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HASAN KALYONCU UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE EDUCATION INSTITUTE

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

The Role of Trust in Cooperation and Coordination Among NGOs in the Syrian Crisis. An Analysis through Social Exchange and Neo-Institutional Perspectives: The Case of NGOs Operating Cross-Border in Northwest Syria from the Gaziantep, Türkiye Hub.

SALİH AYDEMİR

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LİSANSÜSTÜ EĞİTİM ENSTİTÜSÜ
DOKTORA TEZ KABUL VE ONAY FORMU

Siyaset Bilimi ve Uluslararası İlişkiler Anabilim Dalı Doktora Programı öğrencisi **Salih Aydemir** tarafından hazırlanan **"Suriye Krizinde STK'lar Arası İş birliği ve Koordinasyonda Güvenin Rolü: Gaziantep/Türkiye'deki STK'ların Sınır Ötesi İnsani Yardım Operasyonlarının Sosyal Mübadele ve Yeni Kurumsal Perspektiflerle Analizi"** başlıklı tez, 11/01/2024 tarihinde yapılan savunma sınavı sonucu **başarılı** bulunarak jürimiz tarafından **Doktora Tezi** olarak kabul edilmiştir.

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Bu tezdeki bütün bilgilerin etik davranış ve akademik kurallar çerçevesinde elde edildiğini ve tez yazım kurallarına uygun olarak hazırlanan bu çalışmada bana ait olmayan her türlü ifade ve bilginin kaynağına eksiksiz atıf yapıldığını bildiririm.

Salih Aydemir

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PREFACE

Trust is one of such phenomena that you know it exists, but you never pay enough attention to how a big role it plays in one's life. It forms a cornerstone in our social relations. It is multifaceted, complex and it has many levels. We all use it as a concept on a daily basis and we do it by confidence, but we never truly dig into how it really functions or on what conditions its realization and non-realization depend. We take it for granted. It was not until I had the chance to do a two-month internship at Trust and Peace Center at Coventry University that I ever thought of trust as being such a huge field of study. Therefore, I extend my heartfelt gratitude to Prof. Alpaslan Özerdem for not only granting me the opportunity to collaborate during the internship but also for introducing me to this captivating topic which became the work at hand. I am equally indebted to my supervisor Prof. Dr. Emel Topcu for her patience and invaluable feedback during the process. I am also grateful for the insightful comments and guidance provided by Prof. Dr. Saime Özçürümez, Prof. Dr. Muhiddin Mulalic and other committee members.

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ABSTRACT

This case study has sought to explore and investigate the role of trust in cooperation and coordination among the international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) and local NGOs (Syrian and Turkish) operating in the Syrian protracted cross-border humanitarian crisis in Northwest Syria from across Gaziantep-Türkiye hub. It has done so through the lenses of the Social Exchange Theory and Neo-institutional Theory. Accordingly, both cooperation and coordination challenges at micro-level in dyadic inter-organizational relations and meso-level (at the level of host state, Türkiye) and at macro-level (wider political dynamics) and their impacts on the inter-NGOs cooperation and coordination have been explored. The data for the research have been collected by key informant interviewing. The findings suggest that different landmarks or so-called critical junctures in different phases of the crisis have been effective in terms of challenges in the cooperative and coordinative behaviors of I/NGOs at the three levels of analysis (micro, meso and macro) in addition to the already existing structural issues. The findings further suggest that although with the formal UN coordination mechanism in place there is more transparency and thus less negative competition among the I/NGOs, there is also a diminishing role of trust in collaborative efforts (counter to the increasing needs, their complexity and their ever-technical nature) in comparison with the initial years of the crisis when humanitarian efforts were less structured and when uncertainty regarding the future of the crisis was at its peak.

Key Words: Trust, cooperation, coordination, NGOs, cross-border, Social Exchange Theory, Neo-isntitutional Theory

HASAN KALYONCU ÜNİVERSİTESİ
LİSANSÜSTÜ EĞİTİM ENSTİTÜSÜ
SİYASET BİLİMİ VE ULUSLARARASI İLİŞKİLER ANABİLİM DALI

Suriye Krizinde STK'lar Arası İş birliği ve Koordinasyonda Güvenin Rolü: Gaziantep/Türkiye'deki STK'ların Sınır Ötesi İnsani Yardım Operasyonlarının Sosyal Mübadele ve Yeni Kurumsal Perspektiflerle Analizi

SALİH AYDEMİR

Danışman
Prof. Dr. Emel Topcu

ÖZET

Bu vaka çalışması, Türkiye'nin Gaziantep merkezinden yürütülen uzun soluklu Suriye sınır ötesi insani krizinde faaliyet gösteren uluslararası sivil toplum kuruluşları (USTK) ve yerel STK'lar (Suriyeli ve Türk) arasındaki işbirliği ve koordinasyonda güvenin rolünü araştırmayı ve incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu çalışma, Sosyal Değişim Teorisi ve Neo-Kurumsal Teori lensleri aracılığıyla gerçekleştirilmiştir. Buna göre, ikili kuruluşlar arası ilişkilerde mikro düzeydeki işbirliği ve koordinasyon zorlukları ile ev sahibi ülke Türkiye düzeyinde (mezo düzey) ve daha geniş siyasi dinamikler (makro düzey) olmak üzere farklı düzeylerdeki zorluklar ve bunların kuruluşlar arası işbirliği ve koordinasyon üzerindeki etkileri incelenmiştir. Araştırma için veriler, kilit bilgi kaynağı görüşmeleri yoluyla toplanmıştır. Bulgular, krizin farklı aşamalarındaki dönüm noktalarının veya kritik eşiklerin, halihazırdaki yapısal sorunlara ek olarak, üç analiz düzeyinde (mikro, mezo ve makro) örgütlerin işbirliği ve koordinasyon davranışlarındaki zorluklar açısından etkili olduğunu göstermektedir. Bulgular ayrıca, resmi BM koordinasyon mekanizması yürürlükte olmasına rağmen, örgütler arasında daha fazla şeffaflık ve dolayısıyla daha az olumsuz rekabet olsa da, krizin ilk yıllarına kıyasla (insani yardım çabaları daha az yapılandırılmış ve krize ilişkin belirsizlik en yüksek seviyedeyken) işbirliğine dayalı çabalarda güvenin azaldığını (artan ihtiyaçlara, karmaşıklıklarına ve giderek daha teknik hallerine karşılık) göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Güven, İşbirliği, Koordinasyon, STK'lar (Sivil Toplum Kuruluşları), Sınır Ötesi, Sosyal Değişim Teorisi, Neo-Kurumsal Teori

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ABBREVIATIONS

ACU: Assistance Coordination Unit

AP-I: Additional Protocol I

AP-II: Additional Protocol II

ARC: American Red Cross

AFAD: Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency

EMRO: Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office

GC: Geneva Conventions

GCIV: Fourth Geneva Convention

HCR: High Commission for Refugees

IASC: Inter-Agency Standing Committee

ICRC: International Committee of the Red Cross

IHL: International Humanitarian Law

INGO: International Non-Governmental Organization

IHH: The Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian
Relief

MSF: Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders)

NGO: Non-Governmental Organization NWS: Northwest Syria

OCHA: Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

SCF: Save the Children Fund

TRC: Turkish Red Crescent

UN: United Nations

UNGA: United Nations General Assembly

UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UNICEF: United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

UNRRA: United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration

UNSC: United Nations Security Council

WHO: World Health Organization

1. INTRODUCTION

The need for humanitarian aid is greater than ever. As of June 2023, 360 million people are reported to be in need of humanitarian aid, with a thirty percent increase from the year before (UN Press 2023), and these figures are on the rise despite the fact that states contribute more than ever and philanthropists are making more donations than ever. The drivers of humanitarian need are as diverse as ever. Among the most known causes of these increasing needs are the climate crisis, food insecurity, global inflation, conflict and displacement, and critical funding gaps (Save the Children n.d.-b).

In the face of all these needs, humanitarian action is not a novel concept; it is as old as human history. Over the years, however, it has changed its shell and got into a new identity quite in line with the developments in the world. Particularly, as the conflicts are becoming more frequent and political, with their nature being more *protracted*, the needs coming along are also complex, going beyond emergency relief. This transformation and increase in needs have been remarkable, especially in the post-Cold War period. Part of the reason for such a transformation is the conflicts in the wake of the changing world order (Mackintosh, 2000:1). These *protracted* crises are regional in nature, but their impacts are long-lasting and do not remain regional; they extend well-beyond their borders. The protracted nature of the crises around the world is causing people to get internally displaced, flee to the neighboring countries in search of a refuge and a new beginning. This does not come without a cost for the transit or host states, causing economic and social repercussions. Not only are the conflicts independent variables of the human movement, but the risks of natural hazards with climate change make them 'more frequent, less predictable, and longer lasting' and present everywhere around the globe. Natural disasters and human-induced disasters (conflicts) are particularly effective in regions where there is already vulnerability owing to factors such as rapid population growth, food and energy insecurity, poverty, ecological degradation, etc. (IASC-Inter-Agency Standing Committee 2015).

The dynamic interactions of the main drivers of humanitarian needs are also testing the humanitarian efforts in the humanitarian domain, putting them in a state of constant flux in parallel with the ever-changing challenges and priorities coming along. While crises may differ in scope, scale, and nature, many challenges persist across humanitarian emergencies. These include, but are not limited to, access to affected areas, limited funding resources, security concerns, political and legal constraints, sustainability, long-term impact, and cooperation and coordination. Particularly, *cooperation* and *coordination,* or a combination of both, *collaboration* form the main pillars of successful humanitarian action. However, the myriad of actors and the diversity of contexts in which these actors are involved make both *cooperation* and *coordination* challenging. Even though there are day-to-day efforts by a plethora of actors to improve *cooperation* and *coordination* among the humanitarian actors through formal and informal mechanisms, the uniqueness of every crisis makes it challenging to attain it. The most well-known system of coordination is the formal UN cluster system that has been in place since 2005. It is effective in *standardization*, *accountability, transparency, local capacity building*, and *information sharing* among the stakeholders in a humanitarian setting. However, not all relationships among the humanitarian organizations are set up and organized in a formal way, and in some cases, this system cannot be applied, or its application can get delayed. In such cases, the NGOs, as the core actors of the humanitarian aid system, form alliances or other formal or semi-formal mechanisms to attain collaboration.

The Syrian cross-border aid mechanism for Northwest Syria (NWS) is such a case in point. In the initial phase of the crisis in 2011-2014, the non-existence of the UN agencies in the management and coordination of the cross-border aid from across Türkiye into the NWS or the inability of the international community to reach a deal at the UN Security Council (UNSC)[1] to formalize the cross-border aid mechanism enabled both the international and local entities to deliver the aid from across the border, mostly under the auspices of Turkish AFAD,[2] the Turkish Red Crescent (TRC), and IHH.[3] The alliances such as NGO Forum[4] and ACU, among others, were effective mechanisms of both coordination and, to lesser degree, cooperation among the NGOs operating from the Türkiye hub until Resolution 2165 came into effect. After the resolution, their roles have

[1] For more detailed information on the "Syrian Cross-border Humanitarian Resolution, Res. 2165" and the main arguments about the legality of cross-border aid delivery and its application in the specific case of Syria, is dealt with within the purview of *International Humanitarian Law* in Chapter 2.
[2] "Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency," in Turkish, "Afet ve Acil Durum Yönetim Başkanlığı." It is a Turkish government agency that is responsible for the management of emergencies and disasters, including natural disasters, humanitarian crises, and other emergency situations.
[3] "İnsani Yardım Vakfı" (IHH) in English, "The Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief," is a Turkish NGO established in 1992 and has been known for its global humanitarian activities. Although it operates independently of the Turkish government, it is in high collaboration with government agencies and other organizations in the Syrian cross-border context to provide humanitarian aid and relief.
[4] The first of its kind to bring together both international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) and local Syrian NGOs under the same roof of a coordination mechanism (Reliefweb, n.d.).

continued, especially the former's role now being more of an advocacy level, as stated and confirmed by the interviews. In the periods both before and after the resolution, i.e., in the absence of a formal coordinative body and in its existence, cooperation and coordination have been integral parts of the humanitarian aid delivered. Undoubtedly, there are various factors affecting the effectiveness of both in different contexts and settings, be they humanitarian or otherwise. *Cooperation* and *coordination* are considered two distinct facets of collaboration in inter-organizational research (Brattström and Bachmann 2017). While cooperation is defined as *"joint pursuit of agreed-on goals," coordination* is *"the deliberate and orderly alignment or adjustment of partners' actions to achieve jointly determined goals"* (Gulati, Wohlgezogen, and Zhelyazkov, 2012). Thus, according to Gulati et al. (2012), cooperative relationships are based on "contributions" and "benefits" partners give and get in a relationship that leads to *interdependence*, and the scope of such a give and take will also determine the scope of the *interdependence*. On the other hand, the discrepancy between contributions and benefits will lead to cooperation failures (Gulati et al., 2012) or cooperation concerns (Brattström and Bachmann, 2017). Coordination involves the specification and operation of mechanisms for *information sharing*, *decision-making*, and *feedback* that help partners in a partnership to *synchronize* and organize their efforts so that the resources are utilized efficiently and effectively (Gulati et al. 2012). Accordingly, the challenge to coordinate activities of the organizations is called *"coordination concerns"* (Brattström and Bachmann, 2017).

Consequently, the study at hand aims to explore these challenges and concerns at different levels. Ultimately, exploring these challenges through the lenses of *social exchange* and *neo-institutional* theories among the NGOs, particularly those of local character, Syrian-led or Turkish, and INGO's operating from across the border in the Gaziantep/Türkiye hub into NWS will provide us with an understanding of how trust plays a role in cooperation and coordination.

Trust is a complex phenomenon with many different dimensions. It is known to foster cooperation (Brattström and Bachmann, 2017) and facilitate coordination of tasks by increasing *stability* and *predictability* in inter-organizational relationships (Bachmann, 2001). Considering the uncertain and volatile nature of humanitarian settings, the role of trust in interorganizational relationships in such settings becomes even more important. The existing literature on trust in inter-organizational relationships in humanitarian settings has mostly covered *"swift trust"* (see, for example, Dubey, Altay, and Blome, 2019; Tatham and Kovács, 2010). While we acknowledge that *swift trust* is essential in humanitarian settings—natural disasters or man-made conflict situations—where many international and local organizations, governments, and all other chains of the supply chain have to interact to deliver aid to the needy, it is also becoming more and more important to see how the role of trust plays out in cooperation and coordination in *protracted* humanitarian settings, which are becoming more and more of a reality in the modern world.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

This study addresses the critical challenge of effective cooperation and coordination among humanitarian organizations, a pressing issue underscored by the complex and protracted nature of modern crises, as exemplified by the Syrian cross-border situation. Humanitarian emergencies, now characterized by prolonged durations and politicized contexts, necessitate a nuanced understanding of inter-organizational dynamics, particularly in environments where formal coordination mechanisms are absent or ineffective. Central to this inquiry is the concept of trust, a pivotal yet understudied factor in the world of humanitarian aid. The research specifically investigates how trust influences the relationships and collaborative efforts among non-governmental organizations (NGOs), between the INGOs and local NGOs operating in such challenging contexts. This focus is predicated on the hypothesis that trust plays a significant role in shaping inter-organizational interactions and alliances, especially in protracted crisis settings where the initial (swift) trust may not be entirely applicable anymore. By applying principles from social exchange and neo-institutional theories, the study aims to unravel the complexities surrounding the development, maintenance, and impact of trust in the domain of humanitarian cooperation and coordination. Through this lens, the research seeks to contribute a deeper understanding of the dynamics at play among NGOs in the Syrian cross-border crisis, thereby offering broader insights into the management and efficacy of humanitarian operations in similarly complex and enduring emergency scenarios.

1.2. Research Aims and Objectives

This research seeks to explore how/if trust plays a role in cooperation and coordination among NGOs (INGOs and local NGOs) in the protracted Syrian cross-border context. To reach this aim, the following objectives have been determined:

- To study and investigate the role of trust in cooperative relations between INGOs and local NGOs.
- To study and investigate the role of trust in coordination among humanitarian organizations (INGOs and local NGOs) in the Syrian cross-border context.
- To study and investigate how *swift trust* among NGOs in the Syrian cross-border context at the initial phase of the crisis has transformed in the current protracted nature of the crisis.
- To analyze and investigate how different periods in the Syrian crisis have affected inter-organizational cooperation and coordination and what kind of challenges these periods have brought about.

Especially, the theoretical lenses of social exchange theory provide us with a view to see how the protracted nature of the crisis has affected any roles that trust plays in cooperation and coordination. In using such a broad theoretical lens for this case study, we have mainly focused on some functional concepts that we find to be more germane to our study. Especially, Emerson's (1962, 1972s, 1972b) *negotiated exchange, power,* and *dependence* have been key concepts to our analysis, although *uncertainty* and *risk* (Molm, 2013)—also two important dimensions of trust—have been considered as key concepts shedding light on our data within the framework of social exchange theory.

As Coyle-Shapiro and Diehl (2017) arrive at their conclusion about trust within the framework of social exchange theory, trust is 'situational,' meaning that it would not be viable to say that it exists universally and is isolated. Rather, trust is built and determined by specific interactions taking place between individuals or parties in a *specific context*. While it is essential to see and analyze the specific interactions determining the nature and role of trusting relationships, it is not wise to say that only the bilateral relations between two entities would decide on the role of trust and that their relationship would be independent of the environment in which they interact. Accordingly, trust formation and its processes cannot be thought about independently of the contexts in which actors party to a relationship interact. In fact, for the study at hand, the adoption of the *social exchange* theory enables us to investigate the dynamics of trust between two NGOs to a greater extent at the *micro* level, leaving out the *meso* and *macro* levels, which are also of high importance in assessing and analyzing the relationships of the institutions/organizations, and even more so in the context of humanitarian action in an intra-state conflict that is characterized by high dynamism and an ever-changing landscape of actors involved in the conflict at different levels: local, regional, and international. So has come about the need to combine the *social exchange theory* with *neo-institutional theory* to better account for the dynamics of trust and its role in cooperation and coordination among the NGOs. The *neo-institutional theory*, thanks to its emphasis on institutions in many forms, be it formal rules and regulations or informal norms, beliefs, or cultural practices, fits better to investigate and analyze the relationships among the I/NGOs at *meso* and *macro* levels as these organizations operate in highly institutionalized contexts consisting of a complex web of rules, norms, and regulations both at the organizational and inter-organizational level. In particular, the emphasis of the approach on the broader context in which organizations operate, capturing the political developments at both international and regional levels that affect the dynamics of cooperation and coordination, makes the processes among the NGOs crucial. Especially the partnership agreements between INGOs and local NGOs are becoming more and more of a norm, which is best reflected in the UN documents. They mirror challenges and constraints at both a normative and contextual level that affect how these partnerships work at different times across different contexts. The nature of these partnerships in the humanitarian world is embedded in a broader level of contextual and structural realities, going well beyond micro-level organizational relationships. It is no longer viable to assess organizations as solely being the dynamo of production; rather, it is more viable to analyze them with their cultural and social dimensions (Johnston, 2013:15), an interpretation that highlights the importance of the environments in which the organizations operate. The dynamic and diverse nature of the humanitarian setting where humanitarian organizations engage daily in their activities requires a broader vision of these organizations' interactions and the nature of the dynamics that guide these interactions. Therefore, exploring the nature and dynamics of cooperation and coordination challenges will also inform us of the role of trust in relationships among the I/NGOs. In doing these, we will make use of two of the most well-known concepts in neo-institutional theory: *isomorphism* and *decoupling*. The former signifies the efforts of organizations to homogenize, to be similar to other organizations, and to attain legitimacy in their environments, while the latter represents the actual day-to-day practices of organizations versus what they have as official procedures in their organizational structures (Meyer and Rowan, 1991). With such a perspective, exploring such dynamics through social exchange and neo-institutional theories will provide us with a more complete picture, not only giving us insights about the dynamics at the micro-level but also at the meso-level and macro levels.

The force of globalization can severely affect local structures and people, which is why persistence with the micro level of analyzing of institutions and getting stuck with a macro-level approach would not help (Powell and Bromley, 2015:765). Therefore, this study adopts both social exchange theory and neo-institutional theory to provide a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of inter-organizational relations among humanitarian organizations, specifically International and Local Non-Governmental Organizations (I/NGOs),[5] in the Syrian context. These frameworks will be used to analyze cooperative and coordinative factors at the micro, meso, and macro levels. In line with these theoretical frameworks and the rationale that cooperation concerns and coordination concerns can exist independent of each other (Brattström and Bachmann, 2017), this study aims to explore such cooperation and coordination concerns in inter-organizational relations, specifically in the relationships of the local NGOs with the INGOs in the Syrian cross-border context in their existence and operations from the Gaziantep/Türkiye hub. We argue that the dynamics of cooperation and coordination challenges can be explored on three levels, macro, meso, and micro. The developments at these levels have been effective in the cooperative and coordinative behaviors of humanitarian organizations, thus affecting the role of trust in their relationships. Furthermore, it is vital to note that protracted crisis situations are usually accompanied by a complex and dynamic political environment that affects, changes or transforms actors' course of action and the patterns of relationships in which they are involved. We argue that the highly dynamic and political situation in the Syrian cross-border humanitarian setting has affected the partnership relations and patterns among the humanitarian organizations and, hence, cooperation and coordination challenges, which, in turn, have implications for the role of trust.

[5] For the purpose of this study, I/NGOs refer to both international and local NGOs (Syrian-led or Turkish).

The novelty of the study lies in the fact that the studies investigating the role of trust have involved swift trust and coordination in the humanitarian supply chain. However, the humanitarian crises around the world are more protracted than ever, with the humanitarian actors remaining in the same crisis location for an indefinite time. Accordingly, exploring the role of trust and the dynamics of it in cooperation and coordination becomes quintessential. Another novelty of it is the adoption of the lenses of *social exchange* and *neo-institutional* theories that complement each other[6] in explaining the role of trust in cooperation and coordination among the NGOs in the very case of the Syrian cross-border context.

1.3.Research Questions and Working Hypotheses

This research investigates the role of trust in facilitating cooperation and coordination among humanitarian organizations within the Syrian cross-border context, specifically focusing on the relationships between International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) and local NGOs based in Turkey's Gaziantep province. The study is guided by the theoretical frameworks of social exchange and neo-institutionalism, acknowledging the potential for research questions to evolve during the investigation process, as emphasized by the concept of "progressive focusing" (Parlett and Hamilton, 1972).

RQ1: How has trust, in relation to cooperation and coordination, evolved among humanitarian aid agencies (INGOs and local NGOs) in the cross-border response throughout the different phases of the Syrian crisis (as outlined in Table 4.2.)?

RQ2: To what extent have landmark events, processes, or critical junctures in Syrian Crisis humanitarian aid impacted the relationships between INGOs and local NGOs during the various phases?

Working Hypotheses

Informed by the selected theoretical frameworks and existing knowledge on the subject, the following working hypotheses are proposed:

WH1: The protracted nature of the Syrian crisis is expected to have a positive impact on trust-building between local NGOs and INGOs.

[6] In their work, Brattström and Bachmann (2017) highlight the importance of such an approach in inter-organizational trust research.

WH2: In the Syrian cross-border context, trust plays a significant role in facilitating cooperation and coordination among INGOs and local NGOs.

WH3: A positive correlation is expected between trust and the localization process of humanitarian aid.

WH4: The presence of various external factors at different levels is anticipated to positively influence the development of trust among cooperating and coordinating NGOs in the Syrian cross-border context.

1.4. The Significance of the Research

Trust is a phenomenon as old as human history, and it is an indispensable tool in human relations. People trust each other for different reasons, and hence there are different types of trust in the functioning of society. In society, we are no longer individuals; rather, we have become institutionalized, and now, like human beings, organizations have their own identities and interact with each other within the sector in which they operate. In this study, the role of trust in cooperation and coordination among the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the Syrian crisis was investigated. The fact that these organizations must quickly intervene to help people in need during times of crisis makes *cooperation* and *coordination* crucial factors rather than a preference, whereas private business-like entities would choose their partnerships based on their own individual interests. Of course, this does not mean that NGOs in their respective fields of operation (humanitarian aid in this case) do not have their own interests.

It is particularly important in a *protracted crisis* situation to understand how the role of trust shifts or matures over time among the humanitarian organizations in comparison with the initial emergency situation, in which the applied type of trust is known as *swift trust*. Understanding the role of trust in terms of cooperation and coordination in protracted humanitarian crises would help policymakers and people in the field develop more solid and trusting dynamics among humanitarian aid organizations. This could, in turn, lead to a better understanding of similar contexts and future crises, even though every humanitarian crisis is unique and the generalization of one crisis to other contexts would not always be plausible.

1.5. Dissertation Outline

The thesis is structured as follows: in the second chapter, *Humanitarianism*, the history of humanitarianism with its main pillars, its actors, the specific context of the Syrian crisis, the legal and operational intricacies of humanitarian aid, as well as the history of the civil society in Syria and the formation processes of the Syrian humanitarian aid groups in NWS in the early years of the civil war, are provided. This context-setting is crucial for understanding the nuances of research findings. In the third chapter, where *the conceptual and theoretical framework* is discussed, the main definitional and conceptual challenges in the study, as well as the main contours of the theoretical lenses through which the findings are analyzed and discussed, are elaborated upon. At the same time, the recent literature on inter-organizational trust and its application to studies in the humanitarian domain are discussed with a view to locating where the current study stands. In the fourth chapter, *Methodology*, the research design, the methods adopted, data collection and analysis techniques, as well as ethical considerations, are detailed. In the fifth chapter, *Findings*, the results of the interviews are presented with some slight contributions from the existing findings. In the *Discussion* chapter, findings are interpreted in light of the literature reviewed and the theoretical lenses adopted. The *Conclusion* chapter summarizes the key findings of the research, reiterates its significance, presents the main limitations, and offers recommendations for future research.

2. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

2.1. Humanitarianism, Humanitarian Action, and Main Principles

To understand the core of humanitarian action, there is a need to go through the main dynamics that govern the general structure of humanitarianism as well as the humanitarian principles that guide the modern humanitarian structure. In this chapter, firstly humanitarianism is discussed in terms of the main principles guiding it, followed by its historical evolution. Briefly, the historical emerging of the key institutions, such as the UN, its humanitarian bodies, as well as that of some of the leading international NGOs, with their important roles and implications in regard to the development of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and some vital conventions, is tackled. Subsequently, the issue of humanitarian assistance is investigated in terms of its legal stance in international law, for that matter the IHL. In the purview of such an approach, together with an account of the civil war in Syria, the legal base of humanitarian cross-border operations into Syria and diverging discussions, opinions, and intricacies around the matter will be expounded upon. Last, but not least, the civil society dynamics in Syria are discussed; this is done with a historical approach, looking into the Syrian civil society structure and its evolution into the era before and after the civil war.

2.2. Humanitarian Principles

Humanitarian action is defined based on humanitarian principles; they help distinguish humanitarian aid from other activities that are political, religious, ideological, or military in nature (European Commission, n.d.-a). In 1965, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement developed an operational and ethical framework to guide their work in polarized situations. The four of the seven fundamental principles have come to be: *humanity*, *impartiality*, *neutrality*, and *independence* (Labbé and Daudin, 2015:186; Mardini, 2022). These four principles would so come to the foreground that they would be influential in the normative shaping of the humanitarian sector (Labbé and Daudin, 2015:186). The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) would adopt them as guiding principles in 1991 with Resolution 46/182, which stipulates that "humanitarian assistance must be provided with principles of "*humanity*, *neutrality*, and *impartiality,"* at the time *leaving* out the principle of *independence,* which UNGA would adopt later in 2004 with Res. 58/114. Mardini (2022) views *humanity* and *impartiality* as serving as a moral compass; while the aim of humanitarian action is to alleviate and prevent suffering, thus *humanity;* it is done solely on a needs-based approach without '*discrimination'* for nationality, race, religious beliefs, class, or political views, thus *impartiality*. While humanity and impartiality form the coin of moral and ethical face of humanitarian action, *n*eutrality and *independence* are considered as *practical tools* emanating from the ICRC's practical responses to operational challenges faced by the first humanitarians working in conflict situations, and they make humanity and impartiality a "practical reality" (Labbé and Daudin, 2015). Within Pictet's parlance, when we talk about *neutrality* and *independence*, "we are in the domains of means and not of ends"(Pictet, 1979). These two principles are related to non-discrimination; they help assure Red Cross of having confidence of all parties which is inevitable for realizing its mission (Pictet, 1979). In that sense, *neutrality* and *independence* are means to realize objectives, which are enshrined in the principles of *humanity* and *impartiality* (Mardini, 2022; Pictet, 1979).

As a recap to this discussion, the quintessential humanitarian principles can be defined as follows (UNHCR, 2023):

- **Humanity**: the primary motivation of humanitarian assistance is saving lives and alleviating suffering in a way that is aligned with human dignity. Irrespective of the type of the crisis (natural or man-made) humanity should be the main driver in the response.
- **Impartiality**: Irrespective of race, religion, gender, nationality, political ideology, or class, there should be followed a needs-based approach taking the most urgent cases as the priority.
- **Neutrality**: Humanitarian workers are to avoid taking sides in conflicts.
- **Independence**: It requires that humanitarian bodies be autonomous, not to be under control or subordination by political, economic, military, or other non-humanitarian objectives.

These principles are the rudder of the humanitarian workers; any action of humanitarian character carried out disregarding these principles is to be questioned. In that sense, *"principled humanitarianism"* is a center of focus for humanitarian action which signifies meeting the needs of the affected population in a way that is "distinct and separate from political and other motivations" (UNHCR, 2023). Several important documents in the world of humanitarianism have referred to these principles and have urged their adoption. One of these documents is the Code of Conduct[7] in which commitment to humanitarian principles is made. The Sphere Handbook,[8] another such document setting humanitarian standards, emphasize on the humanitarian principles.

While a definitional distinction between humanitarian principles is of little trouble, their application in crisis situations, especially in *"complex emergencies[9]"* can be intricate, proportional with the number and diversity of the actors involved. As it will be elaborated upon in the following sections, in the complex emergency of the Syrian quagmire, the planning, coordinating and application of the humanitarian assistance across different regions inside the country brings about important challenges for the humanitarian bodies taking active role in the response.

2.3. Historical Evolution of Humanitarianism

According to the Cambridge Dictionary (n.d.), humanitarianism is *"a belief in improving people's lives and reducing suffering."* Similarly, Oxford Dictionary (n.d.) put it as: *"the beliefs and practices of people who try to help people who are suffering and improve the conditions that they are living in."* As it can be well noticed, the commonality in these two definitions is that primarily humanitarianism is considered as an idea, a thought, but as the word "practice" denotes in the second definition, humanitarianism has not remained at an abstract level, it has been put into "practice." And it has been there for as long as human history. However, even though the definition of humanitarianism as providing relief to the needy in disasters and conflicts in a *neutral*, *impartial*, and *independent* way was formulated by the International Community of Red Cross and Red Crescent (ICRC) and was applied to all humanitarian situations, other humanitarian bodies have come up with different notions of what humanitarianism is based on ambitions and challenges they came across (Barnett, 2011: 20). Hence, the amplitude of definitions as to what humanitarianism is and what should be the main principles revolving around the working of such a term will differ from organization to organization, and even on an individual level, there will be variations as to who sees humanitarianism

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[7] For more information, see the last part of following section *"Historical Evolution of Humanitarianism."*

[8] See the following section.

[9] Complex Emergencies are defined as: "humanitarian crises in a country, region, or society where there is a total or considerable breakdown of authority resulting from internal or external conflict, and which requires an international response that goes beyond the mandate or capacity of any single agency and/or the ongoing UN country program"(UNHCR, 2001).

as what and how. Notwithstanding, there are two important drivers of humanitarian action that have come along with the historical evolution of humanitarianism: religious belief and the law of war. The monotheistic religions of *Judaism, Islam,* and *Christianity* are said to have contributed to the humanitarian system the most (Walker and Maxwell, 2008:14). The concept of charity has been quintessential, though its formulation and expression may vary from religion to religion. For example, in Islam, *zakat*, being one of the five pillars of Islam and one of the ways through which assistance is given to people, is regarded as a balancer in society, not only in terms of a just distribution of material wealth, but also for a morally stable society (Abdullah and Suhaib, 2011). Another important institution in Islam has been *"Waqf,"* a charitable foundation for which usually an endowment is set, and it is used to fund the purchase of land or the construction of a building to be used as a mosque, orphanage, school, hospital, etc. (Walker and Maxwell, 2008:15). An essential part of the social structure of the Ottoman Empire, these foundations had many kinds and diverse functions based on their purpose of foundation, on their type of administration, their belonging to *waqf* administration or state, and in terms of leasing (Teber, 2002).

Laws of war, on the other hand, have expressed the limits and terms in warfare dating back to ancient Greece and Rome (Eleanor Davey, John Borton, and Matthew Foley, 2013, 5); Sun Tzu's famously known manual *The Art of War (475-221 BCE)* is not only a manual for generals and military people to follow on the battlefield, but it also enshrines principles of military ethics and humanitarian ideals (Verma Sahil, 2020). As it will be discussed later, these principles will find body in various international conventions that stand out as International Humanitarian Law (IHL).

As Barnett (2011) states: "Although it is impossible to carbon date the origins of *humanitarianism,* the actual term began coming into everyday use in the early nineteenth century." In a modern sense, therefore, the start of humanitarianism as being put into action is attributed to the works of Henry Dunant, whose greatest legacy is the Red Cross, founded in 1863, formerly under the name of the International Committee of the Relief of the Wounded.[10] The Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement was a pioneer in international

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[10] Swiss businessperson Henry Dunant's experiences with his visit to Italy and his witnessing to the battle between French and Austro-Hungarian forces at the Italian city of Solferino during this visit makes him write the book "A Memory of Solferino," which later becomes a best-seller and ignites the grassroots' aspirations, resulting in the foundation of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Geneve Convention (See Barnett, 2011) that will later form the basis for International Humanitarian Law. Also see Britannica, 2021 for a full account of the "Red Cross and Red Crescent."

cooperation, especially illustrated by its roles at the Franco-Prussian War (1870-71), while beyond Western Europe and North Africa, the Ottoman Red Crescent Society (founded in 1868) and the Japanese National Society (established in 1868) came to the foreground thanks to their work in the Russo-Turkish War in 1877-78 and the Russo-Japanese War in 1904-05 respectively (Eleanor Davey et al., 2013:7). Between the time the Red Cross was founded till the World War I, humanitarianism did not go much ahead, and it came across with new challenges due to the destructive nature of the technology, bringing more harm than ever (Barnett, 2011:13-14; Eleanor Davey et al., 2013:5). The role of the ICRC role during the World War I was quintessential in assisting a large number of prisoners of war (POWs). Even though the ICRC was not given any official post in this regard, it helped with communication between the POWs and their families, carried out campaigns for the repatriation of gravely wounded or ill soldiers, helped unite families and facilitated families sending relief parcels (Eleanor Davey et al., 2013; ICRC, 2005b; 2005a). The ICRC did this by cooperating with Catholic and Protestant churches as well as Muslim institutions. Especially, the efforts of the Nordic Red Cross Societies' efforts in camps of POWs in Siberia and the support for their repatriation from Russia after the war are significant. An important aspect of this was the neutrality of the Danish and Swedish societies, which facilitated their access to the POWs in Siberia (Eleanor Davey et al., 2013). During this time, the ICRC played an effective role in non-international armed conflicts such as the Finnish Civil War in 1918 and the Hungarian Revolution in 1919 (Eleanor Davey et al., 2013; Veuthey M, n.d.:412). During this period, the protracted nature of the conflicts combined with the destructive nature of technology opened the way for the coming into existence of many voluntary organizations, such as Save the Children Fund and the Committee for the Relief of Belgium—an American organization helping with the supply of food to the then occupied Belgium and Northern France by Germany—whose leadership was taken by the future US President Herbert Hoover. This Hoover-led American aid spanned a duration of 10 years, from 1914 to 1924, with a cost of 5.2 billion dollars for relief materials that helped save millions of lives (Little, 2014).

The assumption is that humanitarianism also developed with man's technological and civilizational progress; from the seventeen century up until the nineteen century, when the existence of regular armies in warfare became the case, the humanitarian deployment also increased with sophistication; the highest humanitarian deployment of the time being in WWI is no coincidence (Brauman, 2004). This sophistication was also translated into military medicine whose practices became more innovative and advanced with different local conflict around the world; for example, the triage system developed by Dominique Jean Larrey in the Napoleonic Wars (1803-15), the advances in evacuation and medical transportation during the American Civil War (1861-65) and the establishment of St. John Ambulance Association (1887) and the efforts of Florence Nightingale and her nurse team during the Crimean War (1854-65) were not only representing advances in the military medicine, but also reflecting the progress of humanitarian ideas and principals, even though these practices at the time had only national purposes, serving to the nationals of respective countries, despite the fact that they took place abroad (Eleanor Davey et al., 2013:6). These national efforts, however, would soon find embodiment as international efforts, such as the first International Sanitary Conferences taking place in the 1850s and, during these times, international medical conferences becoming the norm; notable at the time was the establishment of an international Maritime and Quarantine Board in Alexandria in 1881, later turning into the Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office (EMRO) of the World Health Organization (WHO).

As a second leg to the internationalization of humanitarian efforts, natural disaster response was another drive, especially in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the aftermath of the civil war in the United States, for example, the attention of the American Red Cross (ARC) was shifted to natural disasters such as the flooding cases in 1889 and the hurricane in 1900 (Eleanor Davey et al., 2013:6). Remarkable at the time were the earthquakes in San Francisco, Jamaican Kingston, and Italy, killing thousands, leaving thousands of others homeless, and causing huge damage. The common denominator of these natural disasters was that the response bore an international nature; for example, in the Kingston earthquake, French, British, and US naval ships provided emergency assistance and medical care with the allocation of funds from the British Empire (HMSO, 1907; quoted in Eleanor Davey et al., 2013:6). In parallel with the disasters of the time, the International Congress of Lifesaving and First Aid in the Event of Accidents was to take place in Frankfurt in 1908 (Eleanor Davey et al., 2013).

