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## Ukraine's New Generation: How Young Adults Perceive Non-Governmental Organizations

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### **Abstract:**

*This article reports the results of a 2014 research project that documents the attitudes of Ukrainian young adults (under age 31) toward non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with missions in different sectors of society. As an emerging democracy, the importance of a developing civil society structures is being severely tested by the ongoing conflicts in Eastern Ukraine and the continuing tensions with Russia. The 377 respondents used surveymonkey.com between September and December 2014 to complete an anonymous questionnaire. Major findings note modest support for NGOs in all fields: education, human rights, meeting basic needs, and cultural affairs, but participation rates remain low. A reserve of goodwill can help NGOs connect to their next generation of leaders, staff, volunteers and donors.*

**Keywords:** Ukraine, NGOs, young adults, civil society

### **1. Introduction**

As new democracies develop, one important element of their growth, stability and changing culture is the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). This process has been widespread in the states of the former Soviet Union (Ritvo, 2012). Nonprofit organizations often provide programs, services and information that governments and corporations do not, cannot or will not offer. This article focuses on the perceptions of Ukraine's under-31 generation about the rapidly changing role of NGOs. This is the first generation born in a free Ukraine. This research focuses on how this next generation of Ukraine's leaders views one of the cornerstones of a civil society, NGOs, in selected sectors of society. The article begins with a summary of the 2014-2015 civil unrest and what these events might mean to those under the age of 31. The methodology was a straightforward online anonymous survey, the results of which follow. It concludes with analysis of the key findings and limitations of the research.

### **2. Current Events in Ukraine**

The crisis of 2014 forms the backdrop for this research project. After continuous negotiations on Ukraine's EU membership, President Yanukovich unexpectedly abandoned his pledge to build economic, business and other connections with the European Union. Instead, he adopted a more Russia-friendly approach, hoping to receive a tremendous credit (\$15 billion) from Russia. This decision led to the protests in Maidan Square, Euromaidan, in the center of Kiev. Aiming to stop "mass disorder," the Parliament passed non-democratic laws prohibiting protests, which only served to inflame the situation. By the end of January and early February 2014, approximately 100 people were killed (referred to as the 'heavenly hundred'), more went missing and over 10,000 were injured as the situation turned violent, as armed special police "Berkut" dispersed the protesters. When Viktor Yanukovich fled the country, a hastily scheduled presidential election took place in May 2014. Patriotic and Ukraine-oriented Petro Poroshenko became president of Ukraine, having a war-oriented external enemy.

In the winter/spring of 2015, separatist rebels were emboldened by the support of Russian troops and used lethal weapons to occupy (or as they say "liberate") cities and territory in eastern Ukraine and Crimea. French and German efforts in January and February 2015 to mediate a peaceful resolution of the conflict and a treaty signed in Minsk did little to end the all-but-declared war.

"A democratic civic revolution won in Ukraine. The criminal regime of President Yanukovich, who created a total system of violence and corruption for his own benefit, was toppled. The Ukrainian parliament has since formed a legitimate new coalition government that has to bring the country, robbed by its previous government and ex-president, back on track. A national consensus on Ukraine's further democratic development is arising" (Komissarenko, et al, 2015). If Ukraine's recovery and development follows the pattern of

other countries, this process will include local, national and international NGOs to help stabilize the country, meet emerging human needs and attempting to hold the government accountable for its actions.

Thus, invading or providing military support to local rebels has had a negative impact on Ukraine's sovereignty, population, borders, tourism (shooting down a civilian airplane was the most visible and tragic event in the process), international philanthropy, government and the economy. Ukrainian NGOs must prioritize their limited funds, resources, and energy. It is against these events that the survey on public attitudes toward NGOs in Ukraine was conducted.

### 3. The New Adults

This most recent social protest movement began with both organized and unorganized young people. "The students were the first to protest against the regime of President Viktor Yanukovich on the Maidan, the central square in Kiev, last November. These were the Ukrainians with the most to lose, the young people who unreflectively thought of themselves as Europeans and who wished for themselves a life, and a Ukrainian homeland, that were European." (Snyder, 2014)

Those born at the end of 1980's and the early 1990's hold a special place in Ukraine's history; they are first generation of a new independent Ukraine, the post-Soviet country with the communist regime that was established by force in 1919. The population of those under the age of 31 differs in many ways from their parents and grandparents (Bohdan Hawrylyshyn Charitable Foundation, 2015). Mike Manna (2008), Vice-President of Youth Ministry International and Director of the National Center for Youth Ministry in Kyiv, wrote "In order to truly understand Ukrainian youth, we must consider the following areas: Ukraine's violent history, the educational system, problems facing youth, and trust (or lack of) in government at all levels."

