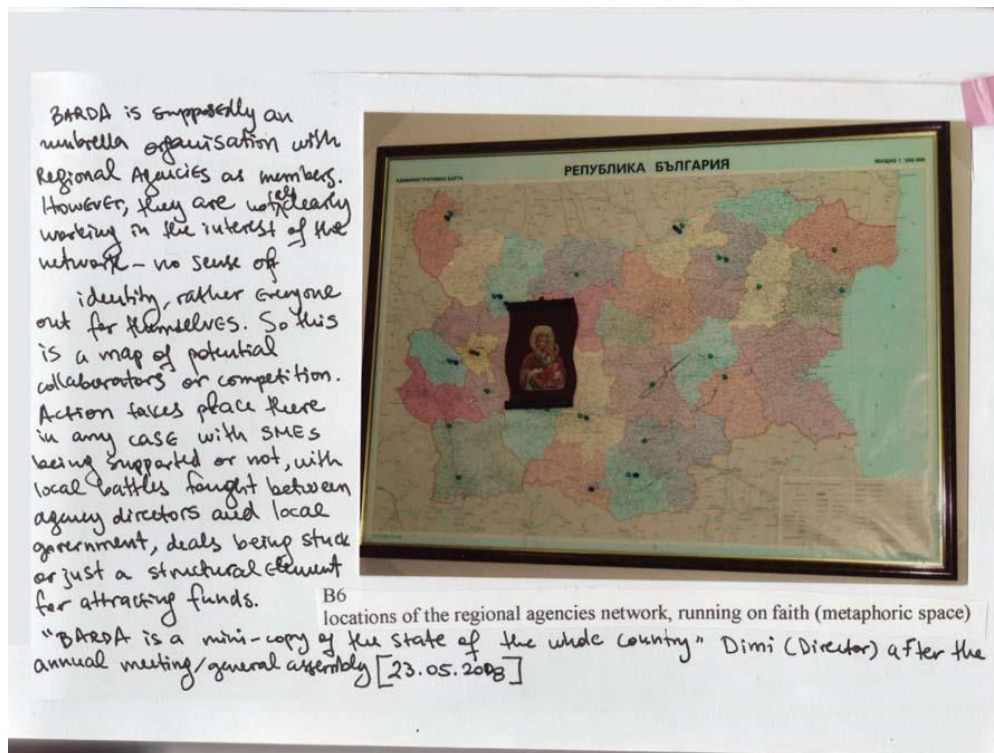


Fig. 15 Data 'braid' Case 1

ACTOR

Importance of keeping **trusted** partners for **project longevity**  
**Attitudes of loyalty** to partners vs. **backwardness** perceptions  
 Unclear notions of significance of each of the partners in the project process  
**Pragmatist** approach to project partnerships – funding access  
 Aggressive and competitive (organisational?) approach to work and practice  
**Culture of mistrust** within the organisation  
**“Reluctant leader”** in a non-NGO domain of regional development  
 The “impossibilities”, problem prevalence, dissatisfied outlook in language

KNOWLEDGE

**Shared project planning – responsibility dumping, allocating technical tasks to NGO**  
 The routine “**drill**” of project planning  
**Top-down template** development for collecting feedback – “**adopted**” and “**adapted**” materials  
**“Flag-posting”** project outputs as “knowledge”  
**Archived knowledge produced – brochure “anatomy”**  
**Efficiency-led ‘innovation’** (stamp, templates)  
**Information sharing limited** within the intra-organisational network  
**Information disseminating** perceived as “**knowledge transfer**” to international partners  
**Learning from experience recognised** (differentiating between survival and learning)  
 Limited **reflection on learning through projects**  
 Current “learning” perceived as repository for **future agency**

CONTEXT

Highly relevant activities and services to the statutory sectors  
**EU funding (policy-based) driver** of project process and partnership (EC ‘family’ ideology)  
 Channelling **funding** both directly through international projects (Western leading partners) and indirectly through national funding programmes (procurement from government)  
 Overdependence (?) on international projects – lacking integration with the sector stakeholders locally  
**Uncooperative local government** attitudes  
**Limited cross-NGO understanding** of partners’ contexts between West and Bulgaria  
**Individual-centred** (not organisation-centred) **interaction** with multi-sector stakeholders  
**“Information gatherers”** for western partners about regional development opportunities through local NGO experience

Fig.16 Themes matched to Category Case 1

In Case 2 the image is a sticker on women trafficking, awareness campaign for the public transport, publicising the Animus hotline for abuse victims. Although the campaign was carried out in 2008, the photograph is taken in 2009 when I return to carry out Phase 2 of the fieldwork, the caption noting that someone has tried to take this advertisement down. I recall an interview in which the respondent mentioned the tram driver sneered at the idea of putting up these stickers in his tram, not taking the issue very seriously, yet not opposing. This relates to the handwritten reflections on the right, “longevity of NGO action and existence in a Bulgarian context”. Longevity has to do with the NGO’s determination to be taken seriously by everybody, to becoming a strategic player in the sector as well as beyond it. This is marked by the organisation presenting itself as a professional body of qualified psychiatrists and social workers, providing services for clients rather than victims. This is a move away from advocacy and towards professionalism. This is not necessarily an NGO positioning move – their efforts towards trafficking prevention are limited as to the Bulgarian institutions handling the criminal aspect. Integrating the expertise into higher education programmes, developing new knowledge and skills though fostering partnerships with other NGOs (Save the Children) demonstrates an expansion of expertise to psychology of children as a new approach (and new target group). In addition there is strong evidence of nurturing an internationally-linked expert community locally across the country, an activity run by one of the most senior experts in the organisation. This raises questions as to the degree to which learning is organisational and based on the NGO’s mission fulfilment, and the degree to which it is individual-centred, in an international expert community context beyond the NGO.

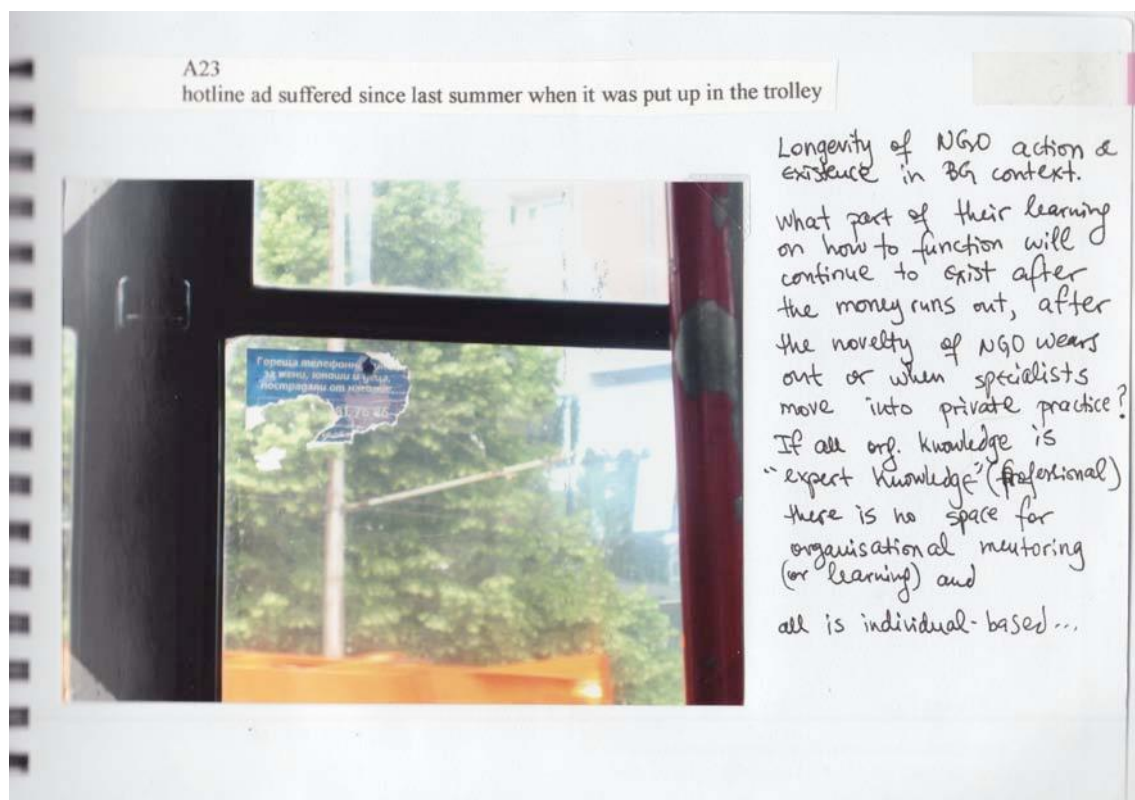


Fig. 17 Data 'braid' Case 2

## ACTOR

Partners united by a **long-term shared goal, strategy and philosophy** (independent joiners)

**Equal partner** perception – **confidence**-related

**Strategic** approach to project partnerships and organisational development

**“Expert” development** organisational practices, establishing a field

**Internal project development to NGO** (limited reporting?)

**Collaboration** with **local NGOs** through project-leading individuals

**Informal organisation**, but **hierarchy present, culture** of open communication

**Proactive leader** in sector development locally

**Idea-based (symbolic) aesthetic** organisational expression

Individual-centred reflection on development, expert terminology, “responsibility” language

## KNOWLEDGE

**Supervision” model (knowledge transfer/acquisition)** – core to development, training, practice

**Creating knowledge** – “facilitators” (training for new NGOs in other transition countries)

**Adopting/adapting** of tested practices

**Documenting experience and positions** – key texts authored

**Analysing and disseminating information**

Awareness of **“knowledge theory”**

**Reflection** on practice and approaches

Presence of **information sharing facilities** within NGO (library, online database)

**Archived knowledge produced – creating templates**

**Group information sharing** – within NGO/ within partner network

Limited reporting?

Individual responsibility for **reporting and training within network**

**experience Learning from experience applied** in new training contexts

**Self-directed learning approach**

## CONTEXT

Activism under a **global network** structure

Foreign government funding driver of partnership – shared cause

Strong **policy-based support from supranational institutions**

**Delivering services to public sector** actors, integrated **mutual benefit**

**Engaging with cross-organisational partners’** - boundary spanning-individuals with international links

BG business/third **sector individual-centred** (not organisation-centred)

Additional **NGO alliances** to main core network – **expertise-based community of practice?**

Fig. 18 Themes matched to Category Case 2

In Case 3 (Fig.23) the image is of an old photocopier in the corridor with a brand new money collection box for donations, which is to be placed at the Sofia airport despite general reluctance of various companies to endorse this campaign for raising money from their customers. The money is for individual children under SOS care, a following the international fundraising strategy coming from the Vienna HQ. I see this as a metaphor for the case study as a whole, where the organisation's identity is changing over time – from implementing international Kinderdorf policy by creating the village model towards, the new struggles to be self-sustainable. As stated in my notes “the pressing issues is being sustainable in a local reality”, as it has been announced that international funding for the Bulgarian SOS branch from Vienna will end in the near future. New fundraising ideas as well as new funding partners in the project (small family type home funded with PHARE and EU money) are a part of this move towards sustainability and away from a model developed decades ago. It seems it has served its purpose and it is time to move on to a new one. This may be threatening the position of the NGO which it has enjoyed as a tested model, as it changes from the founder's unique vision to a model more like other child care and family support organisations. This may be a sign of isomorphism as the sub-sector for delivering social care services matures into a partner to government, i.e. complies to new requirements expressed in the terms for procurement based on Bulgarian legislation, as opposed to the rulebook of the Austrian international model.

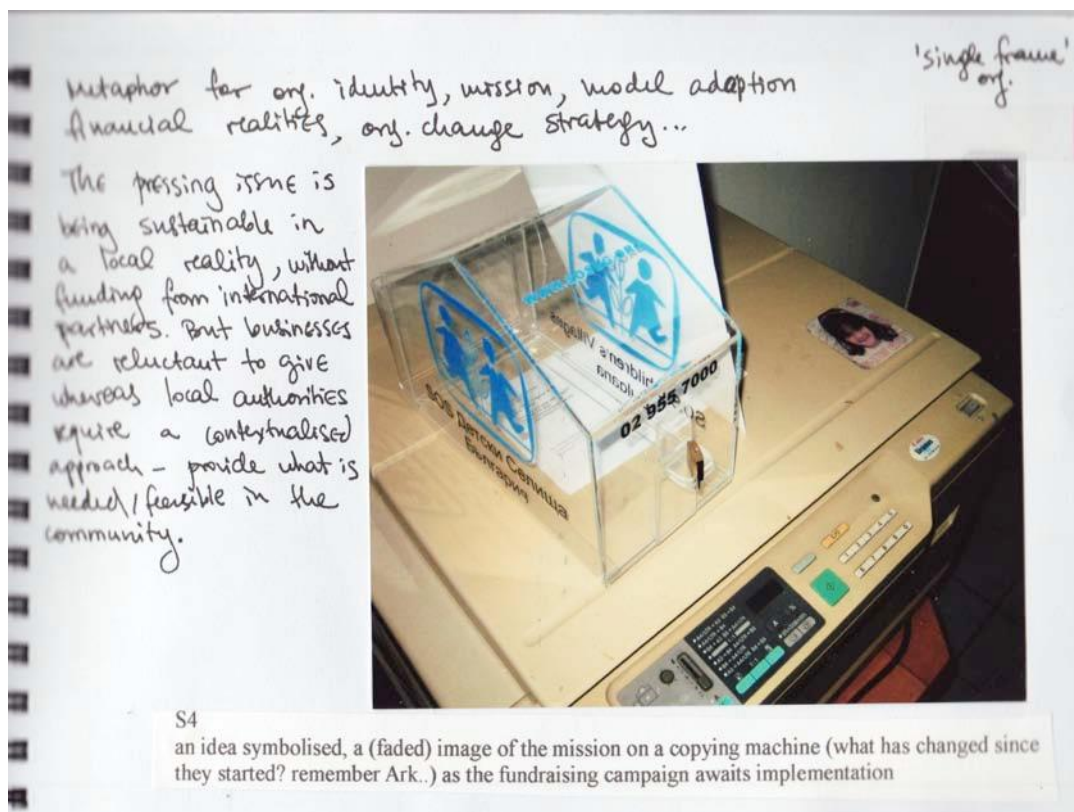
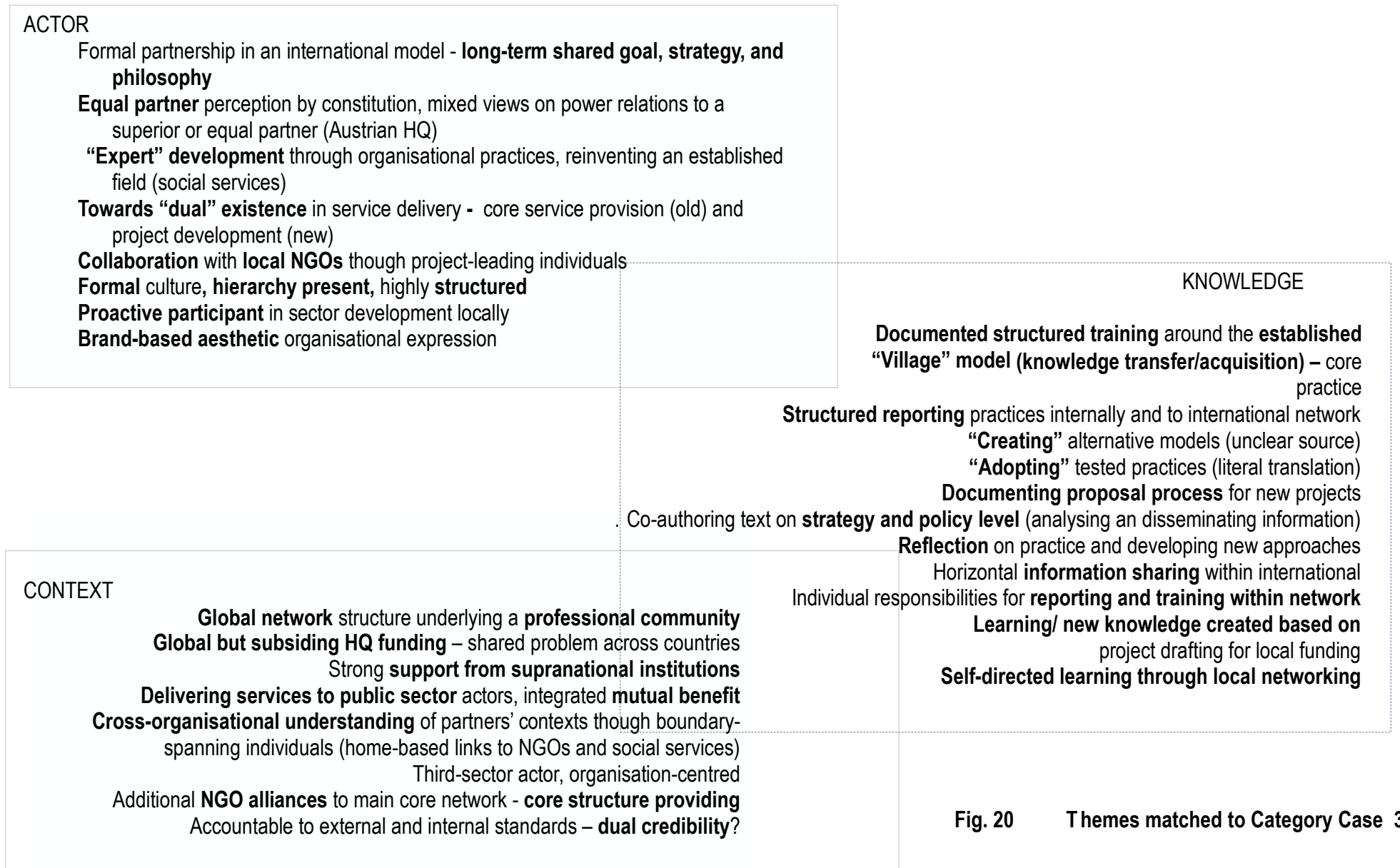


Fig.19 Data 'braid' Case 3



Finally the braid in Case 4 (Fig.25) is ironically one where the organisation's activity is absent in the frame. The photograph is taken at the UNDP office where I am waiting to sign a copy of a funding agreement for a project carried out by UNAY. My reflections while I wait is largely based on using metaphor to explore my impressions of this NGO – it is a “sporadic” organisation active only when a volunteer is available and informed about how to take on a mission-relevant activity and develop the organisation's work based on their own interests. With support by affiliation to the UN, with its national presence via the structure of school clubs (again sporadically coming to life when a volunteer is available to run activities there), the UNAY takes an organisational “shape”. The individuals driving this process seem to be boundary-spanners, traversing the education sector, international relations, and political activism. They utilise the different networks they are members of to gather and “recycle” the materials needed for the next UNAY project or activity underway. Their experience within international network engagement is individual professional development and the NGO's existence is based on their presence within its structure, like any other knowledge worker.

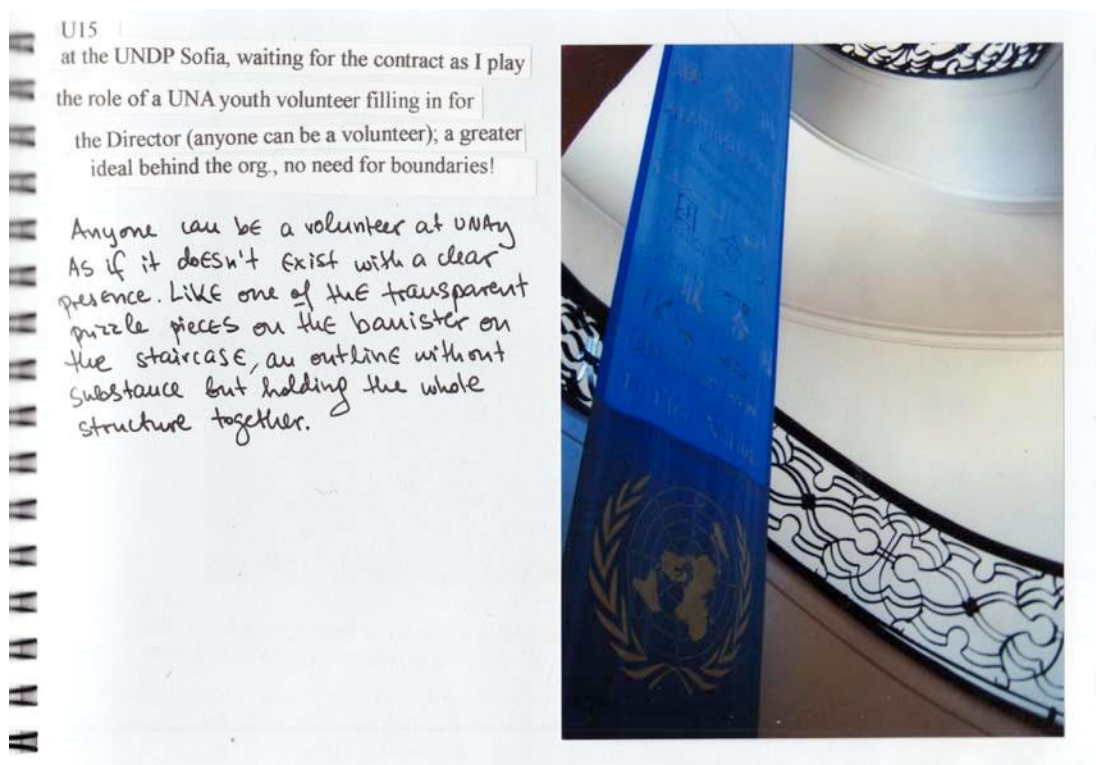


Fig. 21 Data 'braid' Case 4

## ACTOR

Project-based partners for future **project engagement**

**Equal** partners (peer group) perceptions

Some “independence” partner issues (control-aversion based in ideology of UN engagement process?)

**Pragmatist** approach to project partnerships – funding access

Sporadic “pop-up” NGO based on project availability

**Informal organisational culture**

**Student-led**, future “experts” - questionable organisational loyalty?

Informal language with limited NGO jargon – non-professional elements?

**Idea-based (symbolic) and brand-based aesthetic** organisational expression

## KNOWLEDGE

**“Model UN” as knowledge transfer element – know-how and practice**

**Training outside of “family” network – sector-based skills for members**

**Adopting** tested practices – overlapping material content (direct translation)

**Independent discourse on ideological positions** underlying NGO-related work

**Archived knowledge produced – brochure “anatomy”**

**Limited reflection** on learning practice and approaches -

**Information sharing practices** within NGO (library, online database)

Group **information sharing** – within NGO and within partner network

**Individual-led training within network** – self-directed learning

## CONTEXT

Volunteer activism under a **global network** structure

**Government and UN funding** for activity – shared ideology internationally

Some **political support from supranational institutions**

**Delivering services to public sector** actors (schools) integrated **mutual benefit** (youth work through youth engagement )

**NGO as platform** for engaging with **cross-organisational partners** - boundary spanning- individuals with international links (future training for diplomats?)

Engaging with sector actors locally – **part of sector development platform** (inactive)

A **core international club structure** providing networking channels

Fig.22

Themes matched to Category Case 4



## Chapter Six: Case Study Analysis

*The chapter examines in detail the findings for each of the cases along the three framework projections – actor, knowledge and context. Each case is given in the context of selected data excerpts and analysis steps. This provides a traceable logic of how concepts emerge from the data through a continual interplay between data and coding into themes, concept enrichment, metaphor engagement, and referring back to the core categories in the conceptual framework. Finally the cross-case analysis process is presented demonstrating how main categories, concepts, and dimensions emerge across the four cases. This produces a taxonomy which informs the initial conceptual framework. Interpretation of each concept and dimension in the taxonomy is provided with examples from each case study.*

Data coding took place using three separate methods over the course of the two phases. The first was the pre-coding method in the research diary using colour-coded stickers to signify (red/orange) significant issue to the research questions (yellow) raised issues of importance to respondents (green) for probing further and (blue) observations in the fieldwork. The pre-coding were a first glimpse at important aspect in the cases and were used to guide further data collection and most importantly, reflection on what the findings mean (in the analysis phase). This took place within each case and at the end of phase one led to cross-case theme comparison between Case 1 and Case 2. A 'compound coding' effect was observed as well at the time the second data collection phase had started, where reflections on phase one had led to a settling on a few key themes and trends that were on the brink of expectations as I started on the SOS case. Two examples of this compounding follow.

Analysis of the Animus case had been on the way by the time a meeting was secured with one of the founders at the time of SOS and UNA fieldwork (missing at the time of the fieldwork in Animus). The formal analysis process included a paper presenting initial findings and reflections at the Cinefogo conference earlier that year in Ljubljana, where it is evident that at least two of the main themes in the case, as well as across BARDA and Animus, had been identified – i.e. *embeddedness* and *professional identity*. This shows to have had a bearing on what I ascribed to the interview with the founder, as evident from an entry towards the transcript notes on the meeting (below).

Within the two years of field work and reflections on the data I experienced a sense of drift away from the possibility of a partnership-based learning typology. With the case of Animus, however, I found myself coming to terms with the possibility of 'saving' the framework as I was convinced I had seen glimpses of a potential mentoring type here and there in the data. It somehow always managed to disappear in the context of the case narrative, which raised issues as to the overpowering relevance of the context category in the conceptual framework. A note on this appears in one of the returns to the data after attending a conference.