The colonization process has also provided a context for the improvement of humanitarian action, especially through public works, epidemiology, and other improvements in the colonies (Eleanor Davey et al., 2013:6). The missionary work was an integral part of colonialization. In that sense, the first people to benefit from the medicine in the colonies were the Europeans. As can be fathomed in the writing of Eleanor Davey et.al. (2013), this had a three-fold dimension: 1) the missionary doctors first served the missionary workers suffering from diseases some of whom died while others were transferred back home; 2) then there was the extension of treatment to the colonized people which came with the thought that the nature of the medical help itself would promote their missionary efforts and thus make conversion easier; 3) lastly assisting the colonized was also closely connected with the intention of preserving the colonial labor which was exemplified by the establishment of South African Institute for Medical Research (SAIMR), funded by Chamber of Mines and it sought researching diseases affecting mine laborers and even in line with that mine factories had built hospitals, recruited full-time medical personnel to reduce the mortality rate that was affecting the mine labor (Farley, 1991:193-194). The colonial context also at times determined the humanitarian phenomenon and the parameters by which that phenomenon could be measured (Eleanor Davey et al., 2013:6-7).This is best exemplified by the definition of the Famine Code in India—developed by the British colonial regime as a response to a series of famines in several states in India between 1860 and 1877 (Howe and Devereux, 2004:356-357). Part of this policy was to bolster its political influence as a colonial power (Brennan, 1984; cited in Howe and Devereux, 2004:35).

With the Nazi surge in Europe, however, the Red Cross' silence or inaction in the face of Nazi propaganda gave a huge blow to the humanitarian institution, which to date, even though the Red Cross admitted to it, has not been erased from the memories (Brauman, 2004). WWII would also witness the emergence of Oxfam—one of today's biggest international non-governmental organizations—during the Great Famine in Athens (Greece) by persuading to provide help to the victims together with the Danish Red Cross and Turkish Red Crescent (Brauman, 2004). The end of WWII would see the emergence of UN agencies such as the High Commission for Refugees (HCR) and UNICEF, to be succeeded by the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), which was founded in 1944 and dissolved in 1946 as a result of the reluctance of the United States to fund it following the Communist states' benefitting from it. In that sense, for many, the aftermath of the Second World War was a new turning point for humanitarian action; it is also regarded as the continuation of the efforts of the interwar period (Eleanor Davey et al., 2013: 7). Especially the institutional developments in the interwar years had heralded the upcoming structures after WWII. The Treaty of Versailles, which ended the First World War had given birth to the League of Nations, whose mission was to maintain world peace, was a pivotal part of US president Woodrow Wilson's vision of international reform. Its success in maintaining international peace can well be disputed, as WWII, the deadliest and biggest war in human history, would follow only 19 years after it came into being; however, the scope of the issues it dealt with at the time was to form the basis of the modern international institutions' agendas of nowadays' challenges.

The early set-up purpose of humanitarian organizations after WWII, which was to reconstruct war-torn Europe, would find new areas of operation with the movement of decolonization; this, according to Barnett (2011:11) was when humanitarian action went global. The newly emerging so-called *third world*[11] was the main destination where the work of humanitarian organizations was destined, especially in the 1970's. Squeezed between the First World (west) and the Second World (the east), the Third World was the testing ground for the projects of *inequality* and *development,* a feature of humanitarianism in the Cold War that was also the space in which the *development* discourse was being voiced (Eleanor Davey et al., 2013). For that matter, the UN declared the first decade of development in 1961. The decolonization process of the time, coupled with geopolitical transformation, was felt in the United Nations as new states were being added—72 new ones— as a result of states getting independent.

Certain landmarks in the post-WWII period have had a transformative impact on the development of humanitarianism, both in terms of the methodology applied, scope, outreach, and actors. The Civil War in Nigeria (1967-70), also known as the Nigerian-

[11] The term Third World was first used by Alfred Sauvy in 1952 to refer to the "third estate" or common people before the French Revolution, and it had connotations such as "political powerlessness," "poverty," and "social marginalization." In the early phases of the post-colonial period, the term came to define a group of states united in opposition to colonialism and imperialism. In the context of the Cold War, this group of states found a place for itself between the First World (capitalist states) and the Second World (socialist states) (Thomas, 1999). For more on the "Third World" and its contemporary standing, see Solarz (2012).
Also, in his discussions and attempts to reach a working definition for the third world, (Greene, 1980) proposes that the term has geopolitical, psychological, and programmatic dimensions. Geopolitically, referring to nations of the world, especially in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, that bear a common history of being colonial dependents of the major European powers, while the psychological dimension refers to these nations as being oppressed and thus struggling with an anti-colonial spirit to improve their own conditions, and lastly, the programmatic dimension, which is characterized by social and economic progress, sees the New Economic Order as the organizing of the Third World.

Biafran War, is cited as one of the turning points in the history of humanitarianism (Barnett, 2011; Macalister-Smith, 1985:118; Salvatici, 2020), in that the aid sent to the victims of this war also meant a shift in the "course of action" of the humanitarian agencies away from Europe to other regions of the world that were going through the decolonization process, as well as the "tensions" of the Cold War (Salvatici, 2020:448-449). This, with the power of the media, was for the first time a post-colonial conflict generating an international humanitarian concern otherwise ignored by the West (Salvatici, 2020:449). The Biafra Civil War was also an event in which the power and outreach of NGOs went beyond that of the UN and the ICRC. The UN Secretary-General, U-Thant, saw Biafra's secession in 1967 as an internal issue of the Nigerian federal government, a position supported by Britain too as a former colonial power. When a proposition to do an airlift into Biafra was opposed by the Nigerian federal government and the famine conditions became worse, NGOs such as Oxfam and CARE and a coalition of church agencies under the banner of JointChurchAid stated airlifting into Biafra was something to be done by the ICRC itself after having failed with its negotiations with the Nigerian federal government (Eleanor Davey et al., 2013; Salvatici, 2020).

With the end of the Cold War in 1989, the conflicts started to have another nature, giving rise to 'complex humanitarian emergencies, a term that emerged in Africa in the late 1980s and came to the foreground in the Gulf War (Duffield, 1994). This, combined with the external elements, brought a new dimension: that of technological advancement that had made human suffering to be witnessed in real time (Barnett, 2011:12). The scale and intensity of the crises of the decade also shaped the conduct of humanitarian workers today. As we already discussed at the introduction of this chapter, humanitarian principles have long been guiding humanitarian action. However, with the ever-changing scenery in international relations, conflicts, and the emergence of new actors, some side guidelines and manuals are needed. One such development is the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement/NGO Code of Conduct in Disaster Relief (1994), with a high number of signatories that 'seeks high standards of behaviors, maintain independence and effectiveness in disaster relief,' it is a voluntary code (ICRC, 1994; Mackintosh, 2000:1). Another important document is the so-called Sphere Project, which was initiated in 1997 by a group of NGO humanitarians and the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement that came up with a Humanitarian Charter and set up Minimum Standards to be sought in disaster relief in key five sectors (water supply and sanitation, nutrition, food aid, shelter, and food services) (European Commission, n.d.-c). This initiative led to the publication of the first Sphere Handbook in 2000. The Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in the Sphere Project contribute to the operational framework for *accountability* (European Commission, n.d.-c). The main principles around humanitarian action and the rights of the populations—affected by disasters, independent of whether they are natural or man-made—to protection and assistance are covered in the Humanitarian Charter (European Commission, n.d.-c). It is a source of reference for humanitarian practitioners active in the humanitarian response, helping them refer to minimum standards in different phases of the response, such as fund-raising, project proposals, etc. (The Sphere Project, 2011).

Figure 2.1. A cartoon from the Sphere Cartoon Campaign (Sphere, n.d.)

2.4. Contemporary Humanitarian System: Key Organizations and Treaties of the Modern Humanitarian System

The origins of humanitarianism are as old as human history, and the main driver at its core has been the very humane feature of altruistic behavior, which is latent in all religions and philosophies (Walker and Maxwell, 2008). The foundations and base of contemporary humanitarian principles and that of the humanitarian system, for that matter, are attributed to the works of Henry Dunant and his subsequent initiatives that followed through an organization that has come to be known as the Red Cross today. Like the Red Cross, several other pivotal organizations have helped shape humanitarian history by dint of several treaties and conventions constantly being in evolution starting mid-19th century until recent times.

2.4.1. International Committee of Red Cross (ICRC) and IHL

The mid-19th century was a period of mature time for the betterment of human endeavor in many fields; the revolutions of the 18th century in Europe and America had created this space (Sallie Morgenstern, 1979:951). Rapid diffusion of information and intercommunications had made societies more susceptible to the details and atrocities of the wars, and this, as Morgenstern (1979) puts it, "led to the gradual growth of the idea of making war less awful." Henry Dunant's real-time observations in the aftermath of the battle of Solferino between the French-Sardinian alliance and Austria, his organizing of the women in the nearby villages to help the soldiers wounded, which is cited to be 40.000 for both sides (Sallie Morgenstern, 1979), is seen as the base of the "foundational principles" of the humanitarian intervention, which include *negotiating*, *access to the affected population*, *impartiality*, and *neutrality* (Anderson, Becknell, and Taliano, 2018:11). His endeavors to organize civil society to do voluntary relief work would pave the way for the ideals of the Red Cross Movement and modern humanitarian action (Anderson et al., 2018:11). Although Dunant's trip to Italy, his observations, and subsequent efforts are shown to form the basis of modern humanitarian action, his motivation and inspiration are triggered by Florence Nightingale's works in the Crimean War (1853-56), who, together with a group of English women, carried out humanitarian efforts for the soldiers on the actual battlefield (Sallie Morgenstern, 1979:949). Nightingale's works during this battle were not only a good manifestation of *organization* and *efficiency*, but they also informed the awareness of the reforms needed for hospitals in peacetime (Anderson et al., 2018:949). In his book *"A Memory of Solferino,"* Dunant makes reference to Russian Duchess Helen Pawlowna, born Princess Charlotte of Württemberg and herself the widow of Grand Duke Michael, leaving St. Petersburg with three hundred ladies to the Crimean hospitals and Florence Nightingale's departing for the battle ground with the thirty-seven ladies, going to the aid of those wounded at the battle of Inkermann and later visiting and inspecting hospitals in Balaclava (Dunant, 1986:28). Dunant appealed for a relief agency to be comprised of the voluntary committees to go to the aid of the soldiers in times of war, which subsequently resulted in the “International Committee of the Relief of the Wounded” (Anderson et al., 2018). This committee would later organize a conference to which 16 nations’ representatives attended, which led to what we know as ICRC today. The recommendations of the conference would be for the governments to establish national societies to be prepared for the care of the wounded, train medical personnel, and get prepared for times of conflict (Anderson et al., 2018). For that matter, the ICRC’s works were on an international level, intending to promote national relief societies or committees, which are recognized today as Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. The movement is comprised of over 190 national societies (Anderson et al., 2018). The first of such societies was to be established in the Württemberg state of Germany in 1863 (ICRC, 2016). It was to be taken to the United States by Clara Barton, a former teacher known for her work during the Civil War in the US for supplying food to the Union soldiers during the battle as well as locating missing troops after the war. It was due to her campaign that the US ratified (in 1882) the Geneva Convention of 1864 one year after Clara Barton founded the American Red Cross (American Red Cross, n.d.).

Contextually, at the time, the focus was on the battles and the primary subjects of the war, soldiers. The founding of the ICRC would later lead to the development of the Geneva Conventions, which would subsequently form the basis of the IHL. The first Geneva Convention in 1864 urged warring parties to care for the wounded soldiers, irrespective of the side they were fighting for. Initially, though, the role of the ICRC was that of a coordinative one; only later did it get to operational level in the field as the need for a neutral intermediary between warring parties became needed (ICRC, 2016). During the First World War (1914-1918), the ICRC took up the duty of serving as a connector between the POWs and their families through the Central Prisoners of War Agency founded in Geneva. The ICRC’s efforts during the war regarding prisoners of war would come to fruition in the post-war years when it could persuade the governments to adopt the second Geneva Convention in 1929 with a view to providing better protection for POWs.

In the post-war period, the emergence of the League of Red Cross Societies was a result of national red cross societies ‘thinking that there was a need for a change in the role of the ICRC and that it should adopt more of a coordinative and supportive role as well as the fact that Red Cross societies needed to cooperate more also inpeacetime (nobelprize.org, n.d.). The first members of the league were the Red Cross societies of the USA, Great Britain, France, Italy, and Japan (nobelprize.org, n.d.). The 1921 period witnessed cooperation between the ICRC and the League of Red Cross to bring about a conference in Geneva on the issue of the Russian famine, which was to result in the International Committee for Russian Relief (Anderson et al., 2018:12; Walker and Maxwell, 2008:26). The League's first tasks involved getting help for the nations that suffered most during the war (nobelprize.org, n.d.). The League would survive WWII and later rename itself the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) in 1991 (Walker and Maxwell, 2008:28).

Today, there is an operational distinction between the ICRC and the IFRC in that the former is involved in conflict settings while the latter concentrates on natural disasters. These two bodies, together with national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies, are components of what is today called the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. The three components of the movement also use emblems to get identified in conflict times. The IHL makes use of emblems to identify and protect medical services in times of conflict (ICRC, n.d.-a) and the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement currently holds three emblems (see Fig.2.2.). The first sign of the Red Cross was adopted after the Geneva Convention in 1864 by governments with a view to using a clear and neutral sign to protect medical personnel and facilities. It was during the Russo-Turkish War (1877-1878) in which the Ottoman Empire, bound by the 1864 Geneva Convention together with Russia, informed Switzerland, the depositary country of the Geneva Convention, that it would respect the Red Cross but, in the future, it would use the Red Crescent (ICRC, 1998). At the time, Persia, the current Iran, was using its symbol of red lion and sun, and in 1980, it dropped the use of this symbol in favor of the red crescent. With the adoption of the Third Protocol in 2005 in Geneva at a diplomatic conference, an additional protective emblem of "red crystal" was adopted. The adoption of red crystal is said to reaffirm the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement's universality and commitment to neutrality and independence (Reliefweb, 2007). In a way, this move can be seen as a measure for the concern regarding respect for the neutrality of the red cross and red crescent in certain difficult conflicts, as the new emblem is stripped of any religious connotations associated with the cross and crescent (ICRC, n.d.-a; Reliefweb, 2007).

Figure 2.2. *The emblems of International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement*

2.4.2. The UN and its humanitarian entities

What came to be known as the UN today started with the League of Nations, resulting from the Treaty of Versailles after World War I. The primary goal of the League was to prevent war, but it also had the aim of addressing labor conditions as well as the populations living under colonial control (Anderson et al., 2018:12). The League was not successful in preventing the deadly World War II; however, it heralded some important institutions that would follow with the end of World War II. Following World War II, world leaders such as Franklin D. Roosevelt of the USA and Winston Churchill of the UK conjured up an image of the world in peace, and to this end, three organizations—the UN, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank Group— would make global economic crises less likely and thus provide the international community with means to contain aggressors in the future and thus maintain world peace (Anderson et al., 2018; Walker and Maxwell, 2008). The drafting and signing of the UN Charter by 50 representatives and the subsequent ratification of it by the five permanent members and other signatories gave birth to the UN in 1945. The emergence of the UN came with some developments in human rights. One of them was the expansion of the Geneva Convention (GV) to include internal armed conflict. In 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted, which inspired the United Nations Convention Relating to the Statues of Refugees—famously known as the 1951 Refugee Convention—which would bring about a definition of the "refugee" and set minimum standards as to the treatment of refugees in the country where they are hosted. The Convention is a legally binding document, and its adoption marks a turning point in humanitarian law (Anderson et al., 2018:14). One of the first UN agencies to be equipped with a humanitarian mandate was the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), which was founded by the Allied forces in 1943. It was involved in the repatriation of millions of people across Europe and acted as a coordination body among the voluntary relief agencies (Walker and Maxwell, 2008:34). However, it was short-lived as it got criticized by the USA for repatriating nationals back to Eastern Europe, a move seen by the USA as bolstering the communist regimes, which brought about the closure of the UNRRA (Walker and Maxwell, 2008:34). The assets and personnel of the UNRRA were distributed among the UN's new specialized agencies, such as the International Refugee Organization (IRO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and the World Health Organization (WHO) (Eleanor Davey et al., 2013:9). The subsequent body to replace UNRRA would be IRO (1946), which was later replaced by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), whose formation was in parallel with the signing and ratifying of the 1951 Refugee Convention (Walker and Maxwell, 2008:35). The temporary mandate of IRO involved registering, repatriating, protecting, and resettling refugees (OHCHR, n.d.). In light of this, the primary task of the IRO was to help with the 21 million of refugees dispersed across Europe after WWII (Anderson et al., 2018). The refugees that came from 30 countries were mainly from Eastern Europe. Due to the political tensions, IRO's operations were seen as controversial, and the organization was funded by only 18 out of 54 member states, which gave way to thoughts of establishing a successor organization even before the organization's mandate came to an end (OHCHR, n.d.). Enmeshed in that political controversy were also the definitional ranges that each organization at the time adopted. While the definition of "refugee" for the UNRRA was based on national groups, that of the IRO was expanded to include groups, irrespective of their origins, fleeing persecution (Walker and Maxwell, 2008:35). Even so, such an approach would not keep IRO out of the Cold War political struggles (Walker and Maxwell, 2008).

As a successor organization, in its initial years, the UNHCR's role was coordinative, which later turned into developing programs to support fundraising, operational protection, and assistance (Anderson et al., 2018). At the time the 1951 Refugee Convention was signed and ratified, there were temporal and spatial reservations, meaning, for instance, that the definition of refugees would only be applied to those groups of people before 1951 and not be applicable to people coming from Asia and Africa. In the negotiations for the Convention, the Soviet Union and all communist countries except Yugoslavia had withdrawn from the table, viewing it as a tool by the Western powers to incentivize Eastern populations to migrate; this, according to Walker and Maxwell (2008:35), was rightly so, as the language of the convention led to this interpretation. These reservations were to be removed in 1967 with the appendix of an additional protocol. This development opened the way for the UNHCR to assist refugees worldwide without being bound by time and place restrictions (Anderson et al., 2018:14; Walker and Maxwell, 2008:35). The organization has had multiple roles in the Syrian Civil War; it offers protection services and humanitarian assistance to refugees, asylum seekers, IDPs, returnees, stateless people, and vulnerable host community members. As a part of the coordinated program of the United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and Res.2165, the UNHCR started its cross-border operations into Syria in 2014. Involving its role, the UNHCR leads the Protection, Shelter/Non-Food Items (NFI) and Camp Coordination and Camp Management Clusters (CCCM) (UNHCR Türkiye, n.d.).

Another eminent organization to start under the banner of the UN would be UNICEF. As an organization to have taken its share from the remnants of the UNRRA, UNICEF was established in 1946 by the General Assembly with a view to supporting emergency aid for children. The organization's name was changed from UN International Children's Emergency Fund to UN Children's Fund in 1953. The initial view of this body was a short-term solution to provide food to children across Europe, and it was in 1947 that the organization set up a committee in the USA to assist with the fundraising activities there. Today number of such committees helping with fundraising goes over 35 (Anderson et al. 2018:14). Later, UNICEF would start campaigns of vaccination in Europe against tuberculosis (Nobelprize.org, 2023), which was seen as the beginning of UNICEF's involvement in public health and vaccination programs, distinguishing it from other UN agencies as being primarily an operational one (Anderson et al. 2018:15). Starting from 1950s UNICEF's focus, while continuing to meet emergency needs, shifted into a long-term approach by launching campaigns against tuberculosis, leprosy, yaws, and malaria to protect children while at the same time encouraging maternal and child health care education (Nobelprize.org, 2023). Between 1960 and 1970 what became known as the 'country approach,' UNICEF developed programs of aid for children to tailor the assistance according to each nation's priorities for its children, an approach that went beyond physical needs, encompassing intellectual, psychological, and vocational dimensions (Nobelprize.org, 2023). What made UNICEF different from other agencies at its inception was that it started to work with government ministries and NGOs by setting up offices in the field (Anderson et al., 2018:15). Later, UNICEF would play a vital role in the eventual adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989, which has been ratified by 196 nations, making it the most accepted human rights convention (Anderson et al., 2018:15).

The post-war era also witnessed international developments in food and agriculture. The conference during the war on food and agriculture convened under the leadership of Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1943 gave the subsequent birth to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in 1945. To support world-wide development and recovery, the organization established guidelines for using excess food production (Anderson et al., 2018). In 1961, upon the request of US President Dwight Eisenhower, to start as a pilot project to provide food aid through the UN on a three-year experimental basis, the World Food Program (WFP) was established. Among the purposes that the food aid served were land resettlement, feeding programs, and stimulating reforms through *food-for-work* initiatives (Walker and Maxwell, 2008). In its first serious test after its inception, it provided victims of the earthquake hitting northern Iran, the Boein Zahra region, with 1,500 metric tons of wheat, 270 tons of sugar, and 27 tons of tea (World Food Programme, 2023). In its first three years, it responded to 32 emergencies and managed 116 development projects (Walker and Maxwell, 2008). The three-year experiment was a success for the WFP, and it was given a mandate of three years more with a great extent of contributions from the US, although with a warning that other countries contributions should be more (Walker and Maxwell, 2008:41). In the following years, between 1960 and 1974, WFP utilized food project aid to promote social and economic development with a reliance on surplus food aid and funding from the USA. In the mid-80s and early 90s, the organization embraced its current identity—that of an agency concerned with food aid and food security in emergencies (Walker and Maxwell 2008), involving in many crises around the world.

The WFP has played a key role in the Syrian crisis, providing millions of families with food aid. In June, in 14 governorates of Syria, WFP provided 5.6 million people with assistance, which included 400, 000 people as cash beneficiaries with a transfer value of

USD 3.8 million (WFP SYRIA 2023). However, due to a lack of funding, the WFP declared, starting in July 2023, that it would be unable to support 2.5 million people out of the 5.5 million individuals who depended on WFP aid monthly (WFP SYRIA, 2023).

The conference on International Organizations in San Francisco in the aftermath of WWII gave birth to a new international health organization, and a year later, the Constitution of the WHO would be approved in New York. The early roots of such an organization, though, can be traced back to the 19th century, when the first international Sanitary Conference was held in Paris in 1852 that lasted for six months and was attended by eleven European states and the Ottoman Empire against the backdrop of the cholera and other epidemics in 1830 and 1847. The purpose was to come to an agreement on standardized international quarantine regulations against epidemic diseases such as plague, cholera, and yellow fever, in an attempt to remove extra cautions that were coming in the way as obstacles to international commerce (Howard-Jones, 1981:467). It was seen as a first international attempt at creating a mechanism for international cooperation on the prevention and control of disease (McCarthy, 2002). At the regional level, in the Americas, the predecessor of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), recognized as the International Sanitary Bureau, was established in 1902, making PAHO the oldest international health organization on the globe (McCarthy, 2002). The European leg would be two organizations, the first being L'Office International d'Hygiene Publique, established in Paris in 1907, and subsequently the Health Organization of the League of Nations founded in Geneva in 1919 by the League of Nations, at the time. In 1948, the WHO Constitution had enough signatories to bring it into existence, at which stage PAHO became one of the six regional offices of the WHO (McCarthy, 2002). The preamble and Article 69 of the Constitution articulate that the WHO should function as a specialized agency of the UN.

2.4.3. OCHA and international humanitarian coordination architecture

In 1991, UN Resolution 46/182 called for stronger leadership for humanitarian crises, and the resolution set up Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC), a worldwide advocate for all people in emergencies who is equipped with being the main advisor to the UN Secretary General on all humanitarian affairs. The resolution also brings about the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC),[12] Consolidated Appeals Process, and the

[12] IASC is a unique, 'highest-level,' 'long-lasting' humanitarian coordination platform of the UN system that brings together leaders of 18 UN agencies (FAO, OCHA, OHCHR, UNDP, UNFPA, UNHABITAT,

Central Emergency Revolving Fund (which in 2005 became the Central Emergency Response Fund—CERF) to the service of the ERC as key coordination mechanisms and tools, as well as establishing 12 guiding principles for humanitarian assistance, among which is that humanitarian action must be in a carried out in a principled manner, in line with the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, and impartiality (IASC-Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2015:3; OCHA, 2021). The ERC is also the focal point for international governmental, intergovernmental, and non-governmental aid efforts (IASC-Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2015:4). In 1992, when the Department of Humanitarian Affairs (DHA) was established by the UN Secretary General, the ERC was assigned as the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, with offices in New York and Geneva serving as providers of organizational support. As a part of the reform initiative of the Secretary-General, the DHA was converted into what is today known as OCHA in 1998 (OCHA, 2021). It came out as a development that was to confirm the central coordination function of the IASC system (Kent et al., 2016). Since then, OCHA's mandate has been expanded to include coordinating humanitarian response, policy development, and humanitarian advocacy (OCHA, 2021). The coordination function of OCHA works through the IASC, and the participants are all humanitarian partners. The purpose is to facilitate inter-agency decision making (OCHA, 2021).

The humanitarian assistance framework outlined in General Assembly Resolution 46/182 has gone through a series of reforms over the years. The IASC Humanitarian Reform in 2005, the IASC Transformative Agenda in 2011, and the most recent one being the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul in 2016. The 2005 reform, which came out as a result of the Humanitarian Response Review (Adinolfi et al., 2005) mandated by the

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UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, WHO, and the Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of IDPs) and non-UN organizations such as NGOs—the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA), InterAction (a US-based alliance of international NGOs and partners), Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response, IFRC, ICRC, IOM, and the World Bank that work to collaborate on ensuring the coordination of preparedness and response efforts as well as setting policies and priorities for stronger humanitarian action. IASC is chaired by the ERC (IASC-Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2015:4; IOM, n.d.). The IASC's work is organized into three main bodies: 1) IASC Principals, whose task involves strategy and decision making concerning humanitarian action; 2) IASC Working Group, which deals with policy development, shaping guidelines, and formulating policies that guide humanitarian activities; 3) Emergency Directors Group, whose job is focused on the operational aspects, making sure that humanitarian responses are conducted effectively during crises (IASC-Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2015). It should also be noted here that the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement cannot be tasked by the IASC as they work independently of the UN-led operations on the ground, and also, although there is no distinction between "members" and "standing invitees" during meetings, some of the agencies in the IASC are in the position of being standing invitees, e.g., OHCHR, the Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of IDPs (IASC-Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2015:4). The IOM's position has been changed to full membership since 2016 as a result of the agreement about the relationship between the UN and the IOM (IOM, n.d.).

ERC and identifying gaps and weaknesses in the coordination of humanitarian action, culminated in the *cluster system*[13] (Kent et al., 2016:37) that is now widely being applied across different humanitarian crises, ensuring dedicated leadership, efficient and specialized coordination, and strengthening the sectors in humanitarian aid. The cluster system would bring 'automaticity' in response and a clearer sense of responsibilities in the system (Kent et al. 2016). Another important development coming with the cluster system was that it would remove the lack of responsibility regarding the IDPs by extending the UNHCR's role to include the conflict IDPs as a lead agency in the protection of refugees (Kent et al., 2016:37). The earthquake in Haiti in 2010 and the flooding in Pakistan showed further weaknesses in the international response framework, and the IASC was to initiate the Transformative Agenda in 2011 (Anderson et al., 2018:22), which was successful in dealing with some structural issues such as the responsibilities for the IDPs being clarified, tasks related to camp management, water and sanitation, and protection were made more efficient and the interagency accountability mechanism Real-Time Evaluation was to be replaced by Operational Peer Reviews (Kent et al., 2016). The Agenda has been of importance in aiming to enhance the capabilities of vital humanitarian response actors such as Humanitarian Coordinator, Humanitarian Country Team, country clusters, and cluster lead agencies (Anderson et al., 2018:22). The initiative was regarded as distinctive in that the IASC, for the first time, agreed on a consensus on how to address major emergencies (Anderson et al., 2018).

The World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul in 2016, yet another reform initiative in the world of humanitarianism, brought together 60 heads of state and government and other officials from 173 states, hundreds of civil society and non-governmental organizations, as well as partners from the private sector and academia. One of the most important outcomes of the Summit was the "Grand Bargain," an agreement between the largest donors in the humanitarian world and humanitarian organizations committing to the effectiveness and efficiency of humanitarian action, with the ultimate goal of ensuring that more resources reach those in need (IASC, n.d.-b). The shared commitments were comprised of 52 commitments categorized in 10 work streams, such as *greater transparency, more support and funding tools for local responders,*[14] *increased use and*

[13] See Fig. 2.3. for the sectors of humanitarian action coordinated by the cluster system.

[14] This workstream, together with the related commitments, seems to have stayed more with the humanitarian professionals. When asked about the Grand Bargain, the interviewees, informed about the process, mentioned about the Grand Bargain commitment of 'an aggregated target of at least 25% of funding going directly to the local and national responders as directly as possible until 2020' and grumbled

coordination of cash-based programming, functional reviews aimed at reducing duplication and management costs, improving joint and impartial needs assessment, inclusion of the affected communities in decision-making, multi-year funding and reduction of earmarking of donor contribution, harmonization and streamlining of reporting requirements, humanitarian development nexus (IASC, n.d.-a). The Grand Bargain process is closely related to the trendy "localization" agenda that has been extensively studied (see, for instance, Erdilmen and Sosthenes, 2020; Frennesson et al., 2022). Half a decade after the agreement on the Grand Bargain in 2016, the signatories of the agreement conducted a comprehensive assessment of the agreement that led to the "Grand Bargain 2.0" in 2021 to be further evaluated in 2023 (Alexander, 2021). Bearing parallelism with the first version of the agreement, the new version focused on two primary areas of emphasis: strengthening local leadership and involving local communities more actively, as well as providing more long-term, flexible support—the so-called quality funding—to the humanitarian responders (Alexander, 2021).

2.4.4. Coordination structure

Coordination is considered as key to implementing an effective humanitarian response by increasing predictability, accountability, and collaboration (ICVA, n.d.). Effective coordination is essential on local, national, regional, and global scales (ICVA, n.d.). An emergency may require that several hundred organizations respond at the same time and at the same location; most of these organizations do not have a presence in the country and are deployed only after the emergency takes place (IASC-Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2015:12). The complexities of emergencies make the need for coordination essential on grounds such as avoiding competition, fragmentation, and suboptimal response, thus leading to duplication of aid and gaps (IASC-Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2015:12). OCHA, in its leading role in the coordination of humanitarian aid, aims at providing effective and principled coordination in emergencies in collaboration with national and international actors by advocating the rights of those in need, promoting preparedness and prevention, and working towards long-term, sustainable solutions enmeshed in five areas of work: coordination, humanitarian funding, policy formulation, advocacy, and management of information (IASC-Inter-

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about it not having been realized. Part of the commitments in this workstream is also to reduce and remove barriers in the way of organizations and donors that hinder their partnering with local humanitarian entities(IASC n.d.-a).

Agency Standing Committee, 2015:6). It supports the ERC at the global level and Resident Coordinators (RCs) and HCs at the local level (see Fig. 2.4.). While the RC is responsible for deciding the type of need required by OCHA, OCHA's support to the RC can be on many levels, depending on the scale and stage of the emergency, such as providing remote support, deploying staff from regional offices, assignment of humanitarian advisor team (HAT), or even establishing a fully-fledged country office (IASC-Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2015:6).
In this regard, the post of Resident Coordinator (RC) is vital in making sure that organizations work together and support the state to strengthen its capacity to respond to an emergency. At the same time, as the States are the primary duty bearers to protect and assist people in a crisis, the RC also makes sure if there is a warranty, the welcoming or acceptance of the State for an international response to a crisis, then the RC takes up the duty of leading and coordinating the efforts of both the UN and non-UN groups unless there is a separate Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) in charge (IASC-Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2015:1). However, in cases of crises of non-international character in which the state is party to the conflict, the coordination of humanitarian action may take place with limited state involvement so as to ensure that affected populations have access to humanitarian protection and assistance, irrespective of whether the population in need lives under the territorial control of the state in question (IASC-Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2015:13).

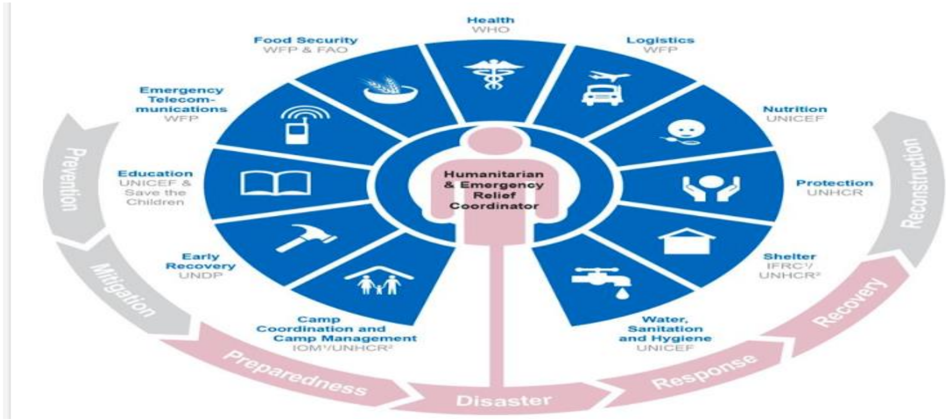

Figure 2.3. Diagram illustrating the 11 sectors of humanitarian action coordinated by the cluster system (Humanitarian Response, n.d.)

At the operational level of coordination, the inter-cluster coordination group is composed of coordinators from various clusters. The aim of this group is to enhance operational collaboration among clusters, minimize duplication, and ensure a coordinated and impartial response prioritizing people's needs. This group is chaired by OCHA, and it serves as a communication channel for strategic and technical issues from clusters to HCT or vice versa. At the technical level, the clusters bring together the UN and non-UN partners around the 11 sectors[15] of the areas of technical expertise with a view to coordinating their efforts in preparedness and response activities. Within each cluster, there is a designated *cluster lead agency* that takes on the responsibility of leading and coordinating technical expertise within that sector. The cluster lead agency is the ultimate source of support in cases of critical response gaps, and they are to mobilize all humanitarian partners to address these gaps; in cases of insufficiency, they are to fill in the gaps themselves or advocate for the necessary resources to address those gaps (IASC-Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2015:14).

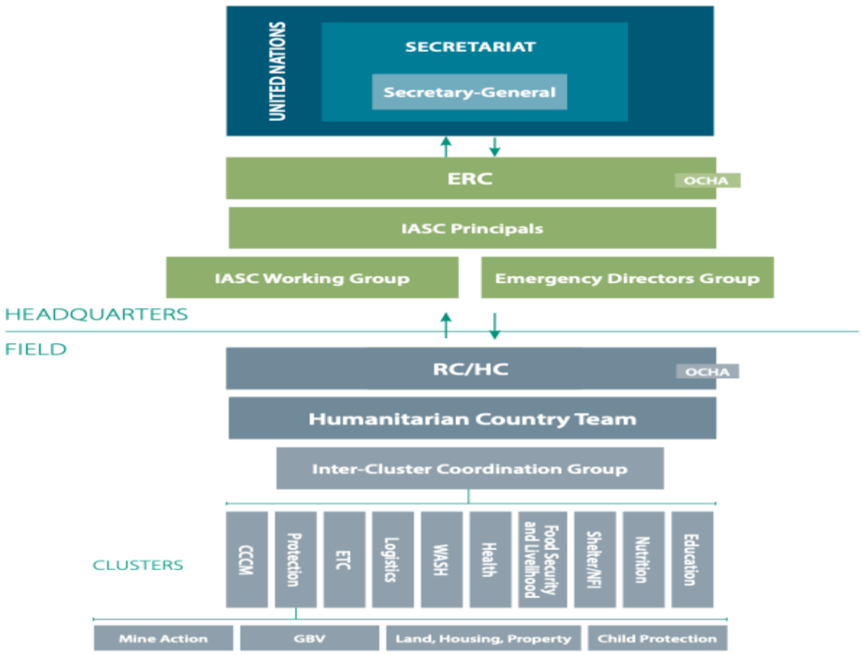

Figure 2.4. Global and country level leadership and coordination structures (IASC-Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2015).

In conclusion, the humanitarian UN institutions and their functions tackled here are confined to a few and only done in a brief manner. Since its inception after WWII, the UN and its bodies have been in constant evolution, adapting to changing global challenges and circumstances. Now 75 years after its creation, it is working towards international

[15] See Fig.2.3. on "Sectors and Cluster Lead Agencies"

peace, security, humanitarian assistance, human rights protection, and upholding international law. These days, its agenda is more diverse, with sustainable development goals as well as climate action in the face of new challenges faced by global warming (United Nations, n.d.).

2.5. Some Leading NGOs

The need for humanitarian assistance is increasing tremendously every year. This increase in the need for humanitarian assistance is also reflected in the growing number of humanitarian organizations' emergence on the humanitarian scene. What was seen solely as a field of operation for the Red Cross is now witnessing a number of UN agencies and NGOs volunteering to aid (Mackintosh, 2000). New NGOs emerge every year with the new crisis around the world; some of them are small and stay so, some get bigger and get high recognition, while others just disappear (Slim, 2004). Indeed, since its appearance in Article 71 of the UN Charter, *"NGO"* has become a buzzword in the world of humanitarianism. These organizations are marked by their independence and self-mandate, which give them the freedom to write their own mission and charter and accordingly raise money from the public, government, business, trade unions, etc. (Slim, 2004). Together with the ICRC, some important NGOs have helped shape and guide the direction of humanitarianism over the years. Here will be tackled only a few of them shortly.

2.5.1. Save the Children Fund

Founded in the wake of World War I in 1919 in London by Eglantyne Jebb and her sister Dorothy Buxton, Save the Children Fund (SCF) would take children to its center of interest. Its inception after WWI, the SCF would take up the aim of alleviating the starvation of children in Austria, Hungary, and Germany during the so-called allied blockade of Germany. Eglantyne Jebb and her team started, with a view to exposing the injustices of war, an information campaign by getting excerpts of news from international newspapers—from *allied*, *enemy*, and *neutral states*—and publishing them in newspapers such as *Cambridge Magazine* and *Manchester Guardian* under the heading "Notes from the Foreign Press." This information campaign would be continued later after the Armistice, as Jebb knew that the Armistice, although ending the war, would trigger economic wars, and she, her sister, and other people on board continued the information campaign with *Fight the Famine Council*, which was the parent organization of SCF

(Sellick, n.d.), the separation from which would bring about SCF, 'the first recognizable trans-national NGO' (Walker and Maxwell, 2008). At a time when it was controversial to help children in the enemy camps, and something only partly carried out by German American associations, SCF's position that British relief should go to all children, including German children, was a courageous one, for which Eglantyne Jebb is credited (Barnett, 2011:83). The efforts of SCF during the Russian Famine (1921) would face protests at home as help to the communist state of Russia was being questioned, but even so, SCF was able to help 300.00 children with 157 million meals (Yates, 2022). The efforts and works of Jebb would also culminate in the drafting of what came to be known in 1923 as the *"UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child,"* which would form the primary steps leading to the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* later to be adopted in 1989.