1.) Ukraine's violent history forms the backdrop to the current, ongoing unrest, sporadic fighting, death and social unrest. "Moscow's meddling has created so-called frozen conflicts in these states, in which the splinter territories remain beyond the control of the central governments and the local de facto authorities enjoy Russian protection and influence." (Mankoff, 2014) The dangerous situation in Ukraine mirrors Russian actions in the Republic of Georgia. By warning, policy and proclamations, Mr. Putin has acted to protect Russian citizens (to whom they issued passports even though these people were Georgians) and Russian speakers in other countries. The resulting conflicts, wars, skirmishes and general disruption has put a freeze on business expansion into Ukraine. It dampens financial institutions' willingness to loan funds for economic development; global markets detest instability. This negativity will impact opportunities for recent college graduates and younger people searching for employment.

2.) Educational system - Ukrainian children start school at the age of three when they attend kindergarten. The primary school begins at age 6 or 7. Ukraine's educational system is rooted in its Soviet past. Normally, Ukraine provides free education. Students who score high on the examinations do not pay tuition. Those with lower grades or scores are charged. However, bribery remains; degrees can be purchased. Outdated teaching methods may hold the better students from reaching their full potential. Ukraine has been striving for EU integration; joining the Bologna process in 2005 brought positive changes to the Ukrainian educational system, reducing bribery and creating a more merit-based system fair competition. (Skvortsova, 2008)

3.) Youth problems - Clearly one of the major issues facing young adults throughout the world is finding employment. "Problems of youth culture seem to all stem around the lack of hope for a good future. Economic concerns seem to be at the top of the list." (Manna, 2008, page 10). Other concerns reflect choices facing peers elsewhere: family issues, financial problems, relationships with peers, love, health, environment, drugs, alcohol, and questions about the future. Started in 1996, the NGO Ukrainian Youth Center's (2014) offers programs designed to foster the "development of the youth movement in Ukraine in the process of democratization of civil society. "Its aspirations include confronting many of these issues.

4.) "Trust issues including Communism, Corruption, and Chernobyl" form a general divide in Ukraine. Governments rise and fall on the levels of trust that they earn from the citizens they govern. If politicians are corrupt, people will not trust what they say. Actions will be assessed against the low standard of who got paid off. On the other hand, transparency in public decisions increases trust; NGOs are part of the international process to bring openness and accountability to governance. The blatant lies told by the government when Chernobyl first occurred not only cost lives but also eroded trust. This continued in 2014 when the government's militaristic responses to what they termed "radicalism" and "extremism" of the demonstrators.

"In Ukraine, although civil liberties flourished after the Orange Revolution, they were not anchored in legislative changes that would make these liberties sustainable. As a consequence, they were easily rolled back after Viktor Yanukovich was – democratically – elected as the country's president in 2010." (Jarabik and Yanchenko, 2013) These authors continue: "The less citizens trust the government, the more faith they have in civic organizations and vice versa."

Key questions that emerge include the following: Will the activism which coalesce in Maidan translate into this generation holding (more) favorable impressions of NGOs? Will it lead to their greater involvement in local or national NGOs? How can NGOs reach out to this next generation?

### 4. NGOs in Ukraine

NGOs form a critical role in filling the void in programs and services that the public may need in any country but which the government cannot or will not meet. The concept of a civil society is rooted in the role of NGOs as mediating systems. When NGOs succeed, they do not function in isolation. The government and the corporate sectors must find ways to work together. This is not always easy to accomplish and has a direct impact on meeting the needs of those under the age of 31. A 2014 United Nations Development Program report on NGOS in Ukraine concluded that "capacity development of both civil servants and civil society working with youth is an important strategy to empower and equip young people and foster democratic transformations. "The foundation for this idea is that Ukrainian society needs to focus on developing the next generation of leaders now rather than wait for

them to learn on-the-job. It is an attainable goal, one in which NGOs can play an important role in this process. The examples of specific NGOs in the following sections illustrate the range of missions, locations, size and scope across non-Crimean Ukraine.