Two things are observed in this note (left). The first is a sense of re-contextualisation of coded findings, the 'instances' referring to learning and knowledge-related codes in the data and in the reflections on the data. As a result of conference exposure, the data has 'developed' a new feature which was not evident in the first phase – the ability to signpost typology elements. This was somewhat more realistic than the initial

```
...I MUST name the
instances where it
[mentoring] appears (use
metaphors: "illumination",
"apparition"...ghosts of the
future, ghost of the past)
and describe them well
before rushing to calling
them 'mentoring' elements
```

expectation that data would contain the elements with which to build a typology. Of course, there were the cases of citing mentoring resemblances in the first two cases described in Chapter 5, which were a significant contribution towards the framework categories. However, in a self-deceptive fashion, resemblances were seen as alternatives to the sought

relationship definers associated with the mentoring literature, even though this relationship had not yet been defined.

Another note from the diary towards the end of phase one is on the overwhelming amount of data with the realisation that "I don't need any more cases [i.e. the planned two for 2009]. There is enough here in terms of information (unprepared for the load, need to assimilate in order to probe further in key issues identified). There is a need to explore the partnership element – getting in touch with the major partners in the network". Consequently the idea of pursuing the partnership line of inquiry was abandoned for two reasons: (1) It would be an new aspect of understanding the role of the relationship in the exchange of knowledge/learning experiences for the Bulgarian NGOs, this time from the western partner's perspective. Thought this seemed possible at the time it came to mean data overload given the time limitations. Of course, it is nevertheless considered one of the more evident limitations of the research and a possible future direction for developing the research. (2) Financially this would mean visiting countries beyond the UK incurring costs which would not be covered by the available funding.

As described by those who practice this methodological approach, grounded theory is a process of constant reworking of what the data is 'saying'. As introduced in previous sections, the literature-inspired categories *Actor*, *Knowledge*, and *Context* form the framework for data collection. Against the framework, questions have been constructed as interview schedules to guide the interview process. The exchanges produce findings which enrich the initial questions, leading to further questions and to gathering data. Apart from the interviews, findings have been sourced from documents, observations, and photographs. Codes are further developed and grouped, leading to concepts and categories.

The availability of different types of data sources and the experience in the field have a bearing on the way the analysis is conducted. Some of the cases have provided opportunities for first-hand observation of how the NGO conducts its daily work (BARDA). Others have mostly involved reflection on what the presented and found documents reveal about organisational identity, practices, use of knowledge and/or handling of information (SOS, UNA), or what interviews reveal about partnerships-based (SOS) and experience-based learning (Animus, SOS). The coding process in the analysis addresses the issue of combining data findings

into meaningful constructs which lead to interpreting the themes relevant to the research questions.

### **Within-Case Analysis**

Much like an investigation room, the walls in my living room are adorned with the experiences of my data gathering research stage in 2008-2009. There are four unfinished clusters composed of a photo collage on a single page, a couple of randomly selected and arranged photo printouts, and purposefully placed notes containing memos and themes on post-its scattered over them. One cluster for each of the four organisations in multiple case study work in progress. In the process of reading on the qualitative research process as it reaches the writing stage, I come across the concept of “winnowing” (Ely 1997:188). In the hastiness of a preoccupied mind with the data itself I misread winnowing as “windowing” and the idea of the photograph as a window to the organisation is noted to be used later in the write-up. Returning to the photos staining the wall, I ask myself the first question: how does this photograph make me feel now and why? I ask in the hope that this would help me see the organisation in a single shot, in its wholeness, a complete case towards which I should be moving at this stage, according to grounded theory. If this works, I would be able to meet myself halfway, the self that is picking up the pieces one by one from a mental heap of interviews, notes from observations, and documents collected in the field.

The question leads me to the same recognisable types presented at a conference Cinefogo in Ljubljana on the emerging findings after the first stage of data collection. BARDA are the unsung heroes who were most generous to me, Animus are the serene professionals that kept their distance. As I scroll from one image to the next much like looking through a family photo album, I find myself reminiscing about what happened that day, what person x told me, how I felt being in place y. A photograph being “...a slice of time rather than a flow, making it memorable” (Sontag 1971: 17), holds a whole story within itself, much like what case studies try to convey by being slices of time, snapshots of the organisation. The more I scroll however, the more I lose the single-frame organisation strategy amongst the multiple artefacts and events recorded each with their own meanings attached for each cluster. There is a sinking back into the richness of the data, but also cross-case themes begin to emerge from the post-it notes as images begin to speak with concepts and text comes to the forefront. As though the image itself is not useful any more unless it is attached to some scribbles.

By this time another question has crept in from some particular photos, not the obvious ones of “the time when we went to” and “the overall look of the office” but of objects which do not have a clear message but are deliberate. Why did I take this one, what was I trying to say? An attempt to categorise and systematise the data in the photographs is a first return to the projections identified in the literature – actor, knowledge and context. Elements in the frame are considered the concept-forming data, literally contextualised by my organisational snapshot i.e. the reason why I took the particular photo. I begin to distinguish first-order codes in the frame as *Artefacts*, *Actors*, *Locations* and *Experiences* (interpretation).

First-order codes under the category *Learning and Knowledge Moves* related to the context of organisational practice. Episodes and moves are units of sharing which appear in a research exploring the micro-process of knowledge sharing in organisations (Berends 2005). Using an interpretivist stance in his work, the author provides a taxonomy under five categories – descriptions, suggestions, evaluations, questions and actions. The researcher models the process of analysis on this with respect to the knowledge and learning data without employing any of the actual categories.

First-order codes under the category *Learning and Knowledge Moves* are my own observations in and experiencing the fieldwork of what the literature describes as “knowledge” and “information-handling”, “organisational learning”, and “knowledge exchange”. For Case 1 it is a photograph from the trip to the contractor, radio interview at the AGM, meeting with potential partners, project meeting UK. For Case 2 it is the diagram from a respondent who I ask (as part of an interview) to distinguish how Animus learning from others and how learning takes place within the organisation. For Case 3 it is a photograph of the knowledge transfer moment between three actors (local, HQ and an NGO representative from the international structure). There is an elaborate layered story framed in the two photographs - from local practice and the element of experience-based learning about the NGO activity (supporting families with children in risk), through HQ accountability procedures within the network (procedures for documenting and reporting, information-handling), to partner exchanges as knowledge transfer instance in the international network (the translation between the Bulgarians and the Polish representative about information-handling, reporting, and experience-based practice).

*Artefact* is considered the most central first-order code category in terms of conceptual development. Codes here are instances of organisational knowledge and learning and denote what knowledge and learning means for the NGO. Artefacts are ‘instances’ meaning that they are considered to be the emphasised organisational symbols, exchanges, textual or non-textual embodiments by the NGOs themselves. *Learning and Knowledge Moves* are observations of learning and exchanges present in the NGO practices as noted by the researcher. Together they resemble to some extent what Knight and Pye (2004) refer to as ‘episodes’ in their research approach to learning by networks (after Wick 1992), where researchers “...bracket and punctuate [...] network experience to create temporal and structural boundaries for their empirical case” (ibid.:475). The term ‘episode’ was not adopted because the source was discovered at a later stage in the research.

Artefacts are central because they more closely and precisely correspond to two of the three research questions than the other three categories. These questions are what constitutes learning and knowledge in the NGO's practice (albeit without necessarily distinguishing the role of the partnership in the learning process) and what are the integral organisational identity elements to this learning and knowledge. These refer to the Knowledge projection questions set out in the methodology section.

The code categories *Actors*, *Locations*, and *Experiences* relate to all of the research questions including what contextual factors surround the processes of learning and knowledge - institutional pressures faced,

stakeholders involved in NGO work, cultural factors interfering with the definitions of learning and knowledge in a transforming society.

Each of the categories and their combinations tells the story in the fieldwork for each case, where some stories are valuable to answering the research questions and therefore feature as the case descriptions. In terms of looking at the narratives, knowledge *Artefacts* is the central theme of the organisation's story written by incorporating respondents' interviews, reflecting on the experiences had, and by collecting observations from the locations visited. In a sense, all other categories are subordinate to *Artefacts*, and to some extent subject to transformation *into* artefacts as the analysis progresses. For example, photos featuring people engaging in activities are used as *Artefacts* related to knowledge rather than *Actors* as sources of information on knowledge activities. These are the focal points around which the researcher has constructed the case for each NGO as a set of stories and descriptions (Chapter five).

The transformation between categories and codes marks the process described in the grounded theory approach as 'axial coding', or the act of relating concepts and categories to each other (Corbin & Strauss 2008: 198). Despite this attempt to categorise the data in the photographs, clearly there are overlaps. Respectively, the authors claim that the distinction between open coding and axial coding is artificial since the two go hand in hand (*ibid.*). This process is described as developing a strategy for qualitative analysis: "[w]hat becomes obvious when we ask questions of the data is how much we do not know about a concept and in [...] developing the concept it becomes not just a label for a piece of data but a whole new set of ideas" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008: 71).

For each case, the ratio for photographs falling in each of the code categories differs. For example, in the initial analysis Animus has nine photographs under "location" and seven under "*Artefacts*" with only six distributed in the other two categories, whereas BARDA have an equal distribution between all categories. These relationships also reflect the interplay between the available data sources in each case. For example, "location" photos feature heavily in the case of Animus, because it is a substitute for experiences in the fieldwork, due to the limited access and sensitive nature of the NGO's work (counselling for abuse and trafficking victims). In effect, this has given the opportunity to explore in more depth the concept of organisational space - some of the codes emerging here are the role of aesthetics, symbolic space, space as refuge, space for self-discovery, ownership of space, etc. which are integral to the organisational identity but also to the nature of learning that is taking place.

The frame analysis and fluidity of the concepts derived from the photo-frames reflect the difficulties of



grounded theory in data analysis. In terms of what is in the frame, some photos are seen to contain a concept; some capture a story, while others produce both. Furthermore, some contain elements for concept development which move from one category to another. In other words, there is a transformation between the coded “experience” (explicitly individuals and places) into “artefact”, a similarity to literature differentiating knowledge as both explicit form and as tacit. For example, the photograph above contains the main Case

3 knowledge transfer ‘instance’ – the individuals are representatives of their organisations (Poland SOS International network partner, SOS HQ and SOS local partner delivering services), who are engaging in an international-level knowledge transfer exercise where a key respondent from the HQ (middle) has a mediating role.

This shift then depends on the underlying assumptions of what is happening in the field as well as the assumptions in the literature which informs the interpretation. This raises the issue of ‘reaching saturation’ in grounded theory - at what point does the analysis move from one type of codes to another, how do you generate concepts from clusters of codes, and eventually, how does “saturating” the categories with enough concepts and dimensions occur leading to the construction of theory? According to the literature, “only when a researcher has explored each category/theme in some depth, identifying its various properties and dimensions under different conditions, can the researcher say that the research has reached the level of saturation” (Corbin & Strauss 2008: 148-149). Saturation may have more to do with the researcher’s capacity than that of the data. In any case, using the research question as a constant focus tool within the spiralling cycles of analysis and synthesis during the fieldwork, leads to some transformation between the photo categories, where *Artefacts* dominate the interpretation of the fieldwork experiences.

### **Data Triangulation**

The primary code categories allow coding to move to cross-case analysis level for all types of data not only for photographs. One of the most integral type of artefact across all cases appearing as both text data and as a photograph is the organisation’s brochure. It is the first thing I am given in the fieldwork upon entry to each of the organisations as a demonstration of “this is what we do”. In some cases it is a demonstration of “these are our achievements” as well as “these are our current and past partnerships with western NGOs”. Based on this, the brochure object embodies various elements of interest here, falling code categories relevant to organisational identity, knowledge/learning evidence, and partnership components.

The brochure is a central element to understanding the NGO work and the essence of their partnership with Western organisation. It is at the same time a text and a place of partnership as well as evidence of knowledge exchange. Here I notice a first significant difference between the cases which qualifies both as a concept emerging from the field and meeting literature themes, whilst remaining distinct data artefact of organisational practice. This is the difference between cases in the degree to which they modify the texts when translating or borrowing from their partners' materials is found to differ across the cases. It is considered interesting in that it articulates some of the issues raised in the literature on translation of practice.

With the exception of where I was involved in the translation of the project documents, there is a difficulty in articulating this transformation, translation, borrowing, however defined by respondents in interviews and by my own analysis. There is no direct observation of the process and no straightforward way of differentiating between text 'objects' and related organisational activities or 'outcomes' (both embody learning and outcomes from knowledge transfer and learning).

An association can be made here between the code categories and the "elements of narrative" in literary theory's approach to researching and writing about organisations: the act, scene, agents (characters), purpose (themes) and agency (dialogues, rhythms) (Czarniawska 1999). Here the agents are the organisations, or Actors, with their *Artefacts* and Locations as the embodiments of their practice.

Visualising the organisation's entity or "body" as a collection of *Artefacts* is not the researcher's conceptualisation of the organisation's identity, but something the NGOs in the study have worked to achieve in terms of constructing and projecting an image. The researcher was bombarded with a variety of visual/textual materials upon entering each of the organisations, which were presented by the informants as accumulated evidence of activities, knowledge, and partnership involvement. From this the concept of "anatomy of the brochure" as a visual and textual being of the organisation has emerged with its case-specific dimensions. Case 1 brochures on partnership projects, Case 3 concept formation diagram/procedure used across the international partnership network, their standard-setting procedure manual for running a family-type home, Animus's manifesto incorporated into training manuals, and the compiled education materials used by Case 4 volunteers.

### **The Actor Projection**

To recap, based on coding in photographs and texts, the first-order codes are observed within each case in the face of the organisation's brochures (text forms, owned and adopted language about organisational practices) the office artefacts cupboards and bookshelves (archive of knowledge and experience and reference for developing future projects, training, etc.) the working spaces and their features (virtual, physical, individual, networked). Actor codes are those assigned to denoting organisational self-identification and organisational space (symbols, logos, physical appearance of respondents, office design, etc.). Location

codes relate to organisational space or space where the organisation conducts its practice, which is again seen to denote identity. Prominent differences between cases are noted as the feel of an organisation's office and the impressions gathered whilst travelling to observe organisational practice. With respect to how the organisation appears to presents itself to others there is a variety in the data: travelling to meet partners, traveling to attend an organisation's conference presenting a project, visit to a partner office (branch of the NGO) in the case of SOS with the Polish colleague.

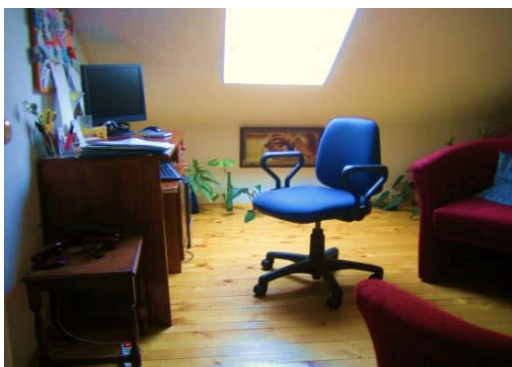
The work-related space where activities are observed vary across cases. Some display features of traditional office-based filing work (Case 3), or a more fluid type of activity as a combination of physical and virtual (Case 4), more individual-centred (Case 2) or more collective, networked type of activity (Case 1). Evidence of metaphoric space is recorded as one across all organisations, that is, how much space an organisation takes on a page alongside its partners on a project description or whether there is space for certificates on the organisation's walls or symbols on office walls as an "escape space". The data seems to conflate the working space to the organisation's presentation to others. It also conflates what the NGO does in terms of providing service/action in the sector space, and their organisational space. All of these are seen as the "face" of the NGO, or the organisational "presence". The corresponding statement behind this notion of "presence" is "this is what we do".



For Case 1 the organisational presence is captured as “a room on Bureaucracy Boulevard”. The NGO exists in very limited office space, where all of its work can fit into a filing cabinet (photo left). It is an NGO in a cupboard and has recently been asked to move out of their office in a shared building into an even smaller space. The space on project brochures showcases the NGO logo alongside its many partners, making it one of many and signalling co-dependence (photo top right). Project-dependence is at the core of NGO practice and existence. The corridor space where the General Assembly meeting commences signals making-do with what is available and a lack of professional identity being communicated internally to members of the Association (photo bottom right). Organisational survival seems unstable, even threatened.



For Case2 the organisational presence is summarised as *a place of refuge from reality or space for creating a reality?* Cultivating an ideal, metaphoric space; Aesthetics and symbols of comfort, serenity, beauty, love (even around mundane objects such as a photocopier); Individual space for senior members and shared space for junior (symbolic of both group and individual co-existence in NGO, reflected in their learning strategies as



For Case 3 the organisational presence appears to be a case of an organisation *reinventing itself for the future*. From conservative office space (middle photo) to fluidity of organisational space and boundaries - discovering the organisation changes on the move (literally), as the key contact drives us to the conference where they are presenting a new type of foster care model. The driver is networking with local UNICEF colleague on the way (photo left) It makes an appearance as a network-based knowledge sharing space at a conference presenting the new project, watching the video of who the NGO has been so far and where it is moving to. The image on the screen shows the transition from the village model to the new SOS model of family-type care. Representatives from the social care profession (public and non-profit) are in the audience. Sector context is central..



For Case 4 the organisational presence appears as *People as organisation space*. Individuals embodying the organisational identity and office, where the organisation's office space is a repository of learning and knowledge sharing practice (shelves carry the evidence of training and project participation) which are the artefacts of NGO practice. Any young volunteer member can use the space and develop their own project as long as their interest fits with the UN millennium goals, posted on the walls and in the guidelines in the cupboards.



The detail of aesthetic and spatial presence of the organisation informs the metaphors and concepts, which develop into a dimension which I call "aesthetic definition" with dimensions of strength of aesthetic definition.

It involves the process of 'cultivating' an identity which the organisation communicates to others, and the stance of 'assuming' a particular identity, as a more passive and deterministic view of how NGO existence is communicated to others. Again, these are emerging from the field descriptions rather than taken from the literature.

## **The KNOWLEDGE Projection**

Codes related to *Learning and Knowledge 'Artefacts'* are those assigned to the knowledge and learning exchanges in the inter-organisational relationship. Based on selected literature reviewed earlier, organisational artefacts are the objects or channels that carry or translate organisational practice, depending on the tacit or explicit form knowledge may take. This section illustrates the analysis process of taking data and reflection on its meaning, leading to coding beyond distilling themes, with the idea of assigning emerging findings to the conceptual framework, at the same time differentiating the important components under each concept in the framework. The researcher considers exposing the raw data and the reflection notes important for making a case for qualitative research transparency of data analysis. Also, the data is left to speak directly to themes raised earlier, rather than abstracted directly to a conceptual form for the taxonomy.

### **1. Case 1**

#### ***Project seeds and the knowledge-able organisation***

##### **Data type – Observation**

Two meetings with German company and UK representatives (UKTI) as BARDA's potential partners demonstrate what is valuable as information and knowledge held by BARDA, based on their local experience. At the same time, it is an opportunity to observe how BARDA presents itself, shedding light on their perceived and expressed organisational identity. I attend a meeting with a potential partner organisation from Germany, who has shown an interest in working with the NGO. Four of us meet at the café in Sheraton Hotel, Sofia close to the BARDA office. Research diary notes (left) with combined immediate and post-fieldwork reflections (right).

*The introduction and emphasis throughout the meeting from BARDA's side is on lack of support from the government. "Things don't work in Bulgaria", "we work with them [government] but they don't work with us". When asked to clarify they explain that there is a one-way giving - their advice is taken on operational issues but then when they ask for support they do not receive it.*

*When asked about how they work with foreign partners, EEDA is mentioned as a strategic partner. D. openly admits they prefer German, Austrian and British people to the French. Then she goes on to explain that regional development agencies need to become intermediary bodies and need the appropriate structure to carry out this role especially after the pre-accession instruments. The government cannot and should not attempt to create, own, control and evaluate the structure, perhaps under conflict of interest considerations. The German representative asks what BARDA needs in that case.*

*He adds that there seems to be a need to create best practice for training and to demonstrate it to stakeholders. "Perhaps it is too early for network building?". The response from M. is agreement – there is a need to first change the mentality of businesses owners and managers. People don't want to attend the offered courses, even though they're free, employers aren't interested. The guest reiterates that first BARDA must show how similar companies, in Germany for example, have benefited from similar training, to motivate the Directors.*

Is this moaning justified? I ask a contact at the Regional Development Ministry what BARDA's reputation is: he's never heard of them. Should they expect government institutions to work with them if they are not on the map? Or perhaps the government officials are cocooned in their office by the layers of paperwork for the Structural Funds planning period?

Experience-based stereotyping in action – is it motivated by cultural prejudice or is there a connection to financing? A German organisation has been financing BARDA from the start and UK ones have been providing projects since.

The governance issue and conflict of interest aspect to Bulgarian institutions is raised, but not picked up by the potential partner – is it not their area of expertise or not feasible to address within the time limit of the meeting? [limited understanding of context by partner as a theme]

Is the German testing the ground for potential consulting on network building the whole time?

Personnel development rather than organisational development = an individual-centred rather than organisation-centred thinking from both businesses and trainers prevails in Bulgarian business culture [generalisation]? I am reminded of a Bulgarian proverb: 'a craft is not learnt but thieved'; Bulgaria is alone in its development.

*M. continues with her previous point that even big companies are not willing to invest in training and HR. Compared to other EE countries which are more open to training, such as Polish companies who are happy to train in the UK, Bulgarian businesses are inactive despite funding from embassies in western countries*

*The German expert moves on to the routes to funding and partnership, stating that there is the EU and the Bulgarian project option. Bulgaria is seen as too difficult by BARDA as the organisation refuses to conduct business under the table. The European Social Fund is mentioned as a partner to BARDA, who are now slightly boasting with their pioneering work. The first business incubators and the first public-private partnerships have been a part of the BARDA network, they say.*

*“We cannot learn from Bulgarian partners, so we look abroad”*

*Again there is a recommendation from the representative that BARDA should try and work with the businesses with whom they have an established link already, after which he inquires about which industries in the country are most active.*

I suppress an urge to jump in and encourage a more positive attitude from the girls - it is as if BARDA is trying to deter the German guest from trying to offer solutions! Later as we leave the hotel in the rain, D. responds to this frustration although I keep it to myself: “one day I hope we are like this...expecting things, normal things, like him... Talking business and not about the impossibilities”.

BARDA is not afraid of implying corruption is essential when applying for projects. Later I witness another open discussion on this with an RDA representative (BARDA colleague). This creates a drama for the girls when they make accusations on radio Deutsche Welle against a government department, and a backstabbing by their colleague leads to them being reprimanded ...[culture of selfish behaviour]

...I hear for the second time in the last two days. In the context of the complaining about lack of support and government incompetence, perhaps BARDA consider themselves ‘reluctant leaders’ in the RD sector for the country, meaning that the government should be more active and BARDA should play a supporting role more fit to their capacity.

I get the feeling Germany rep is here on an information gathering mission, having no prior knowledge about what goes on in the country at all in terms of regional or business development. One month from this meeting, UKTI and Interim Management Solutions (UK) representatives will be asking the same questions. Somehow it is disappointing that there is so little research prior to the meeting on both sides about the potential partnership.

*M. explains: a part of the difficulty in providing training is that there needs to be the legislation in place addressing the respective subject of training, which needs to come from government and their Operational Programmes<sup>6</sup>.*

*Working with universities is suggested at that point as an alternative and a specific industry (one of the active sectors in the country) – “for example, what are your objectives for technology development? he asks”. The response from D. is that BARDA will send an email and set out the technology objectives. A motion is made to draft a proposal for funding with a co-financing option with SMEs for knowledge transfer. The guest insists that universities should be the place to start with knowledge transfer strategies.*

*“You have experience from Bulgaria and we [German organisation] have better information, we have project management skills, collaboration with Brussels. You just have to mention three or four programmes to us which have good potential for co-financing.”*

*D. responds to the universities idea that they are currently working with a food industry with a University partner. The problem is that the SMEs (the project beneficiaries) are “backward - they don't even use fax or internet! What knowledge transfer are we talking about then...” Two successful projects*

*are named – Embrace and Pro-Change. In the final comments of the meeting, the representative emphasises communicating good results is crucial to motivate others.*

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Not so much about learning and knowledge then as about the barriers to putting the learning in practice. Are partnerships with NGOs helpful in addressing this domestic problem? Then again, aren't all problems domestic at some point?

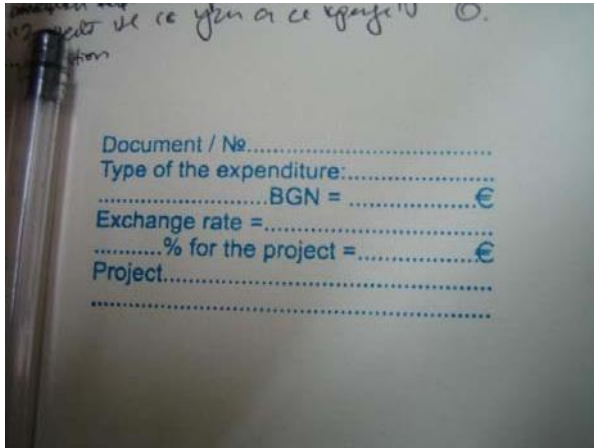
...but why not talk about objectives then and there? Perhaps a lack of expectations regarding the purpose of the meeting is what leads to the lack of constructive responses? Nevertheless, the discussion has a positive note, at last

...a spy! I knew it! Testing the ground and then off he goes developing knowledge transfer proposals for Bulgarian businesses with his consultancy firm.