In dire humanitarian conditions today, according to SCF, even before the earthquake, 15.3 million were people in need inside Syria; more than 7 million of them are children. More than half of the children have grown up in the conflict and crisis in the very protracted nature of the Syrian conflict (Save the Children, n.d.-a). As of the writing of this, SCF is written to have reached 3 million people in Syria, 2 million of them being children, among their services being the support of primary health clinics, maternity hospitals, and education facilities, including formal schools, informal learning centers, and vocational schools (Save the Children, n.d.-a).

2.5.2. Oxfam

Oxfam was founded during WWII in 1942 in Oxford, in the UK, by a group of people to help people starving in Greece under the name *"The Oxford Committee for Relief."* The famine in the German occupied lands was further aggravated due to the British naval blockade (Black, 1992:3). At a time when the movements of 'internationalism' and 'pacifism'—values that had gained currency in the post-WWI period—were leaving their place for the urge to arm and stand up against the Nazism, the group of people founding Oxfam were pioneering the phenomenon of 'neutrality' which bore the ideal that the needs of innocent men, women and children came before any political polarization (Black, 1992). In that sense, the primary concern of the Oxfam was the European victims of war, but not only those caused by Hitler but the 'total war' policies of the Allied (New Internationalist, n.d.). The so precious term of neutrality and the approach of 'human need above politics' have been persistent in the history of Oxfam reflected in different crises—in the 1960s in Congo and Biafra; in the 1970s in Southern Africa and Cambodia; in the 1980s and 1990s in the West Bank and Ethiopia (New Internationalist, n.d.).

In the shattered Europe of the post-war (WWII) years, the need for humanitarian needs was high; many people were hungry, homeless, and refugees. The committee collected clothes and money and sent them to local agencies working on the spot, a localized approach of working adopted by the organization since then (Gwynn, 1993). At the same time, the post-World War II period witnessed the growth of the organization as it helped with refugees, and in 1960s, the organization took a developmental approach by undertaking agricultural and food production projects in poverty-stricken countries (Tikkanen, 2020). A system of field directors was developed abroad to manage its projects, with the aim being the self-help of local communities. In 1970s, Oxfam affiliates would be formed in many countries (Tikkanen, 2020). In 1995, the collaboration among these affiliates led to the confederation of what is today known—Oxfam International, with 21 member organizations. Oxfam International is active in 70 countries (Oxfam International, n.d.-b).

Oxfam international's activities in the Syrian crisis range, *inter alia*, from the provision of water by way of restoring water infrastructure, hygiene practices and related trainings of the local community volunteers, as well as cash provision and training of farmers with agricultural activities (Oxfam International, n.d.-a).

2.5.3. Médecins San Frontiers (Doctors Without Borders)

Dissatisfied with the ICRC's neutrality and its inactions or failures to react to the Nigerian government in the face of the humanitarian crisis in the Biafran War, himself one ICRC's doctors and outspoken critics of the institution, Bernard Kouchner and his colleagues decided to form an organization that would be more outspoken in the view of atrocities (Anderson et al., 2018). According to Brauman (2012), the accusation that the ICRC remained silent during the Biafran War (1967-70), was rooted in the silence of all the parties, including the ICRC, in the face of the annihilation of the Jews in the Third Reich, a notorious legacy that has not left the ICRC alone ever since.

Since its inception in 1971 in Paris, today it has turned into a movement of 68.000 people (MSF, n.d.). Their relief efforts are based primarily on medical care, while the ICRC in this sense is more multidimensional (Brauman, 2012:1). Currently, they are running activities in Northern Syria (Northwest and Northeast), providing medical care in Idlib and Aleppo, supporting hospitals and maternities by providing drugs and other medical supplies, as well as covering staff salaries (MSF, n.d.). Their activities are limited to the northern Syria as Syrian regime is not granting consent to the organization to operate in government-controlled areas (MSF n.d.). The organization has had an active role post-earthquake of February 6, 2023, which hit south of Turkey and north Syria, sending medical and non-medical items (MSF, n.d.).

To sum up this section, tracing back the origins of humanitarianism in the rubbles of history is no easy task. As the term already denotes, humanitarianism has existed as long as human history. However, the origins of its modern structure are attributed to the Battle of Solferino (1859), and from that time on, the complex technologies adopted in the battle fields as well as the ever-changing nature of humanitarian disasters around the world have made the term linger in a constant flux and evolution. In that sense, there is a correlation between the globalization of world politics and the progress and evolution of humanitarianism and also the independence of it accompanied by the spread of its principles around the world. At its very core has been the unraveling of some world events, such as the two world wars and the Cold War serving as the critical junctures that have been decisive in shaping the scope, methodology, and types of actors involved in the domain of humanitarianism. In that regard, the chronological division of humanitarianism has been diverse across different writers; Barnett (2011), for instance, divides it along three lines: 1) the era of imperialism, characterized by a period from the French Revolution to World War II; 2) the era of *neo-humanitarianism*, covering the timeline between World War II to the end of the Cold War; 3) and from the end of the Cold War till current times being identified as the age of *'liberal humanitarianism'* (Borgwardt, 2012). In a similar approach, others have divided it into four eras: 1) its inception taken from the 19th century developments, especially the foundation of the ICRC as the beginning and extending it till the World War I; 2) from the post-World War I—the so-called Wilsonian era—till the reforms such as the UN and its bodies' emergence that was followed by the World War II; 3) the Cold War period in which humanitarian needs are characterized and assessed through the lenses of 'global poverty' and 'inequality' and also being the era that leads to the 'development' discourse; 4) the post-Cold War period, which is ground for geopolitical shifts in the global order, affecting humanitarianism's *modus operandi* (Eleanor Davey et al., 2013). The commonality of these chronological divisions has been the historical landmarks and how the context of the time prepared the next phases of humanitarianism and further developed it. Succeeding the Battle of Solferino, pivotal institutions such as the ICRC and its de-facto pioneering of the Geneva Conventions (GC) came out, which together with its Additional Protocols form the core of the IHL. The changing political landscape as well as more and more technological warfare methods in the 20th century, especially in the aftermath of the Great War, heralded new institutions, also so named by some as "international government" (Eleanor Davey et al., 2013), supporting Wilsonian principles for the world peace interwar years until World War II. The Cold War period witnessed the solidifying and diversifying of international organizations such as the UN and its bodies, making responses to the different internal crises around the world more and more systematized. It also witnessed the booming of NGOs with their course of action going beyond Europe with a view to fighting against poverty and inequality, two concepts later to be encapsulated in development projects. The post-Cold War era being the spot for wars of internal nature characterized by "complex emergencies," which has required updating of coordination mechanisms through different reform movements for the UN and its institutions as well as other humanitarian actors. It is a dynamic process that is constantly being challenged by new developments. The most current challenges being climate change related phenomena that not only increase the scale and scope of humanitarian needs, but also challenge the existing methodology of handling such humanitarian emergencies. Such challenges also change the agenda and priorities in the world of humanitarianism for humanitarian actors. The latest such trend is the localization process spearheaded by the Grand Bargain. The localization process is surely a reaction to deep-seated problems in the funding imbalances, but also it holds the prospect of making the humanitarian efforts more native and thus more resilient and sustainable. Humanitarianism has been shedding its skin historically in the face of challenges, and it will continue to do so in the future.

2.6. Humanitarian Assistance: Where Does It Stand Legally?

Humanitarian assistance is the aid given to a crisis-hit population with the purpose of alleviating suffering and saving lives (Anon, 2003). This being said, humanitarian assistance is not only about meeting physical needs; but it also seeks to protect human dignity. This requires a close understanding of the local community affected—their cultural sensitivities, fears, and aspirations (Labbé and Daudin, 2015:187).

There is no definition of humanitarian assistance in the *Geneva Conventions* and its *Additional Protocols (APs)*; however, the rights and responsibilities of the parties to a conflict covered in the convention can bear important implications for humanitarian agencies since the primary subjects of these conventions and protocols are states and not humanitarian agencies (Haider, 2013). The right to humanitarian assistance in IHL is based on two important principles: a) distinguishing between the civilian population and combatants and ensuring respect, and protection; and b) humane treatment for people who are not or no longer part of the hostilities (Stoffels, 2004:518). In line with this and with a view to protecting individuals who are not or no longer taking part in hostilities, the nature of the assistance to civilians in an armed conflict can be assessed on three levels in the IHL: situations of international armed conflict (in situations of occupation); international armed conflict (outside of occupation); and in a non-international armed conflict situation.

With regards to international armed conflicts in cases of occupation, Article 55 of the *'Fourth Geneva Convention Relative to Protection of Civilian Persons in Times of War'* states that the Occupying Power has the duty to provide the population with food and medical supplies, *"it should, in particular, bring in foodstuffs, medical stores and other articles if the resources of the occupied territory are inadequate."* The following articles of 56, 56 and 57 cover the duties and responsibilities of the Occupying Power in terms of hygiene and public health, conditions for requisition of hospitals, and spiritual assistance, respectively (ICRC, n.d.-d). Article 59 of the same convention, under the heading of "Relief," mandates that if the Occupying force is unable to provide for the needs for the population of the occupied territory, it should facilitate humanitarian assistance to this population by a third party. In such a case, bodies taking action (the third party) can be a state, impartial humanitarian organization such as ICRC, and the provisions shall primarily be comprised of foodstuffs, medical supplies, and clothing (Art. 59, *para*. II). "Subject to temporary and exceptional measures imposed for urgent reasons of security by the Occupying Power," Art. 63 emphasizes that Red Cross Societies and other relief organizations "shall be able to pursue their activities" in accordance with Red Cross principles, which, as have already been discussed above, can be indicated as *humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntary action, unity, and universality* (ICRC, n.d.-c). As it can be seen, in cases of occupation, it is unconditional for the occupying powers to facilitate and cooperate with humanitarian assistance programs (Haider, 2013), although it is within the power of the Occupying entity to have control over the “search of the consignments and regulate their passage according to their prescribed times and routes” (GCIV, Art. 59 (4)).

In situations of international armed conflict (beyond occupation), Art.71(2) of the AP-I sets it out as follows:

> *If the civilian population of any territory under the control of a Party to the conflict, other than occupied territory, is not adequately provided with the supplies mentioned in Article 69, relief actions which are humanitarian and impartial in character and conducted without any adverse distinction shall be undertaken, subject to the agreement of the Parties concerned in such relief actions. Offers of such relief shall not be regarded as interference in the armed conflict or as unfriendly acts.*

Especially the part ‘subject to agreement of Parties’ has been a source of debate, not only for conflicts of international character but also, as we will tackle followingly, for those of non-international (internal), and for that matter, the Syrian conflict, specific to the main purpose of this study.

In light of the discussion above regarding humanitarian schemes for civilians in international armed conflicts bearing the nature of occupation and those beyond, especially Article 23 of the GCIV is essential in providing a more detailed picture of the free passage of aid. In AP-I with Part IV Section II under the heading of “Relief in Favor of Civilian Population,” obligations about the entry, passage, and distribution of aid for civilians are also given. In the same Protocol in Article 50, civilians are included as being civilians independent of their nationalities and positions in the conflict, that is, “all persons who are civilians” (GCIV and GCAP-I).

Lastly, for internal conflicts (non-international), the rules and rights to access humanitarian assistance are not as explicit in the Fourth Geneva Convention as are the conditions in cases of occupation and international conflicts, and so certain deductions from certain elements in these conventions are made (Gandhi, n.d.; Stoffels, 2004:519) and it is the least developed section in the body of the IHL (Haider, 2013; Modirzadeh, 2014b). Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions regulates humanitarian relief scheme for non-international conflicts for which minimum requirements and prohibitions for the parties involved are articulated. As this article has become part of customary law; irrespective of states’ ratification, it is applicable to all conflicts of internal character (Mackintosh, 2000:5). In the second part of the article, an impartial humanitarian body such as the ICRC "may offer its services to the Parties to the conflict" is noted. The following line in the same article states: *"The parties to the conflict should further endeavor to bring into force, by means of special agreements, all or part of other provisions of the present convention."* This has given a leeway to interpret the article in such a way that other provisions applicable to international conflicts in the GC can be applied to non-international armed conflicts as well (Mackintosh, 2000:5-6). Also applied to non-international armed conflicts, it is stated in AP-I that these offers by impartial humanitarian bodies *"shall not be regarded as interference in the armed conflict or as unfriendly acts."*

Nowadays, humanitarian law applied to wars or international conflicts is more easily distinguishable than conflicts of internal nature, which are becoming more and more the norm in the current world order (Gandhi, n.d.). The nature of civil wars involves diverse non-state actors, which makes reading and interpreting the IHL in terms of humanitarian assistance and actors involved difficult since the issue of "consent" becomes controversial as to whether it is required in all cases and, if so, the consent of which actors, party to the conflict, would be enough for relief action to take place. In that sense, the Syrian Civil War exemplifies one of these confusing settings. The following section covers the Syrian Civil War briefly and the context in which the cross-border humanitarian assistance takes place with its actors involved. Lastly, it discusses the controversies and debates around the cross-border humanitarian assistance into Syria in connection with the IHL.

2.6.1. Syrian Civil War in a nutshell

Starting with peaceful protests in 2011 as a continuation of the Arab Spring, the mass protests in Syria would soon turn into a civil war. Entering its second decade as of this writing and with no visible political solution, the Syrian civil war has taken the lives of half a million people and left 3 million disabled. As of March 2022, 5.7 million people have fled to neighboring countries, and there are 6.7 million internally displaced people (IDPs) inside the country (CNN, 2022), making it the country with the largest number of IDPs. Since the very beginning of the crisis, humanitarian organizations have scrambled to the aid of the needy. However, as it is a civil war, meaning that one side to the conflict is the Syrian regime, the effectiveness of the humanitarian deliveries through the hands of the Syrian government, especially to the areas under the control of the opposition, has been a contentious issue (Wieland, 2021). This led to the de facto openings for humanitarian aid to be provided to the needy from across Jordan, Iraq, and Türkiye, so-named cross-border humanitarian assistance which would only get under a formal UN coordination structure in 2014.

2.6.2. Coordination of humanitarian aid and humanitarian actors in the Syrian context

Although a scheme to categorize contemporary crises has been proposed—categories being rapid onset 'natural disasters,' 'conflict,' 'protracted crises,' 'recurrent crises,' 'urban disasters' and 'mega disasters,' (ALNAP, 2015 quoted in Kent et al., 2016), it is becoming increasingly difficult to categorize a humanitarian crisis under one label as the crises around the world bear features of at least more than one crisis specification (Kent et al., 2016:22). The humanitarian situation in Syria has been characterized as a *complex humanitarian emergency*, and according to Kent et al. (2016), it fits best to the category of "mega" crisis owing to the fact that it includes features of conflict, urban disasters, and protracted crises. The dire needs of the populations inside the country are ever-growing, not to mention the increasing number of refugees taking refuge in neighboring countries or fleeing to other parts of the world through dangerous paths. In 2013, as a revision to the December 2012 figures, the Syria Humanitarian Response Plan (SHARP) declared the figures of the population in need to be 6.8 million—a number that is more than 2 million more than the initial report indicated—including 4.5 million IDPs with an appeal of $1.41 billions (Reliefweb, 2013). Initially, due to the Syrian Regime's attitude towards not letting "countrywide" and "unconditional" access, there was a delay in reaching an agreement on the operational procedures of the UN-led missions, and this was further complicated by the Syrian Regime's stringent conditions on UN agencies and the INGOs collaborating with them (Leenders and Mansour, 2018:230). It was not until August 2012 that an agreement could be reached, allowing eight UN agencies and nine INGOs to operate inside Syria (Leenders and Mansour, 2018:230). It was this kind of talking and negotiation that delayed 'emergency response' under the SHARP and the accompanying appeal for funding until the end of the year (Leenders and Mansour, 2018). It was in January 2013 that a Level 3 (L3)[16] emergency was announced, manifesting the scale and complexity of the Syrian crisis.

[16] The declaration of Humanitarian System-Wide Emergency Response (referred to as Level 3 Response) brings along a comprehensive mobilization of resources, including leadership, personnel, and funding, aimed at scaling up and accelerating the delivery of humanitarian aid. The activation of the L3 takes place when there are sudden and substantial changes and after assessing the five criteria—scale, complexity,

The coordination of the humanitarian efforts inside Syria has been managed from various locations, inside and outside the country. The reason for such a decentralized approach has been due to the challenging operational conditions under the Syrian regime, and to complement such efforts, cross-border humanitarian assistance mechanisms were set up in Turkey, Jordan, and Iraq with the consent of the UNSC (Wieland, 2021:89). In the initial phases of the crisis in 2012, as it became clear that the Syrian regime would not consent to the entry of assistance into Syria any other way outside of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC), many NGOs started their cross-border operations from the south of Turkiye. This was also the time when an NGO Forum was founded and became the responsible body for coordination with a sectoral working group approach that resembled that of cluster system (Svoboda and Pantuliano, 2015:18). Although not having a formal mandate in the cross-border aid operations at the time, OCHA opened offices in Antakya and Gaziantep; with such a move, OCHA was considered by the international community as bearing the responsibility to inform the actors in Turkey—through the collection of information and sharing—of the crossline activities being managed from Damascus (Svoboda and Pantuliano, 2015:18). Before the cross-border humanitarian assistance became a formalized mechanism with the adoption of Res. 2165, OCHA, with the ever-increasing number of humanitarian actors, took up initiatives to give a formal structure to the NGO Forum-originated coordination structure; the first such development was the creation of the Humanitarian Coordination Meeting (HCM) with a view to sharing information across a wider humanitarian community, and followingly, the first Humanitarian Liaison Group, bringing together diverse stakeholders such as INGOs, diaspora NGOs, local Syrian NGOs, Turkish NGOs, donors, and Red Crescent Societies, was convened (Svoboda and Pantuliano, 2015:18).

Starting from September 2014 and with the formalization of the cross-border assistance mechanism, the humanitarian actors inside Syria took up the Whole of Syria (WoS) approach, uniting humanitarian organizations working inside Syria and from neighboring countries such as Turkey and Jordan with a view to enhancing the overall effectiveness and efficiency of the response (Humanitarian Country Team, 2014). This approach got a formal foundation with the Strategic Response Plan (SRP), which provided an overarching plan for the coordination of the humanitarian work inside Syria

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urgency, and reputational risk—it becomes evident that the current capacity to lead, coordinate, and provide humanitarian aid and protection on the ground is insufficient to meet the magnitude, complexity, and urgency of the crisis (IASC, n.d.).

(Humanitarian Country Team, 2014). The plan sought to enhance the efficiency of the response by enhancing the identification of need and gaps inside Syria, strengthening the coordination and alignment of response efforts across different hubs, reducing duplication, and expanding the reach of the humanitarian assistance. The WoS is co-led by the RC/HC based in Damascus and the Regional Humanitarian Coordinator (RHC) based in Amman, a post that was considered as highly important as it enabled the advocating for protection and voicing of the issues that were hard to be managed directly from Damascus due to the politicization of the crisis (Wieland, 2021: 89). In Damascus, the HCT, which is comprised of senior representatives from various humanitarian entities, such as the UN, INGOs and local organizations, is led by the RC/HC who faces political challenges and pressure due to its position as being the head of the entity that formulates shared policies, engage with the government to advocate for the implementation of the response plans (Wieland, 2021). The complexity of the conflict has brought along challenges to the humanitarian efforts in the field. Especially, the UN's position in the country came under heavy criticism by many groups on the grounds that its position and stance in the country allowed for the political interests of the Syrian regime to manipulate humanitarian relief efforts, leading to deprivation of the needy in the besieged areas as well as providing contracts to businesses close to the Assad regime (Beals and Hopkins, 2016; Leenders, 2016; Wieland, 2021).

As stated previously, every humanitarian crisis is unique, and so are the dynamics that make each one of them have individual features. However, diverse, and distinct though they may be, humanitarian actors in the field have also become somewhat standardized. The graph below intends to show the main actors in the Syrian cross-border humanitarian assistance efforts in the NWS. This is only a rough sketch of the actors, as there are a myriad of other actors involved at different levels and in different capacities. Especially considering the limited presence of international aid agencies in NWS, there are many diverse groups standing out of the formal mechanism; these include, inter alia, medical groups that existed before the civil war, charities, diaspora organizations, coordination networks, and armed groups that take part in relief efforts[17](Svoboda and Pantuliano, 2015: iii). At the peak of the crisis in 2015, OCHA numbers indicated the creation of 600 to 700 local groups (Svoboda and Pantuliano, 2015). Due to the relative

[17] In the following section, "Civil Society in Syria in the 20th Century," the general landscape of relief organizations prior to the Civil War is provided. At the same time, the newly emerging relief bodies, such as the now fully-fledged NGOs and local councils, and their efforts are discussed.

presence of international agencies inside Syria, the areas where the relief is delivered, “remote partnerships” with local organizations have been opted for as the way forward. Traditional international aid organizations’ choices for “partnership agreements” have stemmed from access issues as well as insecurity in the field. The partnership is usually between an international aid agency—it can be a funder, UN or INGO—and a local Syrian organization that is sub-contracted by the former, and then the latter can refer to other local groups as implementing partners.

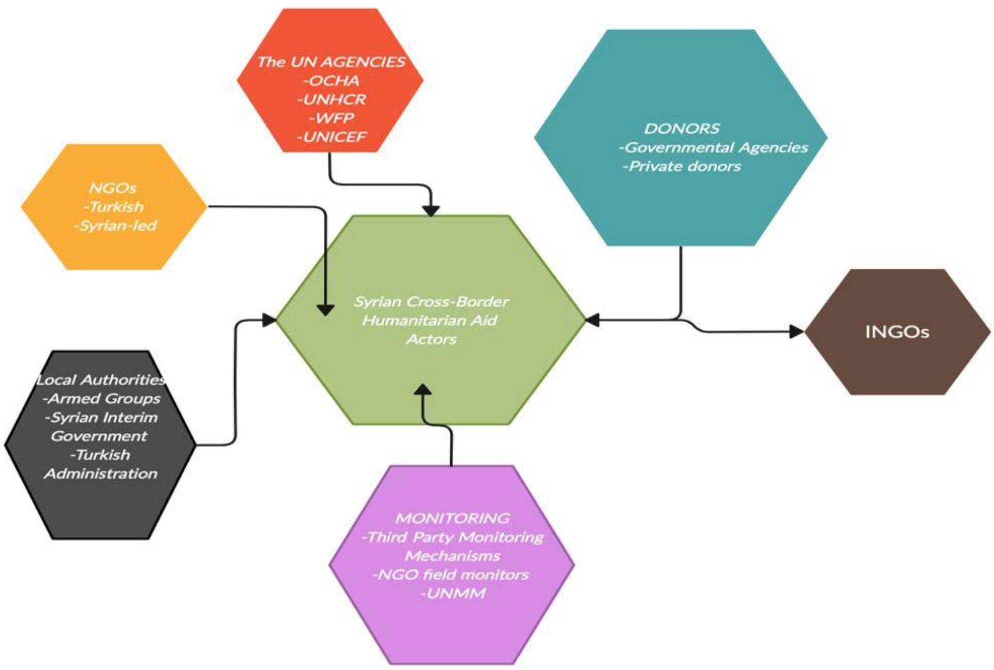


Figure 2.5. Humanitarian actors in the Syrian humanitarian crisis in the NWS (author’s own compilation).

2.6.3. Cross-border humanitarian action into Syria and its legal base

The practice of cross- border relief operations has come to be more and more of a trend in humanitarian action. Recent crises around the world, such as those in Rohingya, Yemen, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and the Central African Republic are just a few that form part of this trend. The origins and causes of these crises may differ from one to the other, but each in itself is a result of political and socio-economic problems turning into civil wars that are later only exacerbated by the involvement of regional and international actors. The term cross-border operations, though not having any formal definition, is adopted for referring to the provision of aid from the territory of the third states into the one in which the crisis is taking place and people are in need (Gillard, 2014:352). Mostly, cross-border operations are taking place from the neighboring countries due to the proximity issue. The distinction between humanitarian intervention and cross-border operations needs clarification. Though at times both are used interchangeably, cross-border humanitarian operations signify provision of humanitarian relief supplies and services that are essential for the survival of civilian populations, and they comprise basic necessities such as water, food, medical supplies, clothing, and shelter; humanitarian intervention,[18] on the other hand, is an issue dealing with the protection of civilians, therefore focusing on phenomena such as "preventing and putting an end to genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes" (Gillard, 2014). Another definition that needs to be made for a healthier understanding and comparison of the arguments in this work is that of the "cross-line" mechanism. Unlike cross-border mechanisms, crossline operations require that aid be delivered through government channels to the areas not under the control of the government (Beals and Hopkins, 2016; Security Council Report, 2023).

Cross-border assistance into rebel-held areas in Syria has been in place in the form of the delivery of food, medicine, and shelter since 2014 under UN authorization. The Syria cross-border mechanism allows for the delivery of the humanitarian assistance from Türkiye without the need for consent from the Syrian government. Negotiations for the renewal of this authorization has been there all these years (Security Council Report, 2023) due to Russia and China's positions. The first resolution in 2014—Res. (2165) unanimously adopted at UNSC authorized cross-border aid allowed four crossings into the rebel-held areas: two of these doors from Türkiye (Bab al-Salam and Bab al-Hawa), one from Iraq (Al-Yarubiyah), and one from Jordan (Al-Ramtha). Until 2017, the UN Resolutions allowing cross-border aid into Syrian rebel-held areas were adopted unanimously with a one-year period until 2017, Res. 2393, which started a series of cross-border resolutions characterized by abstentions on the part of Russia and China in the Security Council. Also, since 2019, four of draft resolutions have been vetoed. The position of Russia and China stems from their belief that the cross-border aid mechanism

[18] Examples of humanitarian intervention in recent history are numerous, the most known ones being the NATO-led interventions in the Kosovo War in 1999, in Bosnia in 1992, and in Libya in 2011. In the Libyan case, was also invoked the *Responsibility to Protect* (R2P) principle adopted at the UN World Summit in 2005; primarily developed to ensure that international community does not make the same mistakes (of its inability to respond to atrocities in Rwanda and the Balkans in the 1990s) of taking action against mass atrocities, including genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity (Global Center For Responsibility To Protect, n.d.).

is a threat to the sovereignty of Syria under international law and that the aid should follow through the channels of the Syrian government (Security Council Report, 2023; Wieland, 2021).

With the earthquake hitting southern Turkey and northwest Syria on February 6th, 2023, the issue of the cross-border aid came to be debated on a different level. The people living in the NWS were already in dire conditions and living almost solely on outside aid, also because the most refugee hosting Türkiye was hit severely, affecting more than 10 provinces in the region with a death toll of more than fifty-thousand people (ReliefWeb, 2023). But what exacerbated the debate was Assad's *"consent"* (Fassihi Farnaz, 2023) to let more crossings—the doors of Bab al-Salam and Al-Ra'ee)—into the opposition-held areas from Türkiye in the wake of the earthquake, a position that was not previously backed by the Assad regime. The opening of these doors outside of the UNSC resolution would be possible from February 13 for a period of three months, and in May, the Syrian government consented to keep them open until August 13th. The continuation of the consent would be reflected again at the end of the first half of the year, when the UNSC Resolution would be due, and a new extension on the cross-border aid would be vetoed by the UNSC by the vote of Russia, while China preferred to abstain. The last resolution allowing the humanitarian aid into opposition-held areas was Resolution 2672 adopted by the UNSC in January 2023, allowing a 6-month extension of the aid into NWS.

The disagreement at the council over the further renewal of the resolution was an issue over the period that resolution would cover; Russia proposed a 6-month extension, while the co-penholders of the Syrian humanitarian file, Brazil and Switzerland proposed a 9-month continuation of aid to cross across the border from Türkiye into NWS. UN's leading humanitarian agencies announced a joint statement urging the council to renew the resolution for a year as renewals of 6-month period would only increase the operational costs and emphasizing that "any and all avenues to deliver humanitarian assistance must be kept open and, indeed, expanded." In the same statement (Reliefweb, 2023b), while underscoring the vitality and complementarity of the cross-line humanitarian aid, the UN bodies also put forward that the aid going through crossline mechanism would in no way match the scale and scope of the cross-border operations; with the UN and its partners delivering medicine, safe water, shelter and protection services to 2.7 million people every month (Reliefweb, 2023b). Earlier in June, the report of the Secretary General on the needs of the Syrian Republic was also emphasizing the complementarity function of cross-line and the need for it (UN Security Council 2023).

Humanitarians are concerned that this action of the regime to consent to the border crossing could invalidate the need for a UNSC resolution, which would destabilize the region (Beals Emma, 2023). A point that is based on the assumption that unless there is a political agreement supported by guarantees UNSC resolution(s) allowing for unimpeded passage of humanitarian aid to the regions in need is the only way forward (Beals Emma, 2023), a clear sign of high distrust in the Syrian regime and its actions.

With this historical background of the Syrian Civil War and the evolution of humanitarian aid, we can now discuss on what foundations the cross-border humanitarian assistance into Syria has been based on in international law, or IHL for that matter. First of all, to understand the base of cross-border humanitarian assistance into opposition-held areas inside Syria, we should have a good understanding of the notion of "sovereignty" and that of "consent," as most of the debates and interpretations of the IHL will take us to these two different, yet interwoven concepts. Art. 2 (4) of the UN *Charter "prohibits the threat and use of force and calls on all Members to respect the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and political independence of other States.*" This article protects states from other states' interference in their internal issues as well as respecting their territorial integrity. General Assembly (GA) Resolution 46/182 in 1991 guides the international humanitarian community's efforts in emergency assistance and among other novelties it brings to the coordination of humanitarian aid, it states:[19]

> *The sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity of States must be fully respected in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations. . . . The affected State has the primary role in the initiation, organization, coordination, and implementation of humanitarian assistance within its territory.*

The translation of these articles into the IHL would be that states have the primary obligation to meet the needs of people within their territory or under their control. For that matter, the focus in the Geneva Conventions on the entity to provide humanitarian assistance is that it should be either the ICRC, which is known to be the pioneer of the humanitarian principles, or an *impartial* humanitarian organization. However, such offers

[19] The novelties coming along with this resolution were tackled in the section on "OCHA and Humanitarian Coordination Architecture." This resolution and its constituents have been the main pillars of the argument of the Syrian regime in their discourse of sovereignty and its say on the organization and implementation of humanitarian assistance.

of humanitarian relief operations by impartial bodies should be accepted (consented) by the parties to the conflict so that they can be carried out. In the case of Syria, the debate around cross-border assistance is valid only for the time period that stays outside of the UNSC authorization for cross-border humanitarian assistance, which would mean the period from 2011 (the start of the civil war inside Syria) until the UN Resolution 2165 of May 2014 and the period starting with the end date of the Resolution 2672 on July 10, 2023, a further extension of which was vetoed by Russia in the UNSC due to reasons already discussed above.

The first such UN resolution was taken in February 2014,[20] which is the first time that Council demanded parties to the conflict allow for humanitarian relief operations (Gillard, 2014:381). In the same year in July, the UN adopted Res. 2165, making reference to the previous resolutions, with the tone of the language in the statement being concerned and urgent, conveying a sense of alarm and distress regarding many issues such as attacks on civilians, destruction and obstruction of humanitarian aid, issues already tackled in the Res. 2139[21] a few months before.

> *Deeply disturbed by the continued, arbitrary and unjustified withholding of consent to relief operations and the persistence of conditions that impede the delivery of humanitarian supplies to destinations within Syria, in particular to besieged and hard-to-reach areas, and noting the United Nations Secretary-General's view that arbitrarily withholding consent for the opening of all relevant border crossings is a violation of international humanitarian law and an act of non-compliance with Resolution 2139 (2014) (Res.2165, 2014).*

In the statement above, the consent is emphasized as having been withheld arbitrarily. The Assad regime's argument regarding its refusal to consent to cross-border humanitarian assistance has been that any assistance to rebel-held areas would mean a potential entry of terrorists into its territory. This argument is claimed not to be groundless and even "hypocritical" if viewed otherwise by the West, considering how the West also considers some of these armed groups operating in the so-called liberated opposition-held areas (Modirzadeh, 2014a, 2014b). At the peak of this debate, a letter signed by 35 important jurists, was putting forward the legality of the cross-border assistance without the need for consent from the Assad regime. Their main argument laid on the fact that the UN refrained from involving itself in cross-border humanitarian assistance into Syria because it was afraid that its members would find it "unlawful" to do so without the

[20] UNSC Res. S/RES/2139

[21] In the parlance of the Geneva Conventions, a "High Contracting Party" is a sovereign state.

consent of the Syrian regime. The graveness of the humanitarian needs by the civilians, as per the letter, required impartial humanitarian actors' access to areas of opposition for the purpose of humanitarian aid. In the same letter, it was emphasized that despite the UN Resolution 2139, the consent by the Syrian regime to the cross-border operations are withheld by the Syrian regime. According to (Modirzadeh, 2014a), the letter urging humanitarian cross-border access by the UN and other humanitarian bodies into Syria was a misinterpretation of the IHL on many levels. Firstly, Modirazadeh (2014a) targeted the penholders of the letter with the argument that it was not for the fact that the UN was afraid that it would not lend humanitarian services across the border, but rather the fact that it was simply unlawful for the UN to do that without the consent of the Syrian regime—only in certain cases there is no need for such a consent. Secondly, her argument against the penholders of the letter is that despite a set of Security Council decisions asking for the facilitation of humanitarian aid in Syria in line with the IHL and the UN guiding principles of emergency humanitarian assistance, in neither of these it is stated that the UN and its bodies are authorized to provide humanitarian aid (without the Syrian regime's consent) even if the consent by the Syrian regime is withheld arbitrarily or capriciously. It is only within the power of the Council to determine the appropriate course of action in case of a sate's non-compliance with SC decisions, not the UN and its humanitarian bodies.

The conflict in Syria is a civil war in nature, which means that the conflict is between a state apparatus and an insurgent group, rebels, or non-state actors. An alternative reading of this is that the non-state actors are to be considered as party to conflict, and thus, the argument of those supporting that there is no need for the Syrian regime to consent for the relief operations lies in the fact that most of the areas are controlled by various opposition groups, not the Syrian government, and there is no need for the consent of the Syrian regime as the aid will not be passing from the areas under its control. On one side of the spectrum, this argument is seen as having its due as long as the aid to the areas that are not under the control of the Syrian government is humanitarian and impartial in nature (Labbe and Rodenhauser, 2013). However, on the other side of the spectrum, Common Art. 3 of the GCs (the article serving as the foundational provision applying to conflicts of internal character) which stipulates that *"The wounded and sick shall be collected and cared for. An impartial humanitarian body such as International Committee of Red Cross, may offer its services to the parties to the* *conflict"* and this could provide a framework for a line of argument in favor of humanitarian operation into Syria's non-government controlled areas without the need for the consent of the Syrian government, but there is not an open understanding from this article that an "impartial humanitarian" body's offering its services to the opposition-held areas and acceptance of such an offer by the group (s) in these areas without Syrian government's consent would make such an act lawful (Modirzadeh, 2014a). Under normal conditions, Art. 18 of AP-II, which states that *"relief actions… shall be undertaken subject to the consent of the High Contracting Party concerned*," could give a leeway to interpret the humanitarian assistance to the rebel-held areas in Syria on the grounds that a High Contracting is a state and the State is only concerned if the humanitarian assistance is to pass through the territory under its control and not if the aid passing across the border into the rebel-held areas beyond its control (Labbe and Rodenhauser, 2013). In the case of Syria, AP-II, addressing the protection of victims of non-international armed conflict, is not applicable as Syria is not a party to GC AP-II. In that case, only Common Art. 3 of GCs and customary international law would apply (Labbe and Rodenhauser, 2013). Viewing from another angle would only simplify the matter: if there is a service offered and the parties to take it, it would not be possible to do it without the consent of the parties involved and not necessarily that of the State's (Henckaerts, 2005:189; Labbe and Rodenhauser, 2013). In other words, reading it contextually, "the party concerned" would also mean the party to the conflict in control of the territory (Labbe and Rodenhauser, 2013) and in that case, it would comprise the areas that are under the control of the opposition and over which the Syrian regime has no say, and thus, as a party to the conflict, the rebel group's consent for the humanitarian relief to take place would be valid.