Serhy Fedorynchyk, director of the Green World Information Center, noted four concerns about the NGOs focused on Ukrainian environmental issues:

- a) the public's lack of information,
- b) reliance on Western philanthropy instead of stakeholder needs and aspirations,
- c) lack of cooperation with other NGOs, and
- d) the gulf between NGOs and the corporate and governmental communities.

"These are questions that all NGOs must address. They aren't specific to environmental groups."(Miner-Nordstrom, 2003)These are also reflected in Table 2 below.

Estimates suggest that there are over 30,000 NGOs in Ukraine with a wide range of missions (Ukraine Gateway, 2013).But, even though this number may seem high, it does not demonstrate awareness or support of this pillar of the civil society movement. The U.S. Agency for International Development commissioned a study (Mikhanchuk and Volosevych, 2014) in September 2014 to ascertain "public attitudes towards civil society, citizens' engagement, participation, activism, and general characteristics of the Ukrainian political culture. "The survey consisted of over 4,000 questionnaires and interviews of people across the country including Crimea and internally-displaced people.Three of its major conclusions are relevant to this project.

1. "Ukrainians prefer to fund causes rather than engage as volunteers."(page 2)
2. "The readiness of citizens to volunteer in civic initiatives is very low (1-5%)."(page 6)
3. "The most famous types of NGOs in Ukraine and Crimea are volunteer groups and charity foundations (even though) 45% of Ukrainians, 24% of IDPs and 64% of Crimeans do not know a single NGO in their region." (page 8)

These findings and the current military, political and economic instability provide the national context for this research. As a general summary, "civil society is in an embryonic stage with scarce civic responsibilities." (Korostelina, 2013)

## 5. Methodology

This research was conducted online using the well-known and secure website [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com).The anonymous questionnaire was available from September 1 through December 31, 2014 and disseminated through the snowball or network method. The process is simple: the first participants tell their friends, families, coworkers and others about the survey and share the link. These people may then choose to participate or not. Some post on Facebook or other social media sites. One person invites others who in turn invite others; this becomes the sample.

## 6. Results

- Sample: This article reports results based on 377 respondents under the age of 31 and discusses implications for this age group and NGOs.
- Gender: The gender breakdown of the respondents is presented in Table 1.

	Female	Male	Totals
Under age 31	258 (69%)	117 (31%)	375 (100%)
Total Population (2014 estimate)	23,958,080 (54%)	20,333,333 (46%)	44,291,413 (100%)

Table 1: Gender of Respondents

Clearly this sample does not represent the general population of Ukraine. It is younger and more female.

### 6.1. Analysis

The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Development has been working for decades with NGOs; its experience is relevant to the development of NGOs in Ukraine. A recent conference reviewed the different factors that lead to successful NGOs across different missions in different parts of the world. (see Table 2) The commonalities across the sectors is instructive.

Climate Change (Koo, 2011)	Education (Avolio-Toly, 2010)	Disaster Responsiveness (Do, 2011)
Community partners	Community focus and ownership	Community participation
Education, public awareness and training		Education, public awareness
Technological innovation	Innovative approaches to providing services	
Multiple partnerships	Partnerships	Partnerships
Capacity-building	Capacity-building	Capacity-building
		Inclusivity of most vulnerable populations

Table 2: Key factors for Effective NGOs

Solving complex problems requires multiple approaches. Table 2 illustrates the approaches that have worked in different spheres. Commonalities abound including partnerships, capacity building, involvement and broad participation. The sections below illustrate selected NGOs that practice these factors as they relate to the results of this research.

#### 6.1.1. Overall Perceptions of NGO Effectiveness

When assessing the perceptions of the sample, a note of caution regarding the context is in order. A UNICEF (2010) study concluded that, while young people (defined as between the ages of 14 - 35) do attend events sponsored by NGOs, they “much more rarely participate actively as members of organizations or as volunteers. “Reasons for this could include lack of information, the need to work, lack of structured opportunities to get involved, lack of parental role models who support NGOs, peer pressure, or political concerns.

With this caution in mind, these young adult respondents were asked “overall, how effective NGOs are in meeting people’s needs? “The table below shows the results. An effectiveness scale ranged from 1 (not effective at all), to 3 (generally effective), to 5 (very effective). The mean was 2.99, indicating a modest perception of NGOs performance.