In an interview, the level of system-wide inaction in terms of knowledge transfer in the country is mentioned by D.: “We don't have this analysis for anything...Do we have technological transfer, who is carrying it out in Bulgaria, does it actually exist, in the universities is there anything left some departments, probably some sporadic activity, who knows”.

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<sup>6</sup> Operational Programmes are a key regional level mechanism for absorbing money from the EU Structural Funds for the respective programming period (2007-2013 at the time of the fieldwork). They set out the region's development priorities in that period under the country's National Strategic Reference Framework.



The issue of 'backwardness' comes up again later. Their strategic partner EEDA uses it to refer to how BARDA tries to cope with the bureaucracy of financial reporting both domestically and internationally. NGOs are required to submit a large amount of documents stipulating their international transfers for all aspects of project work (as per the Bulgarian accounting standards). D. has come up with a rubber stamp mini-form inked directly on project-related documents to save some time in copying repeating information (left). She call this an 'innovation' in an interview. And perhaps it is, of a Taylorism efficiency type, where it helps with limited organisational capacity in a local bureaucracy.

The commissioned partner for the EEDA language training project are a university in Plovdiv which we visit the next day. Their accountant turns out to be a rubber stamp herself, holding back the project with disagreements on how much language specialists (faculty) should be paid for their services.

## **Towards learning within partnerships(1)**

### **Data type – Interview with the Director**

*“The leading partners in the project... have a lot of experience. Starting with the documents they sent us, the protocols, the list of participants, the dissemination systems, the form of reporting...protocols from meetings with partners, things which are created with the years of experience, their own templates, they have created their own style, which is polished (изчистен).*

*Sending these templates to us, we had the opportunity to borrow (взаимстване) from them to be used for the rest of the projects – forms of reporting (отчитане), protocols, all types of documents needed for the implementation of a project. Regarding the partnership, because the project was really very successful, together with the same Greek partners we applied for Embrace 2. This time we delegated the project to our partners, the agency in Plovdiv, our members...this was done because we wanted to transfer the experience from national to a regional level. We communicate regarding the possibility for Embrace 3, in which we are again going to be partners. ...[I]n the second one part of the partners did not participate but we were asked to continue due to our good standing in the first project and are inviting us for a third one. This means they see in us a partner who has proven a capability to work well. ... In a way this has given us knowledge (познание) about how to communicate in future work. As a lesson for example we learned that regardless of the fact that we are partners, you have to regulate*

*(управляваш) the project...in a strict manner... it is very important that the manager of the project to coordinate things and when something has to be done (да се свърши нещо), he is the main person who has to chase the other partners to do their work...the partnership is not simply...partnership by itself (само по себе си); work has to be done too.”*

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What the respondent from BARDA understands as learning within partnerships is mostly concerned with the communication artefacts (documents). The ‘what’ of learning. There is a blurring between outcomes: project ‘outputs’ in the brochure turn into project ‘products’ when translated to Bulgarian practice.

Insight to the language and understanding of the process of learning, the ‘how’. There is a clear copying of materials as a learning mode, multiplication in other projects.

Sharing information within the NGO across a clustered structure as a ‘sharing of experience’=‘knowledge transfer’?

Benefit of project success is longevity in project-based partnerships.

Positive self-regard as based on partner intentions in offering further work.

An example of a tangible learning outcome - coordinator skills in managing communications with partner.

Somehow the lesson learned from partnership comment is revealing - partnerships can be (perceived as) superficial, only ‘for show’ according to the respondent.



*“...in the UK the problem with immigrants is very big...It is not a coincidence that Poland is participating in the project, they have 6 million in the UK... Spain and the other have experience with the crossing through Morocco...that's why the partners have been chosen. For BG it is expected that this will be a problem which will worsen, expecting a boom of emigrants for us, [leaving for] England.*

*We were interested globally in the issue not only for the immigration towards England but as a pilot project for developing a strategy for each country in the EU. Information which is published somewhere...you cannot find this information anywhere here. People gather this info from friends and acquaintances...*

*I think that this kind of project with this kind of information may be applied for preparing this for each country and for example, an agency or the ministry of labour and social policy, any such institution, may be coordinated in terms of having this shared information. ...Bulgaria has a problem with statistics, there is no basis for comparison in terms of information.*

*We make sample-based (qualitative) studies and research because we have no other way of doing it. Our project is budgeted so we can survey 30 individuals, we cannot afford more ...*

Justification of the political motives behind the decision to engage in a particular project with specific partners, beyond the global civil society ideal of knowledge exchange and sharing ideology.

EU policy level is acknowledged as a shared goal for working in project-based partnerships across Europe. This is echoed in an interview with EEDA rep who claims that creating a level playing field is the reason for working with BARDA, an NGO, whereas EEDA is a government entity.

BARDA motive for creating a knowledge repository for future RD policy work engaging with the government institutions. Towards a larger system-wide solution for information inadequacies across the sectors, beyond regional development. But their ability to engage on this level is limited – what is the use value of this accumulated knowledge in this case? Only a stepping stone for securing further project funding and partners?

Justification of methodology applied with capacity limitations. The methods are adapted from those of the leading partner though the sample is smaller. BARDA claims this is the first time interviews have been used in a RD project to inform reports on economic migration in Bulgaria. It is seen as an “innovation for the field”, thanks to the engagement with UK (rather than Bulgarian) partners.

## **Learning within partnerships (2) - Project “Network to Know”<sup>7</sup>**

**Data type - Observation** of a live project meeting with international partners.

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*The meeting starts with leading partner Dacorum presenting a document on EU cohesion policy and working with the Structural Funds while EEDA makes an announcement about open days for training in Brussels.*

The message being sent is the UK organisations want to make sure their European partners are aware of EU-funded working policies and that their training is to a good standard. This would of course influence the quality of Network to Know and other potential project outcomes. This is echoed in EEDA’s approach as represented by A. (informal conversation at the meeting break).

“EEDA is working towards sustainable engagement with organisations, both building upon past successful partnerships and expanding the network internationally in accordance to the National priorities and those of the EC”...“it is hard to find a reliable partner like BARDA who we know we can trust”.

So when you find one, you naturally want to keep them.

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<sup>7</sup> The project is for €179,062.36 and is funded by the European Commission Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities DG Progress Programme (75%) over 12 months. It supports nine partners (four from the East of England and five from Bulgaria, Hungary, Latvia, Malta and Spain) led by Dacorum Council for Voluntary Service (CVS). Project activities include study visits between partners, sharing good practice in the following areas: skills base, employment of migrant workers, use of funding as a tool for rural development, training of specific client groups (disabilities, ethnic minorities, etc). Another outcome is the creation of “How to Guides” promoting good practice covering: the role of European Employment Strategies and National Reform Programmes for employment in decision-making, bid writing, maximise collaboration /partnerships, improving skills, project management, building self-confidence of beneficiaries, business growth and development. The project also involves the creation of a website to disseminate project activities and tools to a wide audience <http://www.networktoknow.eu>. The project has appeared in a report by the current Conservative MEP for the East of England, Vicky Ford as an example of past EU funding for the UK (online 2011).

*The meeting proceeds with talk about how the project money can be used by each partner. As long as the partners use this meeting to disseminate information on the current project, the money can be allocated on the partners' discretion.*

*Then an informal matching process takes place – each partner chooses two partner countries which they would like to visit and conduct the 'knowledge exchange', sharing experience on the project priority areas. The leading partner emphasises that learning from each other is the goal of the project. EEDA supports the claim stating that based on past experience from working with Leonardo projects, there is a need for more one-to-one interaction between partners within projects, adding that using Skype is the closest it comes to face to face and we encourage this form of communication".*

*The next point on the agenda is on addressing the EC priorities on social and environmental benefits. The objective is therefore to make people more employable and to 'upskill' using the structural funds. M. from BARDA follows up by giving an example (definition) of 'flexicurity', a term introduced by EEDA on this point. This is quickly overshadowed by a discussion on whether it is too hot to travel in July/August partner countries while the UK leading partner takes the opportunity to mention being aware of carbon emissions when planning the trips.*

*BARDA is already planning to use this for a strategy development meeting with their long-time financier, GTZ (D. whispers this in my ear, thinking-out-loud mode)*

M. has frequent Skype conversations with her EEDA colleague. They have established a friendship over the last few years of project work together through the visits and meetings in England and BG. Informal communication does take place between the organisations alongside the more official emails (example). To what extent is the personal closeness an indicator of the organisational closeness? It doesn't matter - EEDA passes on the partnership to another UK organisation. Even worse, EEDA faces 'extinction' with the upcoming elections and the possibility of a Tory government which threatens funding for international project work<sup>8</sup>.

Perhaps this is an opportunity to show solidarity towards EEDA, their favourite partner. Or perhaps to impress the rest of the partners with their knowledge (a case of 'teacher's pet')? An issue with their organisational identity and/or partner dynamics - level of confidence, influence by the education system/culture, experience in working with EEDA (who might like there to be a demonstration that the partner is following their thought). Too many maybes...

Not much interest is shown from the others about key concepts and definitions. A pragmatist approach dominating the group dynamic?

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<sup>8</sup> In interview with EEDA representative, London 2009

*Next is the issue of the format of the study visit report which would demonstrate what the outcomes of the project are. The UK partners propose to use a 'common questionnaire'. Spain points out that two formats are needed, one for the host organisation and one for the visiting one, the host report being more detailed with information on the content of the visit in the local language serving the needs of local organisations. Latvia proposes that a sample questionnaire is developed at the meeting. In response, the leading partner starts to give examples of what would go into the report – why did you choose this visit, what did you hope to learn, what is the best thing you can use from the visit.*

*BARDA adds a point - "what are your recommendations for the politicians in the host country". This is then rephrased by the UK partner as recommendations for the host organisation and participants.*

*Spain continues to justify the need for detailed report in order to aid learning while D. quietly lets me know she is frustrated with the level of these unnecessary questions from Spain which are delaying the meeting.*

*Finally the UK partner closes the discussion by saying that a template will be prepared and sent to the partners for them to add to.*

The lack of clarity and structure of this agenda point strikes me as an underestimation of the main project objectives. It is not clear what they will be sharing as experience, which organisations in the local economy are showcased as having this experience, what is seen as 'good practice' and how has it helped in specified project areas (skills base, employment of migrant workers, use of funding as a tool for rural development, training of specific client groups). No one has mentioned these areas by name – is that because everyone knows what they are or because everyone is supposed to know so no questions are asked?

The leading partner takes the lead proposing to prepare the template. Regardless of its name, the collective preparation of a 'common questionnaire' is seen as intimidating for some partners and thus indirectly rejected (allocated to UK expert).

An example of the differing expectations from the project outcomes for the partners. BARDA is interested in the project's public sector reform impact. Is it because their work is entwined with government institutions or is it its self-perception of policy patron?

Different understanding of 'learning' from the project amongst partners – BARDA seems to know the drill of planning alone, sending in for feedback and approval to the lead partner and moving on. This seems to be a 'standard procedure' applied to the local evaluation process point. A template is developed by UK sent out to the others with for formal approval, then edited and resent to participants.

*The meeting continues with the rest of the agenda points on the project delivery and management. The UK partner shows an email written to the government institutions of the partner countries, asking for collaboration on the successfully funded project. None but two of the approached institutions have responded. Slovenia is a one of them and proposed as a potential stage for presenting project outcomes.*

*Then there is talk about the website development for the project, one of the main outputs planned. There is a proposal that the links included in the website to the local seminars should be in the local languages. This prompts an obvious point from Latvia – “How are we going to be sharing experience when the links for the seminars are in the partner language”? The UK suggests that the main information is in English with links to other languages leading to partner sites. Debates continue and eventually die out without a resolution.*

*Dacorum asks partners for ten lines of information on their organisation and their involvement with the project to be emailed in 3-4 weeks, along with any formatting suggestions and partner logos for the website content. Main points are reiterated. One partner asks how many presentations should be expected at the hosted visits. Dacorum responds that this depends on the location and*

*projects which the partner wants to present (adding the numbers 2to3 including the host presentation).*

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This demonstration of the lack of interest from governments in an EU funded project seems to come as a surprise to the UK partner, which is not mirrored by the rest of the partners. It seems the limits of what is transferable from the West to the East starts with institutional differences [Context theme].

Perhaps the project outputs denote the flag-posting nature of this collaboration, rather than one of shared learning from experience?

This does not seem like a case of shared responsibility of the project planning in terms of outcomes and impact. More like responsibility ‘dumping’, or retaining control of the whole operation. July, EEDA rep interview: there is unprompted partner defence – “Partners may seem to be doing less than they actually are.. it’s a matter of timing in project stages, at some point they are all crucial”. Especially for project funding longevity?

## **Organisational Learning(1) – Project-based**

### **Data type - Document analysis of Project VISIBLE**

Organisational learning comes to the fore through a learning-centred project providing findings on the nature of 'knowledge exchanged' in the partnership. Excerpts are presented demonstrating accounts of 'learning from experience' which constitutes the project content co-constructed by BARDA actors. Content analysis is employed using the participant observation status of translator of project documentation. The actual text appears in the left column, reflections are on the right. The text asks the participant to fill out a report on a situation reflecting two competencies, Problem Solving and Focus on Results.

*... [...] In the last 12 months we are carrying out a "project" for organisational survival without project financing. We are applying the practical experience gained throughout the years when the agency was a leading organisation in the development of a number of projects. We are trying to follow the advice which we have given to companies and non-profit organisations who have sought help from us. The consultant role was definitely easier. Now we comprise all functions - of a project leader, contractor, target group, trainer and consultant [...]*

*One of the last objective difficulties we struggled with was the decision of the Administration office of Sofia Region to take away from us the office we were renting from them. There is no opportunity for renting out another office in our city, which would observe the conditions outlined in the regulation guide for applying the Government Property Law.*

*... [I]n the process of coming to a solution, we felt the strong support of the executive*

*secretariat of BARDA, it is good when you are not alone in the battle for survival. Given that organisations like ours is not financially stable, we depend on the support of the media and our partners.*

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As it becomes clear later on, this 'project for organisational survival' is not really what is meant in the case descriptions. It is the crisis they are facing, seen as the issue to be managed by the project manager in the RDA. A sense of irony about the organisation as a teacher forced to learn their own lessons – lessons which do not always prove useful, or has the teacher forgotten how to learn? Implied limitations to what can be learned giving way to what needs to be endured?

Political reasons (implied) and legal hindrance as a reality overtaking that of project work. Resonates with the numerous analyses on Bulgaria's civil society unable to exist in the context of political and legal underdevelopment.

Knowing who's on your side seems to be important in the context. A sense of unity in the organisation seems to contradict other accounts with other RDAs.

*We would like it if we came to a resolution of this situation successfully and to be able to give out the recipe for that later – a methodology could be created to theory?*

Not sure if the methodology remark is deeply sarcastic or a real proposition for contributing.

[form asks to fill out] What was learned from this [experience]?

Aggressive stance of participants or of the context in which they operate? [Actor theme]

*...not to accept without objection the decisions of [those] more powerful than us*

*... to be not so polite. Good manners can get in the way sometimes*

*... together we can do more*

[form asks to fill out] Possible Learning Needs identified?

This could be a serious remark or again an ironic statement on the paradox of learning from experience - will the organisation exist long enough to apply the learning or will the experience prove fatal for that organisation. Echoes a remark in an interview with the Director that the NGO may not live to see better times.

*We will be ready to popularise the results amongst others who are in a similar situation. Seminars can also be set up. We can even be the first trainers for managing crisis situations. I hope there is a target group left for that.*

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In this exercise it is hard to tell what actual learning has been addressed by the competencies framework, essentially a document format for sharing learning experiences. Neither the forms nor the contents feature in the final project output, the Visible guide, found on the project website.

## Organisational Learning(2) - Beyond the partnership

### Data type – Interview

*So this is a virtual learning incubator for people with disabilities for “resource tutors”...not really translatable in Bulgarian... We found firms which readily agreed to offer a place for a person with disabilities, but not all had the ability to provide the necessary conditions, nor the money for that – people with disabilities are sensitive, they don’t like others lifting the wheelchair...So the sessions were 2 hours long where using the bathroom was not necessary, but more than that would need different conditions. We created an employer’s network open to sharing information for employing people with disabilities. Seeing how difficult it is to be a small firm, can I take on such a person? Yes, but depends on the disability. If the person has a hearing problem this or that, ok, but if there if it is a physically crippled when we are few... and we are a training firm; what if we were production firm (“people with mental disability are very hard practically to employ”). People have to be able to lift, to carry, do stuff in the small firm, right...*

*We have other image projects – one for international student internship. We sent students [to Italy] in July, August and September as interns because they didn’t want to be late (for lectures?). They knew that you can’t make wine in August, they only trained a bit on that in Padua, in August they go to pick grapes...and they said ‘we are not for grapes, we are for wine’...But wine is made from grapes (“You have to start somewhere...”) It was about organic process*

*so this includes the fertilising process of the grapevines and everything...We have no brochure on that.*

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Translation challenges are conceptual challenges. Confirms issues raised in the literature about west and east divide on understanding each other and tailoring to the funding agenda with the right terminology.

Adapting the project to the local conditions is crucial for making it work at all.

Sharing information comes as a first step to learning about the activities SMEs should be able to undertake. This is as far as the NGO can provide with limited capacity.

Some local stereotypes in place are not challenged, but reinforced by the ‘learning organisation’ despite their exposure to western practice and international experience. Do leading partners know about this? Who cares? Irrelevant to project productivity.

Transforming accumulated knowledge on project-based work across sub-sectors to fit local conditions may be grossly distorted – is this missing the point of NGO supporting the development of a civil society at all? Legitimacy issues are raised here on the back of translatability mismatches and lack of accountability to regulators in the sector. Or perhaps it is a truly ‘adaptive’ approach to NGO management?



## 2. Case 2

### ***'Elements of 'expertise' - People with a knowledge repository***

In contrast with initial impressions at the meeting at which I 'met' the NGO, throughout the interviewing process I note a modular element in the internal operations of the organisation in the sense of everyone doing their own thing independently. Projects are allocated to each professional with consideration of their level of expertise, independence, and interest, resulting in limited knowledge of what the others are doing. This indicates a capacity for becoming more complex. One factor facilitating a more complex organisation of activities is the formal education and structured training present in Animus. Its practitioners are all graduates in psychology, psychiatry or social work, some with degrees from western higher education institutions. My entry contact M. is in the process of completing a PhD in Warwick at the time (in fact we recognised each other when we met, having met in Warwick three years earlier!). Institutions which keep cropping up in interviews are the Tavistock Centre in the UK and the Boston Trauma Clinic.



The importance of having a systematised repository of practice-relevant materials has been recognised in the NGO, who have established their own library and invite me to have a look through. The text-based resources collected over the years by members of the organisation have been indexed and placed in a shared office space to be used. The indexing in particular can be taken as an indicator of self-directed learning at play in the organisation, whereas the diversity and high quality of the materials speaks of a repository rather than a storage for old brochures and project outputs. Some of the interviews directly state that the library is currently being used for individual learning.

**Res.:** *How do you prepare yourself for your work?*

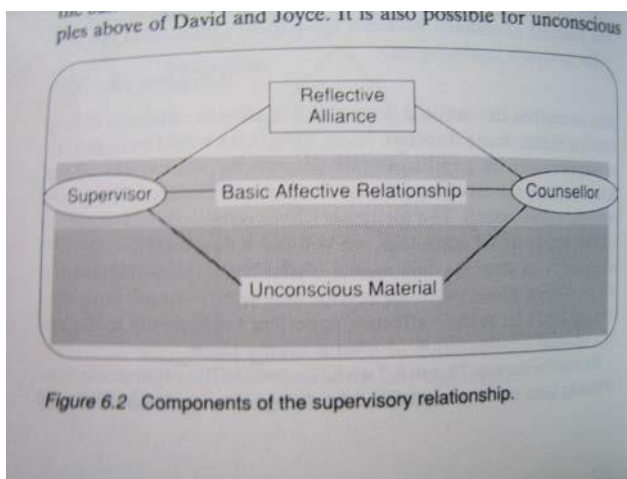
**D.** Apart from the Friday sessions I read individually articles and books that are on certain subjects we work on. Now for example I am working with a family and I don't have much experience this is my third case... I am reading about family therapy, I read, underline, think..."

I inquire as to whether this type of expertise is different from the psycho-dynamic approach, the school of thought and practice which Animus practitioners have embraced.

The smaller index numbers and more ruffled-looking books have titles like *Men are assholes* by B. Duncan translated into Bulgarian, Penguin's *Dictionary of Psychoanalysis* in English, there are some books in Russian like *Psychological development in young people* by Bower. Newer books include *Human traffic human rights* by Anti-Slavery International, a number of copies of a serious-looking textbook *Educational*

psychology: a developmental approach, and a collection titled *L'enfant et ses symptomes*, a French/Bulgarian bi-lingual copy. I wonder if there is any systematic change in the types of texts accumulated over time, starting with the more fundamental but also more literary (and feminist) texts in any language and moving on to textbooks on applied methods, more specialist and recent research, translated, perhaps even jointly developed with practitioners across locations.

I look at the bi-lingual text in more detail. It is a write-up of the proceedings and materials generated in a seminar between France and Bulgaria on education for practitioners across the sector working with children with disabilities. It goes on about the “established dialogue between participants”, the “importance of moving towards an individualised approach to child support as a model”. A number of key professionals in this field appear (both Bulgarian and French) who have supported the initiative, as a result of which “a network of professionals paediatricians, psychologists and social workers has been created... inspired by French ideas and experience...where dialogues and reflections accompanying the programme contributed to its effectiveness”.



In this text I find the etymology of ‘partnership’ as a French game of “applies and the palm” played face-to-face (as opposed to tennis which then was played facing a wall). The difference between the two is presented as a metaphor for the transition which has been taking place in the profession, towards a child-based approach to working with children. Working with children is also the direction in which the

NGO is developing its expertise and service provision. There is a clear relationship between the texts in the organisation and their most current activities.

Looking at the content of another text more closely leads to an interesting discovery. A diagram in a book makes me recall one of the most highly recurring themes in the interviews. *Supervising the counsellor* discusses in depth the relationship between the more experienced and less experienced counsellor in gaining experience and guidance while practicing the profession i.e. providing therapy to clients. It refers to the reflection on practice by the therapy worker who is supervised by a more senior professional, the latter guiding the less experienced in-training. The recurring themes is the ‘internal supervision model’ (Altas count). Perhaps this text is the origin of the supervision ‘model’ operationalised by the organisation’s formal training process? Interviews do not cite the text specifically and I cannot confirm what seems to be a direct link between the two.

## ***Learning within Partnerships***

Animus “facilitators” are currently conducting training for Ukraine, Moldova, and Belarus. In the process, new knowledge is created. This signals an expert status achieved by the organisation within their sector on the basis of association with La Strada. With respect to the formal strategy which has been absorbed from this partnership, there is recognition of learning audible in the interviews. However, there is also an element of improving on what is transferred from the western organisation through experience, i.e. experiential learning.

M. “What we are doing is taking from the western knowledge and learning from it. We are also learning from the organisations which we are training. It is a complex process. In our training for Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus we created a better system than our western partners, by firstly developing a needs evaluation, we started from the recognition that they have a particular approach in their own context and that it would be difficult to develop a universal approach given contextual particularities.

This case proved to be very rich in terms of actors’ own description on the processes of learning taking place both within the NGO activities and interaction with partners. The nature of working with victims of trafficking and abuse requires a deep understanding of interpersonal interaction and the psychological depths of personal experience. With consideration of the high level of reflection on these issues demonstrated in the initial part of interviews with Animus respondents, I was able to ask directly about “the extent to which one can exchange experience as a partner organisation, and the extent to which one organisation can train another considering that they operate in totally different environments”. One response summarises the point vividly, emphasising the importance and place of the individual in valuing the learning taking place through partner interaction.

D. “I think that the meaning/purpose of a training seminar is not for us to say what we do and so on, but rather to give people the opportunity to say and hear what we say ... for them to summarise and reflect upon their own experience and to feel respected for what they do and for the effort they put into their work. Only then after they feel reassured in this way in terms of regard, they can feel a bit more open for learning and new things.... In the field, the process of working with this problematic is very difficult because every one of us regardless of whether we recognise it or not, is involved in the work in a very intimate way... when we work with such painful [болезнени] topics, one identifies with his work and respectively if someone comes and gives a different model or says ‘we do it better’, people take it personally, not just about the work...this is just the nature of the job...it’s not like when you work in a bank.”