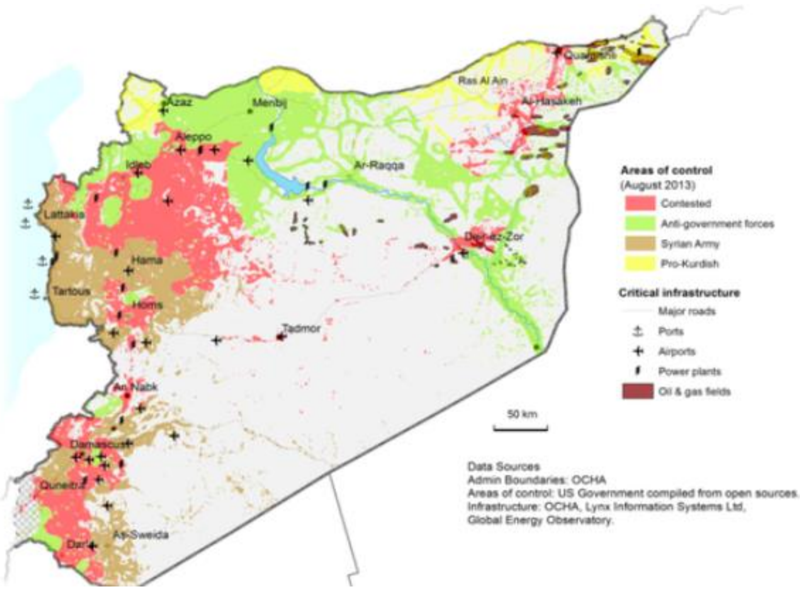


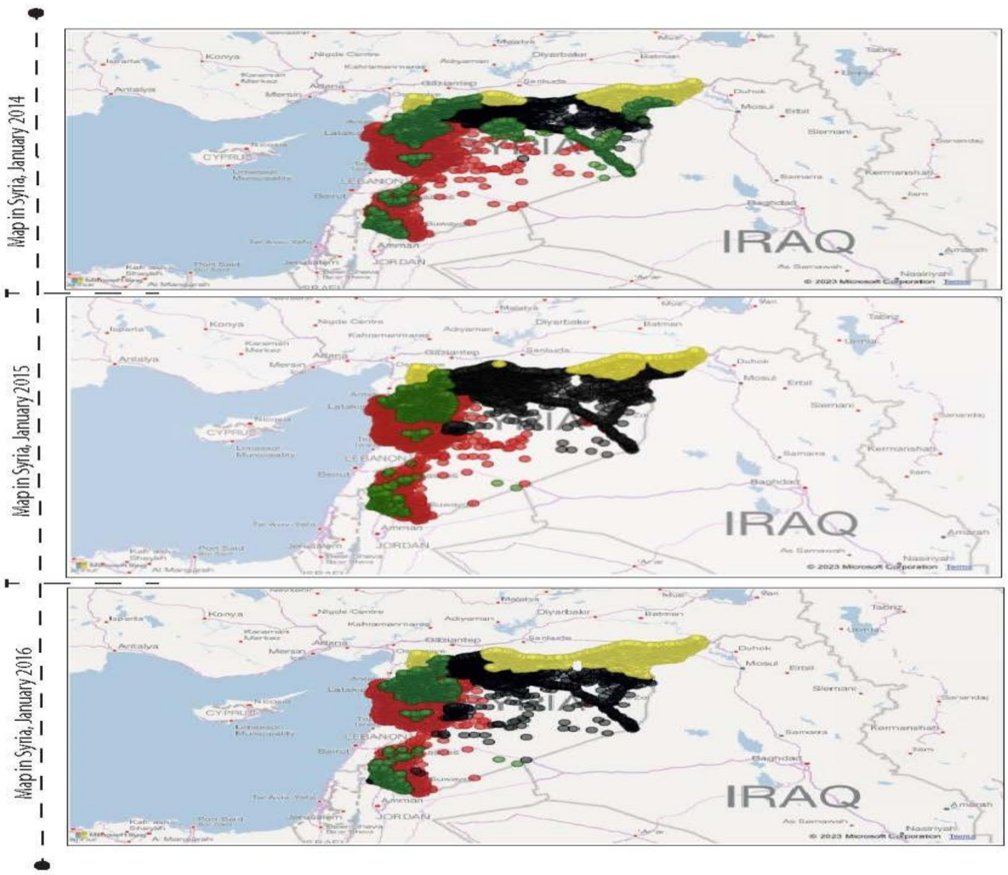
Figure 2.6. A Map showing the areas of control in Syria in August 2013 (Reliefweb, 2013)[22]

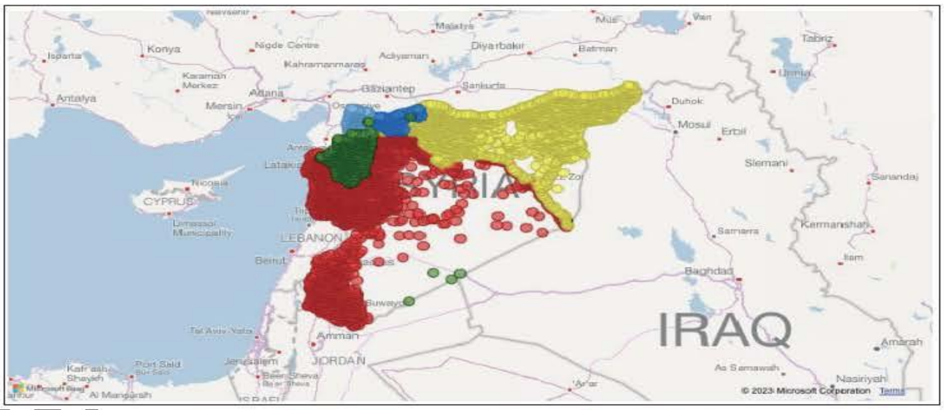
However, it is argued that even if Common Art. 3 is interpreted in a way that non-state actors could give access to humanitarian aid, it is not clear if non-state actors could give consent to third parties to cross into the state from across another border. The view is that even if such non-state actors are in a position to give consent, the assumption is that the humanitarian entities offering assistance are already stationed in the country, not that they will be crossing an international border into the Syria by getting the consent of armed groups such as ISIS in one region, Jabhat al Nusra in one region, and the Southern Front in another region without the approval of the Syrian government (Modirzadeh, 2014a).

It is also true that usually the discussion on providing cross-border humanitarian aid to opposition-held areas rests on the following assumptions: *a) the opposition is unified; b) it has a relatively stable control over a specific area*; *c) the civilian population stays put whether in areas controlled by the government or opposition-held areas*. However, it is hard to talk about a unified opposition in Syria as the country is divided along several lines: the Islamist opposition, the non-Islamist opposition, and the Kurdish forces. Having a look at the control of regions inside the country will give a better picture

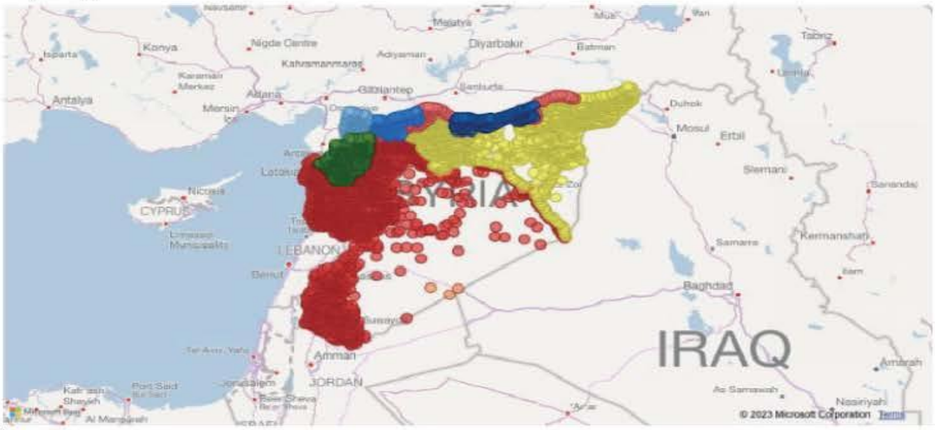
[22] Although the control maps inside Syria are provided below, which start from January 2014 until 2023, to better picture the distribution of the actors in the pre-resolution period, which is when the debate on the legality of the cross-border humanitarian assistance into Syria is at its peak, the 2013 map of actors in Syria is also provided.

of how dynamic the nature of the conflict is and how fluctuating the control in the hands of different actors is. See the maps with different timelines below.

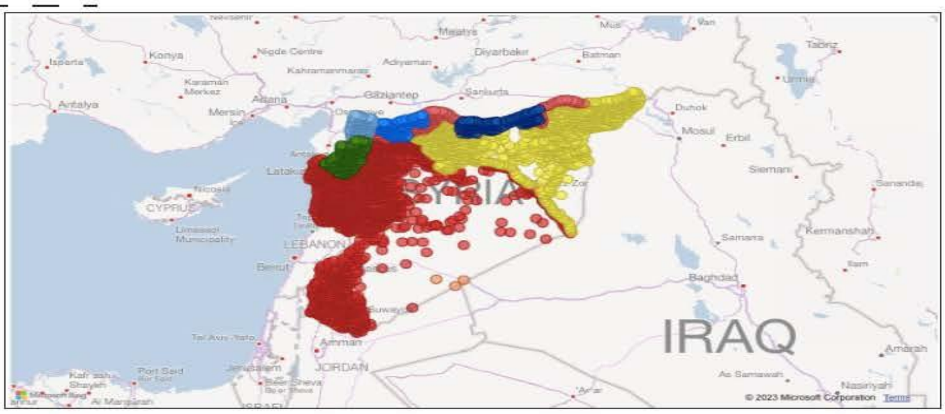




Map in Syria, January 2019



Map in Syria, January 2020



Map in Syria, January 2021

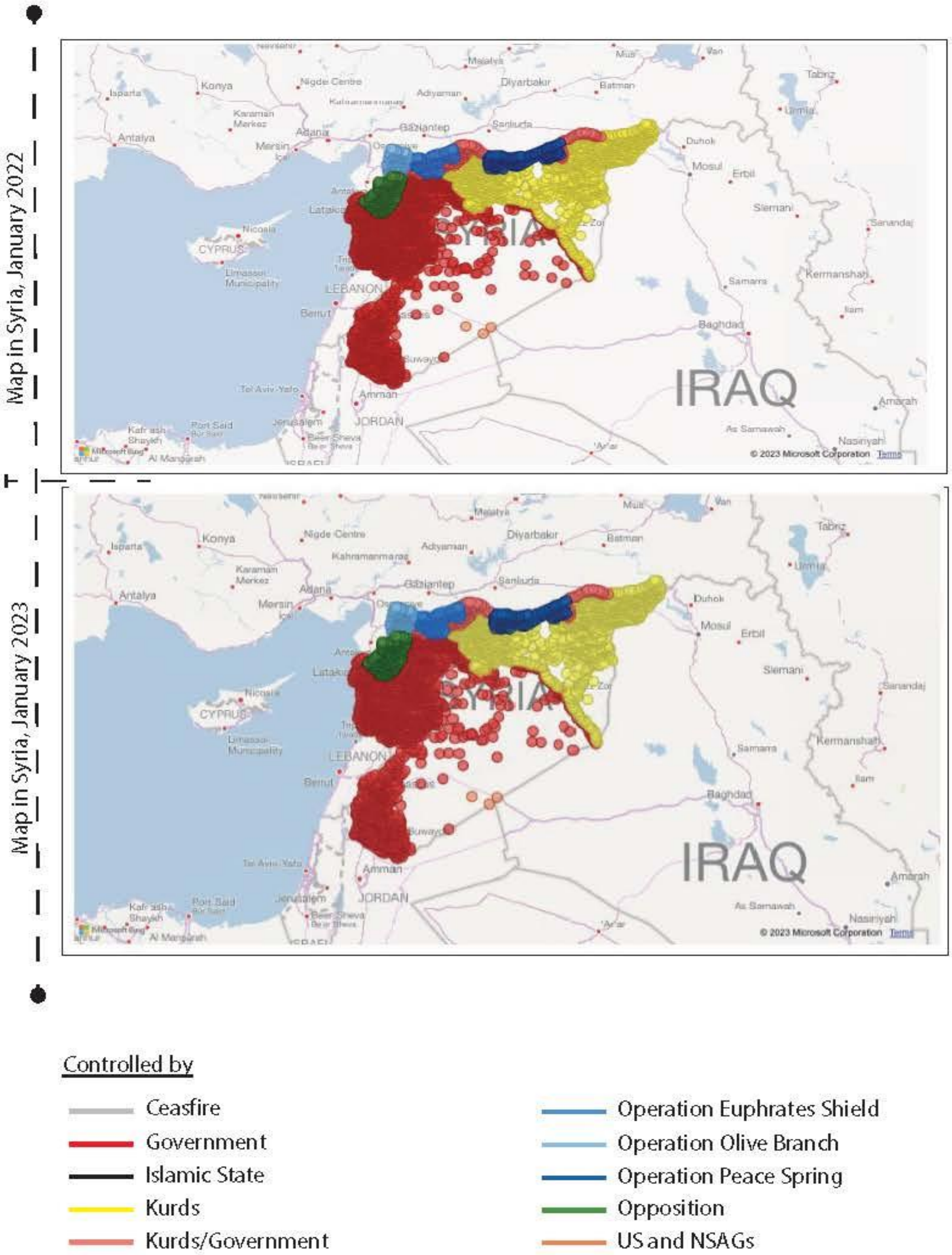


Figure 2.7. Control maps inside Syria (2014-2023) (The Carter Center, 2023).

A simplistic reading of these maps will show that since 2019, the areas of control have been relatively stable, but before that, the historical evolution of the control inside Syria over the years since January 2014 has witnessed a constant shift of control over the territory between different actors. In that respect, it is hard to speak of any homogenous opposition or any such clear-cut land that is not under the control of the government in power. The Syrian context is anything that fits into this image.

Furthermore, the fact that discussions and debates around the legality of the cross-border humanitarian assistance and the consent issues were hot from the inception of the Syrian Civil war in 2011 until 2014 when the Res.2165 allowing the cross-border assistance into Syria was adopted, does not mean that humanitarian organizations did not attempt to supply humanitarian aid into opposition-held areas from Turkey or other neighboring countries. Indeed, the work of NGOs—both international and newly emerging local aiding groups—was in full swing before the resolution came out in 2014.[23] States are the principal parties to the Geneva Conventions, not NGOs. However, their involvement in a humanitarian crisis without the consent of the High Contracting Party[24] or an authorization from the UNSC would mean risking the security of the personnel or targeting of the humanitarian aid by different groups. Even the UNSC authorization and the consent of the Syrian regime to deliver UN-led supplies to hard-to-reach or besieged areas would not be enough to stop such attacks on humanitarian personnel and consignments. One of the most important of such incidents was the attack on the UN and Red Crescent convoys that led to the suspension of the aid convoys (Siddique and Borger, 2016).

In conclusion, the complexity and multi-actor nature of the Syrian crisis have also complicated the humanitarian relief efforts. The interplay of the issues of consent, sovereignty, and international law has been at the core of this debate. While a line of jurists claim that non-state actors' approval would be enough for the humanitarian entities to operate in opposition-held areas, others hold the view that such an interpretation of international humanitarian law would be misleading, and this would ignore the

[23] As a part of the study, the interviews conducted with NGO humanitarian practitioners also involved questions about the organization and implementation of their activities from across Turkey into Syria. In reference to disorganization and lack of coordination at the time, one of the interviewees defined the situation as being "Wild West," with the aid running across the border from different organizations with different scales. Another interviewee mentioned how a hotel was being used as a base for many NGOs to plan and conduct their humanitarian activities across the border.

[24] In the parlance of the Geneva Conventions, a "High Contracting Party" is a sovereign state.

sovereignty of the Syrian state. In the current stage, after years of resolutions allowing cross-border humanitarian assistance into Syria, the impasse at the UNSC in July 2023 as to the extension of the cross-border humanitarian assistance has led the Assad regime to consent to the cross-border humanitarian assistance from the Bab al-Hawa crossing. It remains to be seen if the Syrian regime will respect the delivery of humanitarian aid into Syria in a principled manner outside of the UNSC resolutions and if the future will need more of such resolutions to be adopted.

2.7. Civil Society Structure in Syria in the 20th Century: A Historical Perspective

Civil society is an indispensable part of human development (Azis, 2018:238). It is a common denominator for all development aspects, rising from democratic governance to the eradication of poverty (Azis, 2018). Even though the term came to be known only in the late 1980’s, it has a rich history.

Collective action has been a universal part of human experience, expressed in different ways in different times, places, and cultures in search of a good society (Edwards, 2004:1). According to Edwards (2004:2), there are four main reasons why the term became popular at that time in history: 1) the democratic tendencies that followed the post-communist period; 2) the newly arising economic models; 3) the need to come together in an ever-insecure world; and 4) the rise of NGOs. In that regard, civil society has been regarded as a means offering solutions to social, economic, and political problems, as well as a platform for social movements and a “practical framework for resistance” (Edwards, 2004:110). Indeed, there is a positive correlation between the rise of civil society and globalization, supported by the improvements in human rights, development, democracy, and good governance (Azis, 2018:238).

So, what is this structure considered as a panacea for different social and economic problems? What does civil society mean? There are different accounts as to what civil society means. A modern definition of civil society sees it as “a dense network of groups, communities, networks, and ties that stand between the individual and the modern state” (Michael Kenny, 2016). Or it is seen as a movement to reduce the role of politics in the way of free markets and individual liberties (Edwards, 2004:2). Similarly, as a society that is viewed ‘as the single most viable alternative to the authoritarian state and the tyrannical market” or as a mechanism set to protect those who organize to challenge power (Edwards, 2004). The main commonality of these perspectives on civil society is that it is seen as a counter-power mechanism emerging to stand against authoritarian structures. The existence of an 'independent civil society' is considered as a "precondition" for a healthy democracy whereas its absence or weakness being the projection of modern sociopolitical problems (Michael Kenny, 2016).

The purpose of this section is not to give an elaborate account of the rise of civil society organizations on the global stage, nor does it aim at exploring its historical transformation and societal impacts. Rather, this section sets out to tackle the emergence of civil society organizations in Syria, going as far back as the Ottoman times, through the French mandate, and especially starting in the 2000s until the outbreak of the civil war in Syria in 2011. This section, thus, seeks to explore and identify the parameters that were effective in the evolution and rise of the civil society organizations in the Syrian context starting with the coming to power of the so-called junior Assad as well as the basis of their foundation that this research aims to unravel as having played a significant role in the operations of the aiding bodies (organizations) in the opposition areas[25] emerging at the very beginning of the civil war,[26] thus this can give us a better leeway into a more thorough analysis of the current state of the Syrian-led humanitarian organizations still working and providing cross-border aid in the Northwest Syria (NWS) in the protracted Syrian crisis.

2.7.1. Civil society in Syria in the 20th century

Perhaps it would be an interesting question to explore and answer: can the emergence of the Syrian Civil War or the so-called Arab Spring in the Middle East and North Africa be associated with the materialization of a fledgling sense of civil society movements in these societies in the face of inequalities and pressing authoritarian regimes? Doing an analytical inquiry into the historical standing of the civil society organizations in Syria, especially with a focus on the rise of such a tradition in Assad's time, may give us some implicit answers to these kinds of questions, though in no sense would it be viable to attribute the ongoing bloody Syrian Civil War to one single factor.

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[25] The term "opposition areas" here refers to the parts of the country that are no longer under the control of the Syrian regime.

[26] We consider the very beginning of refugee crossings into Turkey in April 2011 as the start of the humanitarian action, though its cross-border mechanism was not based on a legal mechanism provided by the UN Security Council Resolution, which only came to be realized in 2014 with the Resolution 2165 on Cross-border into Syria from the four border crossings from across the neighbors of Syria (Turkey, Jordan, and Iraq). Notwithstanding, the actions of the newly emerging civil society organizations in the opposition areas already kicked off with the suppressive attempts of the Assad regime against the protests starting in March 2011. (see, Khalaf et al., 2014).

Notwithstanding, in the modern perspective, seen as panaceas to social and political problems, civil society movements can trigger such developments, if not pioneer them.

It would be viable to consider a four-fold divisional view of the evolution of civil society in Syria: 1) Syria in Ottoman time; 2) Syria under French mandate 3) the Baath regime's overtake 4) the 2000s—Bashar al-Assad's coming to power till the outbreak of the civil war.

One cannot think apart the religious layout of Syria from the civil society organizations in the country. In that sense, the religious structures in Syria have been the main drivers of the associative culture. It would not be wrong to claim that during the first half of the 20th century, the civil society in Syria lived on a structure emanating from the Ottoman times; this structure being represented by foundations such as orphanages, charities aiding the poor, and social associations promoting certain groups such as the youth and women (Khalaf, Ramadan, and Friederike Stolleis, 2014:6). These groups of charities, the so-called traditional charities,[27]were reaching some particular group as their target audiences, be it a religious group such as Shia, Sunni, orthodox, Catholics, or an ethnicity such as Arab, Assyrian, Armenian, etc., or some vulnerable groups within society such as the elderly, youth, women, or orphans(Alhousseiny and Atar, 2021:107; Khalaf et al., 2014:6). It is hard to observe a constant upward development of civil society life in Syria in parallel to globalization and development. Rather, the destiny of such activism in Syria has been in line with the ever-changing political landscape in the country. In that sense, the transformation of the Ottoman time charity structures into the modern sense of civil society model has been slow, and arguably, it has not been achieved to date. The very origin of such a civil society activism based on religious duties has helped with the continuation of such a culture in the post-Ottoman period. The registration of many of these associations came to be realized with the legislation on associations (Law No. 93) that was adopted in 1958. According to Khalaf et. al (2014: 6) many of such associations did not register under this law at the time, as it was not seen as favorable on the grounds that it required of these associations to be subject to the approval and supervision of the security apparatus of the time. The time interval between the end of the French mandate (1946) until the assuming of the power of the Baath party in 1963 saw some improvement in the number of such charities (as quoted in de Elvira and Zintl,

[27] See, the article of Alhuseiny and Atar 2021. Also, with the interview that I conducted with Alhuseiny, he refers to these structures as traditional, standing out as natural structures in the society.

2012:11). Between 1952 and 1954 the number of the registered associations increased from 73 to 203. This resulted from the favorable environment observed for the development of civil society. The deterioration of the environment for civil society development post-the Baath Party's seizure of power came with the announcing of the notorious state of emergency that was to take hold of Syria for many years to come, and it resulted from the fact that the activities of such formations were seen as challenges to the newly formed power mechanism (de Elivra and Zintl, 2012:12).

Ruiz de Elvira and Zintl's (2012) extensive work on the civil society in Syria, especially with a focus on the years of Bashar al-Assad's presidency up to the first years of Syrian Uprising in 2011, is very telling and informative in terms of giving out the parameters and the rationale as to the connection of the civil society to the emerging social, economic, and political problems that paved the way for the Uprising in 2011. Although the history of the civil society under the Baathist regime before Bashar al-Assad is that of oppression, the approach to the civil society organizations starting with the coming to power of Assad is that of these organizations' promotion (de Elvira, 2012:7). As Ruiz de Elvira (8-7) points out, between the years 2002 and 2009, there was a substantial increase in the number of the NGOs registered with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour (MoSAL); in 2002, their numbers standing at 555, and in 2009, going up to 1485. This transformation, as Hinnebusch put it in the foreword of the same volume, is a reflection of the dynamic regional changes with the authoritative regimes' new approach, the so-called "authoritative upgrading". Nonetheless, it would be wrong to limit the transformative approach to the associative sector to the years from 2000s, indeed, there were already signals at the time of the father Assad that the civil society was being given more of a latitude and flexibility (Hinnebusch, 1993:244). Both before the father Assad and during the first years of junior Assad, the changing approach to the associative sector came out as a result of structural changes, not to downplay the micro-level drivers. Especially, the liberal economy approaches the post-Cold War period, and the collapse of the Soviet Union, leading to a new era both politically and socially, can be named as some structural factors.

A leading feature of the period under Bashar al-Assad was that Asma al-Assad, Syria's First Lady, took the initiative to create many GO-NGOs.[28] These organizations,

[28] Government-sponsored non-governmental organizations

tied to Asma al-Assad, were based on the principles of 'partnership' with people and 'responsibility' (de Elvira, 2012). Although with such initiative, the regime seemed to endorse civic pluralism, GO-NGOs creation brought about monopoly on certain activities and networks almost identical to a corporation with privileged access to state's resources and access to foreign actors, which they taken advantage of (monopolized over as it prevented from independent organizations to take part in such activities) by participating in workshops and projects that were managed by foreign institutions (de Elvira, 2012:23-24). According to Khalaf et al. (2014:8), these organizations served as "facades," on the one hand, showing the Syrian president as a reformist, and on the other hand, they acted as "release valve" for Western support for the Syrian civil society. Perhaps the strongest of such GO-NGOs was the Syria Trust for Development, launched by the First Lady in 2007[29] and it organized the first international development conference in Syria as well as launched an NGO network; developments by which it aimed at positioning itself as the "pioneer of the associate sector," which it tried to control and manipulate (de Elvira, 2012:24).

However, the failing response on the part of the traditional charities and GO-NGOs to the emerging social, economic, and political needs in the government-controlled areas led to the structures with no experience in the sector to take reins (Alhousseiny and Atar, 2021). Especially with the eruption of the Syrian Civil War, these structures started to have more of a leeway to act and organize in the face of the challenges that were met as a result of the regime's continuous attacks in these areas (Alhousseiny and Atar, 2021; Khalaf et al., 2014). The new informal administrative structures operating outside of the government-controlled areas ran to the help of the needy as the civil war intensified, increasing the death toll and the number of displaced persons. Soon some of these structures would bear parallel features to the civil society organizations in the government-controlled areas, at least in terms of the scope of their activities, if not their capacities (Khalaf et al., 2014:9). The later phase would see some of these structures become institutionalized and turn into what are known as Local Councils (LCs). These LCs serve many functions, such as essential public services, policing and security, humanitarian relief, and other municipal services such as cleaning the streets, etc.[30]

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[29] In 2007, most organizations affiliated with Asma Assad were brought together under the Syrian Trust for Development (Khalaf et al., 2014:8).

[30] There is not a fixed organizational structure across all the LCs in Syria; however, this tentative chart can give an overall idea. The point for debate is the inclusion of the military unit in the organizational chart;

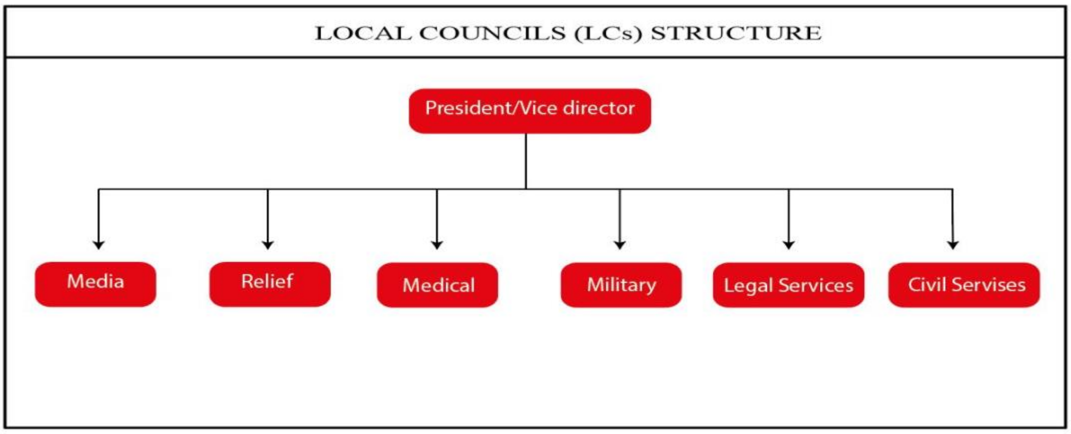

Figure 2.8. Local Councils (LCs) tentative organizational structure (compiled by the author)

Indeed, the origins of the idea of LCs, also known as provincial councils, lie in the fact that it was aimed to better organize political protests and fill the void in the areas freed from the regime control until the later phases, when they became active players in all walks of civic life (Aljundi, 2014:16). The decision to make these councils active bodies in all areas under the control of the opposition was taken by the Syrian National Council (SNC)[31] in 2012 (Aljundi, 2014). After this step, these councils were formed in every city and major town as recognized local governing bodies. Their role was to carry out coordination among smaller local councils in the villages or towns nearby. Apart from its role of coordination of the works of the smaller councils, it also served as a funding mechanism that spent funds in the cities and passed on to the smaller local council additional funds (Aljundi, 2014:16-17). Members of the council are from the community, NGO workers of Syrian nationality, and civil society members (Dadu and Dadu, 2020). Some of these councils are operating under the leadership of the SNC, while others can operate more independent of the SNC, an example of this is the Dara' Council which identifies itself with the SNC while the Yabrad and Ar-Raqqah Councils do not have a direct relation with the SNC, though they were founded through the SNC. In structure, though, of the councils, there is no variation; there are different divisions within the

the written sources show this to be the case, while one of the interviewees told the author that this is the idealized and aspired scenario, while in reality, the military does not make part of this.

[31] Established in October 2011, the SNC is a coalition of "a wide range of local coordination committees of the movement on the ground, existing political groups, and ethnic/religious groups." These groups are represented in different bodies of the Council. Among the common commitments of the groups forming the SNC, "the fall of the Assad regime with all its repressive institutions beginning with the head of the State" stands out (for more about the SNC's guiding principles, National Charter, etc., see the council's website: https://syriancouncil.org.

council, with the leader of which reporting to the elected president or vice directors (Aljundi, 2014:17). The existence of such councils in the opposition-held areas has brought along many advantages owing to some specifications they bear: a) they have better access to populations in need; b) their members are chosen from the community, which legitimizes their mere existence, and they can be held accountable by the community for their services; c) fostering local councils would provide a more sustainable long-term response by providing resilience to future shocks (Dadu and Dadu, 2020). Apart from their familiarity with the region, the networks they have built, and the dynamics of the humanitarian context inside Syria, the fact that international NGOs do not have physical access to these areas, makes these councils indispensable partners (Dadu and Dadu, 2020). However, one of the biggest challenges these councils come across is their existence with the local NGOs, as they must compete for funding from international donors, and usually the latter have more of a reach to these fundings owing to their wider networks (Dadu and Dadu, 2020).

In conclusion, the evolution of civil society in Syria throughout the 20th century is a reflection of historical, political, and social factors. From its origins in Ottoman times, civil society in Syria was based on charities tied to religion or ethnic groups. Such organizations provided relief work to specific related groups, but a broader civil society landscape remained limited. Although some improvements, such as an increase in the number of registered associations were noted during the French mandate, the following Baath regime's take over, and the subsequent adoption of the *emergency law*, there came along challenges and restrictions for the civil society which persisted for many years. The period under Bashar al-Assad marked a new vision for civil society organizations, in whose number there was a substantial increase. This shift in the approach towards the civil society in Assad's time was rooted in factors such as economic liberalization, the collapse of the Soviet Union, etc. This period, also reflecting a regional trend of "authoritative upgrading" witnessed the creation of GO-NGOs, which were used by the Syrian regime as controlling mechanisms of the civil society. The outbreak of the Syrian Civil War marked challenges and opportunities for the Syrian civil society. In the opposition-held areas, informal administrative structures and LCs emerged to fill in the gaps left by the government. The role of these councils has been vital in providing essential services and responding to the needs of the local communities. The challenge remains, however, with finding the right circumstances and opportunities for the civil society structures and local NGOs in the opposition held areas to combine their humanitarian efforts with activities aimed at improving civil society as a whole.

3. TRUST

3.1. Why is Trust So Needed?

Trust is an indispensable phenomenon for the continuation of ‘enduring’ human relations (Seligman, 1997; van Knippenberg, 2018: 3). As Seligman (1997) points out, trust serves as a foundation for long-term order in relationships rather than being a short-term solution to social order like some ever-existing concepts such as ‘power’, ‘coercion,’ or ‘dominance’ do. Indeed, David Hume, in his *Treatise of Human Nature* (1740), regards trust as an essential concept underlying his essential concept of ‘promise’ that he finds vital to the building of the community’s basic cornerstones. He sees trust as the basis of any kind of human relationship and thus the social order (Andina, 2016). Luhman (1979) goes as far as to claim that without trust, we would be confined to ‘paralyzing fear’ and even unable to make sense of what *distrust* could mean for us. His reference to the point that even we would not be able to wake up in the morning without a sense of trust takes us to the *Hobbesian* social contract, by which people *entrust* their security to an authority to be able to survive. In a similar vein, Rotter (1971) relates and locates trust at the heart of all everyday errands such as paying taxes, visiting a dentist, and the like, all of which require trusting in a way or another. In short, without trust, everyday social life would be impossible (Good, 2018:18; van Knippenberg, 2018: 3).

3.2. What is trust?

Defining such a versatile and multidirectional concept is not easy, considering how widespread a usage trust has in people’s everyday speech. Indeed, McKnight and Chervany’s (2000) analogy of trust with the story of the six blind men and the elephant[32] is a good indicator of how varied and subjective standpoints one could have while defining the concept of trust. This variance of viewpoints comes into play across different disciplines. Trust has been the center of focus for many disciplines, such as *political science*, *psychology*, and *sociology*. Although the center point of the first two, while defining trust, is on a psychological individual-level, sociology, on the other hand, tends to see it as a collective phenomenon (Lewis and Weigert, 1985). In their view, according to Lewis and Weigert (1985), trust is not something to be taken on an individual

[32] “The Story of Six Blind Men and the Elephant” is a folk tale from India that demonstrates how different perceptions and viewpoints people could have about the same phenomenon. For a full account of the story, see Baldwin J. (n.d.) The Blind Men and the Elephant. https://americanliterature.com/author/james-baldwin/short-story/the-blind-men-and-the-elephant

psychological level; rather, it is a "collective attribute" at the center of human relations in society. In that sense, different forms of trust and themes associated with the concept have been analyzed and investigated in social science literature. Among them, *generalized trust* (Putnam, 2000; Uslaner, 2001), *social trust* (Fukuyama, 1995), *trust and power* (Luhmann, 1979), *trust in social cohesion and order* (Misztal, 1996) are just a few to mention.

Davis and Schoorman (1995) define the concept of trust as the trustor's[33] eagerness and liability to expect that the trustee is going to act in line with the trustor's expectations without the trustor having any surveillance on the trustee's actions. Gambetta (1988), in a similar vein, defines the process of trusting someone as the expectation that the person involved is going to act in a way that will be beneficial to us, or at least not detrimental, in order for us to engage in a cooperative relationship. Kydd (2000), defines the concept as a risky process in which the *trustor* is vulnerable to the *trustee* without any guarantee that she will not be let down for her choice. However, despite the risk in question, he points out the concept as being an essential social requirement, without which "social interaction" between people would be unattainable. The concept of 'risk' is usually associated with the concept of trust. The vulnerability on the part of the trustor is itself risk-taking and this risk taking is done willingly by the trustor with the probability of losing something at the end of the process (Mayer et al., 1995). Risk-taking does not occur without consideration; it is a conscious choice to accept certain risks, thus a deliberate decision (Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman, 1995). Indeed, people would not have opted for risk if they had any other alternative to trust, which naturally makes trust and risk two sides of the same coin (Lewis and Weigert, 1985:968). Yet, viewing it from another perspective, Hardin's (2002) definition of trust would be the "encapsulated interest" in which the trusted party only does remain trustworthy as long as his interests are served in the relationship with the trusting party and on the part of the trusting party, the action of trusting does not depend merely on expectations but rather on the belief that the trustee will 'fulfill' his trust because his interest "encapsulates" the

[33] The parties involved in the action of trusting are labeled as *"trustor"* and *"trustee." Trustor* is the agent of initiating, extending the trust, while the *trustee* is on the receiving end. Here, the active agent may seem to be the trustor, as he is expected to carry out the act of trusting, but there is a dyadic relationship between the two concepts since trustee in this relationship is someone whose degree of *trustworthiness* will determine the trustor's dependence on her. In this sense, trust is seen as an attitude taken up by the *trustor*, whereas *trustworthiness* is comprised of a set of traits that are associated with the *trustee* (McLeod, 2015).

trustee's interest. In other words, for the continuation of the relationship between the trusting party and the trusted into the future, there is a reasonably well-defined interest.

Mayer et al. (1995) list the features of trustee under the shell of trustworthiness as *benevolence*, *ability,* and *integrity*. Benevolence is referred to as the trustee's goodwill or concern about the trustor; this is where the trustor's vulnerability originates, as he is risking being betrayed. *Ability* stands for the skills that the trustor possesses to carry out the task she is entrusted with. *Integrity*, on the other hand, suggests the trustee's consistency between her words and deeds. As the issue of trust involves a transaction between the person *A* (trustor) and *B* (trustee), this transaction we name *C* in this relationship is to be decisive about the future state of the relationship. Indeed, what is happening is a deal between *A* and *B* on *C*, based on their present conditions. In a way, it is dealing with the present for the future.

Rousseau's, et al. (1998: 395) define trust as: *'Trust is a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another.'* As can be seen here, *trust* suggests having optimism on the part of the trustor that the trustee will be *competent* about what she is trusted about. On the part of the trustee, however, it is the commitment to carrying out the task (McLeod, 2015). This naturally gives the concept of trust a mutual basis. This static view of trust has been challenged and replaced by a view of trust that is more *action*-oriented. Bachmann and Inkpen (2011), for instance, positions trust as going beyond its static state as an attitude, i.e., micro-level, psychological perception, into one that gives the concept of trust more dynamism and equips it with a behavioral construct: trust is "*the action taken which follows the trustor's decision to invest trust in a relationship that actually shows the existence of trust between two actors."* However, since the study at hand is taking organizations as the unit of analysis, investigating the role of trust in cooperation and coordination among I/NGOs, it is essential to see the conceptual framing of trust from an inter-organizational perspective as well, since it does vary to some extent from the definitions of interpersonal trust while still acknowledging the very foundation of trust being human based. In that regard, a frequently employed definition of inter-organizational trust is that inter-organizational trust is *"the extent to which members of an organization have collectively held trust orientation toward partner firm,"* still holding that trust is anchored in individuals, its basis being there (Zaheer, McEvily, and Perrone, 1998). With these different perspectives in mind, this paper will not adopt a fixed definition of trust, even though we are in agreement with Mayer et al.'s (1995) view that the elements of interpersonal trust *(benevolence, ability and integrity)* are also applicable in the inter-organizational relationships. Thus, we will suffice with some of the definitions of trust in the literature we have tackled, which we will later compare and contrast with the definitions of trust from the field collected from the interview participants.

Clarifying the conceptual and definitional boundaries of trust still does not clear it off from being a complex concept, and only having a conceptual and definitional demarcation will not be helpful to help us analyze and draw meaningful conclusions about any empirical finding. In that sense, it is also essential to see the different dimensions of trust.

3.3. Dimensions of Trust

3.3.1. Main forms of interpersonal trust: affect-based trust vs. cognition-based trust

As succinctly discussed above, *trust* is an indispensable phenomenon in human life, and whether knowingly or unknowingly, we depend on it at many levels of our relationships. As a term, it comes out to mean different things for each of us, and yet we tend to take it for granted in most social relations, even though our use of the term is abundantly present in day-to-day relations. Such a versatile term in its definition also comes in different dimensions and forms. The multidimensionality of trust has long been emphasized (Lewis and Weigert, 1985; McAllister, 1995).