#### 6.1.2. Summary of Responses of NGO Importance by Mission

	<b>Economic</b>	<b>Human Rights</b>	<b>Culture</b>	<b>Basic Human Needs</b>
Not Important (1)	4 (1%)	5 (1%)	5 (1%)	3 (1%)
Somewhat Important (2)	28 (7%)	39 (10%)	45 (12%)	30 (8%)
Generally Important (3)	79 (21%)	56 (15%)	77 (21%)	41 (11%)
Mostly Important (4)	105 (28%)	106 (28%)	117 (31%)	85 (23%)
Very Important (5)	159 (42%)	169 (45%)	130 (35%)	215 (57%)
Totals	375	375	374	374
Mean	3.48	3.52	3.86	4.28

Table 3: Summary of Data

The mean responses show strong support (80% replied Mostly and Very Important) for NGOs whose programs and services focus on meeting basic human needs (food, housing, health services, and clothing). Secondary support (75%) exists for NGOs in the broad field of human rights programming, while modest support is in evidence for those NGOs with missions in economic development and cultural affairs.

The general support for NGOs (2.99 on a 5 point scale) is less than the support shown for NGOs in any specific sector. One possible reason for this could be that respondents have a less favorable opinion of NGOs in general than they do of specific NGOs that may know or have been associated with in some way. Alternatively, there may be NGOs that function in fields that respondents did not connect with the survey categories; an example might be NGOs that deal with veterans from the Soviet era. In May 2011, at a ceremony to honor past struggles in World War II, members of the Svoboda party attacked their fellow countrymen who wanted to celebrate connections to independence and the west. These pronounced regional differences pit the more anti-Russian, pro-European factions against the more pro-Russian supporters from the southern and eastern regions.

#### 6.1.3. NGOs with Economic Development Missions

70% of the respondents agree that economic development NGOs serve a mostly/very important role in helping the country restart and continue its economic development. One of the ironies of the current ‘frozen conflict’ is that economic development remains an important ingredient for Ukraine’s growth and stability. Yet, it is exactly at this same time that foreign investors look askance at this emerging democracy. When times were relatively better, the Kyiv Post (2008) wrote that “As Ukraine’s economy develops, many large donor organizations are turning their attention to countries with more acute development needs. The trouble with this seemingly logical shift is that many grassroots organizations in Ukraine depend on the same donors. “Yet, NGOs try to make a difference in the development of Ukraine’s civil society. The Black Sea Forum’s (2015) mission is to foster cooperation between Moldova and the bordering regions in Ukraine. During the summer 2015, they announced a € 3.3 million request for proposals which seek to promote “closer business links, development of employment opportunities in rural areas (and) solving cross-border environmental problems.” This evidences partnerships-in-action.

Civil society organizations and informal leaders can often bring more development and positive changes in society. Active citizens can initiate actions and apply for grants without being a part of NGO, if the donor is willing to support these efforts. In addition, there are NGOs whose mission is to create better conditions for economic development. The “Centre for Regional Development” (2015) focuses on the effective economic development of Rozdillya region in western Ukraine. Approximately 30,000 people live in this area. Economic development activities can be successful in this area because of its strong traditions and united community with its own dialect and customs. Moreover, among these people there are many experts and specialists involved in the cement, sulfur and paper industries. Investors and tourists are also impressed by the region’s natural resources and attractive geographical location. A current €4 million project stresses cooperation between Poland, Belarus and Ukrainian to:

- a) reclaim and cultivate barren land,
- b) develop business plans for new industrial parks,
- c) establish local economic development agencies in Poland and Ukraine,
- d) arrange training seminars for staff of local authorities and NGOs,
- e) adapt training to meet the needs of investors,
- f) support public-private partnerships with local authorities, NGOs and businesses, and
- g) create a cross-border Polish-Ukrainian network of industrial parks.

These two examples show how NGOs can initiate economic development of the region through building a network of partnerships, getting grants and implementing needed projects. They also include training and capacity-building activities.