Although the context of the question is NGO-to-NGO training, the response ‘overreaches’ and has relevance for the theme *practitioner-based learning* on the job and engagement with the work. In some

sense this response raises a methodological issue inherent in the research approach, that of levels of theory - how much can we infer from individual responses about learning on the one hand, and from the types of individual approaches to learning on the other, about the organisational exchanges and knowledge practices? According to this respondent, the answer is quite a lot. This organisation works on issues which are individual-centred, making the transition between individual and organisational levels seamless, which may not be applicable to other organisations considering their approaches and beneficiaries.

### ***Organisational Learning – Strategic developments***

'Reflection' on the theory and practice of learning and knowledge acquisition in Animus is present across the data, both in interviews and in organisation documents. This is not surprising as the area of work which the NGO is involved in is closely related to personal reflection and psychological development, something required when working with trauma patients. The nature of their work allows for this understanding to penetrate into their organisational strategy and development, including the way they work with their network supportive partners.

A layered data construct below shows an overlap in the ideas presented in two independently conducted interviews with senior members – the first respondent works on trafficking and training in the La Strada network and the second on mapping the trafficking-related sector in the country and on developing strategy around learning centre activities (new NGO developments). The third layer combines key NGO documents – one is from a manual for conduct a training seminar, which has become a template for developing further training materials (based on research diary notes) and the second is from a network brochure (strategic partner)

#### Layer 1

**Interview M2.** "In our trainings we work this way, making these interactive trainings, because after all a large proportion of the trainings ... is for adults, even young people are in their teens.... And the theories themselves which refer to learning in adults, state that the absorbing of new knowledge takes place on the basis of making sense of/reflecting on and reconstruction of past experience." [Differentiating between levels of learning based on specified theory. Linked to practice-based learning and not necessarily 'imported' from Holland. Acknowledging the centrality of reflection and experience in learning. Do they apply this knowledge internally, in terms of organisational development?].

#### Layer 2

**Interview M1.** "In six months we did an evaluation of needs for training which was discussed on their turf with key representatives with partners in those countries. It was a complex and multi-layered evaluation process of the needs because we couldn't imagine that we'd go over there with our knowledge in their context thinking that the programme we are developing is adequate in that context. We looked at their documents, we had interviews, looked at country overviews, a small window over six months. The programme was discussed with the organisations, with the leading partners in the network and with the participants chosen for the training in our "developmental programme" based on capacity-building on the basis of their own experience."

[Differentiating between knowledge and learning instances signal reflection, awareness, and engagement in practice with partner organisations. Moving from the individual to the organisational level of analysis is appropriate.]

### Layer 3

**Text 1**(excerpts from a 5-day training seminar 2001 manual): *Working with prostituting women, external trainer from Germany and Animus experts*. The main principles of work are “voluntarism, transparency and non-conventionalism” (not a one-size-fits-all). The “stage” concept appears in the “phases approach” to working in this field, where “understanding the needs and problems of clients” is central, can take on a “passive and active strategy”, and the relationships needs a “fitting management approach”. Communication skills, identification strategies, questions for presenting the situation and emotional strategies are addressed within the training.

[‘Phases’ as a key concept in working with clients signals possible application of theory in training provided by Animus, and very likely to be applied in the direct therapy work as well. Analysis is clearly one of the information-handling processes which the NGO engages in. This does not necessarily mean it reflects the way they work with their international partners.]

Animus is engaged in a sector mapping project, which is seen as a strategic development activity. This is a potential route to new service provision for organisations working with violence and trafficking victims around the country and for relevant institutions.

### **From interview transcript (M2)**

*The project which I coordinate at the moment... aims to make a map of the social services whose goal is preventing domestic violence generally. Prevention of violence is primary, secondary and tertiary prevention, so in a way direct work and consulting are forms of prevention. Prevention... more in terms of reoccurring violence, where the primary prevention includes the dissemination of materials, initial training, so overall the project on a country-wide level aims to collect information of services which run programmes and provide services aimed towards preventing domestic violence, as I said. After which this information is systematised and published in the form of a almanac to be distributed amongst all*

*organisations country-wide so that the professionals can recognise one another and find each other in the framework of their activities, as well as so that the client can see the places they can turn to for requests.*

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Demonstrates a great organisational capacity for development outside the organisation, towards capacity-building for the third sector as a whole.

Demonstrates value assigned to and engagement with systemic information gathering, analysis, coordinated dissemination, and informing policy. Relevant to both Knowledge and Context categories.

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*This is a part of the ideas of the project. The other aim it has is to conduct an evaluation of the good practices and problematic fields concerning the prevention of domestic violence... so that it is made clear what the difficulties are, what additional things are needed by the providers of these services in terms of skills, experience, knowledge, what are the qualifications of the personnel for example, overall.. around the work of the national mechanism which exists at the moment for prevention and protection, how things are going in this aspect.*

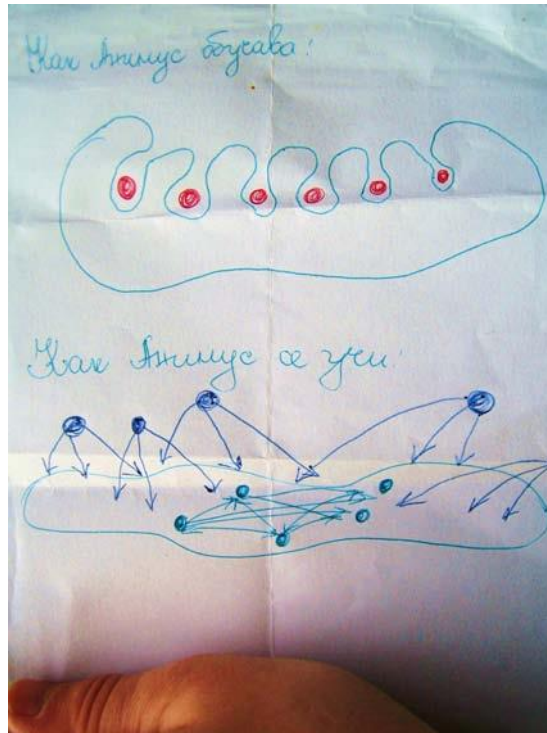
*.. so working visits of the locations [field operations] have been planned for this. Within the framework of these visits, the evaluation of their activities is carried out at these locations, and [we are] organising four workshops in the four geographic regions of the country, which are a form of exchanging of experience and training for the practitioners. This will close with a conference where the actual service providers will be present and representatives of relevant institutions will be invited so that there is an exchange of all of this experience, to discuss the problematic areas and the good practices, because every year there is a national programme carried out and so this would give the opportunity to address the programme with advice; this needs to be done next year, it thus would be based on the real achievements and difficulties met by the practitioners in the field.*  
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The term 'good practice' translated into Bulgarian in use.

Differentiates between learning, knowledge, capacity for the sector.

A carefully planned process of mapping of the field in preparation for policy intervention. The terms used signal the awareness and reflection on the knowledge and learning-related practices involved. Becoming a leading training organisation in the field signals a strategy beyond provision of current expertise and services for beneficiary groups . Cross-sector exchange of experience as part of the learning and capacity-building strategy.

An interview Transcript with invivo coding on key terms relating to knowledge and learning instances follows, accompanied by a photographic response to the questions on *How does Animus learn?* and *How does it teach?* Both develop into respondent understandings and reflections on learning practice.



**Fig. 23 Visual response (respondent T.) on the meaning of “organisational learning” in Case 2**

In order to work on the topic of those who have suffered abuse and identifying the problems it is very important to work with the predispositions of individuals. On the one hand with the predispositions towards the victims and the perpetrators as well as on an experiential level [преживяване] which can't happen if it isn't an interactive and experience-based training. Just reading some lectures. That just isn't as efficient [ефикасно]. The way in which the trainings are constructed is based on, I don't know if you know it, Kolb's cycle... has four steps used to actualise, reflect upon, and transcend past experience with the

use of new knowledge, where the last step is to experiment. The way in which the programme is organised is in a way that there is a topic set,

some theme, something experience-based. Which actualises the experiences and predispositions of the participants around this theme. Afterwards, their experiences are placed at the centre of a discussion, there is a reflection/reflexivity [рефлексия] on what they have experienced and have thought about, in this way their emotional and practice-based experience is extracted..., it is reflected upon and is built upon with the new knowledge, where there is also a theoretical part in the training. So that this theory can be grafted onto something to transcend/building upon and become a part of experience, it is important that it is actualised. After this new transcending knowledge is delivered, something experience based again is introduced, giving it a practice terrain, to try out this new knowledge on the basis on the basis of the reflected-upon past knowledge. Our practice shows, and these are the most up-to-date research findings in the field of adult learning this is this is the most successful way for learning to take place, for adults. For children it is the same. For them it is very important to have this emotional element so that they can identify this problem as something which could be relevant to them. When you are conducting some sort of activities around prevention, the person toward whom they are aimed has to somehow recognise herself that it is possible for this to happen to her, that the problem is relevant, at least I think so as a person who has been working in the field for 10 years...

### 3. Case 3

#### *The 'Village' Model as 'Expertise'*

NGO independence for decision-making and the 'expert' organisation does not seem to be at odds with its subordination within an international structure. Rather, a 'dual identity' is a safe metaphor here, illuminating how the NGO manages to hold a perception of its own development as both established and changing. This mitigates the politically sensitive subject of independence in a highly structured network of reporting. Compliance with standards both at home and internationally is a crucial element in maintaining a legitimate dual identity. Layers of interview responses follow on the question of NGO dependence from the west (excluding funding):

**Res.** *To what extent are you dependent on Vienna for your activities?*

**N.** "There is a subordination system. Bulgaria is the second European region together with Macedonia, Serbia, Bosnia ... the first office which is above us in the hierarchy is in Macedonia. There is an English lady there that leads us. That is our regional office. Then there is the second level, SOS International in Vienna, that is the superior level, from which all programmes and directions for work flow down (**ce спускат**) and towards which all reports flow...our financial plans and budgets come from Vienna as well..."

**A.** "As a whole we are an independent organisation and the international organisation, especially now after the last strategic initiatives, is to give more independence and self-reliance of the national organisations, to strengthen the functions of the board on a national level ... so that we have...independence in terms of the decision-making."

**R.** "the organisational units [for advocacy] have their own continental representation and structure apart from the regional overall structure for the local SOS, where Bosnia is the coordinator for the Bulgarian advocacy employee. The regional coordinator sets the general direction for the development of the strategy, and then the local realisation of the advocacy strategy is developed by the local representative with the approval of the Director and national priorities for the sector i.e. de-institutionalisation at the moment. We use both local and international policy guidelines for developing action plans. ['dual credibility' element]. On a local level, the 'Living care' international project is the template for us to develop the Bulgarian version of this advocacy project stretching beyond the children from SOS, but applies to all risk group children in the country [adopted documents in learning practice]. Also, we have an international liaison advocacy officer part of a team coordinating with the European structures. Under the child protection conventions ratified by the government the country is responsible to report on their actions taken to observe its application. Another report is presented by the sector in the country on this. So I contact the person coordinating for putting in these reports, he would know what is expected and can consult me directly. If I need international contacts of experts he would support. ['coordinating' is a key concept to understanding participation in information exchange with partners and institutions; compare with other recurring verbs across cases]



## ***Learning Within a Changing Partnership***

SOS Bulgaria's established knowledge and identity through the village model may have contributed towards the confidence for change. Nevertheless, the deadlines for SOS International pulling out from Bulgaria and talk of Austria turning off the funding tap is surely a determining pressure to move towards 'sustainability' and develop alternative funding sources. In this context, independence of learning is a dependent variable. The relationships between various variables is difficult to disentangle, though the layered story gives an understanding of how this process of organisational change is perceived by those working in various departments in the structure.

**Res.** *What advice do you receive from your partners in SOS International?*

**N.** "I wouldn't say it is exactly advice... More like instructions.

**A.** "There is a shared methodological basis which we have at our disposal, or are supposed to be using, basic principles... for organising the work, as well as at the different levels/departments of activities we are given (ни се подават) methodologies and ways of working, which are not compulsory but create a framework within which we can be creative and develop." [a more self-determined view of how the NGO operates within the partnership and what they are provided with as methods for practice in the form of information, training and materials]

**S:** "...the sponsorship office Vienna sends "feedback" with an evaluation on the different indicators for my work. This is sent to my manager, our National Director, and to me. It is indicated which are the strengths and those that need further development" [the discussion starts from a point of view of individual training received for working with sponsors]

**M.** "There is a very strong passing of information from top to bottom and bottom to top regardless of the facts that we are local structures. Irrespectively, we are governed by a Board which is a Bulgarian structure by law and we are employed in the Bulgarian organisation. From this point of view in an administrative sense we don't have a boss in Austria [laughs]... Of course the international organisation has its structures continental and regional offices which have as a goal to support the local associations...they can't get involved and influence them in a direct ["rough?"] way. On the other hand, if you want to be a member, you have to prove that what you do is in alignment with the general goals of the organisation."

**S.** "Yes, it's an Austrian organisation and they are our "superiors"...that's SOS Kinderdorf" [**Res.** *So you are not 'equals'?*] **S.** "Well, now...no. The ones in Vienna are our bosses."

#### 4. Case 4

##### ***“Organisational” Learning within Multiple Networks – Future Experts in Training***

In an interview with the UNAY founder, he remembers one of his “best works” - a brochure of political candidates' views on young people, based on interviews the UNAY team conducted. The quote captures the local context, learning elements, partnership contribution to this, and individual engagement over time, all in a single running statement.

I. “The project was about encouraging voting amongst young people. It was a campaign in two phases. In 2003 was the first; we had many components, face-to-face interaction, a concert, etc. The concept was very much based on the US model we were trained by, I don't know whether it is theirs or it is based on their experience when working with other country representatives. They gathered us for the training with other organisations around the country, they gave us a handbook and trained us how to work with volunteers... we participated in the fine-tuning [избистрянето] of the campaigning, how to carry them out. Then in 2005 the focus was geared towards young people in particular. We were national partners then, and instead of having 20-30 organisations they had five organisations which they worked with and we were national partner, working with lower level organisations. The National Youth Parliament was involved at the time, xxxxx organisation let us down, who did nothing effectively. The actual organisation and carrying out of the project left the Americans speechless in terms of their lack of awareness of how things are around here ...in that we set out grandiose programmes and then we don't do what we set out to do. Or everything happens at the last moment. They tried to tell us off at that point... In the second part, perhaps we overestimated our strengths, or maybe they made us take on more responsibilities than we could afford to carry out...Or the local partners let us down, which is absolutely true... They had more outreach but a pseudo-organisation like the xxxxx who on paper unites the student unions but in reality they act alone. The problem was with the volunteers who give their own time, meaning they have to be very motivated. I can say that I have a great contribution in terms of motivating my own volunteers but I can't be responsible for someone else's... It wasn't bad but they [US leading partners] tried to tell us what to do, which I wasn't pleased about.

## The CONTEXT Projection

Emerging themes from case data are related to contextual factors pertinent to the organisation's learning within partnership, for example, the voluntary sector as an environment in the country, political and social influences regionally and internationally etc. These are matched with the identified in the literature-based conceptual framework (Fig.1). This projection was developed initially to show consideration of the larger context which has an effect on the inter-organisational relations. Across the cases respondents spoke of certain context-related themes more than others, particularly focusing on pressures for NGOs working in the sector coming from government institutions in Bulgaria, as well as opportunities for engagement with Bulgarian NGOs in the sub-field of expertise.

With respect to the support received as perceived by BARDA, the relationship with EEDA is regarded as an opportunity to gain knowledge about the content and process of regional development strategy ('knowledge acquisition') and provide experience-based know-how to partners ('knowledge transfer'). Interviews<sup>5</sup> reveal gratitude for what the UK partners bring: (1) the opportunity to take part, (2) to create a stock of project outputs as evidence of expertise, and (3) to increase the possibility of participating in similar initiatives in the future. All are generally perceived as types of 'knowledge' under the notion of 'experience'. BARDA note to have conducted projects "for image", where the funding received is not perceived as worth the effort, but the opportunity to engage in future projects has been the main motive to take part.

On the issue of dependency, Case 1 and Case 3 show Bulgarian NGOs to be a less-than-equal partner but not quite the 'developing' representative of a transition country as NGOs are portrayed by some. Policy-level learning is seen as a higher level learning from project-based learning. The predominant organisational practice in the western partner organisation for Case 1 is implementation of national level policy, quite the opposite of what the Bulgarian NGO partner faces at home. For BARDA communication with the Bulgarian Regional Development Ministry is poor and collaboration with other local stakeholders in the field is highly competitive, leaving the NGO to look independently outward for international projects as the only source for capacity-building. This implies that partners are not necessarily learning *from* each other. EEDA accesses additional financial towards fulfilling a national strategy set in place. For BARDA in addition to funds access, they store knowledge resources for future capacity building in the event of national strategy from below. They expect to be able to engage as an institutional change actor in the future. What the NGO in Bulgaria learns about regional development is also, however, limited by the role they play in the project partnership.

Quite the opposite is seen in SOS where the structure reporting practices within the Bulgarian NGO mirror those of the international network. Documented structured training, reporting and monitoring has provided a foundation for knowledge development on an individual and group level around a specific model of

service provision. Most importantly, these processes are two-way engagements, epitomised in the co-authored policy development. This is based on horizontal information sharing and multiple-level structure tailored to expert development both within and outside the formal chains of reporting. The development of alternative models of service provision takes place independently from the international partnership, where the Bulgarian NGO is taking a wider network-based route to professional development for its future role in the sector.

For BARDA, their unlikely UK partner is not a western NGO building social capital in Bulgaria but “creating a level playing field” for economic co-operation in the EU by collaboration in regional development projects. However, they are not in a position to ‘transfer’ knowledge to the NGO about coping with their context of bottom-up policy making. In a sense the UK partner’s role of disseminating national policy locally can be seen as replicated in the delegated role to the Bulgarian partner, one of disseminating project information and output. For the transition country partner, knowledge acquisition is forward-looking in the form of capacity building for anticipated regional development strategy. However, they are not well-placed in their institutional context to draft policy given the competitive forces in the sector. For the western partner it is an exercise in accessing alternative funding to the usual central government funding, via the European Commission. Therefore it can be claimed that ‘knowledge acquisition’ is still the agenda, as noted by the literature, where the case illustrates possible explanations.

‘Knowledge creation’ is more fitting for SOS, whereas for Animus, there may even a place for ‘knowledge discourse’, creating an identity based on specialist knowledge, group of networked individuals who are moving away from being advocates to being service-providers beyond the sector. The view on capacity building for Animus’ international partners La Strada is expressed in their formal documents as part of the network strategy. The network is now announced as more open, engaging with NGOs beyond the formal partnership with a platform in place to support this. Still, older member organisations function as resources and support for newer ones. As a result, this dual learning approach underlies a wide professional network which includes those NGOs working under a psychodynamic approach as well as outsiders to this professional discourse.

For SOS, their “global network” structure complements what seems to be a more national professional community development. It is unclear if and how this community development outside the formal structure of SOS International is related to the top-down strategy towards financial sustainability in the network. Nevertheless, the Bulgarian NGO has been urged by circumstances, rather than by partner strategic initiative, to make strategic choices about what projects and with what partners to embed their expertise which reaches beyond the formal partnership rooted in an established model of service delivery, and even beyond the sector.

The cases illustrate that dependence is laden with complexities stemming from the larger context where

institutional support outside that of the partnership is determining for NGO practices. For the case of regional development, the political commitment to the ideal European Union appears to be a bridge between country disparities. This provides an opportunity for transition-country actors to engage in international partnerships thus becoming a part of the EU family. In the other three cases, a political commitment to larger world-wide movements and principles as specified in declarations signed on a national level appears to provide for this collaborative engagement. This implies that the strength of shared interest underlying support for NGO activities is related to the wider shared interests of institutional actors. Trafficking prevention receives more support, both ideologically and financially, than SME development as the cases demonstrate.

## Cross-Case Analysis and Emergence of CONTEXT Concepts

The process involves revisiting emerging themes in each case and working with concepts for developing a more detailed categorisation along the three framework categories. In terms of the contribution and development of the typology, the four cases are developing around three core categories, six concepts and eleven dimensions. The three categories are centred on the role of partner relations, the emphasis is on indigenous organisational practices as to the “what” and “how” of learning and knowledge exchange within these practices. These are the other names of components of knowledge-supporting partnership, emerging from the field research rather than the tailored to the selected literature themes. Conceptual coherence is sought across the cases when developing second order codes and concepts based on axial coding (Corbin & Strauss 2008).

After the initial fieldwork with BARDA and Animus, the focus on the case findings is on identifying similarities and differences across NGOs’ against the structure provided by the conceptual framework. Three main groups of codes remain, those relating to (a) identity, (b) level of professional experience/stage of organisational development, and (c) legitimacy/accountability in their own socio-political environments. According to the framework, together, the descriptors found across the three categories are indicative of the nature of knowledge transfer and support taking place in relationships formed with partner organisation (BARDA), as well as the organisation’s own approach to learning (Animus), where relationships have not been observable to the same extent.

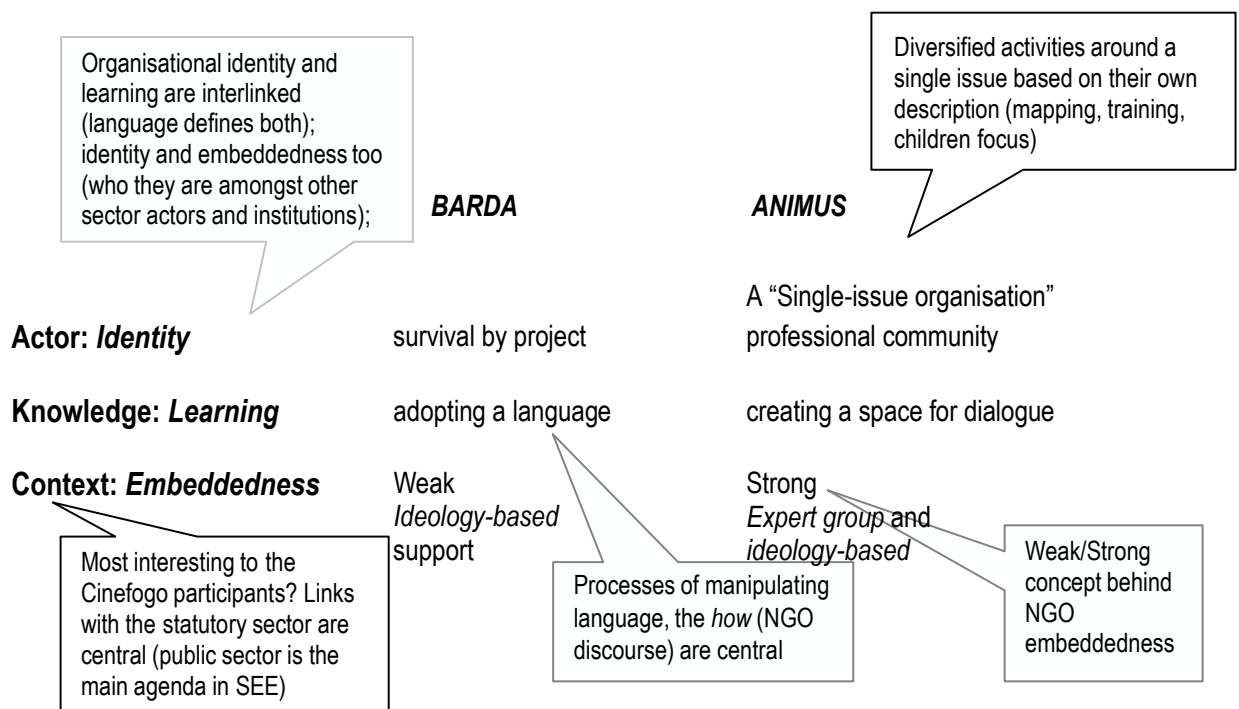


Fig. 24 Cross-case theme development in Phase 1

One feature of interest to the researcher at this time differentiates the two cases is with regards to context. This is the concept of 'embeddedness' (Fig.24). The notion reflects NGOs' level or strength of integration into a local context as actors and refers above all to their engagement with other institutions. Embeddedness here is also related to recognition by other sector actors and institutions. The implication is that whether they are influential actors in civil society is related to how well integrated they are within institutional settings. Support for their strength in the sector may be drawn from various sources. Among these is their arguably their expertise derived from relationships with external partners. In this sense, embeddedness is reliance on partnerships for legitimacy.

Here the data raises a distinction between the two cases as a question of whether they are "dependent on an expert groups" or is the NGO activity based on a "shared global ideology". In the case of Animus they are highly professional practitioners with legitimacy based in the internationally recognised psychodynamic school and various psychology and therapy-related institutions in the US and the UK. At the same time the goal of the organisation, prevention of human trafficking, is on the whole a globally shared goal which does not need additional justification to the international conventions which the Bulgarian government has signed committing itself to fight this crime.

The concept embeddedness emerges as a complex one, loaded with too many potential dimensions or descriptors. It also seems to be related to other concepts under the other two categories, such as the NGO function (Actor category). For example, where NGOs are providers for a particular group through specialist knowledge as in the case of Animus, they also display a stronger embeddedness. Single issue organisation here means that the NGO engages in activities all supporting a clear mission - prevention of and therapy services for survivors of human trafficking and domestic violence. These activities include mapping of the sub-sector capacity around the country, identifying the need for training, as well as providing necessary training to other NGOs working in the field and institutions beyond the sector, the newly developed focus on providing counselling for children, etc. In this sense the organisation is a professional community which in turn is coupled with strong institutional recognition, i.e. embeddedness.