According to (McAllister, 1995), there are two dimensions of trust: *cognitive* and *affective*. In the current huge literature on trust, the concept of trust finds most of its presence as a cognitive process (van Knippenberg, 2018:3). Accordingly, looking into the definition of trust, it is noticed that there is a rational cognitive choice in which the *trustor,* by accepting to be vulnerable to the *trustee*, has the expectation that he will not be disappointed. In that sense, it is the cognitive process of deciding *"whom we will trust, in which respect and under which circumstances"* and our choice will be founded on what we see as *'good reasons'* for us, which in turn becomes benchmarks (evidence) for trustworthiness (Lewis and Weigert, 1985:970). Van Knippenberg (2018) explains this by the fact that "*expectations are cognitions*" and that "*trust is an outcome of subjectively rational process*." Thus, the issues that are at stake in cognitive trust are *honesty, integrity, reliability,* and *fairness* (Dirks and Ferrin, 2002: 616).

On the other hand, it is not only cognition that is the foundation of interpersonal trust, indeed, as the definitions we have tackled above have shown, there is also a *relational* aspect to trust. For that matter, the other sociological base of trust is emotions, which is "complementary" to its cognitive base (Lewis and Weigert, 1985:971). This understanding of trust is about reciprocal inter-personal (mutual) *care* and *concern*, emotional bonds between the parties (McAllister, 1995). Although the trustworthiness of an actor (an individual or organization) is habitually seen to be embedded in its ability to show *competence*, *integrity,* and *benevolence*[34] (all features of cognitive-based trust*)*, the quality of the relationship and the associated emotional connections may also serve as foundation of trust, hence affect-based trust (van Knippenberg, 2018:4).

Although different conceptualizations regarding these two aspects of trust exist, they essentially emphasize the same construct conveyed by cognitive-based and affect-based trust forms. Jones and Georg (1998), in their approach, for instance, come up with the conceptual distinction of trust as having *conditional* and *unconditional* forms, which in essence have parallel meaning to constructs of cognitive and affect-based trust (Webber, 2008). In the *conditional trust,* for instance, what comes forth is knowledge and positive expectations about the trustee, while in the *unconditional trust,* "*positive affect," "mutual identification,"* and "*shared values*" become essential elements (Jones and George, 1998:536-537). Accordingly, positive moods and emotions strengthen the affective bonds between parties, thereby increasing positive affect and reinforcing the sense of trust experienced in the relationship (Jones and George, 1998:537).

Drawing a difference between cognitive and affective dimensions of trust, the latter would come to signify *confidence* based on emotional connections, real care and concern, and an understanding of mutual sentiments, while the former would come to signify confidence invested in someone's history and reputation for *"dependability, reliability,* and *professionalism"* (Hsu, 2022). In the existence of *affect-based* trust, there is a special relationship with the *trustee*, which is reflected in trustee's care for the trustor (Dirks and Ferrin, 2002). While in the existence of *cognitive-based* trust, there is competence of the trustee and positive expectations and knowledge. Thus, according to van Knippenberg (2018)*,* it is the *quality of the relationship* that should be considered as basis of the affect-based trust, whereas cognitive-based trust is not expected to be rooted

[34] See: Mayer et al., 1995.

in the quality of the relationship as its antecedents are more objective, namely, cognition-based trust is rooted in the assessment of the other party's (trustee's) *competence, integrity, and benevolence* (see Mayer at al., 1995) (van Knippenberg, 2018:4).

3.4. Inter-Organizational Trust

An organization is defined as a group of people with a formal identity working for common goals (Boella& Torre, 2005). They can exist in various forms, from norm based bureaucratic systems to competition-based entities in the market (Boella& Torre, 2005).

Organizations, like individuals, have interests, and to reduce costs and increase gains, they prioritize their individual interests over those of their partners' in the cooperative networks they form (Schmidt and Schreiber, 2019:71).Though formal management mechanisms are adopted by these organizations to mitigate the opportunistic behaviors of their partners, the complexity of the competitive environment, the bounded rationality of the parts, and the imperfection of information, deems it not easy to foresee future disagreements, find and formalize ways to prevent or handle them (Schmidt and Schreiber 2019:71). In that regard, what is at stake are informal management mechanisms, though they are not as manageable as formal management mechanisms (Schmidt and Schreiber 2019). These informal mechanisms are, thus, seen to be interpersonal and interorganizational trust, without whose presence, it would not be viable to operate in such environments (Lane, 1998).

The inherently personal construct of trust has been expanded into the organizational domain recently; the premise being that inter-organizational trust is contingent upon the predictability of partner's (organization's) behavior when interacting with the vulnerable actor (the other organization) (Gulati and Nickerson, 2008: 689). In such an inter-organizational relationship if the expectations of the trustor organization are met by the partner organization (trustee), then the trusting organization develops confidence, which in turn is translated into the relationship as a mitigator of concerns of future opportunism (Gulati and Nickerson, 2008: 689). As Mayer et al. (1995) have delineated features of trustworthiness for interpersonal trust *(benevolence, integrity, and ability),* in inter-organizational relationships, the application of these benchmarks of trustworthiness is also encouraged (Schoorman, Mayer, and Davis, 2007: 345). Nevertheless, Schoorman et al. (2007: 345-346), further argue that at the inter-organizational level, the relevancy of 'benevolence' may not be as high as the other two facets (ability and integrity), but it still plays an essential role. In the inter-organizational relationship, even though the turnover of staff is an important factor affecting the role of trust, the over-time crystallization of institutional roles of the staff serving as intermediaries between organizations, remains unchanged due to the institutionalization of the processes of the informal practices of the previous boundary-spanner that, with time, become ingrained and taken-for-granted organizational practices and structures (Zaheer et al., 1998: 144).

To recap, inter-organizational trust, just like interpersonal trust, entails the *willingness* of one party to be vulnerable to the actions of the other party with the idea that the other party (trustee) will not disappoint the trustor by its actions (Mayer et al., 1995: 712). The role of trust in inter-organizational relations is that trust mitigates *opportunism* and thus leads to cooperation between organizations.

3.4.1. Swift trust and humanitarian context

Meyerson et. al. (1996) conceptualize swift trust as a distinctive mode of collective understanding and interaction that navigates the concerns of '*vulnerability,'* 'uncertainty,' 'risk,' and 'expectations' in temporary groups. This way of conceptualizing for temporary groups' relationships leaves out traditional sources of trust such as *'familiarity,' shared experiences, 'reciprocal disclosure,' 'threats and deterrents,' 'satisfaction of commitments' and* '*proofs of non-exploitation of vulnerability*' that are normally present in more structured social systems in which actors interact (Meyerson et. al., 1996: 167). This results from the *temporariness* of the actors and the task at hand, as well as the time-pressured nature of the tasks that require interdependence of actors. Accordingly, the approach is that swift trust is a form of trust which is a cognitive construct rather than an interpersonal one, the emphasis not being on *"feelings," "commitments," and "exchange"* (Meyerson 1996, 191). Clearly, the absence of needs for interpersonal traits is that what brings together such actors around a certain task is their roles *(which define their specific responsibilities)* and their expertise rather than their personal traits (Meyerson et.al., 1996: 173).

As the name itself denotes, swift trust is the kind of trust that takes place in a quick manner between the parties involved in a certain relationship. In this kind of relationship, the actors coming together are new to each other, they have not necessarily had past experience together, and there is no such thing that they may work together in the future again (Blomqvist and Cook, 2017).

In their work on trust and temporary groups, Meyerson, EWeick, and MKramer (1996) position *swift trust* as being applied to emerging trust situations in which temporary groups come together over a common goal for a finite (limited) time span. These temporary groups could range across a wide array of professions at the individual level as well as between organizations. With the development in science and technology as well as the diversification of modes of production, temporary groups or ad-hoc project-based teams are more and more of a reality in the modern world. Some settings of temporary groups include, but are not limited to, project-based industries such as those in construction and movies, advertising, consulting and software development, research and development (R&D), flight crews, combat crews, and emergency response teams (Blomqvist and Cook, 2017: 30). There are some traits that these temporary groups, also referred to as hastily formed networks (HFN), have in common, such as 1) they are established rapidly, 2) they come from different communities, 3) they work together in a shred conversation space, in which they plan, execute, and act and, 4) they achieve an urgent mission (HFN Research Group, 2006; cited in Tatham and Kovács, 2010). The figure below could serve as a representation of the swift trust and the position of the temporary groups. The focus is on the very moment of present in which temporary groups come together around a certain task with little or no sense of yesterday or tomorrow.

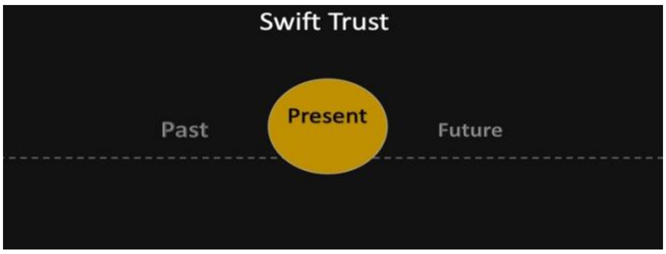

Figure 3.1. Swift trust (Author's own compilation).

Swift trust in humanitarian relief settings has been extensively studied.[35] The characteristics of humanitarian settings in general, as reflected in the common features of HFN, are also compatible with the contexts in which swift trust is applicable (see Meyerson et al., 1996). In every crisis that requires humanitarian aid—be it natural or man-made—depending on the scale and scope, thousands of organizations of local or international character scramble to the scene of the crisis with a view to helping the needy. Although such a crisis setting brings together organizations with pre-defined policies or

[35] See the Literature Review on Inter-Organizational Trust.

aims, it also involves individuals that do not know each other, are not from the same organizations, and have not had the same training (Tatham and Kovács, 2010:36). Thus, according to Kovács and Spens (2008), as cited in Tatham and Kovács (2010:36), a HFN in a humanitarian setting is described as 'co-located teams in short-term local projects' involving inter-sectoral partnerships that bind together various stakeholders such as NGOs, governments, local communities, the military, and businesses (suppliers and logistics providers).

As such, humanitarian relief operations involve time-pressured activities to prevent loss of life and alleviate suffering. Further, usually the organizations coming together, to a large extent, do not have a long history of working together, if at all. Especially in this sense, the newly emerging local organizations are not expected to have had a history with the international organizations deployed to the scene, although this could be true to some degree if the local entities have a long history of working on domestic projects with international organizations. This is certainly not the case in the case of this research, the case of the Syrian cross-border operations, since the organizations are only as old as the Syrian crisis[36], and even so, the nature of the cross-border operations requires that these organizations work together in a time-pressured manner from across the border in a new setting, that is, Türkiye in this case. Particularly in the initial phases of humanitarian disasters and conflict-driven emergencies, though the latter can get into a protracted nature depending on the political situation and other contextual factors involved, the humanitarian organizations do not have time to wait for trust to evolve, they have to rely on each other, hence, *swift trust* is formed.

3.5. Theoretical Framework

3.5.1. Social exchange theory

In examining social interactions and the structure of social relationships, social exchange theory (SET) is one of the foundational perspectives (Cook, 2001). According to Cook and Rice (2006), SET is a reflection of earlier traditions emanating from *utilitarianism* and *behaviorism*, whose traces are visible in modern versions of SET.

The origins of the SET can be traced back to the works of Branislow Malinowski, *"Argonaouts of the Western Pacific*" (1922), and subsequently Marcel Mauss' "The Gift" (1924). Malinowski's ethnographic work on the Trobriand Islands in the western Pacific

[36] See Chapter 2, the section on the history of the civil society in Syria.

brings forward the concept of “Kula ring,” which is a system of ceremonial exchange involving the exchange of arm shells circulating among the island communities, between the high-ranking men on each island. The key aspects of ‘Kula’ exchange as an economic activity are characterized by certain principles: a) the gift giving should be repaid by a counter-gift with a lapse of time; it could be a few hours or a longer time up to a year or more, named as “*delayed reciprocity*” (Welsch and Vivanco, n.d.); b) it is an ongoing process: ‘once in the Kula, always in the kula’; c) the equivalence of the gift exchanged—the value or the nature of the gift—is up to the giver of the gift and it cannot be coerced; d) it entails mutual trust (Coyle-Shapiro and Diehl, 2017). These Kula exchange ceremonies are done publicly and under no secrecy. Similarly, Mauss calls the exchange relationships of the tribes he observes in the west coast of North America *“Potlatch.”* The *Potlatch* comes with three obligations: 1) the obligation to give; 2) the obligation to receive; and 3) the obligation to reciprocate. These obligations in Potlatch bring along burdens for the exchange parties. Accepting a gift comes with the “burden attached,” with that of reciprocation, which one is sure to do upon accepting the gift; it is a challenge for him; it is not a one-time thing benefiting the taker of the gift, but rather the taker accepts the challenge of *reciprocating*, showing that he is not unequal to the giver (Mauss, 1954/1990:53). While in gift giving, individuals pursue their self-interests, there is also a sense of societal obligation attached to the act of exchanging gifts (Welsch and Vivanco, n.d.).

Marshal Sahlins (1972) identifies three forms of reciprocity: a) *generalized reciprocity*; b) *balanced reciprocity*; and c) *negative reciprocity*. In generalized reciprocity, there is not an immediate expectation of return by the giver, as the resources are shared freely in social groups, usually composed of kinship of close-knit community. The idea is that the takers of the gift will reciprocate when the need surges. In *balanced reciprocity*, a return of some equivalence is expected at a later time. N*egative reciprocity*, however, involves haggling, bartering or even coercion at the expense of the other party in the exchange relationship. Sahlin’s reciprocity typology is also closely related to closeness of the exchange partners. In generalized reciprocity, for instance, the exchange parties are family or close-knit social groups; in balanced reciprocity, this group could be extended to a broader network of acquaintances, while in negative reciprocation, the interactions are with people outside of the immediate social circle. Indeed, a similar argument is also provided by Malinowski (1922) in that the gift exchange among the islanders does not work in a single format; rather, it works on a continuum that encompasses various forms of exchange, ranging from pure gift giving to market-form transactions. The types of reciprocities are based on the nature of the social relationships; while pure gift-giving practice is more of an among family thing, other exchanges are among kula partners, and trade involving haggling is seen as a non-partner exchange between members of different villages.

Homans (1959) and Blau (1964) are two other seminal contributors to social exchange theory. Homans was interested in the individual behaviors of actors within social interactions, setting off to find explanations for social processes such as power dynamics, conformity, leadership, and justice from a bottom-up approach (Cook and Rice, 2006:54). For him, there was nothing that could not be accounted for through propositions about individuals that pertained to individuals as long as they engage in interactions (Cook and Rice, 2006:54). With such an approach he dismissed the "emergent" properties of social systems, which formed the core of Blau's work. Blau's approach posits that all structures, composed of subunits, have "emergent characteristics" that are beyond comprehension solely through an examination of the attributes of the individual subunits (Blau, 2017). Indeed, Homan's definition of social behavior tells us that he sees social behavior as the exchange of goods on two levels: the exchange of material goods and non-material goods such as 'approval' or 'prestige' (Homans, 1958: 606).

In his view, in a way, there is a struggle to maintain balance in what people give and receive in their social interactions, an equilibrium that is driven by social norms and expectations. As Homan (1958:606) states: *"persons that give much to others try to get much from them, and persons that get much from others are under pressure."* From the perspective of the giver, what he gives can be a cost and it could be a reward as well; individuals are in the effort of maximizing their net gains, and as long as the reward approaches the maximum value, it will make individuals less inclined to change their behaviors as the aim is to maximize the profits while minimizing the resources and efforts expended (Homans, 1958).

Blau (1964), on the other hand, makes the distinction between economic and social exchanges, while in the former there is a business relationship and the method—an agreement—to assure that parties to exchange fulfill their obligations is in place, which leaves out trust as a significant factor, and in the latter, there are unspecified obligations and the nature of the return is not specified, left to the discretion of the party who will make the return. Relationships involving social exchanges take time to develop and, at later stages, create a bond, which paves the way for trust to develop (Coyle-Shapiro and Diehl, 2017:200). The core principle of social exchange lies in the fact that the norm of *reciprocity* keeps the parties in the game and allows for the exchange to develop in "nature and value" over time (Coyle-Shapiro and Diehl, 2017). An important aspect of the reciprocity principle is the "time." As it was already discussed, Malinowski's work suggested that the reciprocation of gifts take place at a later time, until the next expedition takes place months later, a point supported by Blau, who defends that an immediate urge to reciprocate would be interpreted as the party's unwillingness to stay 'indebted,' and thus an unwillingness to stay in the relationship, seeing it more like a business- like relationship (9). It is the long-term view of the relationship—remaining obligated to the other exchange party and trusting the trustworthiness of the other party to 'discharge' obligations over extended time periods—that helps with the improvement of social bonds and trusting relationships (9). Coyle-Shapiro and Diehl (2017) liken the development of trust in this process to climbing a ladder, with each rung taken, trust develops gradually as the value of exchanged resources grows and the trustworthiness of the parties to the exchange is justified through reciprocity.

Although reciprocity was used by preceding scholars, Gouldner (1960) is said to be the first to define this term (Coyle-Shapiro and Diehl, 2017:199). Stressing the universality of reciprocity, Gouldner points out that it is not always unconditional; the obligation of repayment by the receiver depends on factors such as the value attributed to the benefit received, how much the recipient was in need when it was received, how much did giving such a benefit push the giver's resource capacity, and whether the giver was under any pressure or constraint when he extended the benefit (171). Emphasizing the need for empirical testing of the concept, and making reference to early scholars such as Malinowski, Homans, and Simmel's argument of equivalence in reciprocity, he distinguishes between two kinds of equivalence: one is *heteromorphic* reciprocity, in which the things exchanged in an exchange relationship can be concretely different but equal in value, while *homeomorphic* reciprocity refers to the equivalence being concretely alike or identical in form (171-172).

Another leading scholar progressing SET, Richard Emmerson (1962), has focused on the concepts of *power* and *dependence* in exchange relationships. Social relations are based on "mutual dependence." A depends on B in order for his goals to be achieved, which is through the facilitation by the actions of B. This mutual dependence also puts the parties (A or B) in a position to concede or deny; facilitate, or hinder the fulfillment that is needed by the other party (Emerson, 1962). In Emmerson's view, dependence is the key concept in understanding power since the parties (A and B) are in control of things that are valued by the other party, thus making one party *powerful*. The dependence of B on A is associated with how valuable the benefits provided by A are and also the availability of other options (alternatives) to B, which could be translated as the greater value of the benefit provided by A and the fewer alternatives available to B, thus the greater dependence of B on A (Emerson, 1972). The likelihood of starting an exchange relationship is higher when one party is more dependent on the other party, rather than less dependent (Emerson, 1972).

Emerson (1976) has made a classification of social exchanges: *productive, negotiated, reciprocal, and generalized exchanges.* Productive exchanges are those that involve the joint efforts of the parties coming together, all benefiting from the coordinated efforts and pooling of sources. Negotiated exchanges involve a process in which two parties come together and reach an agreement on the specific terms of a 'discrete transaction.' In reciprocal exchanges, there is no negotiation, and parties to the exchange negotiate directly without discussing the terms of the exchange. Lastly, generalized exchanges are indirect, as the name denotes; the party benefiting from an exchange may not repay to the same person as in the relation that A exchanges a benefit with B and B repays C and C repays A. In this kind of exchange, give and take circulates in a group, not necessarily between the receiver and the original giver.

Molm (1994) further concentrates on the *negotiated* and *reciprocal exchanges* and further expounds on the differences between the two; in the negotiated exchanges, the outcomes depend on the 'joint' action of the parties to the exchange as there is a clear *agreement* between them, making each party know what to get and give; in reciprocal exchange, though, the outcomes for the exchange party will depend on the other party, and thus it involves degrees of risk and uncertainty. The benefits may remain at a unilateral level and thus never be reciprocated, and if they are reciprocated, there is a lack of knowledge as to when they will take place. Another substantial emphasis Molm (2003) makes is on the 'timing of inequality.' In negotiated exchanges, the transactions parties involve in bring them equal or unequal outcomes; however, in reciprocal exchanges, only time will tell about the equality or inequality of the outcome determined by the frequency and value of the reciprocity. Regarding uncertainty, Molm (2013) highlights function, magnitude, and probability/frequency as key principles. In reciprocal exchanges, *function* is about the act being good or harmful, *magnitude* is about how much value each holds and *probability/frequency* is about how likely or how often these acts occur. In negotiated exchanges, however, the only uncertainty is the magnitude and value of the act, as in bilateral negotiations, it would not be expected from parties to negotiate good for harm (Coyle-Shapiro and Diehl, 2017). As for the risk factor for both of these exchanges, the risk factor for reciprocal exchange is that of non-reciprocation, while the main risk factor for the negotiated exchange is the 'risk of exclusion' for the parties in the case of failure to reach an agreement with the desired partner (Molm, 2003:42; Molm, Peterson, and Takahashi, 1999:881-882).

To wrap up, according to Seppänen (2008), social exchange theory revolves around four concepts: *reciprocity*, *long-term relationships*, *dyadic exchange*, and *rationality.* Indeed, reciprocity has been at the very center of SET in that the anthropological works by both Malinowski (1922) and Mauss (1925) have been landmarks in showing how *reciprocity* allows for trust to build when the receiver of the gift reciprocates with something of *equivalent* value and how the gift giver's (donor's) mere action of giving puts him in the position of having the expectation that the receiver will '*reciprocate,'* thus prove trustworthy. Similarly, the loss of trust becomes inevitable if one party to the exchange fails to reciprocate and thus proves untrustworthy. Thus, the process of gift giving and the subsequent actions by the other party will give clues as to the trustworthiness of the latter. Supporting this, Blau (1964:107) states that doing a favor shows in another, and the reciprocation of this favor by the other is the justification of this trust. In that sense, the norm of reciprocity serves as an ignition for an exchange to start, and secondly, once the reciprocity is established between two parties, it creates a sense of trust for the parties that they can rely on each other, and thus it serves as a "stabilizing mechanism" to maintain or enhance trust in the relationship (Coyle-Shapiro and Diehl, 2017:200). However, according to Seppänen (2008:29), the reciprocity between the exchange partners is a never-ending cycle, with one party always owing something to the other party, which leads to a *long-term* relationship. The dyadic aspect of the SET makes its assessment be based on dyads—two entities—although socially, actors are part of networks or groups of networks (Seppänen, 2008:28). The rationality aspect of SET, be it on an interpersonal or organizational level, is about actors' efforts to maximize their profits and lower their losses (cost) which is the deciding point for their exit from a relationship (Coyle-Shapiro and Diehl, 2017: 199; Seppänen, 2008: 28).

3.5.1.1. Power and dependence in social exchange

By now, our understanding of social exchange theory has directed us to the point that it is viable to see social exchange theory and its proponents as classical and contemporary (Molm, 2003; Molm, Peterson, and Takahashi, 1999). Such a division is best represented by reciprocal exchanges and negotiated reciprocal exchanges. The latter has been the focus of contemporary social exchange theorists, studying the phenomenon with binding agreements in place (Molm, 2003). Such a division does not only bring along a division between classical and contemporary, but also different implications for the concepts of *power*, t*rust*, *fairness*, and *commitment* (Molm, 2003). Indeed, with a general view to *reciprocal* and *negotiated exchange*, one could logically place the former in the scope of affect-based trust and the latter in cognitive-based trust, as in the former, without any agreement in place between parties, there is more space for feelings such as trust and fairness to progress and develop in comparison with the latter, in which such feelings are minimized by way of terms being specified in the agreement. For the leading scholars of social exchange theory (Blau, 1964; Emmerson, 1972) there exists a connection between *social exchange* and *power*. At the very center of the issue lies the concept of *inequality*, which comes about when some actors in society control more valued resources than others and which, in turn, leads to social debts (Cook, Cheshire, and Gerbasi, 2018). Accroding to Cook, Cheshire, and Gerbasi (2018: 166), this unequal distribution of valuable resources, creating "social debts," is best settled by acts of subjugation, which in turn, leads to a self-perpetuation of inequalities in exchange relationships characterized by subordination by the less powerful and domination by the powerful.

3.5.1.2. Where is trust?

As we have discussed, *reciprocation* is the key to exchange relations. The norms of reciprocity and trust are closely connected in that successful reciprocity will lead to trust as it fosters a sense of fairness and mutual benefit. Trust, on the other hand, provides a sense of confidence, which is essential for the maintenance of exchange relations. Going back to the definition of trust, the trustor is 'expecting' that the 'trustee' will not disappoint him by not performing contrary to his expectations. The same logic applied to the early anthropological works of Malinowski (1922) and Mauss (1924) investigating the economy of exchange among tribes shows that reciprocity plays the most vital role. According to Coyle-Shapiro and Diehl (2017), in these exchange relations, the gift giver is trusting that the counter gift will be returned by the receiver, and in the case of a failure of such a return, trust is lost. Although the gifts exchanged have no material value but that of symbolic, they serve as a reference for the trustworthiness of the receiver. The cycle of giving and taking (the act of reciprocation) of gifts of equivalent value facilitates trust building (Coyle-Shapiro and Diehl, 2017: 198).

3.5.2. Neo-institutional theory

The birth of the neo-institutionalist approach is said to have been in the late 1970s, with writers and their woks such as John Meyer and Brian Rowan (1977), Lynn Zucker (1977), and followed by DiMaggio and Powell (1983) (Alvesson and Spicer, 2019: 200). It emerged as a reaction to the behaviorist approach that was influential in the 1960s and 1970s (DİBO, 2019). The behaviorist approach took a view of institutions as being the byproduct of individual choices, an approach that ignored the social context. Therefore, both old-institutionalism and new institutionalism are skeptical of the rational actor model in organizational studies and view institutionalization as a context-dependent process that makes organizations less rational by limiting the paths they can take. Both stress organizations and their relationships with their environment and aim at bringing out dimensions of reality that would otherwise contradict the formal view of organizations (Fidan, 2017: 4). Even so, an understanding of the neo-institutional theory goes through a good understanding of the old institutionalism first.

The old institutionalism was identified by an organization's adoption of certain policies and routines and its local acceptance, thus turning into a self-sustaining body that operated independently (Powell and Bromley, 2015: 764). That is, the old institutionalism adopted an internal view of organizations, seeing the organizational structure as an adaptive tool that is shaped in response to the characteristics and commitments of internal participants within the organization as well as the external constraints and influences from the environment (Fidan, 2017). This process of adaptation, according to Fidan (2017: 3), represents 'institutionalization in the view of old institutionalism. This internal view focused on the internal dynamics of organizations has been challenged by the neo-institutional view, which extends the focus towards understanding how the external environment influences the formation of organizations, exploring how the broader social context shapes organizations' formal structures and policies, and thereby increasing their "legitimacy" (Powell and Bromley 2015). This new turn in organizational theory and sociology is also a rejection of the rational actor model, a focus that regards institutions as standalone factors, and instead it takes the turn towards cognitive and cultural explanations and an exploration of properties of 'supra-individual' units of analysis, which cannot be simplified to consequences of individual attributes and motives (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991). This theoretical approach is, thus, predicated on the premise that the behaviors of social actors such as individuals, groups, or organizations are guided by predefined patterns and rules embedded in the environment in which they interact, and thus these actors are viewed as social entities rather than being considered as rational or calculative (Brattström and Bachmann, 2017: 137). The institutional framework, which is at the very core of this theoretical approach, is constituted by established patterns, rules, and norms of social behavior (Brattström and Bachmann, 2017). Bearing similarity with Gidden's structuration theory, neo-institutionalism also makes the case that there is a two-way interaction between the agency and the social *structures*, the dynamic interplay between the two in which the social structures (institutions) guide or influence the agencies' (actors) behavior instead of determining it; and social structures come into existence as a result of their being constantly reproduced by the actors (Brattström and Bachmann, 2017). In this view, for organizations in highly institutionalized environments, organizations' survival depends on 'conformity' to the institutional environments. Meyer and Rowan (1991) explicate this as organizations' ability "to conform to and become legitimated by environmental institutions." In line with what they call "*sagacious conformity,"* Meyer and Rowan (1991), put forward that the leadership in an organization (be it a hospital, university, etc.) requires being knowledgeable of the evolving trends and governmental programs that will help with the conformity of the organization to the outer environment, which is vital for the survival of organizations. However, it is also pointed out that this kind of conformity should take place in a highly *institutionalized environment* (Meyer and Rowan, 1991). In such an environment, the process of conformity is realized through *isomorphism*, which means that organizations mirror the institutional environment through their organizational structure, roles, and processes, and in this way, they incorporate institutionalized elements into their formal structure, which, in turn, enables them to gain legitimacy and increase their resources and survival capabilities (Meyer and Rowan 1991: 53). Being an important concept in the neo-institutional literature; isomorphism, according to Powell and

DiMaggio (1991: 67), is done by way of three channels: *1) coercive, 2) mimetic, and 3) normative*.

Coercive isomorphism, as the name denotes, comes from formal and informal pressures arising from cultural expectations of the environment in which organizations operate, as well as from the organizations they are dependent on. According to DiMaggio and Powell (1991: 67), these pressures could be in the form of coercive force, persuasion, or even an invitation to engage in collaborative efforts. In some settings, the change in the behaviors of organizations is a result of government regulations in place that tilt the behaviors of the organizations towards the change required by the regulation in place (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991: 67). It is the presence of "common legal law" that is highly influential on many dimensions of organizational structure and behavior (67). The main assumption is that organizations try to avoid coercion, which means their conformity to myths[37] and ceremony to gain legitimacy in the eyes of external audits (Möllering, 2006:63). Namely, the conformity to these myths and ceremonies may be *decoupled* from the organizations' day-to-day activities, which could be interpreted as such that there could be gaps between the formal structures and practices that an organization employs and the informal, practical ways in which it actually operates. *Mimetic isomorphism*, on the other hand, is not a result of a coercive mechanism. According to DiMaggio and Powell (1991), "uncertainty" is an important element in bringing about imitation. The ambiguity of the goals or the "symbolic uncertainty" created by the environment encourages organizations towards the behavior of imitating the structures or practices of other organizations (Powell and DiMaggio, 1991). Calling this process of one organization imitating another organization as 'modelling,' DiMaggio and Powell (1991) argue that the diffusion of organizational practices may not even be known to the organization that is modeled and that this *'diffusion'* could take place in many ways: either unintentionally and indirectly through movement of personnel between organizations, turnover, or explicitly by way of consultation firms or trade associations. The urge to model themselves on other organizations, according to DiMaggio and Powell (1991), stems from the fact that these organizations seek more legitimacy as the similar organizations emulated in the environment are perceived to be more legitimate or

[37] "Myths" refer to formal structures and practices in this context. According to Meyer and Rowan (1991:15), myths are rationalized and impersonal prescriptions that transform many social objectives into technical ones and, in a rule-like way, identify the 'appropriate means to pursue these technical objectives. And since they are highly institutionalized, to some extent, they are beyond the individual will or decision of any individual participant or organization. That is why, they are taken for granted as legitimate.

successful. In a close line of thought, they also argue that the audiences that organizations serve create the incentives for these organizations to emulate more successful counterparts; in that the greater the population served by the organization, the greater pressure the organization will feel in adapting programs or services offered by other successful organizations (69-70). Lastly, *normative pressures* are a result of professionalization, which is interpreted by DiMaggio and Powell (1991: 70)—basing their interpretation on those of Larson's (1977) and Collins' (1979)—as the united efforts of individuals in an organization to set and define parameters and methods for their profession, as well as the creation of a "cognitive" foundation and "legitimation" of their professional independence. In other words, it is based on the assumption that certain norms and characteristics of individuals from a certain field will be related to their occupations. This is translated as the homogeneity of certain traits and characteristics among those working in the same profession (Johnston, 2013: 40). Although in a given organization there are different kinds of professions differing from each other, across organizations, these professions converge with those of their counterparts (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991: 71). According to DiMaggio and Powell (1991: 71), there are two important elements leading to isomorphism in the normative sense: the first is through dependence on formal education and legitimation provided by the university specialist, and the second is by the emergence and growth of professional networks that allow for new models to quickly *diffuse* across organizations. In that sense, universities, professional training centers, and professional and trade associations are considered important vehicles through which organizational norms develop (71). Socialization can act as an isomorphic force through trade association workshops, service educational programs, consultant arrangements, etc. thus contributing to the similarity (isomorphism) of professions in a field (Powell and DiMaggio, 1991: 72). The normative pressures affect the operations and structure of a given organization, which leads the organization to change or adapt its structure to the expected institutionalized norms (Johnston, 2013). To recap, the isomorphism through normative pressure takes place through socialization that equips actors with special 'cognitive bases' and legitimation, and this, in turn, shapes how actors perceive and relate to it in their social environment, framing their actions and expectations in line with the institutionalized norms and roles (Möllering, 2006: 64). Once these norms and roles are internalized, actors' actions become consistent with their self-image or societal expectations, which, in turn, creates a standardized, recognizable, and legitimate way of behaving (Möllering, 2006: 64).

Another concept worth analyzing within the framework of new institutionalism is that of *decoupling,* as emphasized by Meyer and Rowan (1991). At its most basic sense, decoupling is when organizations that are expected to follow certain rules and standards try to keep their official procedures separate from the actual work they do. They do this to minimize inspection, evaluation, and control of their activities; instead of sticking to formal rules, these organizations rely on more causal ways of working together and adjusting to each other's needs (Meyer and Rowan, 1991: 57). The underlying logic is that the attempts of institutionalized organizations to coordinate and control activities lead to "conflicts" and loss of "legitimacy," which is why these organizations separate (decouple) their formal structure from their day-to-day activities and from each other (Meyer and Rowan, 1991: 57). To put it differently, the decoupling for organizations is that there is a difference between the day-to-day activities of an organization in comparison with what its formal structure would require it to do. Through *decoupling*, organizations' responses to their practical considerations vary in their day-to-day activities, while at the same time they can 'maintain, standardized legitimating formal structures' (Meyer and Rowan, 1991: 58).

3.5.2.1. Where is trust?

Trust creation in inter-organizational relations can reduce transaction costs and foster the creation and pooling of new ideas (Bachmann and Inkpen, 2011). As the neo-institutionalist approach does not see the agency or actors as rational or calculative and thus sees them as following the rules in the social structure in a *"semi-conscious"* way, trust is seen as an inherent aspect of the human being, existing in all types of interactions (Brattström and Bachmann, 2017: 137). As Bachmann and Inkpen (2011: 282) point out, the commonly held belief in trust research is that the development of trust takes place at the micro-level through interaction-based face-to-face contacts between actors, and this kind of approach limits our view in the sense that it overrides the role of institutions and trust-formation processes. Studying institutions will give us the leeway and angle to see the relationship between actors from a macro-level and thus understand the role of institutions in building trust on an inter-organizational level (Bachmann and Inkpen, 2011). In that sense, the conceptualization of trust through the lenses of neo-institutionalism takes the view that trust develops from the formal and informal patterns of behavior (Bachmann and Inkpen, 2011: 286). The main assumption and logic are the 'socialness' of actors in that the relationships they are in are not independent of the context and environment in which they are embedded. This way of formulating and conceptualizing trust and its stance in the eyes of a neo-institutionalists would be that trust formation follows a kind of alignment with the norms and rules of institutions (isomorphism) in the context and environment in which the actors (trustors and trustee) operate. This way of reasoning, that of isomorphism of actors in the face of institutional environment in which they interact, according to Möllering (2006: 64), offers an alternative view of trust away from 'rationalist accounts' by bringing to the fore the *external pressu*res, *modelling*, and *socialization* (the three types of *institutional isomorphism* as tackled previously) as being important elements influencing the actions of the actors. To put it differently, trust is not based on the perceived trustworthiness of the trustee but rather on the trustor's faith and belief in the institutions and systems surrounding the action and interaction between actors; in such a line of reasoning, trust is formed through the trustee's alignment or *isomorphism* with the established norms, rules, and patterns of behavior that are institutionalized in the environment of interactions or operation (Möllering, 2006: 65). In a more concrete sense, it is the institutions in the environment that makes trustee trustworthy.

3.6. Trust, Cooperation, and Coordination from the Lenses of *Social Exchange* and *Neo-Institutional* Theory

Fitting into the main purpose of this study, as it aims to read the role of trust on cooperation and coordination through the lenses of social exchange and neo-institutional theories, it is essential to see where *trust*, *cooperation*, and *coordination* stand vis-à-vis social exchange and neo-institutional theories in the inter-organizational studies.

The Oxford Dictionary defines cooperation as 'the action or process of working together to the same end'. The word 'end' here is illustrative of at least two parties working to achieve the same goal. When these goals are not aligned or *misaligned*, then 'cooperation concerns' arise (Gulati, Wohlgezogen, and Zhelyazkov, 2012). This way, in their definition of cooperation, Gulati et. al. (2012: 533) emphasize *"the joint pursuit of agreed-on goals"* with a common understanding of the parties as to their roles and benefits. The alliance of the partners involves organizations' negotiating their readiness as to what they are ready to contribute, as in time, resources, etc., versus what benefits they would get, which defines the 'intended scope' or 'intended extent' of the partnership (Gulati et al. 2012). These inputs (contributions) by the organization in exchange for the expectations of the outputs (benefits) result in *interdependence*, and according to Gulati and Sytch (2007) and Gulati et al. (2012), the higher the extent or scope of the partnerships, i.e., the more inputs and more expected outcomes, the bigger will be the interdependence and thus the greater need for cooperation. So, considering the interdependence of actors through the resources shared, a cooperation concern will come about when the parties to the partnership do not act in accordance with their contributions or benefits (Gulati et al., 2012: 534). Since deviations from the agreement are called 'cooperation failure,' these deviations can take place for several reasons, such as that organizations may want to contribute less than agreed upon or they might claim more benefits by way of misappropriation of the resources or outcomes of the partnership, or they could simply take place because of the strong bargaining position of one party to exploit the terms of the partnership in its favor (Gulati et al., 2012). This, in the end, tilts the partnership towards its deterioration, or more correctly, actors' investment in the relationship takes a reverse form, one that is intended to dissolve the partnership (Gulati et al., 2012). Especially for the for-profit organizations in economic exchange relations, because of the profit-maximizing efforts of parties, these misaligned goals are more marked.