#### 6.1.4. NGOs with Cultural Missions

Slightly fewer (66%) feel this way about NGOs with cultural missions. This could reflect the long and proud history of Ukraine's vibrant cultural community. An example of an NGO with this mission is ArtTravel. Based in Kiev and Odessa, ArtTravel focuses on young and emerging artists in order to: "promote Art, discover a new view into Ukrainian cultural space (both authentic and contemporary Art) through travelling and art-performances, link initiatives with the purpose of developing cultural competence and increasing diversity in the cultural sector, develop cultural activity in Ukraine through educational project in Fine Arts, refresh cultural life in Ukraine with international experiences and influences, and cooperate with Ukrainian and international cultural organizations in common ground of promoting Art and realization of joint culture projects (rivercities.net, 2015)." ArtTravel's approach incorporates technical assistance, education, partnerships and capacity-building.

#### 6.1.5. NGOs Meeting Basic Needs

The missions and services of NGOs that help people meet their basic needs received the strongest support in this survey; 78% believe that these NGOs are mostly/very important to civil society in their country. In some ways this is not surprising because human suffering was present throughout Ukraine when this research was being conducted. The daily news documented injury, starvation, rebel forces, health problems, unemployment and inflation. Using Maslow's hierarchy of needs, physiological and safety needs must be met before energy shifts to higher level needs of esteem, personal and professional growth. Housing, safety, clean water, clothing and food are indeed basic needs; domestic and international NGOs have a strong role in helping meet these needs.

As an example, "ROZRADA is a humanitarian NGO in Ukraine that provides social and psychological consultation services to individuals, couples, families, organizations groups and government agencies." It began operations in 1994 after the Chernobyl disaster and its extended services now include domestic violence counseling and protection and working with high-risk children. (Weinholds.org, 2015)

More recently, in Kiev, the NGO "Everyone Can Help" set up a shop to aid internally-displaced persons arriving from eastern Ukraine. Fierce fighting has driven many people out of their homes leaving almost everything behind, and forcing volunteers and NGOs to bear the brunt of the burden." (UNHCR, 2015) This represents exactly how NGOs can meet emerging local needs when government is unable to mobilize the resources or the will to help those in need. These two NGOs use partnerships, networks, citizen participation and education to implement their missions.

#### 6.1.6. NGOs Focusing on Human Rights Concerns

Public appreciation for the role and services of NGOs with human rights missions received above average support (3.52 out of 5.0) support. One explanation could be that the freedom to demonstrate, to protest, to petition the government on major policy issues reveals that basic human rights are in evidence. On the other hand, arrests of journalists still occur. (Doherty, 2015) The respondents in this survey came of age with social media. The revolution was televised around the world on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter! This 'freedom' may obscure other human rights issues.

### **7. Summary and Limitations**

The major finding of this research is that modest support exists for NGOs in general and slightly stronger in specific sectors of society. Even if other surveys show low levels of individual involvement, this base of interest and positive attitudes can be harnessed in the future. As the under-31s become parents, community leaders, business managers and executives, this reservoir of good-will can result in collaborative partnerships, financial support, volunteers, advocates and other benefits.

All research projects should be clear on the limitations which prevent the results from being used inappropriately. This project has several issues of concern.

1. The sample does not reflect the general population of Ukraine; it is younger, more female and probably more technologically skilled than a stratified random sample.
2. The results do not take into consideration where the respondents live. They could be anywhere in Ukraine including Crimea.
3. Given the state of rebellion and international tensions occurring at the same time the survey was available; it is possible that these results might reflect immediate needs.

## 8. Concluding Thoughts

*Shchedryk* is a Ukrainian folk song often sung on New Year's eve; it tells the story of a little swallow that flies into a farmer's home proclaiming that sheep are resting, lambs are giving birth, and money will abound in the future. It is nice to dream of such things, but without NGOs to augment the farmer's hard work and government programs, some of these wishes may not come true.

"Contemporary Ukrainian sociological science, in our opinion, should beware of at least three dangers. The first danger is to remain only a fragment of vanishing Soviet sociology. The second danger is to form exclusively as an apologetic part of Western sociology. The third risk is to become stuck in attempts to demonstrate its own exclusivity. The ideal solution surely lies in an attempt to find its own uniqueness through the universal approach. And this universal approach should combine regional particularities and globalization trends." (Yakovenko and Melnikov, 2010)

This editorial centers on the emerging professional perspectives of sociology in Ukraine. Its thesis applies equally as well to Ukraine's next leaders and many NGOs. As NGOs start, grow, stabilize and face challenges, this advice is worth recalling. As those under age 31 grow into leadership roles, they will have to balance these perspectives: connections to Russia, adopting European values and developing their own pathways.

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