On the other hand BARDA cannot be described as providers for a particular group through specialist knowledge. Though they are providers of business support services for SMEs, these do not form a coherent group in need of one body of specialism, by definition of SMEs belonging to a variety of industries and according to the aims and content of the projects they work on. Projects in which the NGO's role is to coordinate the activity of creating and sharing materials (for enhancing language skills, sharing information on a Europe-wide online platform) for food manufacturing SMEs and a year later for biotechnology SMEs, here is taken as not qualifying for "specialist knowledge". The survival by project mode of operating underlying the organisation's practice and presence (Identity descriptors) is coupled with weak embeddedness. There is an overlap with the Actor category despite ascribing embeddedness to the Context category, i.e. this is problematic as to the definition in terms of constructing of classification framework in that the categories are not mutually exclusive (Doty & Glick 1994).

Even at this stage of the comparison it is tempting to draw parallels from the distinction to a 'before and after' scenario. In the sense of relationships developing over time, it is observed that there is a shift in West-East partnerships in building civil society towards more independence for the developing partner. In this case BARDA exemplifies the before and Animus the after case. However, both organisations were set up around the same time, with comparable experience gathered through their network participation. If we accept that Animus is more developed and therefore a more mature organisation, what gives NGOs 'maturity' in such a model, then, could be the contextual embeddedness (i.e. their engagement with other actors in the sector) which is related to the nature of their work.

This is one possible interlinking between categories and showing signs of developing dimensions for a cross-case concept stemming from analysis in the first phase. It integrates institutional role of the organisation and NGO practice based on specialist knowledge. A second connection between categories appears when examining different features on the Knowledge category for these two cases. The learning modes here are noted as "adopting a language" and "creating dialogue". Both descriptions refer to how NGO actors appear to manipulate organisational texts taken from partners to define their organisational practice. In the case of Animus this is a text to present to potential stakeholders (future partners or funders for the NGO) which outlines the underlying philosophy to the service provision, based on conventions expressed in text by the international network La Strada. In the case of BARDA, these are project materials produced as demonstrating the service provision, based on project descriptors in texts provided by their partner organisations.

Returning to the narrative form of the case, these features can be elaborated with observations from case themes. Case themes imply that BARDA may be seen as a competitor rather than a partner by government municipalities, who specialise in the same line of work and crucially, compete for the same sources of funding for regional development and SME development. Moreover, this line of work is a government responsibility and priority, as regional development has a complex economic and social



significance for the country's overall development. Without government recognition, therefore, BARDA's project outputs, based on even the highest standards of European Commission-level international partnerships, do not seem to produce a strong 'discourse' for regional development on their own. On the other hand, Animus has an authoritative voice on the discourse of trafficking, domestic violence, children's psychological health. Crucially, it has secured its embeddedness as a service provider to the public sector (training for police, schools) and the third sector (mapping and training NGOs across Bulgaria working with victims of violence).

To reiterate, *embeddedness* is a central theme in the first fieldwork phase, referring to two dimensions – (1) the strength with which the NGO has established itself amongst institutions in the sector and (2) the source it draws on for its legitimacy. It is observed again in the second phase becoming a central cross-case theme (Fig. 28).

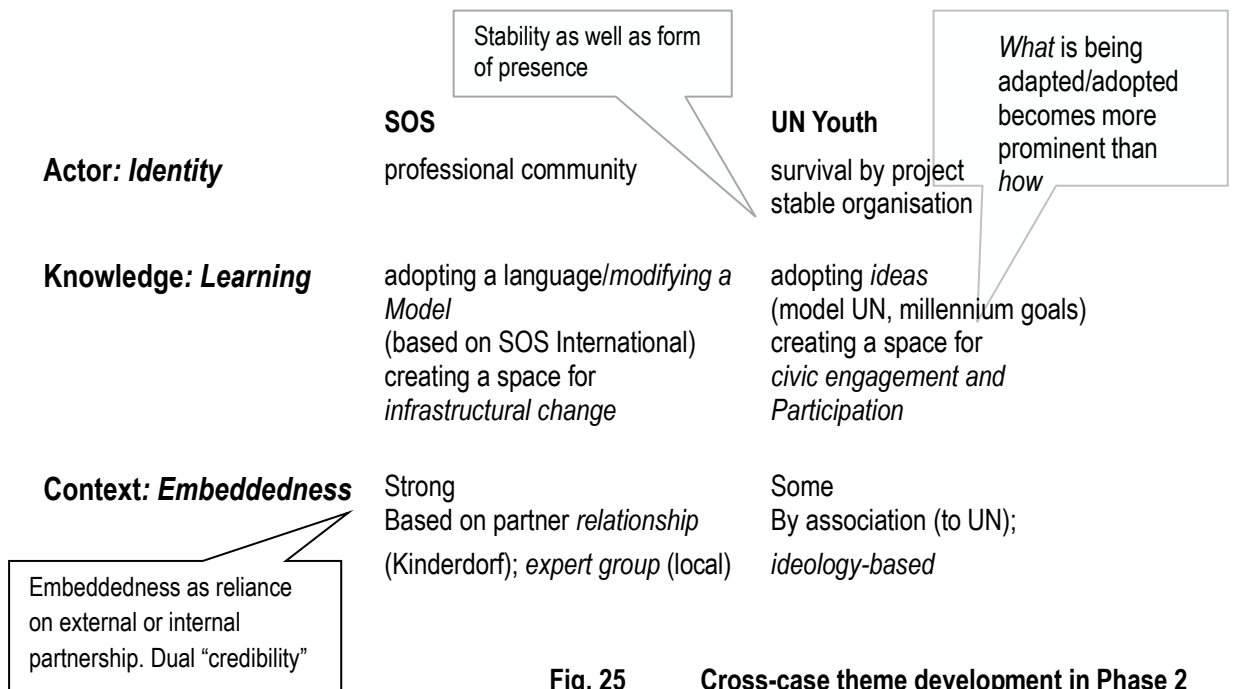


Fig. 25 Cross-case theme development in Phase 2

In the second fieldwork phase, *credibility* emerges as a related theme to embeddedness, reflecting the double accountability to partners and international networks and accountability to local stakeholders (voluntary sector and statutory institutions). It is also related to knowledge sharing, whether it takes place within local and/or international networks and the balance between. There is an element of expertise in the organisation's identity which appears to be doubling up in the Context category, which makes sense – the identity of the NGO is clearly related to their interaction in networks where they are perceived to gain and exercise their legitimacy. The distinction between SOS and UNAY on the theme "dependent on an expert groups" or a "shared global ideology" here shows that the "global brand" of these two international relationships is strong in both cases. The UN goal and ideology is a legitimacy tool for UNAY in this sense, even if their work in school clubs would seem to need the legitimacy from education institutions in the country rather than stemming from a political institution. But end of poverty is a globally

shared goal which does not need additional justification. For SOS Bulgaria the global brand is their international HQ and unique model. Yet their dependence on professional networks at home is important as well, especially since they need to comply with statutory regulations on providing social services under child protection law. This is expert group local in Fig.25.

## Taxonomy Development

Returning to the original framework developed with the guidance of the trigger case and literature streams, the coding process develops the themes emerging from within-case analysis (Fig.16-Fig.22) across the cases to form the core concepts which correspond to the three general categories in the conceptual framework. The cross-case concepts are reshuffled as they fit more than one general category (embeddedness as related to knowledge sharing is both a Context and Knowledge concept, and professional networks appear in both the Actor and Context category).

### **Conceptual Categories**

### **Emerging Categories**

<p><b>ACTOR themes:</b> organisational function, organisational structure, funding relations, organisational culture, expression (presence), attitudes to partners and other actors, approach to practice (strategy and development).</p>	<p><b>Core concepts</b> --- Presence --- identity presented to self (self-perception and self-assessment); identity presented to others; 'cultivating' and/or 'assuming' an organisational identity</p>
<p><b>KNOWLEDGE/LEARNING themes:</b> adapting and adopting language used in practice (materials); types of materials produced; modes of sharing and interacting with partners; modes of information manipulation in daily practice;</p>	<p><b>Core concepts</b> --- Knowledge modes/Learning practice --- instances of learning from partners; learning from experience; instances of reflection on organisational knowledge</p>
<p><b>CONTEXT themes:</b> belonging to a 'professional' community, connection with the local institutional context, work relations with both, pressures from institutions, information exchange within context, service provision to the voluntary and statutory sectors</p>	<p><b>Core concepts</b> --- Embeddedness and Credibility--- in statutory sector; in the community; in international networks</p>

**Table 6 Matching conceptual categories and emerging core concepts**

Further coding based on merging and developing the themes and concepts produced the following refined concepts and dimensions presented as a taxonomy. The discussion on taxonomy is found in Doty and Glick (1994) where the authors defend the capacity of typology to build theory by distinguishing it from

taxonomies and classification schemes. They state that the latter “refer to classification systems that categorize phenomena into mutually exclusive and exhaustive sets with a series of discrete decision rules... [T]ypology, refers to conceptually derived interrelated sets of ideal types. Unlike classification systems, typologies do not provide decision rules for classifying organisations. Instead, typologies identify multiple ideal types, each of which represents a unique combination of the organizational attributes that are believed to determine the relevant outcome.” (ibid.232).

<b>3Core Categories 6Concepts 11 Dimensions</b>	<b>Case 1 dimensions</b>	<b>Case 2 dimensions</b>	<b>Case 3 dimensions</b>	<b>Case 4 dimensions</b>
<b>Actor:</b> <b>Organisational presence</b> D: spatial presence D: structure type  D: core purpose  D: organisational vs. professional-focus	Moderate  Clustering  Project-based service  Organisational	Very Strong  Expanding  Beneficiary Service, Expert community development  Organisational and Professional	Strong  Splintering  Beneficiary Service, Expert community development  Organisational and Professional	Strong  Sporadic  Project-based Expert development  Organisational and Professional
<b>Knowledge:</b> <b>Knowledge Production modes</b> D: primary information handling function D: primary knowledge produced  <b>Learning practice</b> D: adapted vs. adopted process/language D: degree of practice translatability  <b>Knowledge Sharing modes</b> D: reliance on home network vs. international network	Gathering, Reporting Disseminating  Payment artefacts  <i>Adapted process</i> Adopted language  Weak  International network	Gathering, Analysing, Disseminating  Investment artefacts  <i>Adapted process</i> Adopted language  Strong  International +Home network	Gathering, Analysing, Reporting  Payment and Investment artefacts  Adopted process Adopted language  Strong  International +Home network	Disseminating  Investment artefacts  Adopted process Adopted language  Strong  International network
<b>Context:</b> <b>Institutional Embeddedness</b> D: degree of embedding  <b>Credibility source</b> D: reliance on global expert community vs. home institutions	Weak: Potential actor in institutional engagement  Home	Strong: Actor in institutional engagement  Global +Home	Strong: Actor in institutional engagement  Global +Home	Moderate: Occasional actor in institutional engagement  Global +Home

**Table 7 Cross-case Taxonomy: Concepts and dimensions across cases**

The core aspect of the Actor category is *organisational presence* referring to the NGO form, practices or services delivered, activities carried out, etc. The spatial definition is perceived as an element of self-expression and aesthetics behind agency, therefore an important aspect to organisational identity, both as perceived by others and as perceived by the NGO itself. The dimension is represented as strength of spatial presence, measuring from moderate to very strong. This means that the NGO establishes and communicates its work through its symbols, the way it occupies spaces of work, and aesthetic

expression.

The second dimension is structure type referring to organisational structure within the country (network structure, affiliated clubs, centralised or not, formal/informal network relations, etc.). The point here is to capture the diverse structural components of the NGOs which by nature of their activity are more or less structured and active in expanding their work. In the Case 3, “splintering” is meant to capture the fact they are a central model operating with a national network of service delivery, and at the same time they are developing a separate network for providing their new services for procurement. In Case 1 it is a cluster of RDAs across the country more or less active in given locations; for Case 4 sporadic means it functions whenever and wherever there is an individual present.

Together with core purpose, these two dimensions are the basis for legitimacy and accountability of their practices. Here the main issue is who the beneficiary group is, what it receives from the NGO and through what channels. There may be a very specific community of practitioners who use the NGO's channels for providing service to beneficiary groups, as well as for developing their professional community (Animus). The practitioner community may be larger reaching beyond a single organisation (SOS) or there may not be services delivered to the beneficiary group in society, but benefits enjoyed only by the members of the organisation (UNA). In BARDA's case, the NGO may be a mechanism for (often unrelated) service-delivering projects for various beneficiaries.

Finally the organisational versus profession-based dimension is seen as key conceptualisation of the cross-case findings. It refers to the predominant form in which the organisation appears as an actor in the sector. Findings point to two distinct forms – (a) organisational agency, partner to other NGOs and (b) professional agency, engaging with a wider practitioner networks. Pertaining to the definition of classification systems, the differentiation suggests that either one or the other will be the case, not both. This is tentative with respect to the small sample from which the taxonomy is developing. In addition, the concept *organisational presence* needs further development as the literature on organisational identity is not part of the conceptual framework at this stage.

The characteristics exploring how the NGOs in Bulgaria engage in a relationship with other organisations is defined by the second category, or the Knowledge projection in the framework. The knowledge and learning instances, or process and content of a partnership exchanges around the topic of NGO practice, are the key concepts explored in the coding process. An impressive portfolio of EC funded projects demonstrates a vast experience on partnership-based work, as in the case of BARDA. The nature of the learning and knowledge instances which take place within these projects, however, may be a matter of information-handling and storage rather than knowledge-handling and development expected to occur in a learning relationship. There is a need to distinguish between instance types within partnerships as well as a need to see instances outside a partnership context (personal experience being the most important alternative context). This has been illustrated at length in the Case Study and Analysis Chapters with examples for each NGO.

It is necessary to return to the literature with respect to this projection in the taxonomy. The researcher believes that the argument that NGOs should focus on their learning rather than getting caught up in definition problems of learning paradigms and distinctions between knowledge and information (Edwards & Fowler 2002) can be misleading. Contrary to this statement, the case themes point to the importance of differentiating between activities associated with knowledge production, learning, and knowledge sharing, delineated in the taxonomy.

*Knowledge production* refers to the handling of information and the primary type of knowledge as determined by its use. The way information is handled by organisational actors and their systems is crucial here, denoting practice. This produces a distinction in the cases between gathering, analysing and disseminating, where the emphasis is on primary (dominant) handling mode. The second dimension, *primary knowledge produced*, does not entertain the dichotomy of production and application – e.g. *how* the knowledge is used by the NGO is a categorisation of knowledge type produced. Here the taxonomy borrows from Lyotard's (1979) conceptualisation of knowledge as money, differentiating payment knowledge from investment knowledge, i.e. units of knowledge exchanged in a daily maintenance framework for organisational survival, versus funds of knowledge dedicated to optimising performance. It becomes “artefacts” in the taxonomy as this is what the organisation produces as carriers of knowledge and learning by which they embody the organisational practice as defined in Scott (2002). These are the textual artefacts archived as knowledge resources of the NGO.

The adapting and adopting distinction in *learning practice* (both in language and in the activities) is largely derived from the textual analysis conducted for each case, under the guidance of organisational artefacts (texts) being translators of practice. These have been supplemented with interview data. One of the primary modes of learning observed is through using texts produced by partner NGOs in the West, either directly copying or modifying existing texts across all organisational activities. The subject of learning and copying for the case NGOs here, or practice, are (1) what services can be delivered (2) how they can be delivered, (3) the underlying philosophy to the service provision and (4) the internal management practice which supports these activities (including both organisational structure and processes). The dimension of *practice translatability* refers to the ease with which these practices can be said to be implemented locally. Both dimensions can be traced in the literature with particularly relevant research on how ideas objects and practices travel globally has been noted (Czarniawska & Sevón 2005). The dimensions are in tune with the Czarniawska and Joerges' (1996) preference for the term “translation” rather than “transmission”, which is seen as more appropriate to describing the way in which NGO appropriate ideas about how an organisation frames and expresses its practices (Scott 2003). The subject of translation, i.e. organisational practices, are rooted in experience of working with western partners, but are seen as experiences rather than mechanically transferred procedures within a dynamic approach to which has been adopted taken here.

The data points to the need to differentiate between language and process being adapted to local context or adopted without change, and language in the texts as practice. This is an attempt to articulate the tacit and explicit dimensions of knowledge, as made by the knowledge management literature (Child & Czegledy 1996). The language directly translated from international partner materials for use by the Bulgarian NGO is coded as adopted without change, otherwise it is adapted, imbuing it with meaning as seen by the organisation. This appears in the fieldwork as ownership of discourse and borrowed texts. This is seen as critical for the claims to empowerment and identity-building for the Bulgarian partner – if they are involved in making the text and practice theirs by actively adapting it, they are re-inventing practice for a local context, i.e. reflexivity and learning can be claimed to be taking place through ownership of discourse.

A relevant concept here is 'adaptive capacity' (Staber & Sydow 2002; Timmer 2005) which needs to be used in furthering this dimension. Initially it is included in response to the change in strategy experienced in just one of the cases in the fieldwork, where the NGO is seen to be gradually moving away from the established western model towards a more regionally-based model of service provision. This is a more subtle shift than simply substituting the old for the new. Gradually, this concept informs a recurring dimension observed in across cases, expressed as the distinction between 'adapting' and 'adopting' of organisational processes through the use of resources provided by the partnership.

The final concept is *knowledge sharing*, which refers to the balance between reliance on international networks and within-country networks or partners for learning and sharing experience, developing new services, securing work, etc. This overlaps in a sense with the category Context, where the first delineated concept from cross-case analysis is *institutional embeddedness* referring to the strength of integration within sector institutions (both voluntary and statutory). The development of this concept has been discussed in detail above (see pg. 201). Further coding has led to splitting the initial embeddedness concept into two, dividing the degree of embedding as relational from embedding in the sense of reliance on partnerships for legitimacy. The latter has become a separate concept, *credibility source*, where the dimensions which the cases have crystallised are reliance on global expert community and reliance on home institutions as a source of legitimacy or credibility. Here there may be overlaps with legitimacy and the credibility notion will have to be resituated in the legitimacy literature, which currently has not been integrated in the conceptual framework.

An illustration of how the knowledge and learning concepts and dimensions relate to themes and provide argument for the level of NGO development within the partnership, is given for selected cases as a "reverse engineering" approach to re-applying the taxonomy category for case analysis.

With respect to information handling, the BARDA-EEDA project-based collaboration creates a 'gathering, reporting and dissemination' function for BARDA (e.g. gathering information on Bulgarian SMEs who can benefit from the projects, disseminating project-related materials amongst project partners, reporting on project activities to the leading partner). In some of the other case studies, there is an 'information analysis'

element observed which is not present here. Partly due to capacity limitation and to the role BARDA plays in the projects, an analysis function is not observed within the partnership, though it may have existed as an unused skill. In the case the agro-food sector and its training needs in Bulgaria, BARDA developed language materials which were not reported by EEDA as a resource and did not appear in the final website as a project output, though some vague references were made to “partner contributions”.

The knowledge artefacts produced (e.g. language training materials) are used towards fulfilling the project output obligations, i.e. payment rather than investment for future projects (ownership of the materials was an unresolved issue between the partners and the local higher education sub-contractor). Furthermore, the terminology in the project documentation (similarity of printed materials, ‘anglicisms’ in the office working field of work. The processes, on the other hand, are adapted to fit local realities. For example, the SMEs who were meant to take part in the pilot for testing the language materials pulled out and students were used instead. This raises questions about the legitimacy of a regional development NGO carrying out functions outside its remit in order to meet project objectives. This relates to a weak ‘translatability of practices’ overall, where a UK-based organisation’s ways of carrying out the project are not easy to imitate in Bulgaria. Finally, there is an exclusive reliance of the NGO on an international network rather than on local structures and alliances with respect to sharing of knowledge (e.g. know-how, information, good practice policies, continual training, etc.). Knowledge sharing in these terms being the basis for carrying out regional development project work, such externally-oriented reliance is at odds with the very nature of the NGO’s purpose, which requires local embeddedness and good relations with government institutions and various sector stakeholders. Committing to the objective of creating an EU level playing field may therefore act as a distraction to the NGO which may need to focus instead on committing to local embeddedness (e.g. securing contracts from national funding streams for regional development). What the Bulgarian NGO learns about regional development strategically seems to be limited by the role they play in the partnership, a consequence of the UK-based organisation looking after its own interests.

Analysis plays a key role in Animus practices, for example in their work on country-wide mapping the sector capacity for providing trafficking and domestic violence support. They are responsible for their own information gathering handling in the La Strada international network as an equal partner without the need to report for project-funding to a co-ordinator. There is one person coordinating La Strada interaction whereas a number of senior members take place in seminars and forums through its channels. This is an interesting combination of using the international network as a knowledge sharing mode without the reporting element, giving the NGO an independent stance. With respect to disseminating information, again, this is mostly part of the advocacy work at home rather than in a subordinate role within an international project. Each NGO member carries a project responsibility (horizontal structure of work) rather than having to report within a hierarchy internally, which maintains a largely egalitarian organisational culture. This facilitates a learning environment which takes a central place here with a clear investment knowledge element in the knowledge produced (artefacts).



## Chapter Seven: Discussion

*The chapter draws together the main analysis threads linking them back to the initial conceptual framework. It also links threads into discussions beyond the taxonomy as a first attempt to relate emergent themes and concepts to the wider literature reviewed. Typology developments are discussed and selected conferences attended during the course of the research are proposed as a further relevant context for situating the discussion on implications of research findings.*

At this point the discussion returns to the outset reiterating the argument running through the research. NGOs utilise various available structural *arrangements* (western), for achieving their *objectives* (local) guided by organisational *values* (adapted locally?) to carry out assigned *civil society* functions (adapted locally). Ultimately, existing NGO partnership typologies present structures enabling independence, empowerment, and participation between individuals, who may take shelter in or wear the armour of their organisational entity, as depending on the case. A significant part of what and how is carried out within these arrangements is knowledge and learning about organisational practice.

With respect to the partnership and collaboration literature strand, the research takes a dynamic approach as it allows for a more nuanced picture of what is going on in the exchange process, thus being better suited for a transition setting for third sector partnerships. This approach sets a negotiation-type framework of interactions, bringing the nuances of relationships to the surface, exposing them as complex and often dysfunctional. This is based, at least in part, on the difficulty of finding a balance between multiple goals, difference in opinions, and definitions, as literature on West-East civil society discussions contend. This difference, however, has not been observed in the data across the four case studies.

Over the course of the fieldwork the research has undergone some adjustment to accommodate practical limitations and realities of the observable partner interactions in the fieldwork. Crucially, the focus has become the practice of learning and knowledge handling as only *partially* based on the relationship, rather than the relationship being the focus for learning and knowledge support for development per se. This has resulted in reconceptualising the research outcomes respectively to the research aims: to explore the process of becoming an NGO actor capable of operating in a transition context by mastering practice and second, to explore the learning channel(s) for this process, i.e. the partnerships between Bulgarian NGOs and their western counterparts.

The research question is reiterated here:

**“To what extent does a classification (of inter-organisational relationships) emphasising the underlying knowledge transfer, sharing, and learning processes, offer a useful approach to describing an evolving voluntary sector in a transition context?”**

Approaching a typology through the taxonomy (classification) based on case fieldwork, the cases are largely structured around the pre-determined platforms set out in the conceptual framework for exploring

the relationship as seen from a learner perspective. These are (1) the actors involved in the partnership-based organisational development, (2) the process and content of knowledge being acquired, translated, adopted, etc. and (3) the sector-specific, national, and international institutional elements within which this dynamic occurs. These three conceptual categories further evolve with the appearance of emerging concepts from case themes through coding and data analysis. These are organisational presence, knowledge production modes, learning practice, knowledge sharing modes, institutional embeddedness, and credibility source. Six concepts and eleven dimensions are related to the three conceptual categories.

The *organisational* and *professional focus* dimension relates to the emphasis given to the level of expertise in performing NGO practices (knowledge and qualifications) and the degree to which individuals are prominent as professionals belonging to a practice (e.g. international professional body) as opposed to belonging to the organisation. This is considered fertile ground for theory development, whereas the other concepts in the Actor category remain underdeveloped. The characteristics of an organisation's engagement in a partnership-based relationship appears as *knowledge production* (the handling of information by gathering, analysing and disseminating, and the primary type of knowledge for 'developing' or 'reporting'), *learning practice* (with an 'adapting' and 'adopting' distinction), and *knowledge sharing* modes (distinguishing between reliance on home and international networks). Finally *embeddedness* and *credibility source* are the context-related concepts with respect to a relationship-based development in the cases, addressing the strength of institutional engagement in the home country and the reliance on home versus international expert community when carrying out NGO activities.

An overreaching theme across all three projections which relates key concepts and dimensions is 'professionalisation', or the development of organisational 'expertise', embodied at individual, organisational, and sector levels as observed in the case studies. Reframing partnerships around the professionalisation goals and practices of NGOs in Bulgaria allows approaching a new organisational partnership model in the sector. Professionalisation is observed in the case NGOs as a current rationale in developing practice accounting for a more self-driven development mode for the voluntary sector. It factors in, but is not exclusive to, the role of East-West partnerships.