Coordination, on the other hand, is a more complex phenomenon; according to Gulati and his colleagues (2012), it comes to be defined as: *"the deliberate and orderly alignment or adjustment of partners' actions to achieve jointly determined goals."* Here, the important point not to be missed is the fact that coordination in a way contributes to and encapsulates the cooperation itself in that by coordinating tasks, one also accomplishes cooperation as it involves alignment of goals (Gulati et al., 2012). On the other hand, this view has been challenged as the relationship between cooperation and coordination is further clarified by the fact that the presence of coordination in an inter-organizational relationship does not necessarily mean the presence of cooperation in the same relationship. In that regard, in the literature on inter-organizational relations, cooperation and coordination have come to be considered as distinct facets of inter-organizational relationships (Brattström and Bachmann, 2017: 318). Coordination involves the specification and operation of mechanisms for information sharing, decision-making, and feedback that help partners in a partnership to synchronize and organize their efforts so that the resources are utilized efficiently and effectively (Gulati et al., 2012: 537). Since coordination stands for the pursuit of the efforts of the organizations to synchronize and give out intended results, the nature of the collaboration of such efforts, that is, the internal requirements and external influences that shape partnerships, is something that has to be established and agreed upon by the involving parties (Gulati et al., 2012: 537). The challenge to coordinate the activities of the organizations is named as *coordination concerns* (Brattström and Bachmann, 2017: 131). *Coordination concerns* come about not because the organizations are not eager to work together for the sake of maximizing their organizations' interests; rather, they appear as a result of their inability to align their 'interdependent activities,' which implies that *cooperation concerns* could exist irrespective of the coordination concerns or the other way around (Brattström and Bachmann, 2017: 131). In line with that, it is stated that even organizations with aligned goals and good intentions suffer from coordination challenges; their struggle being devising practical solutions about who will do *what*, by *when*, and *how* (Gulati et al., 2012: 537). It is especially vital that organizations adapt to each other's practices and structures by adopting rigid roles, processes, and communication channels; not being able to come up with *ad hoc* solutions to emerging problems can lead to failure on the part of the partners to reach their objectives (Gulati et al., 2012: 537). And as coordination in essence requires division of labor and thus interdependence of tasks between organizations, it is inherent in all inter-organizational relationships; thus, there is a need for mechanisms in every inter-organizational relationship that will help facilitate information exchange, engagement in joint planning, and synchronization of timing and sequencing of actions (Gulati et al., 2012: 537-538). In a way, the meta goal of coordination is to mitigate *uncertainties* caused by internal tasks and external influences, which can be interpreted as such that there is a correlation between high interdependence, high uncertainty in terms of tasks and external influences, and the need for more comprehensive forms of coordination (Gulati et al., 2012: 538).

Coordination concerns can stem from a variety of reasons. The parties involved may have different systems and routines, and the multiplicity of hierarchical structures occupied by multiple individuals can make the coordination difficult (Brattström and Bachmann, 2017: 131; Gulati et al., 2012: 539). Added to these are the historical backgrounds of the parties involved, as their working principles and cultural practices may differ from one another, which also makes coordination difficult.

When it comes to the role of trust in cooperation and coordination in inter-organizational relationships through the lenses of *social exchange* and *neo-institutional theories*, it becomes essential to see how these concepts relate to one another, and in the case of this study, especially how they could be of use to see and analyze the *cooperative* and *coordinative* actions of HOs, I/NGOs for the specific purpose of this study. As we have discussed above, the main assumption in the *social exchange theory* is that trust is a natural result of exchange relationships that are characterized by *reciprocity*. Although the role of trust in inter-organizational aspect has not been addressed within social exchange theory (Brattström and Bachmann, 2017), the most important aspect of social exchange theory vis-à-vis trust building is that trust is seen as a phenomenon developing over time. The repeated exchanges between two actors will lead to cooperative norms, hence offering vital perspectives into the gradual formation of trust between them (Brattström and Bachmann, 2017: 137). The neo-institutional perspective, however, takes a perspective that is not solely at the micro level, i.e., seeing trust formation as a dyadic relationship factor; rather, it offers insight into the roles of institutions as having essential roles in understanding the trust formation processes between actors (Bachmann and Inkpen, 2011; Brattström and Bachmann, 2017). Table 3.1 below is illustrative of how the concepts of *trust, cooperation, and coordination* relate to each other from the perspectives of *social exchange* and *neo-institutional* theories. This table is to serve us as an analytical tool to analyze and interpret some of the findings of this research, exploring the inter-organizational relationships of the I/NGOs operating in the Syrian cross-border context from the Türkiye/Gaziantep hub.

Table 3.1. Theoretical framework on the role of trust in cooperation and coordination through the lenses of Social Exchange and Neo-institutional Theories (adapted and taken from Brattström and Bachmann (2017)

	Social Exchange Theory	**Neo-institutional Theory**
Conceptual background	Trust is seen as a taken-for granted result of positive social interactions	Trust is considered as an inherent element, present in all kinds of relationships
Trust and cooperation in inter-organizational relationship	Trust alleviates concerns of opportunism and breach of trust would also breach relationship-specific norms in the dyadic relationship.	The failure of cooperation is not considered as a key aspect of trust
Trust and coordination in inter-organizational relationships	-Trust indirectly facilitates coordination by allowing a more flexible task coordination. -Trust enables serial equity in repeated exchanges and this plays a facilitating role in the coordination of mutual expectations	Institutionalized trust fosters stability and predictability and thus enhancing coordination.

3.7.Inter-organizational Trust: State of the Science

Organizational trust has caught the attention of scholars as much as *trust* itself. The early works on inter-organizational trust have covered a wide range of aspects of inter-organizational relationships, ranging from theoretical explorations to empirical implications (see, for instance, Akbar Zaheer and Jared Harris, 2006; Bachmann and Inkpen, 2011; Brattström and Bachmann, 2017; Schmidt and Schreiber, 2019; Zaheer et al., 1998). The importance of role of trust, especially in affecting the actions and performance of organizations involved in dyadic or network relationships, such as strategic alliances (Akbar Zaheer and Jared Harris, 2006), has been emphasized. However, as we have discussed above and as definitions of trust have indicated, trust is an inherently individual concept, and one of the greatest challenges faced is the translation of it into an organizational domain. Quite in line with such a challenge, Zaheer et al. (1998), in their seminal work, set out to explore interpersonal and interorganizational trust dynamics and investigate the role of trust on negotiation costs, conflict, and overall performance in inter-firm relationships. Their explorations have not only been important in identifying interpersonal and interorganizational trust as different constructs and highlighting their different roles in the context of interorganizational relationships, but they have also underscored the importance of trust in interorganizational relationships, suggesting that it significantly impacts how these relationships work and their outcomes in general.

Recent literature on inter-organizational trust has focused on the role of trust in inter-firm relationships. One such study is the role of inter-firm trust in cooperative strategies in supplier-buyer relationships (Laaksonen, Jarimo and Kulmala, 2009). The findings have shown that inter-firm trust can reduce transaction costs in relationships and thus provide a comparative advantage for the partners. In a different study, Mathews (2017), basing on Mauss' theoretical principles of gift giving, receiving, and reciprocating, has investigated the role of gift giving and reciprocity on supplier-buyer relations in a mature industrial cluster where repeated exchange relations take place in which actors in embedded network relationships exchange gifts and favors within commercial transactions. His findings have suggested that gift-giving helps build trust by defining group and individual identities, maintaining relationships, and resolving conflicts. Similarly, a study aiming at investigating the relationship between relational dynamics and the development of coordination capabilities among the Fourth-Party logistics providers within a supply chain has suggested that trust, both interpersonal and interorganizational, are "convertible" form of capital, meaning that trust initially established at interpersonal level can be transformed into interorganizational trust within a supply chain context. Further, trust has been found to facilitate collaboration in logistics services (Saikouk et al., 2021). On a parallel line, Marchington, Vincent, and Cooke's (2011) study on the role of trust in the boundary spanning agents' creation and maintaining of inter-organizational relations has suggested the role of trust in effective inter-organizational contracting. Another study on trust and reliance in business relationships has stressed the anthropocentric nature of trust and suggested reliance as complementary to inter-organizational relations (Mouzas, Henneberg and Naudé, 2007). Tackling the role of institutions in the development of trust in inter-organizational relationships, Bachmann and Inkpen (2011) present a conceptual framework for research on institutional-based trust, highlighting the role of institutions in trust formation between actors versus interaction-based trust. In so doing, they also discuss four mechanisms and situations through which institutions affect trust-building processes in business relationships, and hence the role of institutions on the inter-organizational level.

There are also few studies tackling inter-organizational trust, taking humanitarian entities as units of analysis. For instance, studying trust-building and collaboration among field-level information and communication technology (ICT)—which NGOs responding to crises form among themselves at the head-quarter level to better coordinate crises by sharing information, internet access, satellite info, etc., Saab et al. (2013), have found that building trust through collaborative efforts among the ICT's at the field level is essential for effective coordination across organizations. In their case study of an Indian NGO investigating the role of trust in the context of relief supply chains, Awasthy et al. (2019) have focused on the verification of the three types of trust formation: *companion-based trust*, *competence-based trust,* and *commitment-based trust,* with the results suggesting that companion-based trust is more prevalent in developmental programs while competence-based trust is important during disaster and non-disaster times. Another study (Prakash, Roy and Charan, 2022) on the mitigation of interorganizational conflicts in humanitarian logistics collaboration investigated the role of contractual agreements and trust. The findings have suggested that in the initial phase of humanitarian logistics response (high environmental uncertainty), contracts are shown to increase conflicts, while in the recovery phase (low environmental uncertainty), they mitigate conflicts. Contractual agreements interact with *trust* to mitigate conflicts, offering the prospect of a combination of these two factors in reducing conflicts, although *trust,* acting alone, serves best in reducing conflicts (Prakash et al., 2022). Stephenson (2005), inquiring into what is called the "coordination dilemma" in humanitarian action, puts forward that instead of an insistence on a top-down structure in an authority for coordination in humanitarian action, organizations working in emergencies should be seen as social networks, and efforts to change how they work together and fostering a culture of collaboration can span operational coordination across organizations; and for that matter, he explores what forms of trust can be employed to reach enhanced coordination among humanitarian organizations. Similarly, challenging the conventional view of single authority—the top-down approach—as a solution to the coordination mechanism in humanitarian aid, Stephenson and Schnitzer (2006) argue that trust is a precondition to effective coordination and that its expansion is affected by many operational and strategic factors.

Due to the nature of humanitarian operations—be it a humanitarian disaster or a conflict-driven humanitarian crisis—as they involve uncertainty and require high degrees of interdependence in order to achieve the goals of reaching out to the needy, time is an essential issue and the organizations involved have to act hastily to respond to the needs. Accordingly, the application of the trust literature to the studies of inter-organizational relations in the non-profit sector has mostly involved the role of *swift trust.*

One of such the earliest studies is by Tatham and Kovács (2010), who aim at expanding the understanding of *swift trust* in hastily formed networks with a view to improving relief operations in rapid on-set disaster situations. Their findings have suggested that information coming from third parties about the organizations and individuals involved in humanitarian operations helps with swift trust formation; knowing the track record of individuals and their roles in past operations helps build effective teams quickly. In addition, they argue that the development of common rules, such as standardized operation procedures and common forms, is seen as crucial for the interoperability of humanitarian logisticians from different organizations. Similarly, Dubey, Altay, and Blome (2019) apply commitment-trust theory to the humanitarian context, and their findings suggest that information sharing and behavioral uncertainty reduction serve as enablers of *swift trust,* which is the *mediating* variable for successful supply chain coordination. In another study, Dubey, Gunasekaran, et al. (2019) study the big analytics capability as an organizational culture can increase trust and collaborative performances between the civil and military organizations involved in disaster relief operations. Their findings, among others, underscore that big analytics capability has a positive effect on swift trust and collaborative performance. In another recent study, Schiffling et al. (2020) examine the role of *swift trust* and *swift distrust* in facilitating co-opetition in the uncertainty and interdependence setting of humanitarian organizations using commitment-trust theory. Their findings suggest that both *swift trust* and *swift distrust* enable *coopetition*, further implying that *swift trust* and distrust co-habit in such settings as coopetition involves simultaneous cooperation and competition (Schiffling et al., 2020). Interestingly, the interest in Blockchain Technology (BT) in recent years, has also caught the attention of humanitarian supply chain actors such as donors and government agencies (Dubey et al., 2020). Accordingly, there is also academic interest in the use of BT and its further implications. In that respect, (Dubey et al., 2020), in their work, have proposed a theoretical model as to how BT can affect the transparency of the operational supply chain and *swift trust* among the actors involved in humanitarian disaster relief operations. Their findings suggest that the BT-mediated swift trust can help improve collaboration among the humanitarian actors and thus enhance supply chain resilience.

Within the purview of the humble literature presented above, it is noticed that the role that trust plays in inter-organizational relationships has been mostly confined to the relationships between business entities, i.e., firms, and the investigation and practical analyses of the role of trust on inter-organizational relationships among the non-profit entities are scant (with the existing one focusing primarily on swift trust) and require more attention, especially considering the ever-changing and complicated nature of the humanitarian crises around the world. Also, considering that *cooperation* and *coordination* are two indispensable features of humanitarian aid delivery, it becomes vital to explore and analyze what factors affect these. During humanitarian conflicts and disasters, it is vital that aid reaches the people in need as quickly as possible, which requires optimum cooperation and coordination among the humanitarian organizations. Although it is true that most organizations, especially those of international character, have a prior history of working together in different crises around the world, their involvement in every new crisis involves new humanitarian actors that are of local character, either well-established before the crisis or ad-hoc groups emerging from the ashes of the crisis itself. With the heat and emergency of the conflict, HOs have, but few options to rely on each other in the initial phases of the crisis in order for cooperation and coordination to become effective. They need to establish trust rapidly—swift *trust*—to respond to humanitarian needs. With this perspective in mind and in the specific case of the Syrian crisis, which has been in place for more than eleven years, as of this writing, with no end on the horizon, it becomes essential to see how swift trust among the HOs (local NGOs and international NGOs) has transformed over time, how its nature has changed, and how different dynamics and influences in terms of key political events and developments have affected the role of trust on cooperation and coordination of the operations of the HOs working especially in the NWS from across Türkiye. In that regard, seeing also that the literature on inter-organizational trust is primarily focused on inter-firm relations—profit-making sector—it is also of high importance to see how trust functions, if it does, among the non-profit entities, as they are serving the role of being the leading actors that are on the frontline of complex and *ever-protracted* humanitarian crises. This research seeks to address this aspect in the literature by examining the dynamics of *trust*, *cooperation,* and *coordination* among the local NGOs and international NGOs in the specific context of the Syrian crisis from the lenses of *social exchange* and *neo-institutional* theories.

4. METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, the research methodology for this exploratory qualitative study regarding the role of "trust" in cooperation and coordination among the NGOs in the Syrian Crisis is to be given. The research at hand is a combination of normative and empirical study; that is, it is exploratory qualitative research. Therefore, in this chapter, the general direction of the research within the framework of the "social exchange" and "neo-institutional" theories is drawn, and subsequently, the relation between the theory and empirical data is discussed. Also, in this chapter, general procedures, data collection, sampling, analysis methods, and, ethical issues are discussed. Table 4.1 below shows the general research methodology followed in this study.

4.1.Research Questions

This study has sought to answer the questions below within the framework of the "social exchange" and "neo-institutional" theories. However, named by some scholars as *progressive focusing* (Parlett and Hamilton, 1972), the initial research questions may be modified and replaced by new ones. In that line, some of the sub-questions had to be modified as the investigation into the case deepened and it became apparent that those questions needed modification.

RQ1: What has been the role of trust—in relation to *cooperation* and *coordination*—through the indicated phases of the Syrian crisis (see Table 4.2. for these phases) among humanitarian aid agencies in the cross-border response (INGOS, and local NGOs) based in Türkiye's Gaziantep province?

RQ2: How have the relationships among the INGOs and local NGOs been affected by the landmark events, processes, or critical junctures in Syrian crisis humanitarian aid during the different phases?

4.2.Working Hypotheses

In connection with the theoretical framework as well as the preliminary knowledge on the subject, the following working hypotheses have been developed:

WH1: The protracted nature of the Syrian crisis is expected to have a positive impact on trust-building between local NGOs and INGOs.

WH2: Trust has played a significant role in the *cooperation* and *coordination* among the INGOs and NGOs in the Syrian cross-border context.

WH3: There is a correlation between trust and the localization process.

WH4: In the Syrian cross-border context, the presence of various external factors at different levels is expected to positively correlate with the development of trust among the cooperating and coordinating NGOs.

4.3.Research Design

This study utilized exploratory qualitative research methods, where explorative research questions were answered to produce qualitative rather than quantitative data. This research may be considered a multi-method qualitative study since more than one qualitative method was utilized.

While descending (quantitative) methodologies are performed at the level of the general population, qualitative (ascending) methodologies rather involve at the local level and are adapted to selected groups (Faugier and Sargeant, 1997: 791). The main purpose in quantitative studies is to propose a 'representative' sampling to make inferences about the whole population. However, the qualitative strategies, since they are non-generalizable, attempt to give the utmost "theoretical understanding of a social process" (791). In its very nature, qualitative research involves an active researcher in interaction with the participants and the data that come from them (Corbin and Strauss, 2008:26).

Furthermore, it is the flexibility and openness of this kind of research that contrast with quantitative research, for which rigor is an essential element (Corbin and Strauss, 2008:26). Qualitative research is dynamic, and this dynamism holds the researcher in a constant loop in the research process, making them interact with each other constantly during all steps of the research. Hence, the research process in qualitative research requires constant dynamic interaction among all the elements of the research.

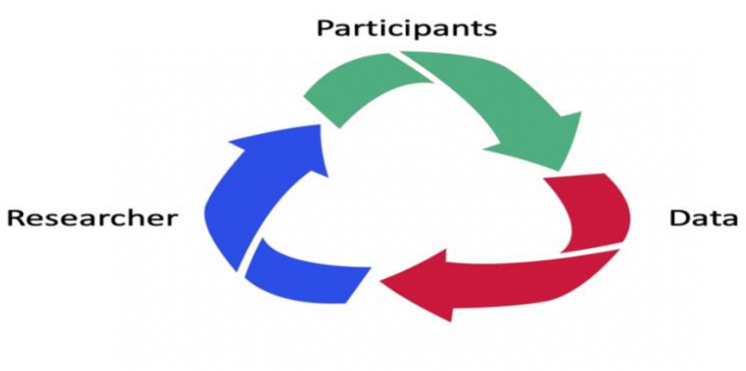

Figure 4.1. The dynamic process of research (author's own compilation)

Good research is also about how trustworthy it is. The trustworthiness[38] in research will have different criteria to be met depending on the type of research. In quantitative research, trustworthiness is achieved through internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity, while in qualitative inquiry, it is attained by means of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018a:57; Stumpfegger, 2017). Credibility, which is about the richness of data and analysis, can be attained by ways of triangulation of methods, sources, etc., such as peer debriefing, persistent observation, and member check, among others (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018a; Stumpfegger, 2017). Replacing the 'external validity' in quantitative research, *transferability* signifies the transfer of the research results to similar contexts. When assessing the transferability of research findings, it is vital to pay attention to the differences in time and context (Guba and Lincoln, 1982:241). In that sense, the generalizability of research of a qualitative nature is discounted on the grounds that the phenomena under investigation will not be free from context and time, although in some cases some degree of transferability can be achieved depending on contextual and temporal similarities (Guba and Lincoln, 1982:238). In the 'rationalist paradigm,' reliability is an issue of 'replicability' meaning that research should show the feature of being repeatable under the same circumstance in a different place and time. However, in a qualitative inquiry, there is an emerging and dynamic design that prevents replication as a second researcher could choose a "different path" from the same data, hence, dependability is associated with *stability* (Guba and Lincoln, 1982:247). It is proposed that a technique to establish dependability is through "dependability audit (including the audit trail) (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018a:1380). Lastly, confirmability sets out to detach the burden of objectivity from the inquirer (researcher), as the traditional rationalistic paradigm tends to see it and stands on the side of the objectivity being placed on the data; that is, the focus is on the confirmability of the data (Guba and Lincoln, 1982), which is achieved through the technique of confirmability audit (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018a:1380; Guba, 1985:319). With these perspectives in mind, qualitative research entails more documentation to attain trustworthiness (Stumpfegger, 2017).

[38] Guba and Lincoln (1985) introduced a new perspective, a new evaluation criterion and a different terminology to assess the quality of the qualitative research. They did it through shifting from traditional conventional terms of internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity to a more qualitative framework centered around the concept of "trusthworthiess" and the equivalent terminology of the new framework being credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

This research combines a normative tradition with an empirical one, where scholars have evaluated independently their functions (Halperin and Heath, 2020). It makes little sense to disjoin these two lines of research since, in many ways, they complement one another (Halperin and Heath, 2020). While empirical research deals with real-world events and political phenomena by asking the question "what is," normative research deals with ideas and thoughts and tries to answer the question "what should or ought to"(Gerring & Yesnowitz, 2006). Although the dichotomy in each camp of political theory arises from their functional differences, this in no way makes them independent of each other (Gerring and Yesnowitz, 2006; Halperin and Heath, 2020). We do not merely perceive the world as it is but also think of it how it *ought to* be (Steve Buckler, 2010). In this synthesis, empirical research should find a place in its inventory for ideas and norms, while normative research should not be devoid of facts (Gerring and Yesnowitz, 2006).

Along such a line of thought, the research at hand is a *case study*, which combines and synthesizes theoretical thinking with empirical data from the field. Therefore, in this research, the *process tracing* method will be used as an integrative part of the case study. Even though each one stands as an independent method, the latter is usually used as an analysis tool for the former. The table below shows a general picture of the methods and techniques followed in this research.

Table 4.1. Methodological outline

Type of Research	**Method(s)**	**Data Collection**	**Sampling**	**Analysis**	**Analytical Approach**
Qualitative	1.Case Study 2.Process Tracing	1.Document based 2.Key informant interviewing	1.Purposive Sampling 2.Snowballing	1.Theoretical Framework 2.Assessment Within-case analysis	Abductive

4.4.Case Study

According to Yin (2018) the nature of case studies involves two important phenomena: a) they investigate *contemporary events* (the cases) in their *real-life* context. It is a study of social interactions, which adopts a particular approach and does it by justifying the methods and techniques through a "philosophical examination" of the hypothesis and principles (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018b). However, defining a case is not an easy task, as it could be represented by a wide range of phenomena such as "an instance, incident, or unit of something and can be anything—a person, an organization, an event, a decision, an action, a location like a neighborhood, or a nation-state" (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018). Indeed, it is even proposed that anything can be a case. As Stake (2005) puts forward: "The case is one among others." It is the uniqueness of the unit of study that makes it a case among others. Such a wide range of units of research for potential cases has resulted in their categorization from less abstract to the more abstract. In his categorization, Yin (2018) illustrates individuals, organizations and small groups as being more concrete than other phenomena such as partnerships, relationships, decisions and even communities. Swanborn (2010) on the other hand, opts to classify cases at three levels: *macro, meso and micro*. At the micro level are persons and interpersonal relations, at the meso level that of organizations or institutions and the macro level involves communities and democracies. Despite the complexity and difficulty of converging at a single definition for what is a case study, some common denominators are to be found across the scholars who have tried to define it; analyzing different definitions of case studies by different scholars, one realizes that across these definitions, terms such as *in-depth, dealing with a single unit, multiple perspectives, from a real-life context* stand out. The reason why there is not a convergence around a single definition stems from the fact that the unit of analysis is *social* and usually there is more than one way to analyze social *phenomena.* This naturally takes us to an approach that a case study is any social scientific study confined to a specific time and space (Merriam, 2009; Charles, 1992). However, even while dealing with a specific case, we do indeed address a variety of different cases, as it is not possible to completely detach one social event from the others (Ragin, 1992). In line with this, for the matter of this study, bounding the case study into a specific timeline and space is not to say that it will neglect other instances (cases) in the case being studied.

Case studies are not about comparing different cases; rather, they deal with the internal examination of single cases. The reason we study a particular case in the first place is not to get informed about other cases; rather, the purpose is to have a deep understanding of the case in hand (Stake, 1995). A justifiable reason for the adoption of case studies in the current work is that it provides a holistic and in-depth explanation of social and behavioral issues, something not possible with quantitative studies (Zainal, 2007). In case studies, by going beyond statistical results, perspectives on social and behavioral themes are provided. The reason for this rationale is that quantitative methods observe data at the macro level, focusing more on the "frequency of the occurrences" while in case studies the investigation into events and processes is at *micro level*, with a detailed in-depth explanation of the case at hand (Zainal, 2007). Case studies are especially important for dealing with "causal complexity," since they involve exploration of the contextual and intervening variables that could play a role in establishing the causal mechanism for individual cases. The purpose is to give as complete a picture as possible of a situation, event, or phenomenon (Jacobsen, 2002; quoted in Krusenvik, 2016). Thus, case studies make use of considerable data from process tracing to explain the complex interactions within the case (George Bennett, 2005). The role of *process tracing* in case studies is discussed below.

Based on the definition of a case study by Yin (2018), such a study should provide us with an in-depth understanding of the *real-life* phenomenon, which should reveal "contextual conditions" surrounding the case being studied. Since case studies in real-world situations and the context in which they occur are embedded in each other, it is necessary to explore the relationship between the two (Yin, 2018). The will to understand the interaction between a specific context of the situation with a phenomenon makes the case study a beneficial tool (Jacobsen, 2002; quoted in Krusenvik, 2016).

Scholars have tried to categorize case study research (McDonough and McDonough, 2014; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018). Yin, for instance, has opted to classify it as *exploratory, descriptive,* and *explanatory*. Stake, on the other hand, categorizes it as being *intrinsic, instrumental,* and *collective*. Even a superficial examination of these two categorizations would clearly show there is overlap.

Case studies are not immune from criticism; indeed, they are one of the most disputed of research methods, by many scholars. The critiques against the use of case studies generally target their lack of internal validity, and external validity (Stoecker, 1991). The threat of bias on internal validity is the fear that the researcher could impact the research by the way of the so-called 'investigator effect' (Stoecker, 1991). That is to say, the case study researchers have "feelings" for the case study on which they work (Becker 1968. The issue of the generalizability has more to do with the external validity of the research. When there is only one case involved, that makes the research objectivity and generalizability difficult to achieve, hence external validity is jeopardized. Stake (1995) notes that generalizations take place within the case studied, but these should not be considered as generalizations made across different cases; rather, he sees them as a refinement of the understanding about the case tackled or *petite generalizations* as he names it. This rationale depends on the fact that the knowledge about the case can be transformed based on further observations (Stake, 1995). It should be noted, however, that case studies are not sampling studies, they are intended to give *specificities* on a single case rather than *generalities* (Stake, 1995). That's why Stake (1995) argues that what should be looked for in a case study is '*particularization*' rather than generalization, as the aim is to dig deeper into the case at hand.

That being said, case study research may be confined to one case and comparison may look contradictory, however, a good case study goes beyond a single case and may have implications beyond the context in which it is analyzed; it can be compared with different single cases with which there is relevance (Halperin and Oliver Heath, 2012). In this sense, a good case study is to have comparative power with other case studies, thus extending the contextual relevance to similar cases in different contexts. The comparative nature of case studies derives from the extent to which they are associated with wider themes, and this happens either by assessment of the existing theoretical framework in which a theory from another context is examined in a given case, or through theory generating from the case in question.

Even though the nature of case studies as a research method has long been debated and contested, at the end of the day it is the type of research question that decides what methods will serve best in case study research (Krusenvik, 2016). Likewise, it is vital to comprehend that, like any method, case studies too have their advantages and disadvantages, but the crucial point is to see them as a complementary tool to the limits and strengths of other types of research (Yin, 2018). What becomes important for case study research is to clearly determine the issue to be studied and clearly define the boundaries of the case (Merriam, 2009).

As case studies can tackle a wide variety of phenomena beyond a single person (Yin, 2018), the research at hand involves non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Türkiye's Gaziantep working cross-border in the Northwest Syria (NWS). The variety of humanitarian actors in the field has required limiting the sampling to NGOs only. Other humanitarian actors, such the United Nations (UN) bodies and government entities of the host government, are not within the scope of this research. Nevertheless, interviews with few related bodies actively working in the field with NGOs have been used to support the data obtained from the interviewees from NGOs, as well as for the purpose of giving a more detailed picture of the NGOs activities with regards to their cooperative and coordinative activities in the field. The primary criterion in selecting this case has been a response to the question: *"What groups would be the best selection for understanding the complex humanitarian cooperation and coordination mechanism in the Syrian cross-border context and the role of trust on it?"* Of course, it is not only the NGOs involved in the humanitarian responses, but for the sake of limiting the scope of the study, as well as to have a better understanding of only independent NGOs, rather than including UN bodies and government entities as main units of analysis. At the same time, it should by no means mean that all NGOs based in Gaziantep and active in cross-border operations were selected. The selection criteria of the NGOs depended on the kind of sectors in which they operated; in that sense, NGOs operating in *food* and *health* sectors or in both were selected. As Yin (2018) states, defining and bounding of a case is not an easy process and in the case of this research it is even harder as it involves many phenomena and actors. The spatial bounding criterion for the case has been the cross-border activities of the NGOs that have their base of operations in Turkey's Gaziantep province,[39] even though the NGOs operational in this province can also have their chain of activities extended to other provinces in Turkey, such as *Istanbul*, *Hatay*, *Şanlıurfa* and *Kilis*. In terms of *temporal bounding*, the start of the Syria Civil War is the beginning of the case, whereas the end of the case has been blurrier, as indeed it is an ongoing case extended over almost 11 years. In that sense, the *periodization* in the research has the end of the case being the post-COVID period. More than two years elapsed in the pandemic and with the so-called Omicron variant and the easing of restrictions by many countries around the world in 2022 could signify the quasi-end (de-facto) of the pandemic. The end date of the COVID period for this research is January 2023, although WHO declared the end of the pandemic to be May 2023. Such a bounding of the period was opted for due to the strong earthquake that hit southern and central Turkey and northwest Syria on February 6, 2023, which has been in a state of emergency and dire needs due to the Civil War in Syria since 2011.

[39] Apart from hosting the second-most Syrian refugees after Istanbul, Gaziantep is also an operation hub for humanitarian organizations working both cross-border in Northwest Syria and for the refugees currently living under Temporary Protection Law in Turkey. Due to its geographical proximity to Syria, with two border doors opening to the country, Akçakale and Karkamış, Gaziantep serves as a good logistics center together with neighboring, Şanlıurfa, Hatay, and Kilis, which also have border crossings to Syria, with which Turkey has the longest land border.

Such a large-scale humanitarian disaster also reshuffled and changed all the humanitarian action dynamics in the region, thus requiring such a bounding of time.

4.4.1. Case Study and Process Tracing

Collier (2011) defines process tracing as "systematic examination" of diagnostic evidence analyzed in line with the research questions and hypotheses adopted by the researcher. In that sense, process tracing is seen as an essential tool in qualitative research (Collier, 2011). Despite its relatively recent introduction into the qualitative research world, it is regarded as an essential part of case studies, especially for within-case analysis (Collier, 2011; George and Bennett, 2005; Tansey, 2007). The nature of the process tracing method involves exploring causal relationships and uncovering the underlying dynamics in the processes that are important. In that sense, within-case analysis allows for "robust causal analysis" as well as exploration of causal relationships and hypothesis testing based on many features of individual cases by way of explaining the *intervening processes* and observations that are involved (Mahoney, 2007). Being closely connected with a case, process tracing could add to research objectives in different ways: a) identifying novel political and social phenomena and systematically describing them; b) evaluating prior explanatory hypotheses, discovering new hypotheses, and assessing these new causal claims; (c) gaining insights into new causal mechanisms; and (d) providing an alternative means—compared with conventional regression analysis and inference based on statistical models—of addressing challenging problems such as spurious reciprocal causation and selection bias (Collier, 2011).

Collier's (2011) analysis on the use of process tracing opens the way to consider that process tracing can be done in at least two ways: (1) *descriptive inference* and (2) *causal inferences*. The very nature of the present case study will allow for the application of the first option, though it does not mean a complete rejection of the second. The reason being that although there are studies on cross-border aid in the Syrian crisis, there is a need for research with a close-up investigation into the protracted nature of the crisis and how it has affected the interactions and behaviors of humanitarian aid organizations towards each other in terms of partnership relations and their implications in the process. Such a study should lead to the uncovering of important landmarks in the intervening dynamics. Along that line, the *process tracing* method utilized in this research is to be centered more on descriptive inferences trying to diagnose and detect important structures of the process and fathom the general dynamics governing these structures.

Coining it differently, Hall (2012) sees process tracing as a 'systematic process,' which is not only an investigation into the process, but also into the outcome. The very case at hand is not only making use of the data obtained through empirical observations,[40] but employs the so-named *'social exchange theory'* and '*neo-institutional'* theories to examine how empirical data align with and inform theoretical framework applied to interactions of the I/NGOs. While the core premises of process tracing are associated with the detailed exploration of causal processes, in this study the generality of the process has been preferred over a minute exploration of each step in the process. This mainly stems from the timeline of the research as well as the lack of antecedent data sources.

Despite the fact that the onset of the Syrian Humanitarian Crisis dates back to 2011, the multidimensionality of the crisis and relatively few documents published on the inter-organizational behaviors of I/NGOs has led to tackling the phenomenon from many different angles, thus preventing the concentration of data in any particular direction. To support the principles of the process tracing method and explore the complex processes involved in the case with regard to the dynamics of causality involved, an approach of *periodization* of the timeline in the case has been adopted. The present case is partitioned according to three important events that I regard as being touchstones in terms of defining *critical junctures* in the process.

The first period is from the inception of the Syrian Crisis in 2011 until 2015, which covers a timeline in which developments such as the release of UN Resolution 2165 (2014), which allowed for direct humanitarian access into Syria from four crossings in Turkey, as well as this period witnessed the US and Russian interventions (2015) inside. The selection of this period is vital in that it opened the way for many NGOs to carry out cross border operations from within Turkey. At the same time the military intervention on the part of US and Russia with different interests led to some changes in the dynamics of the Syrian crisis on many levels, including humanitarian aid.

The second timeline starts in 2016 and continues until the eruption of the Nouvelle Corona virus (COVID-19) starting in the first quarter of 2020, with the official end of which was declared by the WHO as May 2023. The selection of the timeline for this period can be attributed to two reasons: *1) the Grand Bargain meeting held in Istanbul; and 2)*

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[40] In the case of this study, observations is not intended to mean my personal observations from the field; rather, observations obtained through document-based research as well as key informant interviewing, which are the main data collection techniques used in this study. A more detailed account of the data collection techniques applied in this research is provided below.

the increasing number of refugees at the border of the EU, causing the so-called EU Refugee Crisis; 3) additionally, during this period there have been heightened regulatory measures in Türkiye concerning the registration and operations of NGOs.

The main goal of the *Grand Bargain* was to commit donors and humanitarian aid organizations to supply 25 per cent of the humanitarian funding to local and national helping bodies by 2020. Including this landmark is especially significant to help analyze the direction of partnership relations between International Non-governmental Organizations (INGOs) and local NGOs in the so-called "localization" process of humanitarian aid. It will also allow more leeway to compare the period before the agreement and after the agreement.

The third period in the study is from the inception of the COVID-19 pandemic until January 2023. What makes the selection of this timeline vital is the fact that the COVID pandemic caused many humanitarian actors, especially the INGOs, to be detached from the field[41] and implement their actions remotely, something reflected in their relations with their partners.

[41] From the very beginning of the humanitarian efforts through the cross-border mechanism, one cannot truly say that the INGOs or other UN bodies have direct presence in the Northern Syria, specifically in Northwest Syria in the case of this research. However, here the use of field refers to the setting in which INGOs, NGOs and other humanitarian organizations are based and from where their operations are being managed. In the case of this study, the hub for such organizations among the humanitarian agencies is the Gaziantep province.

Table 4.2. The periodization of the research timeline (Authors own compilation).

Period	***Event***	***Significance***
2011-2015	• The beginning of the Syrian Crisis (2011) • The UN Resolution 2165 came out (2014) • The application of the Resolution 2165 in practice (2015) • The USA and Russia intervened	• The protests in Syria turn into a civil war displacing millions of people. • The release of the resolution opened the way for cross-border humanitarian aid from Turkey at four crossings. • The intervention of the USA and Russia changed the military dynamics inside the country, developments that also affected humanitarian aid
2016-2019	• The Grand Bargain was signed (2016). • The NGOs operating in Türkiye faced increased regulatory measures. • The Covid pandemic commenced in the world (2019).[42]	• An important step towards localization of humanitarian aid was taken. • It affected the registration issues with local NGOs and thus possible partnership difficulties with INGOs or other donors • The start of the pandemic led to remote working conditions.
2020-2023	• The Covid Pandemic	• WHO organization declared end[43] to COVID as global health emergency on May 2023, however, in this study the end of the Covid period is seen as January, 2023 as on February 6th 2023 a strong earthquake hit southern and central Turkey and Syria, changing many dynamics in the humanitarian action across the region.

4.5. Data Collection

This study is qualitative research and, by its nature combines two related methods: case study and process tracing. Indeed, it would be tricky to see these two methods as separate, as the latter is often associated with the former. In that regard, as data collection tools, both document-based research and key informant interviewing have been adopted.

[42] The inception of COVID-19 is noted to be November 2019, though the official announcement of its appearance in countries vary. In Turkey, for example, the first cases were recorded on March 11th, 2020, while the first Covid-driven death was registered on March 15th (McKernan Bethan, 2020).

[43] UN News, "WHO declares end to Covid-19 as a Global Health Emergency," accessed: June 20, 2023 https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/05/1136367

4.5.1. Interviewing

Defined as ‘conversation with purpose and direction,’ interviews are widely used as a data collection technique (Given, 2008; Mills et al., 2010). It is through conversations that people make inquiries, acquire knowledge about the others and know how they feel, act, how they experience the world around them or develop individually or in groups, etc. In that sense, the history of interviewing can be traced as far back as the inception of human use of language. We are familiar with modern forms of interviews, such as in therapy, journalism, or research, other forms of interviews, such as religious confessions, oral examinations, and legal interrogations, have long existed. Interviewing as a systematic way of collecting “validated knowledge” is found in Plato’s dialogues, in which Socrates, by eclectic questioning pursues knowledge. Other examples of early use of interviewing include Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalysis sessions with patients as well as Piaget’s interviews with children (Brinkman, 2008; in Given, 2008).

This kind of “knowledge-producing” conversations have recently been labeled as qualitative interviewing. Qualitative interviewing has become not only an important aspect of humanities and social sciences, but also of other sciences (Brinkmann, 2014). The attitude about interviewing has especially been solidified among post positivist approaches in social sciences starting in the 1960s (Brinkman, 2008; in Given, 2008). There are many ways of conducting interviews. They could be formally carried out through surveys, online, on the phone, or face-to-face, and informally through, for example, ethnographic research (Given, 2008).