The second overreaching theme is the dual credibility dimension in the taxonomy, i.e. depending on both national and international networks of institutional actors to derive legitimacy for organisational practice. This raises some unexplored questions for the field of partnerships in development addressing the relationship between credibility at home and abroad on one hand and elements of expertise or professionalism as an expression of an organisation's agency. What makes the professional actor or institution (organisational or international community-focused) a 'credible identity'? How is this new identity managed? One dimension of importance emerging from the taxonomy and supported by case findings is that the ***organisation's recognition as an institutional actor is based on professionalisation processes, which are coupled with a variety of knowledge and learning modes made available to the NGO through their learning and knowledge exchange channels.***

This speaks to the professionalisation discourse and a return to this literature is necessary to develop links with existing professionalisation paradigms. The distinction between “amateur” and “professional” found in voluntary sector research (Hwang & Powell 2009) observe that the sector may be displaying a move towards increasingly viewing its practice as professional. They define this process as rationalisation, where organisations adopt more methodical, bureaucratic procedures. The argument is that administrative expertise and knowledge have become standardised and circulate more widely, leading to managerial aspirations and expectations penetrating organisations through institutional pressures, competition, and employee training and development (ibid.:270). There is a link between the rise of formal organisation and the rise of “organizational professionals” (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) (ibid).

One possible direction of resituating the theme in this literature is to observe the relationship between the categories in the taxonomy and the highlighted themes of professionalisation - standardisation of procedures, formal structure, and employee training, as they are dimensions in the taxonomy. Yet the professionalisation theme in the research presented offers a different reading of professionalism altogether, where the sector professional is one that can manage a dual credibility of organisational and professional roles at home and on international platforms of engagement.

In the context of professionalisation literature, the observations from the fieldworks is that over time, professionalisation of the voluntary sector through the professional development of its organisations is a sign of their maturing into equal partners to other institutions beyond the sector. That is, the process of legitimation takes place on a sector-wide basis (Berger & Luckman 1966). At the same time, it is a sign of possible domestication to the agenda of these stakeholders. As a counterpoint to the critical perspective presented earlier in the limiting role NGO are given in global context by their Western funders, the argument made here is a variation on dependence and compliance. That is, the taxonomy crystallises what the findings in the cases illustrate - there is a move from international to national embedding of the sector, which may be a process of domestication under the guise of becoming “professional”.

The discussions in the transition literature points to both a push and a pull for change in transition countries directed by and affecting institutional actors. Amongst these are NGOs as re-constructed representatives of the voluntary sector, embodying a number of fields of practice represented by four cases serving their respective social goals. Each faces its own challenge of keeping and discarding elements of practice in the process of engagement with their western partners. A lack of reflection on learning about practice is evident in all cases with the exception of Case 2. This points to lacking mechanisms for this winnowing process, which is essential for building a superior level of competence, according to Child and Czegledy (1996).

The cases present a clear presence of both explicit knowledge and experiential knowledge as differentiated by the literature, each affecting organisational practice. A key difference across the cases is how key texts, as artefacts for practice, are adapted and translated by each organisation.

The transition literature and institutional theory stimulate reflections on the research questions around the possibility of interdependence in partnership and the underlying knowledge and learning dynamics characterising this international exchange in the sector. In addition to how an institutional approach is congruent with transition to a market economy, institutions are important to the discussion in their capacity to create the conditions for organisational action. Scott (2003) discusses the process in which institutional elements move from place to place and time to time via different types of institutional carriers. These are symbolic systems, relational systems, routines, and artifacts (ibid.: 879). The taxonomy reflects the presence and importance of such carriers for NGO practice. This fits with research based on the translation and idea-travel defended by Czarniawska and Sevón (2005). Applying their translation modes to the sector, Hwang and Suarez (2005) look at how practices are translated through two artefacts embodying the ideology or organisations - the activity of making strategic plans and websites. Similar modes or instances of knowledge and learning are explored in the taxonomy. "Active translation" with engagement of these artefacts into the organisation's practice is highlighted in both Hwang and Suarez and the resulting taxonomy here – in the Bulgarian case these are described as "adapting" processes and language of text materials rather than adopting them without changes.

Identifying institutional carriers comes close to focusing on the learning and knowledge functions in a partnership between NGOs, and yet does not provide the framework to capture the relationship within which transfer takes place. The hybridity discussion raises relevant questions about institution-building in the voluntary sector across different transition countries. Are NGOs as institutions simply re-exported through partnerships? As Narozhna (2004) suggest assistance from the West can be a false pretence legitimising self-serving practices by insider networks in transition countries creating 'grant-eater' types of NGOs. This is not supported across the cases. However self-serving practices are central. Findings contribute to further conceptualisation of transition hybrid organisations as self-interested 'information consumers', made up of professionalising individuals stocking knowledge from multiple sources.

The research takes the position that the nature of the relationship between NGOs in the West and East creates a dilemma for the Bulgarian side - existence of NGOs is heavily dependent on funding and regulation from abroad whilst being increasingly accountable to national legal frameworks and need to demonstrate their legitimacy to local actors. With a shift towards contextual approach to studying and working with NGOs, organisations are expected to be engaging with various institutions locally, which has been verified by the cases. The consequences for the organisation's direction of development observed in the data is that with the decreasing funding from the West, knowledge transfer is increasingly taking place beyond the partnership, on a wider scale of professional networks.

Literature suggests international actors are faced with the task of building of a civil society in the presence of a lacking common definition on the role of voluntary sector organisations. This has not been supported by findings, on the contrary – even where partnerships do not produce the best learning outcomes for Bulgarian NGOs, there is a shared goal underlying the partnership engagement.

Western third sector observers have recognised the importance of the political engagement of NGOs. At a 2010 NGPA workshop in London, the element of “local credibility” of NGOs was raised by third sector researchers as a significant issue in addressing the politics of western relations with developing countries and stressed the importance of the political standing NGOs have at home on the nature of engagement with partners from the West. Returning to the case study findings, the issue of local credibility raises further questions regarding the suggested approach to NGO’s knowledge exchange and organisational learning. Should BARDA’s credibility at home and their credibility abroad through partnerships be considered separately or as parts of the same enabling mechanism, i.e. building a strong organisational identity? The credibility of Animus abroad and at home seems to be more aligned compared to that of BARDA. Their specialist status is nevertheless based on imported qualifications obtained abroad, something BARDA cannot achieve by interacting with their UK partner. If gaining “local credibility” is a lesson the western partner is not able to teach to Bulgarian NGOs, how should existing embodied knowledge in artefacts like projects, be “adapted” to address local realities? Can organisational learning be guided by partners who have not had the same experiences? When does learning from partners turn into learning from experience and how do both coexist in the context of ‘credibility’?

These questions take us back to the start as we return to the Level 4 questions set out at the beginning of the fieldwork, i.e. the implications of the typology of shared learning relationships for management practice: *How do relationship types affect knowledge transfer and learning between NGOs and is this a useful tool in the tasks of civil society capacity building, nationally and internationally? What accountability and legitimacy issues arise from the relationship types in the process of building of civil society in a country changing towards an EU regulated status?*

It is necessary to rephrase these overreaching questions in order to accommodate the limitation of the research. As the taxonomy graduates into a typology beyond the stage reached in this thesis, it will address whether transition countries and their institutional capacities are late developers historically but potentially fast learners by nature of their professionalisation activity and dual credibility. Being active *simultaneously* in international networks and on their own institutional projects through local partnership arrangements may be a feature of organisational adaptive capacity, which has not been explored by existing literature set in the voluntary sector field. Further research integrating this work with the taxonomy is suggested here (Staber & Sydow 2002; Timmer 2005).

The literature recognises the sector’s inherent duality due to its multi-functionality (e.g. Jenei & Kuti 2008). Research has more often looked within the sector for power dynamics in terms of financial dependence instead of looking to its cross-sector qualities. A contribution of the taxonomy here is that by it poses the question to what extent we can talk about the sector’s internal dual purpose, to serve beneficiaries and support its own professional development, towards which its learning and knowledge instances are geared, and how this relates to its dual credibility. This is a dynamic approach much like the organisational life-span framework where development happens over time but also in the presence of two processes –

embedding in largely national institutional context and professionalisation in a largely international context. Therefore the research contends that:

***An inter-organisational relationship typology for the voluntary sector which emphasises underlying knowledge transfer, knowledge sharing, and learning processes reveals that a “dual credibility” and “professionalisation” are practice-enabling or practice-limiting features for NGO work.***

This evokes the discussion in Billis (2010) setting out the theorising of hybrid organisation types with respect to ideal types defining distinct sectors:

*“...[N]otwithstanding the wide variations in structures, organisations within each sector appear to derive their strength and legitimacy... from the characteristics and rules of the game of their own distinctive ideal type. In reality, organizations within any sector, whilst adhering to the core principles, will vary in the degree to which they fully match the ideal model... And individuals, particularly those in powerful roles or organizational positions, who can contribute to shaping hybridity, will encounter the tensions between the ideal type and organizational reality.” (ibid.??)*

This reflection leads to perceiving NGOs as the ‘boundary spanners’ of national transitions - they gain skills through their international engagements which are necessary to the development of the statutory sector in service-provision, whilst these skills may be packaged as services provided by business organisations (private sector). NGOs can easily transform into social enterprises and for example sell their therapy services to the police force quite separately from their trafficking prevention work. However, in Bulgaria rhetorical and ideological devices pertaining to transition have meant the sector has largely been presented with a set of circumstance requiring compliance, as literature on post-communist transition also suggests (Pop-Eleches 2007; Temmes 2000). Mostly compliance to EU standards. This has recently been supplemented by the withdrawal of international funding and the necessary move towards developing sustainable practice for NGOs, namely, establishing contractual relations with the public sector at home guided by the European Commission architecture. The mechanism and role of embeddedness in and professionalism through international and national networks is key to sector agency.

The trend of international donor withdrawal in Bulgaria has been noted in the cases here confirming other research in the country’s third sector (Taylor 2009). This may be a sign of Bulgaria having ended its transition to liberal values politically, economically and socially, or at least its transition away from socialism. It may indeed be too late to contemplate a mentoring model within West-East NGO relations given the end of assistance in this context, and more appropriate to explore evidence of East-East organisational dynamics with respect to practice, knowledge transfer, and learning. This is in line with what Petrova and Tarrow (2007) suggest about giving more importance to the ties among organised actors and between them and other institutions. In response to hybridity as either mutation or adaptation, it may be the case that new interactions lead to transformations which organisational actors undergo, becoming types beyond those comprising the third sector as it is defined today.

Where Czarniawska asks about fashion underlying the travel of ideas globally, findings here provide commentary on questions which were not raised at the outset - what activities akin to transition setting are *justified* within an NGO-based partnership, and what organisational practices take place under the guise of partnership agendas, whether or not they are related to the task of building a 'civil society'. The translation of approaches in UNAY's practices was seen to fit naturally into concurrent processes in the transition country, such as accession, harmonisation, and implementation of practices which have been taking place since the beginning of the transition period (e.g. EU membership processes). Conversely, BARDA was pressured into engaging with lower level 'knowledge production' modes (gathering and reporting information) by their own partners instead of being directed to knowledge production modes leading to independent organisational practice. Their lack of 'investment knowledge' as noted in the taxonomy, is traced back to the case themes evidencing lack of a strategy for long-term organisational existence.

As seen in the case of SOS, international network and a cross-sector network of experts united by a common cause and approach, defining national practice and a professional group of experts, who may be less loyal to their own organisational strategies than to the whole professional development agenda. If one western partner organisation decides to close down operation in the country, the opportunity to move into or set up another one on the basis of professional standing and network membership, is available. In UNAY, the active force of learning and knowledge practice were the youth volunteers. They were the ones who not only support and promote the UN goals through their NGO work, but who also "become" the organisation whenever they have the opportunity to develop a project. Relying on participation and training in various international networks with a self-directed learning approach in place, these future professionals seemed to be developing their own career by nature of carrying out the NGO broadly-defined goals. The content and process of knowledge transfer in organisational settings, therefore, is at least partly based around the notion of selectively translating western ideas into working, local ones.

This selection process is not necessarily overt. It is better described, as in this research, as the distance between the largely autonomous field of regional development and the more universal women's rights movement. In this respect the degree of convergence around underlying ideologies flagged by institutional actors gives NGOs their license to operate and facilitates partnership-based learning (this is the taxonomy dimension 'translatability of practice'). This question pushes the discussion towards centrality of dimensions and concepts proposed here, which is beyond the scope of the research at this stage.

The issues in this transition country's voluntary sector continue to be the same as they were over ten years ago. Organisational legitimacy, capacity-building, and resource dependency, appear as the main concerns in all four cases, as identified in the international third sector comparison study by Salamon *et al.* (1999). These are observed in the cases as summaries of case findings emphasise in the within-case analysis.

Negotiations which occur within NGO learning and knowledge instances demonstrate that western ideas

are adopted and adapted to suit local practice, needs, and institutional pressures. The agenda of knowledge transfer in organisational settings is at least partly based around the notion of selectively translating western ideas into working, local ones. On the other hand, both learning from western partners and within the partnership, have been harder to spot in the sense of being identified by practitioners in Bulgaria. In Case 1 the NGO's reliance on the western partners is greater than its weak local institutional embeddedness. Coupled with the reliance on home-based rather than international credibility for their activities and weak translatability of practice, this institutional mismatch between credibility, embeddedness and translatability is arguably what makes the NGO an endangered one. The developing professionalised groups (Animus, SOS) in the third sector is no less than self-realisation under international provision of network opportunities. The notion of professional development signals the presence of empowerment in the NGO sector, that is, thanks to the presence of international networks through western partnerships, development towards independence and sustainability of a transition voluntary sector is possible.

### Typology Developments

The following diagrams and drawings are visualisations of the developing cross-case synthesis towards a single framework (in order of their conception). The notes and diagram (Fig. 26) are based on the idea that a single concept representing a dominating characteristic of organisational practices, can be used to sum up each case.

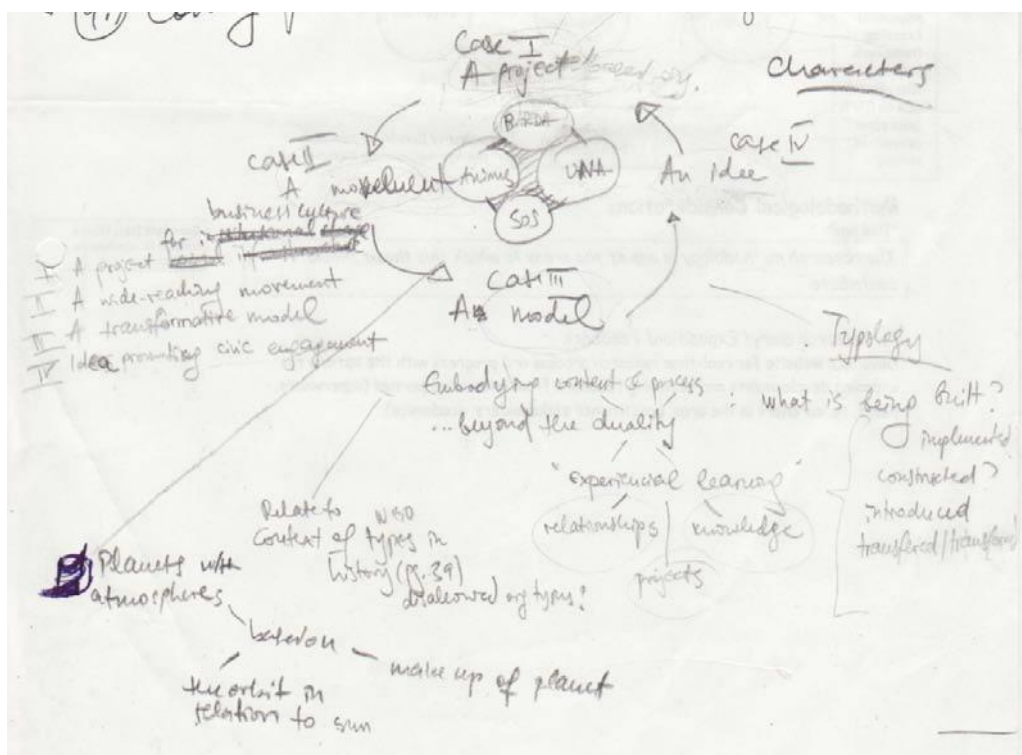
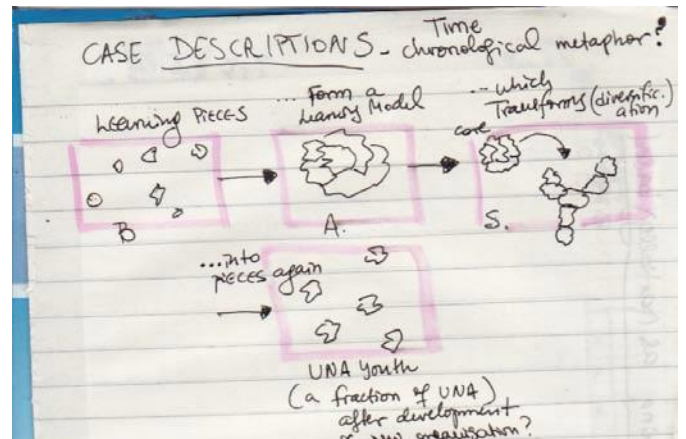


Fig. 26 Within-case summation



In BARDA, the organisation is described as a project mechanism, where each project is an incomplete learning piece in the organisation's bank of information-based (rather than reflection-based) knowledge stored for the future. In ANIMUS, the NGO is a movement, a multi-level, departmentalised operation backed by a strong ideology and on-going international network support. At its heart is a single learning model based on individual and group supervision, a structured training model for the psychotherapy profession developing in the country. In SOS, the established model of service-provision has reached a point of need for reinvention (shifting model). It involves the need to learn to operate in a local context as institutional changes evolve - learning from the HQ in Vienna is complemented, and possibly will be overtaken, by a more networked learning with other organisations. Finally, UNAY is a dispersed idea around a number of supranational network-upheld goals, which takes on various forms depending on who facilitates their implementation. Here learning is based on individual-led projects, possibly a 'community of practice' beyond the organisational boundaries, and as in the case of SOS, making use of sector-wide networks. These four systems are tentative types developing from the taxonomy.



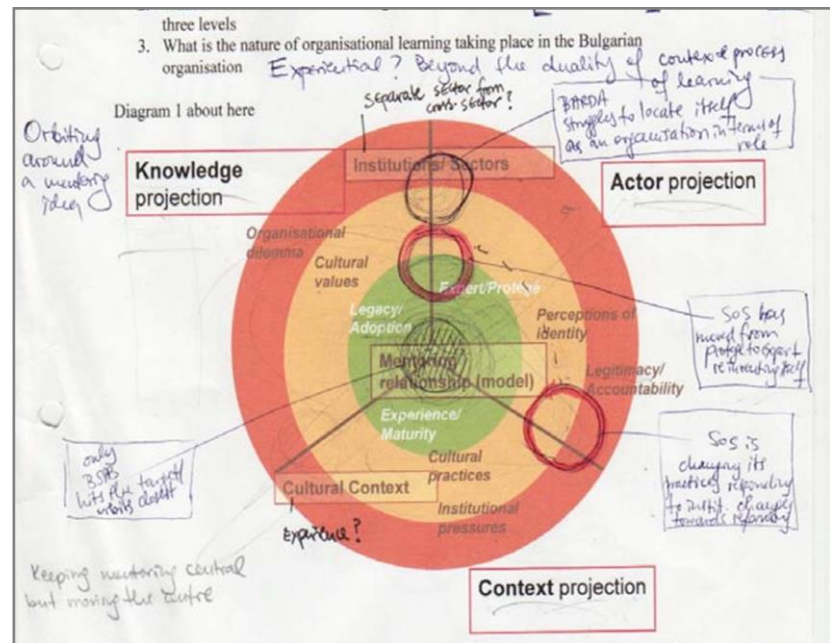
**Fig. 27 Life-cycle approach to types**

The diagram in Fig. 27 sees the four NGOs on the same plane with a linear, life-cycle connotation of the direction of their development. The organisational mode of operation ranges from explicit to tacit, even abstract, practice.

The notes around the diagram are reflections on a metaphor which act as a core for repositioning the case themes around an existing set of relationships, common to all four cases. Are NGOs planets with atmospheres, made up of elements, which orbit around a central star? This metaphor builds upon the actor, context, and exchange path (for learning/knowledge) categories in the original conceptual framework (the central star being the strategic partner).

With the same metaphor, a more dynamic framework emerges from the original conceptual categories diagram (Fig.28).

Organisations are now moving (“orbiting”) within mentoring-related practices and other agendas (context-driven, experience-based learning, etc.). This is a further step in the “moving target” visualisation of where and how mentoring fits in with organisational practices as an ideal type.



**Fig. 28 Mentoring as a ‘possible type’**

Mentoring is still an element in the framework, but as a *possible space*, i.e. ideal type (Doty and Glick 1994). This represents an organisation that might exist, a “unique combination of the dimensions used to describe the set of ideal types” (ibid.:233). Tracking the changes of the organisation’s actions as they lead to practices and relationships with partners is seen to be a more realistic outlook for approaching mentoring as a potential type. Importantly, organisational practices within specific partnership arrangements may or may not resemble organisational mentoring. Organisational activity is the (metaphorical) ‘orbiting’ through the mentoring space, inhabiting it temporarily and only to the extent that a partner relationship allows the knowledge-channelling supportive interaction to function as mentoring rather than another form of knowledge-based interaction.

The following example illustrates this point. SOS (Case 3) appears in two places on the diagram (red circle Fig.32): first it is annotated as ‘changing its practice, responding to institutional changes, towards reforming’. The reform processes are relevant to its legitimacy as an actor in the sector (working more closely with local government institutions than in the past), the re-invention of its identity (as a provider of support for children outside the established villages model), and pressures to move in that direction (based on the eventual withdrawal of international financing from Vienna). Second, SOS appears in another segment of the diagram: in relation to its expert status gained in the context of working within the international structure for eighteen years. These appearances connect to represent an ‘orbiting through the mentoring space’. This means that mentoring is an ideal type which does not fit this case. Another type would be more appropriate in which the combination of key dimensions would more closely capture the SOS case.

## Conferences as Research Developments Context

Attending the conferences is a part of continuous personal development, an opportunity to receive feedback on the research process and to network with researchers in the field. Over the course of the data collection I attended a number of third sector and transition conferences, two of which have had particular bearing on the interpretation of the findings. Conference discussions and presentations are considered as discourse providing “living” texts on currently debated issues by academics and practitioners in the field, highlighting specific strands of the published literature. The level of convergence or indeed dissonance with “local” academic thinking at the time is a relevant aspect to the purpose of research in that we are all participating in the same conversation with our work. In this way the conferences were also an opportunity for me to reflect on my own researcher status as an outsider/insider to the context I was researching by listening for the familiar and the unfamiliar from fellow “easterners”. This context has inevitably emphasised and amplified particular themes and questions emerging in the data. Additional comments from the literature are integrated for elaboration on the themes.

The NGO as an entity was treated with some disdain at the Cinefogo conference in Ljubljana in 2008, where the discussions focused on the political side of local organisational development through partnerships with western NGOs. Academics in a relatively new field of voluntary sector studies present the Balkans as a place searching for self-identification, with a divided local activism, under-supported by western ‘partners’ interested mostly in exporting their own political agendas. The aspect of constructing an identity is seen to be relevant to the case studies here, pertinent to the Actor projection in the conceptual framework particularly the dimension *organisational vs. professional-focused identity*. Its exploration remains a future research direction.

At a later Cinefogo conference in Sofia in 2009, the keynote speaker offered a less antagonistic historicist perspective. In the two periods of civil society development for Eastern European actors (pre- accession and post-2000), there has been a move away from funding dependency and civil society specialisation. In the second period, ‘downloading’ rather than ‘uploading’ strategies are still prominent, where numerous consultations on government capacity and report evaluations are the agenda in transition country development, rather than exchanging ideas about change.

This is reflected in case findings in all four NGOs. “Specialisation” is seen to be related to at least three of the eleven taxonomy dimensions – presence and scope of *professional network focus*, the presence of expert development as part of the *core purpose*, and the presence of investment artefacts as a *primary knowledge production* type. The prominence of strategy ‘downloading’ is contained under learning practice dimensions, particularly the *adopting/adapting of processes and language*, where implications remains unclear.

An interesting phenomenon noted is the development of “issue networks” as specialised coalitions loosely organised civic protests (usually citizens or environmental organisations) preoccupied with sending petitions to the European Parliament committee. The focus of these is mostly on national actions rather than on EU level consultation, perhaps implying that more is expected from new EU members. This provoked some comments from the floor on the “reactive participatory mode” left over from the pre-accession years and that it is a matter of learning and surely a reaction to the top-down consultation process embedded in the European system. From this perspective, the question of maturity and path dependence raised in the transition literature earlier, is complicated further by implications that bureaucratic institutional systems hinder organisational development.

Looking at the case studies together with the proposed categories, both “maturity hindrance” and “reactive organisational mode” are plausible only in Case 1, where participation follows a project application process led from a partner organisation, usually funded by an EU institution. All other cases display an alternative, self-reliant mode of existence. In Case 2, institutional embeddedness is strong and the presence of analysis in the organisation’s *primary information handling* leads to production (e.g. mapping the sub-sector needs, cross-sector collaboration initiatives, developing private sector expertise networks in psychotherapy etc.) Case 3 there is a move towards sustainable project-based funding with local government institutions and through collaboration with voluntary sector actors, albeit via EU programme funding on a national level. In Case 4 school clubs across the country provide for a structured youth volunteering presence in the education sector, regardless of the availability of international funding, where curriculum-development is becoming a part of the UN Association’s work.

Another comment suggests that there is an informal way to ask for a consultation by organisations instead of for a formal response, as demonstrated by the UK organisations’ approach, which “naturally makes them more visible in terms of providing input”. The understanding of NGOs in their “corrective” capacity (reactive) as well as cultural issues and not knowing “the ropes” prevent Eastern European voluntary sector organisations to act in a similar to the UK actors’ way. Confidence and knowledge of politics, i.e. respecting levels of authority and not knowing the informal channels because there is a “proper way of doing things”, seem to be the underlying causes for NGO under-participation. Lack of confidence may be a cultural phenomenon left over from the socialist past, but the question still stands as to whether NGOs learn the ropes or are *shown* the ropes with respect to being “acculturated” in European institutions. Is it an organisational or an individual issue when experts develop opportunistically within their temporary (and temporal) organisational boundaries (NGOs in this case)? “Confidence” is surely an individual feature whereas “knowledge of politics” is institutionally, and therefore organisationally defined.

At the conference, projects are a cited ‘tool for exchange and learning’ by practitioners in the sector. According to one participant, the effect has not penetrated to the individual level and learning has been mostly in the form of passing ideas around a table on a policy level instead of implementing these into

practice. A possible reason is the lack of public debate or the chaotic nature of this debate on development issues in transition settings. This is reflected in some of the literature emerging from these geographies, where the observed 'adaptive changes' (Alexandrov 2007) and theory-taking (Avramov 2007). Nevertheless, the role of networks was seen as growing with respect to 'learning' in this field, even if political readings overshadow the organisational-level management learning discourse. There was recognition that some NGOs have been planted in transition setting, but some have undergone transformations from entities formed before the transition, reformed under pressures from the European parties. The latter is referred to as a "great learning experience" by one Cinefogo participant, practicing in one of the main women's rights organisations. Learning under pressure to conform - a fitting title for a future paper?

The implication of the selected conference discourse regarding cooperation-based learning in SEE transition context seems to be that the space for knowledge creation is scarce - knowledge 'acquisition' and not 'creation' is still the agenda. Second, in terms of benefits of cooperation through NGOs, there is an unmet need for "embedded" rather than "surface" learning on a practice level. Cultural and political elements seem to be the complex underlying factors across individual, organisational and institutional levels for the lack of embeddedness. Yet learning experience based on cooperation cited by practitioners as present and perceived as valuable. This is partly reflected in the case study findings.

Collectively the four cases suggest transitioning partners are mostly interested in acquiring what they can, consumed with building their own identity, as presence in and contribution to the sector. Each of the case studies suggested a different combination of knowledge and learning instances, as defined by the taxonomy dimensions. Although a typology has not yet emerged from the analysis, a 'self-centred collaboration' tendency is observed across all four organisational relationships. It diverges from other collaboration models that may seem fitting for the voluntary sector. For example, Brown and Duguid's (1991) 'communities of practice' is an open, practice-sharing, organically developing model for knowledge sharing, which is characterised in a similar way the voluntary sector often is. The transition country setting for NGO partnerships presented here seems to suggest a different and less idealised context for conceptualising the function of relationships.

Avina (2002) writes that "organizational close-outs are most effective when they occur in phases and at a pace which gives beneficiaries ample time to prepare for full autonomy" and poses a question in closing about the capacity available to promote autonomous organisations, which has been raised here as well: "Can such capacity be created locally or are there other alternatives?" (ibid.142). The taxonomy suggests that an on-going search for this capacity locally, with embedding in a professional community at home with engagement with institutions across sectors, is key to contextualising learning and knowledge practices taking place within partnerships.

## Chapter Eight: Conclusion

*This chapter summarises the contributions and implications of the research, reiterating the main theoretical punch lines. Future research directions are suggested. Research limitations and reflection on the role of self in the study are noted reiterating the research as a learning journey with future research ambitions.*

### Research Contributions and Implications

The primary contribution of the research is re-framing of NGO partnerships with respect to their knowledge and learning support for developing organisations in transition settings. As to the implications for practice in the field, the framing is can be used as a tool for informing potential partners about each other along the outlined dimensions, i.e. in terms of their complex information and knowledge practices, their organisational identities, and their contextual factors. In this respect, the research joins a body of literature responding to the need for a setting up a “generalised and coherent research agenda for the study of managerialism and in the NGO sector” (Roberts *et al.* 2005). However, an overreaching theme emerging from the taxonomy creates an additional research agenda.

Across all three projections patterns of ‘professionalisation’ as part of developing organisational ‘expertise’ is embodied at individual, organisation, and sector levels in the constructed cases. That is, when supportive knowledge-sharing partnerships are the learning context for NGOs in transition settings, professionalisation is seen as a present practice accounting for a more self-driven, empowered development mode in the voluntary sector. This practice is highlighted in, but is not exclusive to, East-West partnerships. The institutional context and engagement with actors at home and abroad beyond the partnership, influences NGO development as well. In this respect the taxonomy highlights two contextual factors – degree of embedding within the sector and the locus of reliance for organisational legitimacy (or credibility).

Finally, the taxonomy highlights that certain knowledge production, knowledge sharing modes and learning practices by the developing NGO within their partnership with Western organisations, are potentially a better fit with institutional and organisational factors enabling NGO development, while others hinder this process. These relate to the level of sophistication of information handling functions, whether the knowledge artefacts produced by the Bulgarian NGO are invested in their further development, the degree of practice translatability across countries, and the balance between reliance on national or international networks for knowledge sharing. More research is necessary to establish the nature of this rationality or causality.

The cases present professionalisation as a practice across all sub-sector cases, based on the perceived need to become a more independently operating organisation. Professionalisation is understood as “expertise development” where this is observed in some cases as confined to the organisation or

alternatively to its individual members, reflected in the taxonomy dimension “organisational presence”. Expertise development is evident in the cases as based on the perceived need to become a more independently operating organisation. A professionalisation-g geared model offers an alternative to the two established models in the literature – the top-down development model based on meeting development needs and the collaboration model one based on shared goals.

The dimensions of organisational presence in the taxonomy signal a vital distinction between individual and organisational framing of the professionalization of the sector which has not been sufficiently explored in literature to date.

A second contribution of the research is in the generation of concepts and dimensions from the resulting taxonomy seen to reflect existing literature strands, whilst being pertinent to the framework. Namely, situating the cross-case analysis in the existing knowledge and voluntary sector literature, the concepts ‘adapting’ and ‘adopting’ of partner strategies, activities, and identities relate to existing models of ‘translation’ (e.g. Czarniawska & Sevon 2005). Contextual dimensions addressing institutional embeddedness can be traced to both issues arising in global civil society network membership literatures and to managerial learning research. So can issues of balancing partnership engagement and situated learning, both making use of networks for organisational development. Respective literatures offer possible future research alternatives for situating findings and renegotiating the resulting taxonomy.

A third contribution the researcher believes is evidence of learning practice lending itself to developing “organisational mentoring” as an ideal type describing partnership for development for the third sector in particular. This is observed most strongly in Case 2 where the NGO has a supervision model in place on an individual and organisational level enabling professional development. This model aids their work in trafficking prevention, helps the organisation develop strategically, whilst at the same time aiding the development of individuals within the NGO irrespectively of the organisation’s needs. In this sense, mentoring is seen as a possible type of partnership in its potential to manage NGO’s dual credibility, by addressing the need to stay accountable to and rely on activity in both international networks and local platforms.

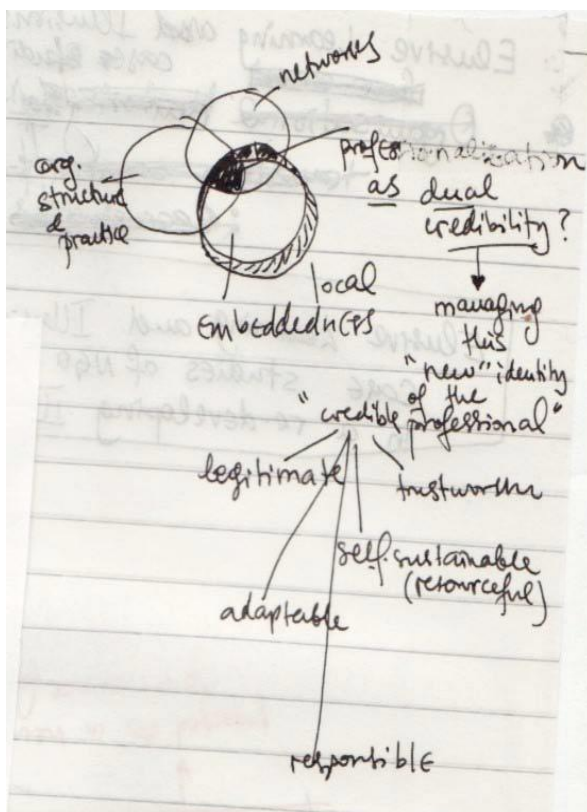
The methodology section in the thesis is a deliberate highlight for contribution as opposed to the conventional reflection of where the research is positioned with regards to existing research epistemology. A contribution here is the “discovery” approach in the qualitative theory-building methodology. This involved going beyond the conventional use of the research diary for making notes about the process of data collection towards the use of the diary as a data coding repository, used as text in the later process of analysis layered with memos and reflections on additional data from other sources (interview transcripts and organisational documents). It has also meant going beyond the case protocolling procedure (Yin 2003) as a way of presenting case findings, exploring various writing strategies instead (Ely *et al*, 1997). The development of a writing strategy of a “mirroring” between actual observation and text data and reflection on stated text (left-and-right reading between the lines presentation) in the Analysis chapter is a highlight of

methodological exploration.

Finally, the contribution of the visual methods has been an important development in the research journey. With the photograph it becomes possible to record the presence of the organisation and to visualise it as an individual “body” of artefacts – the office space, its contents, the textualised being, knowing, and acting performed by the organisation (there are a number of references in my photograph captions to “body”, “anatomy”, “single-frame”). These are first framed spatially and temporally, used to depict and isolate characteristics of uniqueness of the organisational “subject”. This allows for re-creating these characteristics in the case study as a narrative once they become narrative elements.

It is argued that the value added by the use of photographs in the methodology is that through visualisation, the subject becomes more available to the researcher and reader, hence, potentially more understandable. This echoes Stake (2000) on the use of case method in social inquiry, “...our methods of studying human affairs need to capitalize upon the natural powers of people to experience and understand.” (ibid.: 5). Secondly, the conceptualising by the use of photographic collages within and between cases takes narrative beyond the immediate meaning of captured and framed artefacts to a level of theorising about the organisational artefacts, and hence the organisations themselves.

The conclusions and research contributions challenge some of the assertions made with respect to Bulgaria’s third sector. Recent research looking at the sector’s capacity for creating new spaces for non-governmental actors is dismissive - it reports the lack of culture of independent action as characterising the sector, explained with Bulgaria’s authoritarian history (Taylor *et al.* 2009). The overreaching case theme on expert development and the complexity introduced by the taxonomy in this thesis, however, clearly challenge this conclusion. Other key findings report openness by NGOs to work with the state but noting it is “challenging in relations to autonomy, legitimacy and resources” (ibid.). This factor is observed in the



case research presented here, however, it is further developed. Engagement with the state, presented as part of the organisation’s ‘embeddedness’ in the taxonomy, is instrumental to independence from external funding by the West.

**Figure 29 Reflection on cross-case developing themes**

The diagram (Fig.34) show the researcher’s attempts to focus on the relationship between the main themes and concepts emerging from all cases - *networks*, *embeddedness*, *organisational structure and practice*, with



*professionalisation as a dual credibility* (shaded area) uniting the three. The 'credible professional' is seen as a central concept here, as a 'new' identity for the Bulgarian NGO sector. As in the case analysis, 'professional' refers to the level of expertise, self-perceived and other-perceived identity, belonging to a larger, international and local network of practitioners with certain qualifications, etc. 'Dual credibility' refers to maintaining a key position in the cross-sector context as a legitimate, accountable participant, both locally and globally, which are not seen as causally related. A list of features branch out to provide a description – legitimate, adaptable, responsible, self-sustainable, trustworthy are some of the descriptors attributed to the credible professional. These are not traced to the findings individually but based on the researcher's reflections on the case experience.

'Dual credibility' poses questions on the presence of organisational boundaries and the ease with which professionals developing their knowledge in the NGO move from one organisation to another. This is highlighted as a future direction for research development. Does cross-organisational migration happen easily in transition environments given the transient nature of all sectors, professions, and fields of employment? What does this suggest about the particular nature or lack thereof, for the NGO sector in a professional development context? Are organisations blurred cross-sector hybrids, or are they pure forms but employing potentially multi-purpose experts who can change camps if needed? These questions touch on the boundaries of the sector, provoking speculations as to future developments in the context of transitioning organisations.

It seems a suitable 'partnership for development' model for transition country purposes. It offers an alternative to the existing top-down model based around development-centred needs of the learner side, as well as the collaborative model based on shared goals, where overlaps can be investigated further. Research on the professionalisation of the sector (e.g. Hwang & Powell 2009; Robertson *et al.* 2007; Hwang & Suarez 2005) is an existing potential framework to explore for situating case findings. Looking at case themes, professionalisation can be about networking between individuals rather than impersonal organisation-based transactions, of either home or international platforms (links into the 'knowledge sharing' taxonomy concept). This becomes the Actor sub-theme individual and organisational professional identity cultivation practices in NGOs, differentiating the four cases and suggesting possible links to the diversity of Learning/Knowledge and Context dimensions.

Finally, it is important to note here that 'evolutionary partnership' models suggest that over time an organisational relationship reaches maturity and broadening of the purpose in successful partnerships (e.g. Waddock 1989). If broadening means gaining a strategic focus with the more frequent engagement in projects or partnership-based activities, an evolutionary model is evident in only two of the four cases. These are the cases ANIMUS and SOS where with respect to knowledge sharing, reliance on home networks is evident. Instead, the degree of NGO local embeddedness (i.e. role of organisation as an actor in institutional change, developed in the Context category not presented here) was observed to influence

organisational 'maturity' over time. This implies that maturity is not necessarily related to the learning and information exchanges developing over time in the case of third sector organisations. Instead there is a stronger dependence on the establishment of local and regional capacity enabling service-delivery (procurement) partnerships.

Given the context of transition towards a more desirable system via the building of civil society (in part through NGOs), learning approaches emphasising flexibility and self-determination were expected to appear in the data. However, together with organisational interdependence (as opposed to dependence), such learning approaches were not observed across all cases. Instead varieties of learning modes appear respectively depending on the varieties of organisational activities across the four cases. Case findings suggest that the nature of the partner relationship creates a challenge for NGOs in the transition country. They are dependent on funding, regulation, and in most cases limited learning from abroad whilst in the process of being re-contextualised locally with home institutions, creating a case for maintaining 'dual credibility'. This has implications for what we know about partnership-based learning in transition context, not least about strategy and resource management. It also raises further questions about transition and NGO work. Are transition countries entering a new phase of sustainability through local partnerships away from funding relationships and their dependence spill-over effects? To what extent and how does the credibility established within international networks influence the dynamic and quality of the partnerships developing locally? Further exploration is needed to follow each of these leads.

### **Future Research Directions**

As Bulgaria is now a member of the European Union it may cease to be considered a developing country by institutional actors shifting the "development" programme logic underlying assistance through NGO partnerships to an new level of institutional embeddedness. The taxonomy resulting from the data has outlived the contextualisation in the development literature, moving it to that of institution building and sector-wide (field-specific) professionalisation. Therefore further research will be sought with relevance to institutional approaches to field re-definition (e.g. Suddaby *et al.* 2007). To do this more case research is necessary to develop a large sample to adequately represent the variability in the population in voluntary sector organisations.

Secondly, there will be an attempt to explore relationships between the main concepts emerging from the case studies. Presence as either related to organisational or professional field, embeddedness in terms of reliance on networks and positioning within a national institutional context will be redefined as concepts with an enrichment of dimensions stemming from further case studies. This can be done as a feature of organisational adaptive capacity and further research integrating this notion with the taxonomy is suggested (Staber & Sydow 2002; Timmer 2005). After dimensions have been enriched there will be an attempt to relate key dimensions from the Knowledge category to other categories. A mixed methods direction of development is possible where some of the qualitative findings can be refined into quantitative variables for future research.

With respect to looking for a theory habitat where the proposed taxonomy can develop, two frameworks in particular provides possible accommodation for the key concepts of professionalisation, credibility source and embeddedness, in line with an institutional approach to defining the field. Recent voluntary sector research provides some overlaps with case findings, with respect to professionalism in the sector. Hwang and Powell (2009) observe that highly educated and motivated individuals increasingly view their work as professional (i.e. deserving dedication and commitment) in a context of expansion of formal as opposed to informal organisation. This forces a distinction between “amateur” and “professional” which are “at the heart of nonprofits’ identity and culture” (ibid.:289). The authors emphasise the role of organisational leaders and their education background as an element of professionalism. Parallels can be seen with the cases here, specifically for Animus and their Tavistock and Boston-educated founders and senior practitioners, as well as with UNAY’s international studies students running the volunteer-based education projects and taking part in model UN simulation games as a career stepping stone.

Another second approach to professionalisation for reinterpreting case findings is research into knowledge creation in professional organisations. For example Robertson *et al.* (2003) has compared organisations in different institutional (professional) to arrive at insight into the effect of institutional contexts on the knowledge-creation process. Focusing on the “bounded nature of a profession’s knowledge based”, this kind of framework could provide further development of the Context dimensions in the taxonomy. Robertson *et al.* (2003) build on the link between knowledge creation within the organisation to the wider knowledge claims of the profession, which can be seen as a further investigative direction for the dimensions of credibility source and embeddedness in the taxonomy. The main question the taxonomy raises here is whether over time professionalisation of the voluntary sector is a sign of it maturing into an equal partner to other institutions, or whether this is a sign of domestication to the agenda of these stakeholders. As a counterpoint to the criticism pundits deliver on the limited role NGO have in global context thanks to their Western funders and/or partners, the issue is a variation on dependence. Namely, NGOs in transition countries moving from international to national domestication under the guise of becoming “professional”.

...

The spatial presence dimension of the NGO's identity formulation needs further research (Warren 2008). It is an unexplored part of organisation studies with a very recently growing academic interest (e.g. SCOS and Invisio research networks), most recently looking to explore the relationship between text and image in creating meaning in organisational contexts. Before this can be advanced, there is a need for engaging the literature on organisational identity in the taxonomy.

Reflections on the use of photographs to write have provoked a fascination with methodology developments. Exploring photography as a method opens up a discussion on the use of other visualisation methods for concept-building in grounded theory. Acts of imagining, remembering, and relating from various data sources is a sculpting practice – in this research, sketches by interviewees myself are used, as well as diagrams in documents. A further question to explore would be in what cases a combination of

visual methods with other sources of data contributes to different forms of writing, as those described in Ely *et al.* (1997) and used in the cases here. For example, concepts in interviews could be noted as strong, recurring themes without the contribution of visual data (based on word count and categorisation, research diary notes on significant theme given the emphasis the respondent makes, reappearing concept in the organisation's documents, etc.). If however depth is seen to be lacking in an interview due to lack of rapport or resistance, could this be supplemented by the metaphors provoked by researcher-generated, interviewee-generated and even organisational (documented) diagrams and sketches? The added value of photography in management research has been recognised recently (Easterby-Smith *et al.* 2008) and has become a platform for academic networking on developments in visual methods (International Network for Visual Studies in Organization).

Discussions on the contribution of visual methods to understanding complex contexts which are largely based on narrative should perhaps begin from discussions in photography as a visual art. According to Robert Frank, "to produce an authentic contemporary document the visual impact should be such as will nullify explanation" (in Sontag 1971: 111). At the same time, in his more recent work, Frank is largely concerned with both storytelling and memory in an autobiographical sense. The work "tells a story in images, text, and other fragments, though the links between them are not clear and the viewer can only guess that they relate to memories of significance to the artist...they are ordered according to a personal logic" (Tate Modern website). It seems then that using photographs which reconstruct the subject as they "capture" and "present" the subject, may fit comfortably with grounded theory as a place to carry out such visual-narrative merging experiments.

The thesis begins to explore these relationships: parallels are drawn between the coding process and reflections on capturing what is and is not in a frame, how to conceptualise from data with visual metaphors and symbols, and how to develop narrative forms on an organisational level based on photo-collages. More work is needed in this direction with these themes being possible questions for future research. It is a possible course for cultivating a research function for photographs and visual data in general, by using them as 'narrativising' tools, where qualitative researchers would practice a closer resembling of their subjects under investigation (managers and organisations) who are themselves crafting their organisations with narratives.

## **Research Limitations**

Case study research presupposes certain inherent limitations as to what can be achieved with this methodology regardless of the process. A number of limitations have also been identified in the research process both in terms of the method-relevant choices in carrying out the research, ethical elements not adhered to, and the interpretive context of the final outcomes. These are discussed below.

Since this is an exploratory study of the sector context in a particular under-researched country undergoing a complex transition, detail is needed to create a richness of conceptual representations of organisational

culture. The case studies are described in a context of the organisation's role in patroning civil society on a national platform with international assistance, which results in a number of observations and conceptual representations as seen by organisational insiders. These concepts begin to form an agenda of a current organisational culture, which may or may not represent that of the sector in Bulgaria as a whole, let alone representing the sub-sectors in transition settings generally. This point reflects the issue of generalisation, where cases are seen as a poor basis for making generalisations about the issues under investigation within them as applying to a given population of cases (Stake 2000). Nevertheless it seems to be a point a debate whether generalisation is an appropriate requirement to demand of case study research as it is an extension of positivist assumptions (Ruddin 2006).

Further research as a way of addressing this problem would entail a larger sample beyond the four case studies, defined by sub-sector NGOs, respective to the four cases described here. Separating expert from non-expert social service organisations, education-based from non-education volunteer-led groups, etc. would create a richer description and understanding of each NGO sub-category. There is a likelihood this would show whether there is a relationship between the identified type and a particular sub-category. If additional NGOs in a given sub-category demonstrate to belong to the "type" identified in the respective case from the first four given similarity in observed dimensions, this would be a justification for developing a typology beyond the taxonomy along the outlined concepts and dimensions. This is discussed in Becker (2000) who states that a "major problem in any form of social research is reasoning from the parts we know to something about the whole they and parts like them make up" (ibid.:231), an issue he claims has remained largely unresolved.

On the other hand, the resulting taxonomy forms agendas and expression of organisational culture(s) which may speak to particular developments in civil society in other locations, where similar forces of democratic transformation are present. This would make the research outcomes relevant on an international level in that replication of the current study in other locations would be appropriate to show overlaps with current results.

The shared concepts based on recurring findings are an important aspect of addressing the Level 1 research questions. This exposes a problematic aspect in the analysis which sets out to construct collective concepts on the basis of a summation of multiple individual (interviews) and collective data constructs (documents). This issue is addressed as naming the unit of analysis, where it is possible to state the sample contains more than one (for example, using samples made of individual stories as well as organisations, or incidents as well as groups etc.), though it is not advisable to have too many (Easterby-Smith *et al.* 2008).

Developing the codes from terms stated or written in Bulgarian, may have led to a mistranslation of concepts and dimensions used for the taxonomy. For example, in Case 1, the interview transcripts contain language referring to the materials and services for SMEs which BARDA has produced with the help of

information and materials from their partners. It has been translated and has become a recurring theme and significant code, later appearing as a concept in the taxonomy with dimensions - 'adapting' and 'adopting' processes and language, part of the 'learning practice'. 'Adopting' appears in an interview transcript (in vivo code) translated from the original "vzaimstvali", which denotes using an example to look from rather than to copy, but does not make clear what and how much has been taken and in what way. Other related codes include "developing" materials (for both BARDA and the western partner), "mobilising" one's own expert opinion when developing materials, and "extending" or building upon projects, all of which relate to the taxonomy concepts 'learning practice' and 'knowledge production modes'. Depending on the precision in translation, the context within which the terms are used, and the knowledge derived from other data to further understanding from the interview, these concepts may become part of either one taxonomy dimension on another.

A suggested method for addressing this problem is conducting a second reading of all relevant data from another native speaker. This would require providing the researcher with the conceptual framework, the logic of the research strategy, and the key coded data, but not with the taxonomy output. A second coding would allow for a fresh reading and interpretation of key concepts and if and how they fit together axially within categories.