Choosing between the types of interviews depends on how much flexibility one would give to the respondent during the interview. This leads to a balancing act, where interviewers try to position themselves between survey questionnaires and unstructured interviews by choosing *semi-structured interviews* (Given, 2008). The preference for some structuration in the interviews is based on the desire to have the themes of the research covered as thoroughly as possible without getting off track. The researcher’s research interests are the primary concern. This balancing act requires making the distinction between how much information is provided to the respondent with the interview questions and how much is just free exchange of ideas between the interviewer and the interviewee. While survey questionnaires ‘prespecify’ the topic and possible responses to the questions, it is not the case with unstructured interviews (Given, 2008). In line with that, it is essential that there is *guiding* for the interview questions. With semi-structured interviewing, although a general format for the questions is provided, the researcher has the freedom to steer the interview in the desired direction, changing the order of the questions where appropriate (Given, 2008). This leads to the assumption that interview guidance could be done in two ways: *a)* question-based or *b)* theme-based. With the former, the questions in the interview are so designed that they cover relevant aspects of the research using an order that allows the interviewer to probe deeper with follow-up questions or probe-ups, whereas in the second option the themes of the research are listed and they are covered one by one during the interview.

In the case of the research at hand, *semi-structured interviewing* has been opted for, not only for the reasons specified above but also since this is a case study and the themes covered should remain within the case. Instead of the need to make an outline of the content and issues and ask them during the interview, the interview has been set up with basic questions that are aimed at tackling the issues around the research questions and the concepts of the study. An important reason for the structuration of the interviews is the fact that it enables a more structured data collection; a most important aspect of the *process tracing* method is to untangle issues around certain mechanisms in the case in order to explore the causal mechanism and extract the desired data that may otherwise not be visible. In line with that, the questions in the questionnaire have been *thematized* and organized in a way to extract information about certain processes pertaining to the *cooperative* and *coordinative* relationships of the NGOs based in Gaziantep with an orientation and focus towards the *periodization* of the timelines indicated in the research.

Instead of asking interview questions in a verbatim form, based on the flow of the interview, the domain of inquiry approach was used to guide the questioning sessions. Especially in cases where it was clear that the respondents already gave answers to questions that were planned to be asked later. Such an approach was also used when the interviewing was done with people, not necessarily NGO professionals. In this case, it involved people currently based abroad, and at some point, involved in the Syrian context, be it through grassroots movement, be it through involvement in NGO work especially at the initial phases of the crisis, or people currently in academia and having Syrian connections, (see Table 4.4). Table 4.3 shows some of the questions asked in the interview. The whole set of questions can be found in the appendix.

Table 4.3. Some questions in the interview guide selected based on the theme (construct)

Theme (construct)	**Question for INGOS**	**Question for NGO (local, Turkish or Syrian-led**
Cooperation	-What are the challenges when you start a cooperative relations with a local NGO (Syrian-led or Turkish?	-What are challenges when you start cooperative relations with an INGO?
Trust	-How would you define trust from an organizational perspective? -What makes an NGO trustworthy in the eyes of an INGO? -How relevant is trust in your relationships with NGOs?	-How would you define trust from an organizational perspective? -How relevant is trust in your relationships with INGOs?
Coordination	-What are the main coordination challenges in the Syrian cross-border context?	-What are the main coordination challenges in the Syrian Cross-border context? -How would you assess the coordination in the Syrian cross-border context before and after the UN Resolution (2165)?

The interviews with the target group lasted from December 2022 to February 6, 2023, when a strong earthquake hit a vast region extending from the Mediterranean to a greater part of southern and central Turkey into northwest Syria. It is important to note the influence of the earthquake on the timeline of the interviews because the earthquake changed a lot of the dynamics of the working of humanitarian organizations in the region.

Table 4.4. General demographics of the interviewees—local NGOs

<table>
<tr><th colspan="2">Number of Interviewees* (from)</th><th colspan="2">Gender</th><th colspan="3">Position at the Organization</th><th colspan="2">Years of experience in the Syrian context</th></tr>
<tr><td>Syrian-led NGOs</td><td>Turkish NGOs</td><td>Male</td><td>Female</td><td>Programs</td><td>CEO</td><td>Other</td><td>≥10 years</td><td>≥ 5 years</td></tr>
<tr><td>12**</td><td>3***</td><td>14</td><td>1</td><td>5****</td><td>4</td><td>6*****</td><td>11</td><td>4</td></tr>
</table>

*****In some organizations more than one person has been interviewed, but they have not been included in this number.

** Two of the interviewees came from organizations that hold coordinative roles in the Syrian crisis.

*** The number of interviewees from Turkish organizations is not high; the reason stemming from the fact that outside of the Turkish Red Crescent and Turkish AFAD[44] and some charities there are only few Turkish NGOs taking part in cross-border operations in NWS.

**** "Programs" here is a general term that can include roles such as *program manager* and *head of programs* in NGOs

***** Other positions include *co-founder*, *operation manager*, and etc. among others.

Table 4.5. Interview demographics of INGO professionals and others in the Syrian cross- border context

Number	**Position at the organization**	**Years of experience in the Syrian context**		**Others (N=3)**	
				Donor	1
13	Programs	**≥ 10 years**	**≥ 5 years**	Academia	1
		8	5	UN	1

4.5.2. Anonymization of the interview data

To maintain the confidentiality of the participants while still preserving the categorization and affiliation of the interviewees, the following system of anonymization for handling and presenting the data collected through the interviews has been adopted.

[44] The Turkiye Disaster Management Agency was founded with Law No.5902 after its adoption by the Turkish Parliament in 2009. The turning point was the Marmamara Earthquake of 1999, in the aftermath of which the need for reform in the area of disaster management and coordination became more visible, hence, AFAD was founded to manage and coordinate disasters and emergencies "single-handedly," as the sole government institution with authority at times of disasters or emergencies (AFAD, n.d.).

Groups of participants were formed based on the nature of their organizational affiliations. Respondents from Local Syrian NGOs, from Turkish Local NGOs, respondents as INGO professionals, and in the category of Others were given distinct codes.

- Syrian Local NGOs are denoted as SLoC and following a number identifying the respondent as in SLoC1 or SLoC2.
- Turkish Local NGOs are denoted as TLoC and following a number identifying the respondent as in TLoC1 or TLoC2.
- International NGO professionals are denoted as INGO and following a number identifying the respondent as in INGO1 or INGO2.
- The respondent in the “Others” category are denoted as MisC—meaning miscellaneous and following a number identifying the respondent as in the MisC1 or MisC2.

The coding system was done in a way to find a balance between brevity and clarity to ensure that it is understood which category of respondent is referred to while their identities are kept confidential and protected.

4.5.3. Secondary research

In addition to the primary data collected via interviews and questionnaires, essential qualitative data during the initial phases of the research and later in the analysis section from articles, I/NGO publications, academic reports, and works from the so-called grey literature—encompassing documents published by the UN or governments— have been collected.

4.6. Sampling

As discussed above, generalization is not the primary objective of case studies; rather, they aim to provide an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon by digging into the process (es) that constitute the case in question. Non-probability sampling is better suited to this present research, since unlike probability sampling techniques, it allows a subjective (non-random) selection of a unit from a population to be studied, which is the primary purpose of this study. Non-probability sampling better serves this case since the purpose of the case study is not to make generalizations across different cases but rather to explore and do an in-depth investigation of a single case (George and Bennett, 2005; Yin, 2018). Notwithstanding, there are some criteria and purposes in the case of non-probability sampling as well; that is, arbitrariness is not the case in the sample selection. That said, there is not only one sampling technique used; it adopts a multi-sampling method approach. Therefore, the following non-probability sampling techniques were adopted to find the population of interest that can best represent the purpose of the research.

4.6.1. Purposive sampling

In probability sampling, there is a non-zero chance of each element to be selected through a random selection procedure. Non-probability sampling, however, does not involve a non-zero probability of selection. Rather, the selection of elements of the population is being done in line with the purpose of the research, and it is done in a subjective manner(Lavrakas 2008: 148). Considered one of the three non-probability sampling techniques—the other two being convenience sampling and quota sampling—in purposive sampling, as the name denotes, the sample is selected intentionally by qualitative researchers in keeping with the purpose of the study (Salmons, 2014:39). However, purposive sampling is not convenience sampling, as the latter signifies the ease of collecting data without the need for expert judgment regarding the elements to be included in the sampling (Lavrakas, 2008: 148-149). In purposive sampling, it is the criteria on which the selection of the respondents is based that matters, not the number of respondents (Wilmot, 2005:221). The idea is to make the sampling to be as much representative as possible in terms of the breadth and diversity of the population (Wilmot, 2005). On that note, the population of interest in the case of this research is the humanitarian organizations in the Syrian crisis in the cross-border response. The actors involved in any humanitarian response are multiple and diverse and so is the case with the Syrian crisis (see Fig. 2.5.). However, the sampling frame of this study comprises certain I/NGOs. The main criteria of choosing some NGOs from among many others was based on their sectors of operation. The sectors of operation selected for this research are *health* and *food.*[45] The criteria for choosing I/NGOs only from these two sectors among many others is not to say that these I/NGOs' operations or activities in their respective sectors are the main concern of this study. Rather, the idea was to reach as many organizations as possible that could have partnership relationships with each other during

[45] Even though here the food sector is denoted, it is indeed taken as a component of the Food Security and Livelihood (FSL) component of programs that NGOs carry out. In line with that, NGOs with FSL programs are considered to be functioning in the food sector.

the Syrian humanitarian cross-border operations. Hence the largest two sectors were targeted.

Apart from being the core of humanitarian aid, health is also vital in terms of measuring the impact of this aid (European Commission, 2021). The EU, one of the largest health care providers, supports healthcare programs with 200 million euros every year, and Syria is one of the top beneficiaries of this aid (European Commission, 2021). Similarly, the food sector, together with health, is the largest sector. According to a recent report, more than 12 million people in Syria have difficulty in terms of meeting their daily food needs (Reliefweb, 2021). In that respect, these two sectors of humanitarian aid are essential in providing us with an arena in which many of the local and international aid organizations are operating. Furthermore, choosing actors that have their activities in these two sectors was essential to limit the sampling of the research to some manageable size; so, the selection of these two sectors over the others in itself also meant scaling down the size of the research, not to mention the time-consuming aspect and costs involved in including all humanitarian organizations in the sampling frame (see Faugier and Sargeant, 1997: 791). Notwithstanding, the interviews carried out with other government-based NGOs and UN agencies served a complementary role as a part of the data collected for the following reasons, though these organizations are not the main units of analysis: 1) to get a better insight into how the coordination aspect of the Syrian humanitarian crisis in the cross-border context works; *2) to give an outsider/objective perspective on how these organizations perceive cooperative relations among the I/NGOs*.

For interviewing, key informant interviewees from the local NGOs (Turkish and Syrian-led based in Gaziantep), professional aid workers from the INGOs based in Gaziantep, and the UN agencies were selected. There was not a random selection of the humanitarian workers working in respective organizations; in the case of the local NGOs, either the *CEOs* or the *partnership managers*, and for the INGOs, those having experience in partnership manager positions were selected. In that sense, the expertise to understand the inter-organizational partnership mechanism was essential. The choice of UN agencies stemmed from their connection to the *health* and *food* sectors as well as their coordinative roles in the field. Reaching out to these organizations and the interviewees in these organizations had its own curveballs in the research process. This was overcome by starting with the acquaintances in the field and then expanding it further with the so-called snowballing technique, which will be elaborated upon in the following section.

4.6.2. Snowballing as the sampling technique and the process

As the name may well explain, with the snowball technique, the researcher starts off by reaching the sample population through the acquaintances that are informed of the research area, and then it expands into a larger population to have access to enough data for the research to be meaningful for the researcher. That is, it is done through a process that involves one reference at the beginning and then moves to the next (Denscombe 2003, 16). The first reference nomination of another reference thus snowballs from the nominee to another, if possible (Denscombe, 2003). This kind of sampling technique is usually used for populations that are hard to reach due to the special circumstances they find themselves in, such as in the case of gathering data about sex workers, drug dealers, etc. Regarding the use of the snowball technique, Hendrick and Blanken (1992) make the following remark:

> *If the aim of a study is primarily explorative, qualitative and descriptive, snowball sampling offers clear practical advantages in obtaining information on difficult-to- observe phenomena, in particular in areas that involve sensitive, illegal or deviant issues. It provides an efficient and economical way of finding cases, that may otherwise be difficult or even impossible to locate or to contact (21).*

In the case of this study, though, one could argue that the target audience for the research may be accessible, but studies on trust, in nature, bear some sensitivity of some sort.[46] It is not always the case to use the snowballing technique when the population in question involves a stigmatized population, it may also be that the population to be studied is relatively rare and thus hard to reach (Sheppard, n.d.:174-175). As such, the humanitarian community in Gaziantep is a micro-society which has its own space of working and even socializing since there is a large population of these professionals coming either from abroad or internally from different cities across Turkey. In that sense, the sponsorship help of one reference is necessary for the buildup of the contacts required for the data collection as it helps with the trust building between the researcher and the new respondent, something that might be difficult to achieve by approaching the respondent "cold" (Denscombe 2003: 16). Biernacki and Waldorf (1981: 141; quoted in Hendrick and Blanken, 1992) point out that the snowballing technique is "…well-suited for a number of research purposes and is particularly applicable when the focus is on a sensitive issue, possibly concerning a relative matter and thus requiring the knowledge of

[46] For more information, see, Lyon et al. (2011).

insiders to locate people for the study.” Again, the privacy state of the research could be arguable, but the sensitivity of the Syrian civil war in general could be indicated as a reason for the matter to be bearing some privacy. However, here the fact is that there is a need for “insider” knowledge, not because of the sensitivity or privacy of the topic; rather, it also stems from the detachment of the field and the insufficiency of the secondary literature to explore and analyze the case owing to the uniqueness of every humanitarian situation in different contexts and with different actors. In the context of this study, starting at the pilot phase of the research, there was a need for the snowballing technique to get acquainted with the research topic. The intermediary function of the known, first-contacts of reach was essential, if not a necessity. At this stage, the contacts reached would pave the way for access to the population in the humanitarian field, not necessarily from the organizations on our list selected for the purpose of the study, nor was it necessary that they work in the Syrian context. They were humanitarian officials who previously worked in this field and now took up new professions in their lives, and at times they were people working in different humanitarian contexts around the world. Of course, the main purpose at this point was to get as familiar as possible with the topic in general and to have a greater understanding of how humanitarian action worked in the field. It was also of great help with the piloting phase of the interview questions to consult these people and get their opinions about the interview questions prepared. The contributions would usually be in the form of new suggestions, refined terminology, or simply new perspectives. It was in line with the thinking of Hemdrick and Blanken (1992) that at this stage of the work, as it involved exploration of the research topic as well as refinement of the interview questions, the nomination of the new references did not have a limit until it came to a standstill itself; the suggestions regarding refinements for the interview questions came to a point where the changes became minimal.

With the help of the contacts at the *second stage*, the new population to be accessed was narrowed to those working in the cross-border operations in the Syrian context, though even at this stage neither the sectors these people worked in nor the organizations they worked for mattered much; what mattered was that they worked in the cross-border operations in the Syrian context and had a knowledge of how the partnership relations between the humanitarian organizations in general worked, though, again, the main focus was on that of among the I/NGOs in particular. These interactions led to further refinement of the interview questions, making them fit more into the nature of the study and more to the point to get enough of information from the respondents. Also, at this point, it became clearer that the readings from the secondary literature carried out to comprehend the Syrian humanitarian context or the field of humanitarian action in general became more concrete and it made more sense terminology-wise. For instance, having previously done some reading on how small local entities—so-called local councils (LCs)—or family networks in the cross-border operation area (the area where the opposition is situated) improved into self-standing and self-sufficient NGOs (see Svoboda and Pantuliano, 2015), some seemingly technical terminology and only vaguely understood from the secondary literature readings, mostly policy papers, became more meaningful.

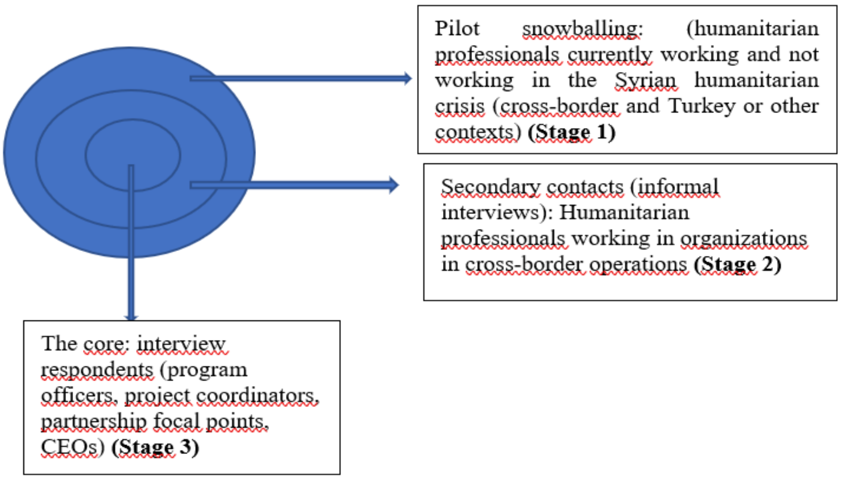

Figure 4.2. Snowballing Technique—from the periphery to the core (Author's own compilation).

Field Note. 1

At first, I took the unresponsiveness of the contacts personally, but later I realized that even individuals I was closely acquainted with were delaying our meetings and postponing them to later dates due to their workload. This being the reason, the duration between the first interview and the last one was a three-month period. Of course, the informal interviews took place quite often before the official start of the interviewing period, during it, and after.

Field Note.2

> I tried to leave the choice of the venue of the interview to the interviewee as a gesture of kindness and flexibility. They would choose places where they would usually find the opportunity to do their favorite pastime activities after the work, i.e. some preferred to do in a nargile café or some preferred cafés close to their home addresses. These choices impacted how noisy the location of the interview would be. Fortunately, though the interviewees were understanding, and they held the recording device close to themselves, thus mitigating the setback.

4.7. Data Analysis

The more than 35-hour interview data was transcribed verbatim, and during the transcription, the first coding cycle was carried out. At this cycle, the initial codes included any meaningfully related insights that were relevant to the research questions, hypotheses, and theoretical framework.

A code in qualitative analysis can be seen as a word or short phrase that "symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (Saldaña, 2021). In that sense, the first cycle coding involved a loose and flexible way of looking at the data and make some wide meanings out of it, while doing this, the process was supported by taking notes for each code and trying to figure out cross connections or even noting down some possible themes that emerged along the way. The second cycle of coding became more nuanced and it involved condensing emergent codes and abstracting as much as possible; that is, creating categories and themes across these categories.

There are two mainstream approaches adopted during the analysis of the qualitative data. One is deductive and the other one is inductive. With the deductive approach the data at hand is gone through and analyzed within the framework an already pre-set rule —a theory—and the empirical data is put to test within this framework. Whereas inductive research draws a general rule—a theory—from a specific case (Okoli 2021: 1-2). The common denominator for these both approaches is "theory." The starting point for deductive theorizing is the use of theory which is supported by the inferences made from the empirical data. In contrast, in inductive theorizing, the starting point is the empirical data, from which theory development is aimed. The goal of deductive reasoning should not be seen as trying to fit the data into theory, the data can falsify or contradict the theory, which only means that the theory is unsupported and, in the case, when the theory is confirmed or the theory is not contradicted, then it is seen as supportive of theory (Okoli, 2021: 2). Then there is a third approach called “abductive reasoning” or “abductive theorizing.” Standing in between deductive and inductive approaches, abductive approach is neither solely data driven as inductive nor hypothesis driven as deductive, it involves an equal engagement with both the data from the field and also the extant theory (Kelle, 1997: 1411; Thompson, 2022). The researcher applying abductive analysis does not go into the field with a completely open mind as he is guided by some theoretical parameters in order not to come across irrelevant data in relation to the research question, nor does he enter the field with a view to solely fit the empirical data into the adopted theoretical framework. The abduction allows for the most logical solution or the most useful explanation of the phenomena studied (Sober, 2021; Thompson, 2022: 1411). As can be seen below in the figure taken from Ketokivi and Choi’s (2014) study, in induction there is some knowledge of general theory and the empirical context serves for theory generation whereas in deduction, the role of the general theory is more and the empirical context feeds into validation of the theory. In the abduction, the feeding of the theory is both from general theory and the empirical context, the constant exchange of which develops and helps the best way explain the phenomenon tackled as would say Sober Sober (2021).

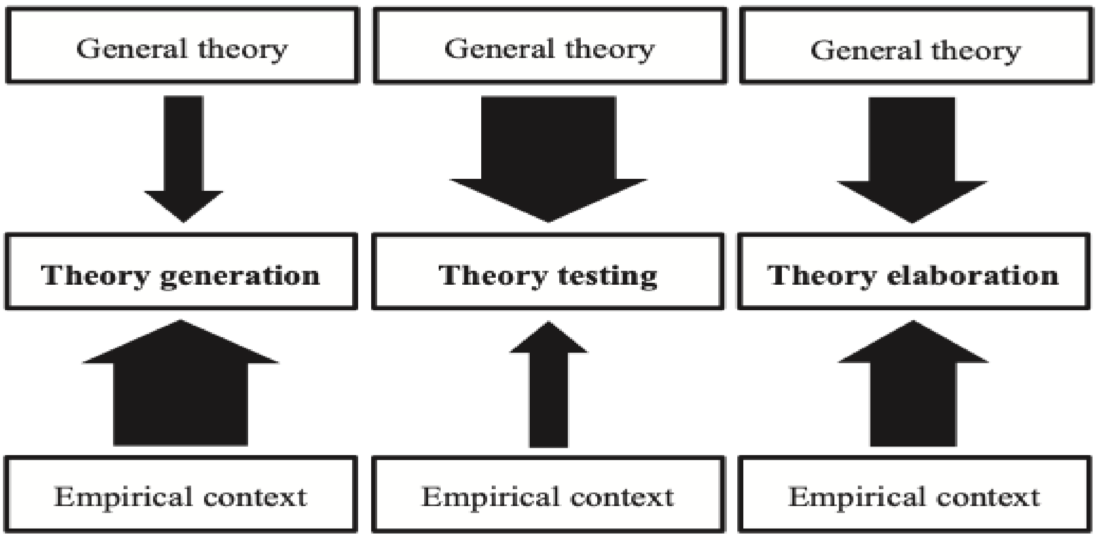

Figure 4.3. The three modes of conducting Case Study research (Ketokivi and Choi, 2014).

This research seeks to enquire into the role of trust on cooperation and coordination among the I/NGOs the case of Syrian cross-border context within the lenses of social exchange and neo-institutional theories. This theory-driven research is a good fit for a deductive approach analyzing. However, as already discussed above case study research involve in-depth understanding of a case whose findings and analyses coming thereafter may go beyond the boundaries drawn by the theory and thus new themes and patterns may come out. In this respect, an abductive approach to analyzing the data and interpreting it has been adopted, giving way to both to possible theory refinement and modification.

4.8.Strengths of the Research

The main strength of this research is that the researcher has been based in Gaziantep for more than 10 years, which has made him a first-hand witness to the ongoing humanitarian crisis. Also, the fact that his first master's thesis was on the Syrian Crisis already increased his familiarity with the Syrian Crisis in general, though not necessarily the humanitarian aspects of it. Last but not least, the fact that Gaziantep is one of the logistical centers of the humanitarian organizations and also one of the few cities in Turkey hosting the UN headquarters made the data collection authentic and spatially within the reach of the researcher thanks to the wide networks of his supervisor in the field.

4.9. Weakness of the Research

Going back to the discussion on being an *outsider* and an *insider,* in field research, the connection between the researcher and the respondents is an essential factor. Especially, to form a trusting relationship, it is argued that being a local can help better in forming trusting circles around which a chain of respondents is formed. The researcher is also an outsider in the sense that he is an academic working on the humanitarian aspect of the Syrian crisis only externally, without having the field experience of working in the field himself; having a field experience could provide a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics of the humanitarian world and thus that of the inter-NGO collaboration.

4.10. Scope and Limitations

A major limitation of this study stems from the very nature of it being a case study, since case studies offer much more freedom in conducting the research regarding the application of procedures, which is stricter and better framed in other methods. Although at first glance it may seem like an advantage, indeed, the managing of the data and keeping the scope of the research within a narrow frame instead of getting bogged down in the rich details encountered during the investigation could be disadvantageous (Krusenvik, 2016).

Again, and closely related to the selection of the case study method, the external validity of the research can be limited as is the situation with the case studies in general. Indeed, the *protracted* nature of the Syrian Crisis and the evolution of *trust* among different humanitarian actors in no way provides us with the certainty that it could be applied to other humanitarian aid contexts (generalizability), since time and space, as well as other structural dynamics are unique to different crisis situations and affect the behaviors of actors accordingly.

Also, the research at hand offers an exploratory aspect into an ongoing case—the humanitarian situation in the case of Syrian context. However, the fact that it uses the process tracing technique to explore the initial phases of the inter-organizational relations by way of interviewing with professionals in the field, it should not be overlooked that the interviewees vantage point regarding the research case may have been affected by the developments taking place between the initial years of the crisis until the current state or other than the external developments, some of their new experiences in the field may have played role on how they see, perceive and evaluate their past experiences. In that sense, we see the passing of time between the starting date of the of the crisis in Syria and now as being a limitation, also the ongoing nature of crisis situation could add up to it.

Finally, another major limitation is that this research as a PhD project has in no ways been funded by any institution or sponsor, which has limited the means to reach more respondents and thus expand the data collection.

5. FINDINGS

5.1. Introduction to Findings

In this chapter, our findings from the qualitative research conducted with the aim of exploring the role of trust in cooperative and coordinative relations among the local-Syrian-led, Turkish NGOs and INGOs in the context of the Syrian cross-border humanitarian aid context are presented. In this chapter, themes, patterns, and insights that emerged from the interview data are provided.

5.2. Contextualizing the Findings

It is essential to revisit the contours of the research and have a look at broader context of our research before delving into the specific findings. The findings of this research are assessed within the framework of *Social Exchange* and *Neo-institutional Theories* that will guide us in interpreting how trust plays a role in inter-organizational relations—the cooperative and coordinative relations between the Syrian-led, Turkish local NGOs and INGOs in the context of the Syrian Cross-border aid, specifically NWS. With such a view in mind, the research sought to explore the subjective experiences, perceptions, and insight from the humanitarian professional from the field, having actively been involved in the Syrian cross-border context from the beginning or taking part in it at a later time, with a view to exploring the dynamics and challenges that these organizations face in their efforts to cooperate and coordinate. This has involved mostly CEOs and program staff at the local NGO level, while in the case of the INGOs, key informants with different roles in their tenure in their respective organizations in the Syrian crisis have participated in this research.

5.3. Overview of Data Collection and Analysis

We collected our qualitative data through key informant interviewing. Subsequently, we applied thematic analysis under an abductive approach to extract and analyze the narratives that emerged from the interview data.

5.4. Organization of the Chapter

The organization of the chapter is as follows: there are seven sections in this chapter; these sections have been constituted based on our interview guidelines as such under each section there are specific emerging themes germane to our research questions and theoretical framework. Within each section, key findings are supported with verbatim quotes from participants with a view to provide an authentic image of their experiences and perspectives.

5.5. Significance of the Findings

The findings presented in this section have significant implications for understanding the dynamics of trust among the humanitarian organizations in a protracted crisis setting. Thus, the implications of these findings can be on two levels: academic and practical.

5.6. Chapter Roadmap

In this chapter, the interviews collected will be systematically presented. Firstly, the general roles and descriptions of the humanitarian professionals who participated in the interviews are described. Thereafter, and before the presentation of the core data, a general layout of the humanitarian landscape in the cross-border mechanism for the NWS is given.

The presentation of the main data starts with the *cooperation challenges*, in which related emerging themes from the view of both local NGOs and INGOs are presented. Secondly, the *trust definitions* and the most repeated constructs, determined as themes, are presented with a view to seeing how both locals and INGOs define trust from an organizational perspective. Thirdly, the *trustworthiness* perceptions of the local NGOs from the eyes of INGO professionals are presented. Fourthly, *coordination challenges* and related themes in the cross-border mechanism in the NWS are delineated. Subsequently, the emerging themes on the *localization discourse* and the accompanying challenges in the way of its realization are conveyed. In the next section, COVID-era challenges are touched upon. Last but not least, other themes that we think are important and were not pre-defined, that is, they conveyed relatedness to the research but did not fit any pre-determined sections, are presented.

5.7. Profile of the Participants

As has been previously discussed, the complexity of the Syrian crisis, combined with its protracted identity, has involved many different actors. Since NGOs (international and local) are the primary concern of this study, the position of the participants in this research is informative of the general findings. The definition of the position held by them will inform us of their roles and responsibilities in terms of inter-organizational relationships.

5.7.1. Chief Executive Officers (CEO)

A position held by some of the local NGO representatives taking part in this study. Also called executive directors or chief operating officer, this profession in an NGO plays an essential role in leading the strategic direction and managing the daily activities of an NGO. In the organogram it is the second in rank after the board of directors, of which it is usually a member as Executive Secretary (Srinivas, 2015).

5.7.2. Program managers

The programming in an NGO structure forms a vital part of its functioning, if not the core of it. Program managers are responsible for leading of the project activities in which the NGO is involved. Since the topic at hand involves issues of cooperation and coordination, the selection of key informants as *program managers* has been essential. Especially their roles and responsibilities as project units involve facilitating *partnerships*, and making assessments of the potential partners. Also, through facilitating effective communication, they are involved in project planning, coordination and information exchange about the progress and challenges of the project. An NGO's staff members' roles and responsibilities are given in NGOs' by-laws-procedures by an organization concerning its internal administrative and operational functions (Srinivas, 2015).

5.8. The Layout of the Humanitarian Aid inside Syria

The humanitarian response in Syria is not confined to one geographic area. Due to the various actors' roles in the Syrian Civil War and thus different dominant jurisdictions, which has been translated into the areas where humanitarian organizations operate or implement in terms of organizational responsibilities and duties.

Crossline: The areas that fall under the Syrian regime—have been contested in this sense because of the besieged areas.

Cross border: This area in NWS is divided into two: Turkish controlled areas which is Euphrates Shield area (Azaz, Al-Bab and Jarablus districts) and Olive Branch area (Afrin district). These areas are under Turkish supervision (civil and military).

5.9. Cooperation Challenges

5.9.1. Cooperation challenges from the perspective of local NGOs

<u>Organizational Capacity</u>

From the point of view of Syrian local NGOs, meeting the standards of the INGOs is not easy. Indeed, it stands out as one of the most repeated themes as being in the way of cooperation between the local NGOs and INGOs. This theme reflects the challenges posed by the high standards and specific compliance required of the local NGOs to provide for in their partnership alliance. Supporting this, an interviewee, for instance, stated that it is easier to meet the UN standards than those of the INGOs' since the latter works with different donors, and they have their own standards as well (SLoC2, personal communication, December 2022). The standards in terms of organizational capacity expected of the local NGOs could be based on various departmental competencies such as proficiency in program managing, financial management—perhaps the most essential along with program capabilities— compliance and legal adherence, risk management, community engagement, etc.

Alignment of Priorities and Expertise

In some way being connected with the theme of "organizational capacity," this theme implies beyond the technical capacity required in order to achieve a partnership with an INGO. One interviewee, for instance, highlighted this issue from the perspective of having the area of expertise and access capabilities aligned with those of the INGOs' expectations (SLoC2, personal communication, December 2022).

Old Relationships vs. New Ones

This theme highlights that the complexity of the Syrian humanitarian crisis, its cross-border nature, and the duration passed in parallel have caused the filtering down of the local NGOs, i.e., the number of local NGOs has gone down in favor of those already there for many years and this, in turn, making it difficult for the new players (local NGOs) to seek partnerships or secure funds. This has been in parallel with the decreasing funds, hence the competition.

Accountability and Compliance

The Syrian humanitarian response got a complicated nature not only in the field, with the needs becoming diverse and going beyond the survival aid most needed for the emergency, but also in the nature of the deals between organizations, which became more demanding and intricate in parallel. This, in turn, brought about a more robust demand for the paperwork and documentation, something that contrasted with the previous period before the resolution.

> *…but after that, the donors started to ask for more solid, let's say, documentation; they wanted to know where everything is going, and, this also created some barriers for some NGOs because some local NGOs, they don't have the experience or knowledge to adhere to what donors or the main INGOs need.*" (SLoC1, personal communication, January 2023)

This played well for some of the local NGOs, which, going beyond their foundational base, had gained expertise and organizational capacity to the point that they could compete for funds with INGOs (SLoC1, personal communication, January 2023). This post-resolution era has contrasted and differed from the loose structure in the pre-resolution period, in which there was a loose approach to funding in terms of control and auditing and also there was great amounts of money coming in from different sources. At the time, the nature of regulations and restrictions in terms of financial management and auditing was not only loose from the perspective of donors, but also in terms of compliance with the regulations and rules of the host country, which were to come more and more after 2016, were not much of an issue (SLoC15, personal communication, November 2023).

Power Imbalance

This theme in general points out the imbalance in the partnership between an INGO and a local NGO, with the former being more willing to transfer the risk associated rather than share it. As the findings may already suggest, there is already an inequality in terms of resources between INGO and local NGOs, in that the latter is dependent on the former. This resource dependence is reflected in many other dimensions of the partnership deals between the two entities. Local NGOs highlight main such issues being the fact that they do not feel that they are in a real partnership in which the two sides to the agreement would be on an equal footing. A remark on this issue that one of the respondents of the local NGO made is as follows:

> *…the most important one is access to the donors. So, not to the fund, but first of all, access to the donors. INGOs, they have the direct access to the donors. They have their, uh, direct meetings with them. With the donors and a different level, not only in the operational level that while we don't have that, so that gave the international NGOs the space to deal with the, uh, or to block some information from the local NGOs."* (SLoC4, personal communication, January 2023)

This, further understood from the interviewee's remarks, is not only a choice made by the INGOs themselves; rather, it is also what the donors would prefer to have (SLoC4, personal communication, January 2023). Namely, the preference is that the positioning of the INGOs as a buffer between the donors and local entities. This power imbalance is best reflected in the "risk" phenomenon, which is what both the INGOs and the donors want to avoid. One of the most repeated themes has been that INGOs are paying special attention to avoid risk, and considering the highly volatile and dynamic nature of the situation inside Syria, with various warring parties being present (See Fig. 2.6. and 2.7.), local NGOs are left alone in the risk of responsibilities of the aid going into the right hands. One interviewee puts it this way: *"Dealing with local authorities, especially some designated groups on the ground. So, if anything happened on the ground, they will put all their liabilities on your side, and they will get away* (SLoC7, personal communication, 2022). The main expectation of the local entities is the equal risk sharing between the partners, rather than risk being channeled down to the local NGOs in their already highly risk-bearing transactions on the field. Complementing to such a stream of reasoning is the state of perception of the local NGOs that the people they deal with at INGOs or the INGO branches are also in a way implementers and that the implications of their operations or other issues arising in the partnerships will not be within reach of the decision-makers in these INGOs, somehow implying that they will not be heard and the impact will not be genuine (SLoC5, personal communication, November 2022).

Contractors vs. Partners

Another salient theme, perhaps also closely related to the "power imbalance" previously tackled, is the perception of the local NGOs that they are not treated as real partners but rather as *"service providers," "implementing bodies,"* or *"contractors,"* as has been stated differently by the interviewees. Although the concept of "implementing partner" may have come from the initial phases of the humanitarian efforts when there were not Syrian local NGOs in the real sense, only getting to be formed at the time, and also because of the loose structure and not structured relationships as is the case now. However, the argument of the local NGOs is that one of the main rationales behind not being considered as real partners, but rather as service providers lies in some financial issues in that it is more seen as a strategy by the INGOs to limit the operational cost and thus decrease the overall implementation costs (SLoC4, personal communication, January 2023). Pointing out to such an approach, one respondent articulates:

> *…that is reflecting on the budget of the local NGOs, the available budget for the institutional development of the local NGO. The, uh, available funding of covering the costs of the, of that national NGO, and that also reflected on the duration of the agreement"* (SLoC4, personal communication, January 2023).

The main argument here is that being treated as service providers and not real partners takes away with itself some of the benefits that would contribute to the institutional and organizational development of the local NGOs. Such a view of things also makes the humanitarian action or the related partnerships coming along be seen as business transactions:

> *We see it as implementing agency. So that's, that's the way we try and then pull them more towards the partnership away from the implementation agency. When you say cooperative, we don't see it as cooperative, as local NGOs or Syrian NGOs. Uh, and they feel, oh, 'if you don't like it, we can go to someone else.' Uh, which is how we feel. We feel it's a business these days. (SLoC8, personal communication, November 2022)*

<u>Short-term Projects and Institutional Development</u>

The division of the duration of the projects into 6-9 months instead of longer-term is seen by the local NGOs as hindering the institutional and organizational development of the local NGOs. In a way, it is considered by the locals as not having any say in the project formation, budgeting, and positioning themselves within the interests of their own organization. This is best conveyed by a participant as follows:

> *That's, they, the INGOs, they have, uh, the full power to decide what will be within the project, what will not, will not be, uh, how the budget of the, uh, of the national NGO will be. So they have the decision on how your organization will grow. So if you want to invest in something that is not in the interest of INGO either, within your capacity, you cannot do that.* (SLoC4, personal communication, January 2023)

This is further highlighted by the findings that short-term contracts for projects affect and strain organizational capacity by pushing them into pursuing new proposals and thus incurring financial, human resources, and time related costs.

> *…in order to respond better, you need long term interventions, like more than one year. But, uh, most of the contracts with INGOs are less than one year. Sometimes it's six months, sometimes it's less. So this brings another challenge because we always have to go through renewal of contracts, discussing new proposals.* (SLoC12, personal communication, November 2022)

On a different level, and still closely related to institutional development, the investment in capacity-building efforts, as the findings suggest, is not reflected in terms of alignment of objectives or the objectives being the priority. Rather, the investment remains at the technical level, with a focus on quality reporting and compliance with the technicalities over the end goal of the project to be implemented (SLoC5, personal communication, November 2022).