The coding procedure illustrated in the Analysis chapter demonstrates it is a highly interpretive process, raising the issue of methodological limitations and challenges in replicating research. Assigning of codes, merging various codes to produce higher order concepts, and ultimately arriving at dimensions are imbued with ascribing meaning to the researcher's own experiences in the fieldwork. Nevertheless the coding process in this work led to development of sufficient themes within and across the cases using sufficient data triangulation and saturation to produce a taxonomy at the least, and a promising direction for developing a typology at best.

Addressing the inherent limitation of coding and qualitative interpretations, the work could benefit from further coding using computer software Atlas. This would enrich the concepts emerging from the interview data in particular, making the analysis more transparent and more precise, ultimately leading to refining of the taxonomy. This could be done using principal component analysis based on interview responses along paired key concepts (Easterby-Smith *et al* 2008).

The participants and investigators were entitled to the actual results of the research at all stages of the research process within a reasonable period of demand. In addition any methodological outputs in the period between the initiation of the case study throughout the research process is available to the organisation if they are seen to be useful by the organisation. One of the principles of the research is to uphold a certain usefulness of the findings to the participants, which depends above all on the organisation's level of engagement with the researcher and the research agenda. In this respect, another type of reflexivity appears, on the basis of feedback sessions with participants to negotiate the key issues and to clarify the interpretations of the researcher of the data. This in itself is a data source - in Finley's

(2002) terms, this is reflexivity as “mutual collaboration”, seeking to involve participants as co-researchers to confront and modify the researcher’s own interpretations (ibid.:218).

This interaction, feedback, and transparency of the research has been a hard expectation to fulfil partly due to the lack of communication after the end of the data collection period. The delay in analysing the data has led to a delay in getting in touch with participants about the outputs, thereby compromising this aspect of research reflexivity. This is an outstanding issue to be addressed within the thesis completion period.

A challenge acknowledged with respect to literature saturation is the question of what makes a coherent framework of features extrapolated from the existing literature. The grounded theory approach dictates that literature should be used only to the extent of informing the research questions and methods, without impinging on the approach, i.e. applied to looking *at* data rather than looking *for* data. This is done as to avoid the danger of falling into existing theory rather than discovering new theory in the grounded theory approach. Breaking the line between the two and falling into existing theory is what Glaser (1978) calls “near misses” – he stresses the importance of differentiating between conceptual and logical elaboration where the former is a deductive process from emerging theory which guides back to the field to discover more ideas to develop a more dense analysis whereas the latter leads away from grounded theory (ibid.: 40). Nevertheless, I believe that saturation has not been fully achieved in this work with respect to sufficient development of the mentoring framework and potential fieldwork themes expected to emerge, *prior* to proceeding to the empirical stage. This only became known after it was too late to stop the fieldwork until more reading had been carried out so as not to influence the data generating process.

Finally, not all questions of inquiry about the nature of the relationship can be addressed with the resulting analysis. They highlight the limitations of the research rationale and the unrealistic expectations of fieldwork. For example:

*What is the nature of the observed inter-organisational relationships in terms of power dynamics, learning approach, knowledge content, exchange process, direct and residual outcomes?*

The question on “the nature of the observed relationships in terms of power dynamics, learning approach, knowledge content, exchange process, and outcomes” underestimates the wide spectrum of issues encompassed by a dynamic collaboration and self-directed learning, by setting an ambitious objective of capturing each case with a single summative ‘nature’. This false expectation is related to the initial misunderstanding of generating a typology on the basis of capturing a case as a type within a single frame. Doty and Glick (1994) discuss the widespread misconception of typologies as inadequate theory-building devices on the premise that they are mistaken for classification systems or taxonomies. This sheds some light on the problem of sketching each case as a potential type based on the types of exchanges and dynamics observed in learning/knowledge instances within and outside partnerships. Using Doty and Glick’s definition, the differentiation between the four cases around the three categories

(projections) and dimensions is still at the classification stage and not yet a typology of partnership-based, learning-centred organisational development.

### **Reflections on Role of “self”**

Some of the initial assumptions with which the researcher approached the literature should be considered when evaluating literature choices and interpretations. First, with regards to the research motivation and inspired by the trigger case, the researcher was most interested to know how much things have really changed in the researcher's transition home country, with the idea that after an initial direct translation, practitioners have surely realised it is time to move away from translating foreign concepts and towards (re)inventing them locally. This view introduced a (potentially) false distinction between one or the other, which I was susceptible to when reading literature and data about 'practice translation' between organisations. Additionally, in correspondence with a potential case organisation early on in the research, I was given the impression that “straightforward copying” of practices from the West is still practiced on a non-reflective level (email correspondence, February 2008). I expected this aspect to inform existing preconceptions entrenched in the literature halfway, yet I was aware that such differentiations prior to entering the fieldwork would it be a distraction from the grounded theory approach and may even lead to contamination of the desired 'emerging' data. I have strived to go beyond this dualism by expanding the literature review and by practicing reflexivity in the analysis.

Another case on assumptions stems from the researcher's nationality. Being a Bulgarian has meant the accumulation of personal observations outside the research context, which may have been amplified by certain literature. Additionally, by playing with the data using visual methods I might have overdone the amplification of some aspects which I feel more inclined to assign importance to, to the detriment of others. Borrowing the notion from research in Sims *et. al* (2009), the researcher has been perhaps conditioned with 'snippets' of news and management context in Bulgaria by using the media scrapbook, intended to allow her to “hear” respondents better – based on the assumption that what they are immersed in textually communicated through the media, informs their practice at work. Instead the researcher may have just been distracted by the noise of partial surrounding conversations which are not directly related to the case context or not explored in full.

Being the same gender and age as some of the respondents may have influenced the research process in terms of a more direct interaction with these respondents. Nevertheless, there were some implications of my “visiting from abroad” status on the data developed in the fieldwork. For example, being perceived as “one of us” in BARDA by “the girls” meant I was drawn to being more protective of their organisation and sceptical towards their UK partners. Acting “as one of us” in UNAY by temporarily assuming the identity of a volunteer and blending into the volunteer-led organisational identity meant I perceived the NGO as individual-defined.

Finally being a researcher from the UK and taking part in conferences in different locations has influenced



the researcher's views on findings. For example, reflections stimulated from responses at conferences at the EIASM *Organisational Change in Eastern Europe* conference in Lithuania 2007, have proved to be useful for setting the future research agenda. However, they also heightened the anxiety regarding choices about which literature was used and which was missed or omitted. Doubt has infiltrated even choices on research strategy, namely, that it has privileged theory-building inductively when there is an abundance of applicable models which I increasingly perceived as fitting as analysis progressed. These anxieties have continued to haunt me throughout the writing process. In another example, the *Cinefogo* event in 2008 in Slovenia nudged the researcher into taking a more western perspective than the one which participants from the Balkans were converging towards. The context of institutional influence in creating civil society actors and NGOs defining their own identity in transition settings have not become the central point of drawing implications in the thesis as the conference would have suggested, but have been considered for further research directions.

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## Appendix A: Sample Correspondence Documents for Fieldwork Access

### Letter of Research Introduction for sample organisations selected for case study fieldwork

To the attention of:  
The Director of .....

Date

Dear .....,

Please allow me to introduce myself and my interest in your Organization, .....(name)...

I have been accepted on a university scholarship as a PhD candidate in Management at Cass Business School, City University in London, UK. The area of interest for the supervising Professors and myself is *organizational learning across non-profit organizations from a Management perspective*. My thesis will be based on a small number of case studies conducted in Bulgaria in non-profit organizations, which have the support of other non-Bulgarian partner organizations in the form of knowledge transfer.

I am highly interested in ..... being one of the key case study platforms, where I would be able to conduct research! I kindly ask you for access to your organization for the purpose of this PhD project. The fieldwork is planned to commence in March 2008.

The research question is focused on ***the learning which takes place in your organization*** and the ***provision of learning support by partner organizations you work with***, which share your mission and purpose in the field of....The reasons for the specific interest in .....(name of org)..... are:

- *the field of work of your organization, representing the issue of ..... as one of high importance in national and international context*
- *the knowledge sharing relationship you have with a non-Bulgarian organization working in your field*

I would be happy to meet with you and/or your colleagues to discuss in greater detail the time frame intended and the methods which would be used. Overall, I would like to conduct interviews and if possible, observe everyday practices and review documents relating to the learning process. The time frame planned for this fieldwork is 4 to 8 weeks (as convenient for you), with all information protected under an agreement of confidentiality.

This would be a great opportunity to gain a better understanding of the non-profit sector in Bulgaria, the relevant management issues and the knowledge exchange as a form of cross-cultural partnership - questions which have been under-researched in Bulgaria. The results would be a gain for the research field as well as for the practitioner non-profits in Bulgaria and in other transforming countries.

I look forward to your reply! Please contact me if you would like more information about the project or about me, as well as to arrange a conversation over the telephone. You may also wish to contact my supervisors, Professor Jenny Harrow [j.harrows@city.ac.uk](mailto:j.harrows@city.ac.uk) or Professor Clive Holtham [C.W.Holtham@city.ac.uk](mailto:C.W.Holtham@city.ac.uk) for clarification and other detail regarding this work.

Best regards,

Ms. Mariana Bogdanova  
Research, Faculty of Management  
Cass Business School  
106 Bunhill Row, London EC1Y 8TZ  
[m.bogdanova@city.ac.uk](mailto:m.bogdanova@city.ac.uk)  
(+44) .....

**Phase 1: Correspondence based on the introduction letter by one of the selected organisations for case studies, BCAF**

**Received 10.01.2008**

Hello

I am writing to you regarding your proposal to include us in your research. In our opinion, our organisations is not suitable enough as a subject for such research, given that the extent to which there is knowledge transfer from CAF to us, it happens not too often and sporadically and it is not a systemic process. The same applies for other organisations with which we have the following types of relationships:

- grantee (we) – grant-maker (C.S.Mott Foundation for example – there are simply requirements which we comply with
- grantmaker (we) – grantees – NGOs
- capacity builder (we) – NGOs. But in these cases we support the others, not them us

With the above I am not saying that there has not been transfer of knowledge directed towards us, rather that it has not happened systemically, in a directed and orderly fashion. I think that the level of learning here has been and continues to be a direct application of ideas and practices from CAF, for example, by directly copying with adding small corrections to tailor to the Bulgarian environment and reality.

I think that a more suitable subject of such research would be an organisations which accepts the methodology of operations in a specific field, as given by the external partner, I know at least 3 such organisations in the social sphere. As far as I know, they are perpetually trained in order to be able to work according to the new methods in Bulgaria. In the case that I can be of help with more information – please write.

Regards,

[name omitted]

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**Response 2 ( BCAF)**

17.01.2008

Hello

I need to understand even more specifically what exactly the idea for your research is. Knowledge transfer is a very broad concept. At least till this moment I cannot imagine what exactly is the nature of your search, what are you going to be asking us? You must agree that we also need to be clear with the nature of the process in which we would agree to be involved. I have been trained to consult and this is my practice with the client organizations. Without enough clarity of the goal and process, it doesn't happen for either of the two sides.

Moreover, you are talking about a time span of 3-4 weeks, which is quite a lot.

Send me detail. For example, what exactly do you understand by "knowledge" in this case? It's a big area. Also, I need not only the specifics for the idea but also for methodology and schedule. As well as for the outcomes expected and what the application of the research findings and outcomes will be.

Regarding the other organisations I mentioned – I would like to clarify that in their case the learning process is not a top-down one. These are groups and teams composed of people, who voluntarily have

studied practices and methods unknown to Bulgarian practice, for the purpose of applying them here. In a sense, their education resembles to a degree the academic type of education, without being such – there is a curriculum, which you follow so that you can say in the end that you know and you can do whatever. In the case of those people, these are knowledge and skills in a completely new to Bulgaria fields like alternative care for children in institutions, social care, sustainable farming. These things have been around and have been developing for a while now, in Holland and the UK, from which places the organizations are learning.

I meant organizations like the FICE Bulgaria association which is an association for pedagogical and social support for children– [email omitted] [name omitted] , chair; Foundation For Our Children”, the new name for EveryChild, Bulgaria [email omitted] – [name omitted], executive director, [name omitted] [email omitted] , [name omitted] chair. The first of the organizations are in the social care sector, specifically in child care for risk groups. Agrolink is an eco-organic farming origination for sustainable rural development.

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**Response 3 (me)**  
**February 20, 2008 6:17 PM**

Hello,

Thank you for your reply and the information and please accept my apologies for the delay in replying [1 month later].

Regarding your response in the previous email, or course I agree that it is expected that I send more detailed information to the potential participants. In the first letter I presented the idea without specific outline of the relevant documents, which information would be of no use in the event that the recipient does not show further interest in the research in question.

Considering your further interest now stated, I am sending the required information which I hope will satisfy the requirements for allowing a researcher into your organisation. This information consists of a Description Document of the Research Project (Research Rationale) complying with all necessary agenda items expected for access approval. This includes:

- goals and strategy outline of the research
- methodology/instruments of research
- description on the ethical issues
- procedures for feedback and information to participants
- timetable/schedule of field work
- description of the use of the gathered data, and others

I hope this presents a fuller picture of the planned research. Also I hope that this

description being in English (as required by the research group) is not a problem. I could send additional information as required by yourself if you provide specifics as to what is further required.

According to the research schedule I will be presenting the research rationale in front of a formal committee on the 18<sup>th</sup> of March. After the corrections, the collection of the data should begin (at the start of April).

If you agree to the rationale outlined, we could begin talking about the next phase in April when I will be in Bulgaria. BCAF could be a case study starting July or October depending on when it suits you best.

I look forward to your reply and the next phase of the research.

Regards,  
Mariana Bogdanova

**Response 3 from BCAF**  
**28.02.2008**

Hello, I was away from Bulgaria for a week, back to work today. I will reply to your email later.

[name omitted]  
**BCAF**

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**NO FURTHER COMMUNICATION - CASE DROPPED**

**Phase 2: Response to the introduction letter by one of the selected organisations in UNA Youth BG  
Last Received 13.04.2009**

Hi Mariana!  
Things here (with the org,) and a bit chaotic and it's not like there is something happening all day long (in the office). We work on a project principle and on whatever is relevant/current at the moment to us. When you arrive I will introduce you to all other main characters, will summarise our current activities and you will be able to attend whatever you chose from our work.  
Regards and see you soon!

[name omitted]  
President of the Youth Organisation of the UN  
Association of Bulgaria

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----- Оригинално писмо -----  
От: "Bogdanova, Mariana"  
Изпратено на: Monday, 2009, April 13.  
13:49:41 EEST

That's great!

I'm coming back on May 7<sup>th</sup> for 4 weeks during which I would like to work with you as well as with the SOS Childrens Villages, which is the last organisation that accepted to participate.

I am sending you the specifications on the project for information – take a look at pages 13-16 in particular where the research questions and methods of field work are described (i.e. what I hope to do over the 4 weeks with you, what I will be asking, etc.)

Can you confirm the dates 11 May -5 June where I would like to be in the office 3-4 days a week in a convenient time for you, attending meetings with partners on current projects (if there are such projects at the moment and if they are not confidential), conducting interviews with colleagues and accessing information on the activities of the UN Youth BG, especially those relating to collaboration with other UN Youth organisations. All of this, of course, under the "eye" of your organisation.

My best

Mariana

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**From:** [name omitted]  
**Sent:** Fri 13/03/2009 09:51  
**To:** Bogdanova, Mariana  
**Subject:** Re: pismo do UN Youth

Hi Mariana!  
I will help you with your dissertation with pleasure!  
Unfortunately at the moment there isn't a likelihood that I will be coming to London so I will see you here.

Regards

[name omitted]  
President of the Youth Organisation of the UN  
Association of Bulgaria

## Appendix B

### List and Description of Main Text Data (provided and collected)

#### **BARDA**

*Selected texts used in analysing the way the NGO presents its work and expertise as well as how it potentially measures to that of their cited strategic international network. Most of the documents demonstrate the projects in which the NGO has participated as the embodiment of information- and knowledge-handling practices in a formal partnership with a western counterpart, but still maintains independence in its function (not a subsidiary type).*

#### **Project-based/Publications**

- MINEM Project Brochure “Meeting the needs of economic migrants” (BG version)
- MINEM (UK version)
- The HARVES Project Brochure – preliminary informative on the project goals
- The HARVES Project Brochure (2) – delivery on project goals
- Embrace 2 Project Report
- VISIBLE Project Plan and supplementary documents – document outlining the requirements for engaging in the project, including the “analytic framework” guiding the methodology of engagement and learning exchange between partners, case history template for sharing experience (learning exchange) between partners, framework for evaluating outcomes, communication framework and all partner profiles.
- A number of additional Brochures on other projects delivered in the past by BARDA and their Plovdiv RDA member

*These documents have been central in the presentation and analysis of the partnership and knowledge/learning practice of the NGO. Detailed descriptions of selected key projects are presented in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6.*

#### **Report**

- BARDA profile (Bulgarian Association of Regional Development Agencies and Business Centres) – contains main project summaries including key projects with strategic partner EEDA.

*This is the BARDA expertise text on what services they provide, the networks they belong to, national and international activities they have been a part of.*

#### **Funding Application Document**

- HARVEST Project funding applications through the Leonardo Da Vinci Programme (European Commission) – contains criteria for setting objectives, partnership outputs, methods, etc..

*This is a valuable description on the process and content of the partnership elements which are of value to the organisations involved and the terminology of their practice*



## Appendix B

### List and Description of Main Text Data (provided and collected)

*(possible source from which it has been adopted as the requirements appearing in the application must be matched with setting objectives and monitoring for delivery on the same).*

#### Other

- Conference proceedings from delivering HARVEST final project outputs
- Email exchanges on project delivery

*Descriptions on the process and content of the partnership elements*

### Animus

*Texts used in analysing the way the NGO presents its work and expertise as well as how it potentially measures to that of their cited strategic international network. The documents demonstrate information- and knowledge-handling practices of the NGO which is in a formal partnership with a western counterpart, but still maintains independence in its function (not a subsidiary type).*

#### Project-based/ Issue-based Publications

- Report “Violating women’s rights – cause and effect of trafficking of women” La Strada international, Amsterdam 2008 (translated into BG)

*This looks like the source of the Animus “position” text on trafficking which has become a foundation document of their organisational discourse and ideology. It matches with the introduction in the training materials found in the Cupboard.*

- “Analytical Report on the project 'Let's help the children and their parents to find, build and keep the family they need' 2004”

*The project is funded by the EU but there is a special mention of the support from the OAK Foundation, who financed Animus' work with the Child Protection authorities of Bulgaria (providing training) as well as financing the children's unit in the Centre for Rehabilitation (Animus office).*

- “The children speak: What is trafficking through the eyes of children?” with Save the Children and Partners Bulgaria Foundation 2007 and “The children speak: risk factors and sustainability factors regarding trafficking of children in SEE” BG Report 2007

*D. has worked directly on developing this project and both of these publications (see interview for details).*

- “La Strada: European Network against Trafficking in Women – Facts and Practices” La Strada Association, Netherlands 2005

#### Handbook/ Manuals

## Appendix B

### List and Description of Main Text Data (provided and collected)

- “Combating Trafficking in Human Beings: Directory of practitioners' manuals and handbooks” Animus Association Foundation 2007 under the Danish programme against Human Trafficking in EE and SEE

*Reference book developed by Animus in relation to their development programme with Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus, aiming to familiarise participants with up to date resources. Five sections or categories of handbooks and manuals included 81 titles in total, developed by the member organisations. Some of the issues relate to domestic violence, exploitation of children, various good practice guides on trafficking-related work for various groups and institutions. Three of the publications have been developed by Animus.*

- “Trafficking in Persons: Questions and Answers” Animus Association 2007 in BG and ENG bilingual publication (included in the Directory)

*The texts are authored by the founding Directors of Animus and other colleagues with professional qualifications.*

- Project proposal for an awareness campaign using beer mats (developed by Swiss volunteer Virginie) – draft version

### Reports

- Annual Report 2006
- Annual Report 2007

*The two reports give detail about all of the projects undertaken by Animus in that period and the related funding organisations, in addition to the financial information*

### Brochures

- “Learning Centre Animus” brochure funded by the Matra programme by the government of Holland under the project “Institutional and programme development”
- Brochure on “Postgraduate Qualification: Foundations of psychodynamic approach in working with adults and children” provided by Animus in partnership with St. Kliment Ochridski University, Sofia
- Brochure for the Centre for Rehabilitation, Counselling and Psychotherapy, Animus
- Brochure on empowerment programme for women at risk of or victims of abuse
- Brochures on sexual assault awareness
- Brochure on Animus's profile (in Eng. & in BG)

## SOS

*Texts used in analysing the way processes and activities of the NGO are planned and developed in relation to their formal relationship with SOS Kinderdorf. The strategic*

## Appendix B

### List and Description of Main Text Data (provided and collected)

*planning and implementation for the international organisation has been treated as sensitive information with limited exposure in the case. Further analysis may be conducted with further negotiations with SOS BG and clearance from the Vienna office. The documents demonstrate the detail involved in the information- and knowledge-handling practices of the NGO which is in a formal partnership with a western counterpart (as a branch in the network).*

#### **Documents on Projects sent to the International HQ** for feedback, describing the stages of a project development within the network

- Concept note components

*The standard form for proposing a new project.*

- Logical framework “prevention of abandonment by supporting the families” – Gabrovo

*New project with goals, activities, actions, and expected results; indicators, information sources and hypothesis for each*

- Programme plan
- Annual report
- Programme proposal 2006
- Report on the progress for the programme for Gabrovo 2008

*Detailed information provided for activities against the indicators.*

- Status quo report

*Formal partnership agreements for development of Family Strengthening Project were signed between SOS Children’s Villages Bulgaria Association and two municipalities*

- Proposal for increasing the Running Costs of Family Strengthening Projects that started in 2007

#### **Docs on the Policy developments**

- SOS Children’s Village Programme Policy: Putting the Child First!
- Feedback form for the programme planning

#### **Monitoring documents**

- Radomir self-evaluation tool for Family Strengthening programme

*Measuring success, evaluating achievements – colour-coded assessment for each of the indicators under Target group, Access to essential services, Families are empowered, Communities are empowered, Partnerships are built, Planning, monitoring & evaluation categories*

#### **Other documents**

## Appendix B

### List and Description of Main Text Data (provided and collected)

- SOS Mother Career

*Intends to define flexible and individual forms of growing into retirement and finalizing career of SOS Mothers. The structure of the paper is based on a chronological working life structure of an SOS Mother. Related to the HR manual, specified in x number of documents*

- Organisational structure of Kinderdorf International
- Organisational structure SOS Villages BG
- Summary document on How to support SOS youth to be competitive in the labour market
- GUIDELINES FOR CONDUCTING FEASIBILITY STUDIES FOR CHILD CENTRED PROGRAMMES (process description presented in the interview with M.)
- Methodology for foster care provision – in a Bulgarian context
- Mother and Baby Unit service provision - *Part of the capacity-building side of the child-centred programme*
- Family-type residence centre service provision - *Part of the capacity-building side of the child-centred programme*
- “Horizons” 2008/1 newsletter
- Website excerpts

### UNA

*Includes a selection of UNA's publications, UNAY brochures, UNAY project documentation, and training materials from the WFUA and other partners. Informal practices within a formal network?*

- National Campaign “Youth delegates 2009/2010” brochure

*Presenting a local project in action with the language and ideas of the UNAY relaying the importance of being engaged and active politically on an international scale*

- “Star of Concord: A permanent world council” 2008, prefaced by the President of the UNA Bulgaria Ivan Garvalov

*The text is a good example of how the organisation creates a sense of pride and ownership of history of the UN principles. This individual interpretation of a supranational discourse may be the key to understanding how NGOs become a professional actor in the sector and in their community.*

- “Teaching human rights (UNA): Instrument for Improving the Quality of Education in Bulgaria” 2007, published by UNA and the Economic Policy Institute

*The text is an insight to the translatability of practices to the local context, and the process of embedding these practices in the education system and mentality of educators.*

- “EU and Meeting the Millennium Goals for Development: A Tool for the Future Citizen of Europe and the World”

## Appendix B

### List and Description of Main Text Data (provided and collected)

- “The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and its Partners in Bulgaria” 2006-2007

Gives background to the activities undertaken by UNA, implying their youth activities to some degree. The association works with university students and pupils within the development of a national network of UN school clubs, already comprise of 30 such clubs. An interview reveals that out of thirty probably ten are active at the moment “due to negligence”.

- Brochure presenting “National Campaign Bulgarian Youth Delegate 2009/2010”

The campaign has its own website set up separate from the UNAY website. The introduction of the brochure refers to the UN and the place for young people in the UN, presented as the Youth Section of the UN Secretariat. Further information about the youth involvement in the structure is given at [www.una.org/youth](http://www.una.org/youth). This site is no longer active – according to the link, there has been a delegation of the responsibilities and support for the structure to the NGOs involved in the consortium which was previously hosted here.

- Photograph of document archive of a UN Model simulation conducted in Kosovo.

The UN model is the youth section’s unique selling point, or according to the interviews , on the of their “know-hows”. Similarly to the youth delegates activity, It also has its own website at <http://unmodel.unabg.org/>. This trend conveys a sense of a diversified organisational presence into different project-based activities, the responsibility for which lies with separate individuals.

- “Making Commitments Matter” CD file on the project in partnership with international UNA youth orgs.