Survival

The findings suggest that the capacity of local NGOs can be undermined in different ways. The most conspicuous reason is not having access to enough funding resources. As most of these local NGOs, especially those of Syrian origin, are solely based on institutional funds coming from either the UN, the INGOs, or institutional funding providers such as *USAID, ECHO,* and *DFID (now FSDO),* if they have the eligibility to receive such fundings. These local Syrian-led NGOs, even though they are registered under Turkish law and liable to obligations thereof under this law, are not entitled to crowd fund generating inside Türkiye as are entitled other Turkish NGOs registered under the same law. The survival of those Syrian NGOs that are of diaspora origin have more channels of funding, this being reflected in their capacities and that being further projected in the size of these NGOs in the Syrian response. The majority of big Syrian local NGOs are known to have their headquarters either in the UK or the USA, a feature that is peculiar to INGOs.

Apart from funding, the transfer of qualified personnel to INGOs also damages the capacities of the local NGOs. One interviewee, himself an INGO professional, referring to the behaviors and discourse of INGOs, stated: *"You keep talking to me capacity building, capacity building, then you take my best personnel from me, where does the capacity building stay in this?"* (INGO1, personal communication, January 2023). Indeed, the turnover of staff, or more correctly, the leaving of the qualified staff, can lead to shrinkage in the capacity of the organization, not only because of the loss of the expertise of the qualified staff but also because for the local NGO to fill up the position, new expenditures are incurred as well as human resources.

Donor Policy and Contextual Fit

Cultural norms and practices may not align with each other. As one interviewee (MisC3) comments, what is acceptable for Syrians may not be welcomed by European standards. This being further supported by another respondent that some donors' policies or practices may not fit with the contextual fit or realities: *"…for instance, X organization is American, so they are following the American procedures or regulations. It's not, maybe not it's yani[that is] 100 percent acceptable in Syria, in the Syrian context*" (SLoC6, personal communication, November 2022). The findings further highlight the inflexible aid structure of the UN system in place, which disregards the contextual needs.

The conditions seem to have been predefined and fixed, and they do not fit into this unique context, as further exemplified by the interviewee:

> *How many local solutions we implemented? We are distributing until now, winterization, winter kits. Uh, it's already designed from before. All the women inside of Syria using scarf and they don't use Pantalone [trousers] and they don't use this type of jacket. But until now we are delivering, our winterization kit without scarf, without the local address, without all of that. So it means we are using the technical solution coming from INGO not what the real local people need about it. And even for operating water station and the other, it's needed for that. (SLoC5, personal communication, November 2022)*

Similarly, the main problem for such a discrepancy is emphasized by the interviewee (SLoC5, November 2022) as being the non-existence of a 'bridging' body between the actors in the field (local NGOs) and the aid-extending bodies (the international organizations), a kind of bridge that will facilitate information sharing between the field and the headquarter where the decisions are taken.

Financial Challenges

One of the most repeated challenges affecting cooperation is the issue of 'overhead costs' or 'indirect costs. Unlike direct costs, which mean the money spent for the project—the funds needed for the project to be implemented and range from procurement of goods (relief materials), transportation, and logistics to the salaries of the field staff—the indirect costs signify a portion of the project budget that is allocated for administrative costs and is given to the organization with which the project partnership is implemented. Although there is not any written rule as to how much of the project budget this overhead cost should be, according to some accounts (interviews), there is a customary practice and understanding that it should be between 5 to 7% percent (SLoC15, personal communication, November 2023). Even so, sometimes no money at all is allocated under these so-called 'indirect costs' by the funding organizations, and at times practice shows that funding organizations attempt to negotiate these costs with the local NGOs:

> *Um, there's also something like support cost or overhead cost. For us to run or to rent, uh, an office or to pay all the salaries with taxes, with SGK.[47] So sometimes they try to negotiate that to reduce support costs and for us to survive, to enable us to respond. We need all the support costs that we have to pay for the government. (SLoC12, personal communication, November 2022)*

[47] This acronym stands for Sosyal Güvenlik Kurumu (Social Security Institution) in Turkey.

The so-named indirect costs are of great importance for the survival and maintenance of the local NGOs, especially those of Syrian-led organizations, most of which lack diversity of funding resources and are dependent on funding coming from projects they secure with UN agencies or INGOs.

Turnover of Staff and Trust-building

The dynamic nature of the humanitarian landscape renders that a lot of humanitarian professionals change their organizations or move to new project implementation locations to other humanitarian contexts, either within their own organization or in a new organization, since most of the positions in the humanitarian world involve short-term contracts or are project-based tenures. This leads to *turnover*. Particularly within the scope of the INGOs or other international humanitarian organizations, there is a high turnover, which, according to some respondents, is impacting the interactions of the local NGOs with their counterparts. One interviewee highlighted this as follows:

> *"But for me, I cannot believe there's something like institutional trust.*[48] *Trust is something human being, interpersonal. Yeah. It's personal. If the people changing every day, how can you build the trust?"* (SLoC5, personal communication, November 2022).

The respondent further highlights the importance of having some steady contacts and connections in helping to build meaningful inter-organizational relationships. This is usually disrupted when these people are gone and when new people take over. The negative impacts of turnover over established relationships are that the new staff's principles or way of working may not click with the parties to the older established relations, or simply the process could take time to rebuild. This is illustrated as such: "*…when these people changed the new people, they come with their agenda, with their mandates, with their experience, with their new mindset"* (SLoC5, personal communication, November 2022). One essential aspect of the *turnover* issue emphasized by the respondents is that the newcomers come from different contexts and are totally new to the Syrian context. This way, their past perceptions and lack of new context will lead to a new evaluation mindset, which may not align and disrupt the relationship.

[48] Here, the respondent refers to 'trust' in inter-organizational relationships rather than referring to trust in a particular institution.

5.9.2. Cooperation challenges from the perspective of INGOs

Financial and Legal Compliances

The Law regulating functioning of NGOs in Turkey is called Dernekler Law.[49] In the post-resolution period, to be able to function with their partnerships with the local NGOs, one of the primary requirements that the INGOs have expected of Syrian Local NGOs has been their registration with the Turkish authorities and having all legal procedures met. This has also required local NGOs to take liaison initiatives with the Turkish government to better understand the laws so that their organizations can fully align with the legislation in Turkey. This is done by way of some alliances formed between the local NGOs and through the liaison efforts of such a group (SLoC4, personal communication, January 2023). According to one interviewee (SLoC11, 2023), it is not the hardness of the Turkish legislation to comply with; simply, it is an issue of comprehending it and finding the right channel of communication with the authorities. Such issues, according to some local NGOs, have put an extra financial burden on their organizational capacity (SLoC10, personal communication, January 2023).

Another point mentioned in connection with this theme has been the fact that for INGOs, having a Syrian local NGO registered in Turkey could be a condition for initiating a partnership over a local Syrian NGO headquartered in other parts of the world.

> *I think if the INGO has an office in Turkey and if the money is going from that office, I mean, sometimes, it's usually better to cooperate or to start a partnership with an organization that has legal registration in Turkey. I mean, I would say that's one thing, and that's been a problem in the past because some organizations didn't have it. Um, then sometimes you can send the money from the headquarters straight to the country in which they have their registration, you know, if it's Iraq or if it's in the UK. I mean, X local organization has its registration in Y country, but now they also have Turkish registration*. (INGO2, personal communication, December 2022)

[49] Law on Associations (Dernekler Kanunu) officially enacted in Türkiye in 2004, aims to form the framework to oversee the responsibilities and activities, oversight mechanisms, and other issues of relevancy for non-profit entities, including the establishment of branches in Turkey. Foreigners are also entitled to set up associations in Türkiye. Accordingly, foreign NGOs are allowed to open branches or representative offices inside the country. Every association is registered under the City Governorship’s Department of Associations (Dernekler Müdürlüğü), operating under the purview of the Ministry of Interior. The associations can manage bureaucratic processes regarding documentation, applications, etc. through the DERBIS (Associations Information System) developed by the Ministry of Interior’s Directorate General of Civil Society Relations to enable electronic handling of processes and documentation of the associations. The terms on foreigner NGOs working in Turkiye in the Law on Asscoiations are clear: “Foreign associations can operate in Turkiye, establish branches or representative offices, establish associations, or umbrella organizations, or join the existing associations or umbrella organizations with the permission of the Ministry of the Interior and in consultation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Law on Associations, 2004).

It is worth mentioning that following the coup attempt of 2016, Turkish authorities adopted a more assertive stance towards INGOs and their activities within the country. This has led INGOs to be more diligent in ensuring they operate in accordance with Turkish laws to maintain their presence and operations within Turkey. As has been emphasized by interviewees in this research (INGO1, January 2023) and corroborated by the existing literature (Rajjoub, 2020), the security concerns of the INGOs have also been as a result of the closure of two of the American INGOs, *Mercy Corps* and *International Medical Corps* in March and April of 2017 along with many other bodies inside the country (Longton, 2017; Rajjoub, 2020). Between 2011 and 2017,[50] the humanitarian organizations working from across Turkiye had a flexible working environment with no significant restrictions. The post-coup period of internal turmoil, combined with the spill-over of the conflict into Turkish lands, designated Kurdish groups' activities along the Turkish-Syrian border from Syria have been important factors for Turkish restrictions on the working of the humanitarian organizations (Longton, 2017; Rajjoub, 2020). The researcher had an informal talk with one of the UN agency workers around the time when there was no longer previous relaxed working environment. The humanitarian worker mentioned that the international humanitarian organizations had a misleading assumption in the initial years that Türkiye would be like other contexts that lacked strong institutionalized infrastructure, and thus humanitarian organizations could have the leeway to act laissez-faire. Indeed, one could argue that the first several years of flexibility in the working environment in Turkiye for many humanitarian organizations was also an environment of laissez-faire, as has also been pointed out by the interviewees (INGO1, 2023; SLoC2, 2023).

It should also be noted that Türkiye's increasing control over the activities of the NGOs in its territories can also be associated with its developing migration governance. Türkiye, with the large scale of Syrian refugees, making it the largest refugee hosting country in the world, on its territory has for the first time encountered such a humanitarian crisis in its immediate neighborhood, at least for the first time in the history of the republic

[50] In the period before the coup attempt, the foreign NGOs did not have issues of registration, and this was reflected in some of them's not thinking proactively, as at the time, taking long-term permissions (five years, as stated in the Law on Associations, the maximum permission time granted) to operate in Türkiye was possible. In the current landscape, however, the registrations are done annually and are to be renewed every year if the organizations want to operate in Türkiye. In cases of opening a representative's office or branch, establishing an umbrella organization, or joining umbrella organizations, the permission granted is indefinite (Laws on Association, 2004).

in such a large scale; formerly, it had a long history of refugees entering the country from the eastern borders and in the *Gulf War* in the early 90s and the subsequent humanitarian crisis and refugee influxes. In that sense, the adoption of "Temporary Protection" for the Syrian refugees in the country as well as the founding of the Migration Management Directorate (MMD) in 2013, itself part of the EU progress reports—EU's monitoring tool for various policy areas including *migration and asylum*, starting to be available since 1998 following Türkiye's official recognition as a candidate country—can also be considered as some testing grounds for Türkiye's management and governance of migration, which also has implications for the governance of the humanitarian crisis at its border and the organizations working within its territory. Accordingly, Türkiye's institutionalization steps in the governance of migration cannot be thought apart from its desire to handle the cross-border humanitarian context within its border and in the areas under its control inside Syria.

Organizational Capacity

In the eyes of an INGO, the organizational capacity of a Syrian local NGO becomes vital, particularly in relation to the bureaucratic requirements that come up with the *partnership agreement* between the two, comprising terms from the donors, the INGOs themselves, as well as those required by the host country. One important aspect of the challenge in the act of cooperation is the extensive needs assessment tools of INGOs, which at times it could be hard for the local NGOs to meet.

> *…my organization, we have an extensive partnership assessment tool with [two-digit] pages, a nightmare. Um, where we really check everything from what the partner is working on, to how many people, what are their donors, what is their MEAL capacity, and, um, how many financial staff do they have? (INGO3, personal communication, November 2022).*

Upon a close scrutiny at one of the needs assessment documents, one is to realize that needs assessment is done with a view to investigating various organizational characteristics. These range from the mission and vision of the organization to the technical organizational facilities, such as the physical conditions of the organization, e.g., the location, property ownership, office numbers, etc. Added to these are also inquiries into the organization's current capacity for implementation, with inquiries as to the financial volume, the audit history, the layout of the employees' demographics across the departments, the types of funds handled, the beneficiary groups served, the region of operation, etc. Furthermore, as a complement to organizational capacity, it has been emphasized that some strategic alliances[51] formed between INGOs could serve as a platform where potential local partners' history and performance or positive experiences could be checked with the members of the alliance to triangulate data about the local NGO with which a future partnership could be possible.

Another aspect of the organizational capacity creating concern for INGOs is the capacity of the local organizations in the sense that INGOs want to make sure that the NGOs have not reached a *saturation point*, which would push their organizational capacity and thus negatively affect the efficiency of the project implementation. This, according to one INGO professional, has become less of an issue as the local NGOs have been around quite a long time now and thus have less problems with capacity (INGO5, personal communication, December 2022).

One other issue that could be considered as a standalone factor, but is still highly associated with the organizational capacities of the local NGOs is the *'monitoring'* issue. Due to the cross-border nature of the Syrian humanitarian efforts and the aloofness of the main funding bodies, including most INGOs, from the field, third-party monitoring has been as a remedy to serve the INGOs to ensure that the projects are implemented. The third-party monitoring serves as an oversight tool, helping the INGOs to have a hold on the activities of local NGOs as a part of the partnership at the operational level as they cannot be physically present inside Syria. In addition to this, some INGOs take extra measures to ensure that the local NGOs have an established system in place to ensure transparency and accountability, which relates to the administrative efficiency of the local organization.

> *Then there's a trust issue, um, that, that you have to negotiate because, uh, It's about how, how will you make sure that the project activities are really taking place if you're not actually there. Um, so that's another aspect. You know, you just have to sit down and, um, put together a monitoring plan. You can say that, 'you know, uh, you have to send us on a monthly basis or every two months, you have to send us a report on the activities, uh, pictures, uh, vouchers,' all of that sort of stuff. Um, and then of course, you have to make sure that the organization is strong enough*

[51] One of such examples could be "Alliance2015," an alliance of seven European mid-sized INGOs that organize around the mission of empowering communities, eradicating poverty, and supporting sustainable development, with equality and inclusivity being the key benchmarks. It is dedicated to amplifying and enhancing the impacts of its members' work on humanitarian aid and the Sustainable Development Goals. It is stated on their website: "We achieve greater reach and impact by working together and acting as a platform to channel influence more effectively to decision makers" (Alliance2015, n.d.).

that they can, that you're not overburdening them with, uh, donor regulations or your own regulations. (INGO2, personal communication, December 2022).

It is well acknowledged by the INGOs that local NGOs are under the weight of donor requirements and external challenges, though they also expect these organizations to have a certain level of administrative efficiency to make up for their non-presence inside the country of operation.

Vetting and Examination Processes

The findings suggest that vetting the process of the INGOs cold go beyond mere organizational capacity.

> *…the vetting is the main issue. Because like I will tell you, for example, donors like BHA, like ECHO, like even the GIZ, they want to have a partnership or sub guarantee. That they already know or they want to vet those people who are in the subcontract. Because usually what's happening, like between an international NGO and a local NGO, the national NGO is subpartner. Uh, and they are, or sub-guarantee they are like, uh, entering, in the contract and the same contract. And then they have to be vetted. And this is an extremely long process.* (INGO5, personal communication, December 2022).

After further inquiries on this theme, it appears that with the political dynamism inside Syria and the concerns and fears of international organizations and donors regarding aid diversion and corruption coming to the foreground, it becomes inevitable that such thorough vetting processes take place.

Partnership vs. Service Provider Dilemma

As we have tackled above, this theme was one of the most repeated by the local NGOs as being a cooperative challenge for them. One INGO professional confirmed this empathically and further stressed the analytical usefulness of the preference of the INGOs for ‘service provider’ over a ‘real partner.’ For INGOs, such an approach embeds in itself some functional utilities, such as the partnership naming of the relationship would bring in more bureaucracy, and the INGOs, although it is not in their mission or vision, have the tendency towards a more transactional approach rather than one that is long-term and based on the principle of the ‘real partnership’ which is what is asked for by the local NGOs.

> *So in theory we would have, uh, a room also for an NGO which only has two full-time staff and are really more still like community led. In reality, that never works because especially here in the Syrian crisis, you have large scale response. You need really some NGO which is able to launch.*

Um, yeah, so 15,000 households with bread distributions. This is like the, the size. So for that you really have no time, really no time to wait until they [the local NGOs] have grown this capacity. What we did do, um, when I was here in 2015 was we used a loophole by giving partner service contracts. So we would really treat them as a service provider, which, by the way, would've been far more honest.

As is well-grasped, the INGOs could go up for situational practicality over long-term capacity- building efforts, which prioritize immediate needs that are required by the situation at hand.

5.10. Trust Definitions from the Field and Trustworthiness

Collecting the definitions of trust from the field from the representatives of local NGOs is important for three reasons: first, it provides insights into how local NGOs perceive trust from an inter-organizational perspective; and secondly, it can provide the nature of the expected trust (i.e., affect-based trust vs. competence-based trust or simply institutional based trust) in their relationships with INGOs, providing further insights as to what they would consider as being trustworthy or what the trustworthiness is based upon. Lastly, it seeks to see and contrast these definitions, or emerging concepts and their overlap or divergence in the definitions of trust in the literature.

It should be noted that when the respondents were asked about definitions of trust from what they thought would be an organizational perspective, rather than giving a straightforward, well-thought-out definition, they provided answers that reflected the contexts in which they had some sort of experiences, which for them meant what the trust should mean or distrust for that matter. We find this quite valuable since having such contextual definitions of trust will inform us of the inter-organizational dynamics rather than a pure personal definition of trust. This will further shed light on and support the findings on the cooperation or coordination challenges.

Lastly, the question asked to INGO professionals about what makes a local NGO trustworthy will give us some themes (perceptions) about the trustworthiness benchmarks or evidence that an INGO would consider a local NGO as trustworthy.

5.10.1. Trust definitions from the perspective of local NGOs

<u>Communication and Transparency</u>

This theme detected in the definition of trust has been pointed out and emphasized by almost all the interviewees taking part in this research. Transparency was highlighted as a must-have part of the communication. Especially during the implementation of the project, sharing information about the steps and processes and being *open* about the surging issues are especially important when things go awry.[52]

> *So a mutual partnership or an equal partnership, uh, is what we need. But at the same time, in case I have any, um, suspicion of violation, corruption aid diversion, I will come forward to you and we say, 'Hey, we have a case, I am doing internal investigation trying to find what's happening, and then I will report to you as a donor or partner and then we discuss the solution of the finding.' So for example, I would say, uh, because of this finding, we will deduct $10,000 of all contracts. Mm, our organization will pay this loss. Uh, or there was a kit, an item that was lost, so you are not responsible for it because it was stolen during the distribution.* So we will take responsibility and we will compensate this. (SLoC12, personal communication, November 2022)

One respondent defined *trust* as a process that started with transparency with the beneficiaries and then the reporting of the right needs assessment to their project partners.

> *So the trust will start from the field. Trust will start from the transparency with the beneficiaries themselves. The trust will be reflected, uh, from the need assessment. And when we will send the gaps and the needs on the ground to those INGOs trust will start when we tell our partner about the situation and the context on the ground*. (SLoC13, personal communication, November 2022)

Transparency is shown to be one of the most vital elements, if not the most vital, in terms of helping with trust building with the donors and partners, and even '*reporting'* of any misdeed or 'communicating' it to the donor during the procurement process with the suppliers in the humanitarian supply chain is to further help with trust-building (SLoC9, personal communication, January 2023). As an example, the same respondent went on to say that trust meant following the rules set by donors and project implementing bodies. He also talked about how important it is to communicate in real time when high-risk issues like corruption and aid diversion happen on the ground, and how talking to the project partner would help build trust (SLoC13, personal communication, November 2022). (SLoC13, personal communication, November 2022).

<u>Cultural and Societal Norms</u>

[52] Although this aspect of trust definition is from the perspective of local organizations, it can somehow be interpreted that local NGOs adopted a sense of trustworthiness (a benchmark) from an INGO perspective. The inference that we make is not only because of the same issue of communication (real-time communication; see findings on "Cooperation Challenges from the Perspective of the INGOs) was emphasized by INGO professionals, but also because usually the implementing party of the project is a local NGO, not the INGO, so we assume that this kind of sense of trust benchmark is adopted by the local NGOs as a result of their experience with the INGOs.

One of the interesting themes that was associated with the concept of trust, affecting the inter-organizational trust-building processes, to put it more correctly, has been the existing societal and communal norms.

> *I guess like having integrity, um, good communication, like transparency, uh, especially with like being clear about your organization's actual capacity. Like if you can't handle like a, I don't know, a $50,000 sub grant, just say so, so that we can, you know, work together to maybe hire an extra one or two people to help manage that fund, for example. Or maybe we have a joint staff training on, I don't know, child protection or whatever the deficiency is. ... unfortunately, there is this thing, I don't know if it's the same for Syrians, but in Turkey there is this thing that, um, I used to teach [REDACTED] before this job and there is this thing that when you speak, it should come out perfectly the first time when you do something, it should be perfect the first time*. (TLoC1, personal communication, October 2022)

Although the interviewee presents a clear-cut trust definition with important concepts highly associated with trust, such as *integrity* and *transparency*, it is also essential to note that the findings also suggest that the way to trust building or trust disrupting processes bear in itself deeply seated cultural norms and expectations.

<u>Risk Sharing vs. Risk Transfer</u>

Previously emphasized, particularly by the local NGOs, as an important cooperation challenge, risk sharing was seen by many respondents as forming the base of trust in their definitions. Associated with the same line of argument and supporting the risk sharing principle have been further emphases on equality to have access to information, an agreement based on mutual interests, reciprocity, and support.

> *…trust is that, uh, there is an, uh, equal access for information for both parties in that relation, uh, so they can both trust each other. Uh, trust is that, uh, there is a, a sharing risk between the two, uh, organizations.* (SLoC4, personal communication, January 2023)

<u>Mutuality</u>

The trust definitions encompassing 'mutuality,' take us to the definition of cooperation: *"the agreed-on goals"* (Gulati et al. 2012), and accompanying such a conceptualization of trust is also the emphasis on the 'equality' of the opportunities in the partnership relationship, such as having equal access to information[53] and resources

[53] The interviewee here put the emphasis on not having equal access to the channel of communication with the resource holding bodies (donors or as such) and thus being deprived of the information generated or shared at that level. The same applies to having equal access to resources, as indeed, this could imply having direct access to funding opportunities without intermediaries in the middle.

(SLoC4, personal communication, January 2023). Relatedly, the mutuality aspect has been touched upon as trust being perceived and thus conceptualized as a two-way process in which the local entity should expect that the INGO will trust the local NGO's knowledge, and in return, the local NGO should be confident that the INGO's motives are humanitarian. *"A trust two side: you need to trust my knowledge about the need of the people, about the way I respond to the people. And I need to trust you that you have pure humanitarian agenda"* (SLoC4, personal communication, November 2022).

<u>Solidarity and Collective Action</u>

All through this work, one of the issues that has been quite often stressed on by the local NGOs is the issue of standing together, and this has been irrespective of the definition of trust. Namely, the issue of alliances, which will be tackled elsewhere. In one respondent's (SLoC8, personal communication, November 2022) definition of trust, he emphasized being a cohesive circle of individuals. He highlighted that trust involves more than just cooperation in project implementation; it also involves unity, collective action, and upholding trust, which is a challenging act, particularly in the very complex environment of the Syrian context in the presence of the de-facto authorities on the ground. He states this as follows:

> *If I trust an organization not to be cooperating with de-facto authorities, uh, then that's it. I trust them, but I don't really want them to be saying one thing in my face and then going behind the scene and, and just, uh, what do you call it, [unclear]. Or, aid diversion or cash diversion or mishandling of funds. So this is, this is what trust for me. It's like if we stand together, then yes, we stand together. And this is what we currently doing as some of the Syrian NGOs*. (SLoC8, personal communication, November 2022)

Other most repeated themes by the respondents include *accountability*, *honesty*, *fairness*, and *integrity*, all of which fit into the widely adopted definition of trust made by Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman (1995); they can all be considered to fall under the umbrella term "integrity," although they have slightly differing meanings.

5.10.2. Trust definition from the perspective of INGOs

<u>Organizational comfort</u>

The comfort in partnership, the way an organization feels about working with another organization based on past experiences and shared common interests and values, came out as a trust definition, which is illustrated by: *"...so I would maybe say the degree to which the organization feels comfortable working with the other one, based on* *experience, uh, on the relationship and on compliance"*(INGO2, personal communication, December 2022). Upon inquiries as to what these shared values would be, the respondent's answer highlighted some meta-principles of following humanitarian principles and simply having humanitarianism as the main point of departure. Furthermore, sometimes some organizations have some leniency, ideologically or religiously, some orientations that affect the comfort of one organization to work with another one and even become decisive in the partner selection process (INGO2, personal communication, December 2022).This further suggested that, despite some conflicting relations between persons in inter-organizational relations, this may not affect the relationship between the organizations as adherence to certain norms and principles as well as the comfort of working with one another being the decisive force.

Healthy Communication and Selective Honesty

The findings have so far suggested that right and healthy communication is a main pillar of meaningful cooperation between the INGOs and local NGOs, and this has been stated by almost all the respondents involved in the study. One of the main things expected of the right communication is 'honesty,' which, as we previously tackled, has also been a 'theme' that came out of the definitions of trust made by the local NGOs. In that sense, however, one INGO professional, for instance, admitted the impossibility of expecting full honesty from their partners:

> *I would not expect a partner to be completely honest with me. I know they have things they hide, but I have to be aware of what they are hiding. And I need there, there, it's really trust. I have to trust the partner that they know what they need to tell me.* (INGO3, personal communication, November 2023)

In the background of such a trust definition—or experience leading to such a definition—lays the intermediary role of an INGO between a local NGO and a donor and the hidden instinct to protect the local project partner, or at least serve as the first buffer that will absorb the blow before it is announced to the donor. In highly sensitive humanitarian contexts such as the one inside NWS, especially due to the fluidity of humanitarian actors, the existence of several de-facto authorities on the ground and the high risks of aid diversion or corruption, the communication between the parties of project implementation becomes crucial, and the right way of communicating the contingencies from the field could in itself be a process of trust building between local NGO and INGO, thus helping or alleviating the impacts of negative situations encountered in the field. In order for such a meaningful communication to take place, an INGO professional, firstly describing 'trust' as mutual trust in problem solving, highlighted the communication between the partner organizations by stressing that it should be felt by the partner organization that their *honesty* and *openness* in the communication will be taken up constructively rather than *punitively* (INGO3, personal communication, November 2022). As another INGO professional points out, the sharing of information in an appropriate manner will also help the sharing of problems and contingencies, hence the importance of an effective communication line: "*…when we talk about the information, that means that sharing the mistakes, the experiences, the problems, on daily basis or at least reporting them on timely manner so they can be dealt with immediately or in no time"* (INGO6, personal communication, December 2022).

5.10.3. Trustworthiness from the perspective of INGOs

As we tackled the data, we found out that the trustworthiness benchmarks for the local NGOs from the eyes of INGO professionals—when they were asked what would make a local NGO trustworthy— in the Syrian cross-border context gave out similar results with the themes detected in the sections of *cooperation challenges* and *trust definitions.* For that matter, instead of giving a detailed image of each of the themes, we will instead focus on giving a brief overview of the themes explored and the main context around them.

Trustworthiness is linked to the willingness of the local NGOs to share and discuss the challenges that they face during their project implementations rather than concealing them:

> *…especially that when there are challenges or problems that they're basically mentioned, um, and, and not kind of put under the carpet. Um, so for instance, uh, I had it happen several times that there's a partner that they're having difficulties spending money for a certain activity, but, um, they don't want to mention that to you, um, because they think you're, you might be disappointed or angry or frustrated*. (INGO2, personal communication, December 2022)

Related to such willingness to share the challenges is that it should come with accepting the criticism, acting upon the criticism and the openness to improve (INGO2, personal communication, December 2022; INGO3, personal communication, November 2022).

One of the most repeated and shared themes by the INGO professionals has been the reputation and experiences of the local NGOs as being decisive elements for the trustworthiness of the local NGOs (INGO7, personal communication, June 2023; INGO11, personal communication, June 2023). Through some alliances, and other informal mechanisms, such cross-checking of the partners takes place. This issue is indeed closely related to that of localization as well, since INGOs may want to prefer to work with the same local NGOs that have already been in the field for some time and thus have shown some competency in terms of administrative and operational experience. As one INGO professional puts it: "*It will always be the same, like three, five, six, seven NGOs that will get the funding… If you only look for reputation, you always end up with the same. So, and new organizations don't get a chance"* INGO11, personal communication, June 2023). This, in turn, could lead to the monopoly of some local NGOs at the expense of a diverse and grassroots mobilization and development, which is nowadays the main agenda of international humanitarian actors under the banner of localization.

Interviewees also highlighted the importance of having *"robust"* technical capacity in place. This benchmark of trustworthiness is not only confined to competencies at the programming level, but also includes financial and operational competencies (INGO5, personal communication, December 2022). The interviewee (INGO5, 2022) also stressed such technical robustness in terms of inter-departmental SOPs, such as between HR departments, finance units, or program units. As for the detection of such technical competencies of the local NGOs, according to the INGO professionals, this is possible through looking at the funding resources of the local NGOs, since, for instance, those working with an institutional donor will also show that they have to go through a lot of compliance issues and thus hard work (INGO5, personal communication, December 2022; INGO7, personal communication, June 2023). And by looking at their portfolio (the source and volume) of funds it got, as another interviewee puts it (INGO10, personal communication, 2022).

Another salient issue linked to *trustworthiness* is that of compliance with rules and regulations. One interviewee, for instance, relates the trustworthiness of a local NGO to its ability to be able to cope with the compliance of rules and regulations at different levels: compliance with the host country's rules and regulations, donors' regulations and INGO's regulations, as a part of bilateral agreements (INGO9, personal communication, December 2022). According to the interviewee (INGO9, 2022), the compliance of local NGOs at different levels is considered as a risk mitigating factor for the international organizations with a view to preventing any jeopardy to their operational existence in the host country.

Community acceptance and *access* come out as other essential elements as evidence of trustworthiness. One interviewee (INGO8, 2022) emphasized the approval of the beneficiaries, as his point rested on the fact that the acceptance by the community somehow would give information about the NGO's reputation. Achieving this, according to the respondent, was possible through a principled humanitarian response and managing to have access, which is also an essential element for the operational competence of an NGO. The access issue was approached by another interviewee as the NGO's ability to coordinate and "stand firmly" on the ground in the face of the challenges encountered with the existence of the de-facto authorities (INGO7, personal communication, June 2023).

5.11. Coordination Challenges

5.11.1. The period before the resolution and the Turkish hub

At the very initial phase of the crisis, there was a scattered approach to the aid; this stemmed mostly from the freshness of the crisis and the newness of the humanitarian actors. As was discussed in Chapter 2, there were debates about the humanitarian aid being distributed by the Assad regime to the areas that hosted intense fights between the Assad regime's forces and the opposition. At the very core of the argument was the impartiality of the aid to be distributed by the Syrian regime (itself party to the conflict), and thus the instrumentalization of the aid by the Syrian regime came to the foreground of the debates. The absence of legal permission at the international political level, nor consent from the Assad regime for the humanitarian aid to take place from across the border of Türkiye into Syria forced the humanitarian organizations to act unilaterally to cross the aid to the other side of the border, and this was mostly being done by the efforts and intermediary roles of Turkish entities such as the IHH, TRC, and AFAD (Rajjoub 2020). This loose structure at the beginning was also not decisive enough to make all humanitarian organizations be assembled in a certain geographic area, although most of them were concentrated in the areas in the immediate proximity to the borderline, especially in Hatay and Kilis provinces of Türkiye.

The accounts of humanitarian workers regarding the initial state of the humanitarian aid for Syria reveal that in the first 2-3 years, there was a scattered presence of actors on the ground that acted without coordination and usually ran to the needs of their own community, focusing on the immediate needs of the people. One interviewee stated this situation as follows:

> *People were acting without thinking the needs of other places; they were more thinking about their communities, or their people, and sometimes there is a pace next to them (a place where people are in need) and they don't think of them; they only think about their community, village, city…"* (SLoC1 Personal Communication, January 2023)

Getting funds for certain communities over others was through the representatives of some communities that had come together at the time, forming *consortium-like* structures at the local level, and these representatives could reach out for aid through some connections they had with donors, INGOs, or some people of power in some INGOs (SLoC1, 2023). The kind of aid accessed in this way consisted in-kind commodities, non-food items (NFI), food items, shelter, etc. (SLoC1, January 2023). That being the case, many places in need of help were ignored, and this caused the displacement of these populations to other places to get access to humanitarian assistance. Another interviewee described the situation as the coordination between people and not calling it between organizations: "*When it started, you know, it's just like a matter of people crossing the border, procuring any locally, aid or humanitarian relief items, and then they pick it up from Turkiye, crossing it to Syria, just like this way easily"* SLoC3, personal communication, January 2023). Another interviewee described the early coordination efforts as taking place in an informal way and in shared places:

> *I don't know if you know [a local hotel] in Antakya. Most of the NGOs used to work in this. And they go to do the assessment in the morning and the back in the evening to Antakya, and the first seeds of coordination, the people after they finish the assessment, they* ***[unclear word]*** *in the night, and the people when they go to have breakfast in the morning, they distributed documents about the area, and they cut Idlib. Because Idlib was something under the control of the government and something like that. So, on this side, it's related to [A international] organization. This side is related to the B international organization for the humanitarian assessment and multisectoral assessment, and all of that. This belongs to the C. The camps are mainly for D and D organizations; all of that.* (SLoC5, personal communication, November 2022)

The development of the coordination structure was in tandem with the maturity of the local council governance bodies, other opposition governance structures, and the advancement and formation of the Turkey hub. The informal coordination to be formed during this phase was of *"grassroot"* character depending on the directorates, e.g., the health directorate under local council governance structures (SLoC3, personal communication, January 2023). The freshness of the conflict, the bombing and shelling of the areas in which individuals got injured and killed, combined with the damage to infrastructure and the immediate needs impelled people to act quickly and organize themselves around some syndicate or union-like structures, e.g*., "Aleppo Union of Pharmacists," 'Syndicate of Free Aleppo Lawyers"* (SLoC3, personal communication, January 2023). This kind of structuring would later pave the way for a more technical humanitarian response to take place when some initiatives from people, from the Gulf States, Pakistan, European countries, or some INGOs opened their offices inside Syria (SLoC3, personal communication, January 2023). The coordination efforts of the time were through the NGO Forum,[54] and according to one interviewee, it was not a challenging task for the forum to manage such a task at the time as the nature of the needs was not so complicated and getting funds was not a big issue, both would get hard at later stages (SLoc2, personal communication, 2023). Another such coordination unit—highly trusted and appreciated by the other organizations— the Assistance Coordination Unit (ACU) was founded in 2012 with the endorsement of the Group of Friends of Syrian People. Introduced on their website as independent of all political, governmental, and organizational structures, the main objectives of the organization are stated as being information management, research, data banking, advocacy, coordination, networking, and highlighting critical concerns of the Syrian matter both at local and global level (ACU, n.d.).

5.11.2. After the resolution, the cluster system, and the Gaziantep hub

After Resolution 2165 in 2014, the aid that was carried into Syria through Turkish organizations was replaced by more flexibility for the INGOs and local NGOs to conduct their operations across the border independently (SLoC11, personal communication, December 2022). Even before the resolution came into place in July 2014, the UN had already made his presence felt a little bit by closely monitoring the situation in NWS and getting informed of the general state of the humanitarian needs in the area, opening an office in Gaziantep, etc., (SLoC2, personal communication, 2023). After the resolution,

[54] This is a unique coordination body that was formed in 2012 with a view to coordinating the scattered aid efforts inside Syria. The role of the Forum has been to bolster the existing thematic and sectoral groups, including clusters to bridge gaps in the inter-agency assessment. Accordingly, the members of the forum cover all the clusters: education, health, food security, shelter, etc. The Forum is the only mixed forum of its kind, comprised of INGOs and local Syrian NGOs, and it is funded by ECHO and the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) through GOAL, CARE, and Hand in Hand (Reliefweb, n.d.). After the installation of the official cluster system, however, although continuing the complementary role, the Forum has increased its role of advocacy, as per some interviewees.

people moved to the camps set up in the areas close to the Turkish border because there was more provision or delivery of aid in those areas, and depending on the situation or planning people had, they would even move further inside Türkiye or through Türkiye making their way to Europe or elsewhere. It depended on a situational analysis of the crisis, and for many, there would be a political solution to it, and they would go back to their homes (SLoC3, personal communication, January 2023). It was a sense of ambiguity that was felt by the humanitarian actors as well at the time. Although the cross-border mechanism brought in place much of the structuring that was needed for a true coordination mechanism in parallel with people's proliferating needs, the dynamic nature of the conflicts as well as the diversification of the actors inside Syria also made some substantial changes in terms of the layout, organizing, and activities of the humanitarian organizations in the Syrian crisis. When Russia intervened in 2015 and the ISIS presence appeared on the scene inside the country the year before, these affected some behaviors of humanitarian organizations. ISIS presence in the northeast of Syria forced the humanitarian organizations out of these areas; at the same time, the aid was halted to go to some areas, such as Selma near Latakia and Palmira, due to Russian existence, which in general created constraints on access (SLoC3, personal communication, January 2023). The new scheme, characterized by security issues inside Syria, witnessed more partnership relations between the INGOs and the newly emerging Syrian local NGOs. Already in 2014, coinciding with the time when the cross-border resolution was reached in the UNSC, the regional dynamics in terms of new armed groups was living in its peak, and at the time there was kidnapping of humanitarian workers by the ISIS inside Syria (BBC 2014), which later would cause an almost altogether withdrawal of international organizations from their operations inside Syria, thus directing and channeling most of their resources through *partnership agreements* with the Syrian local NGOs. This, according to one interviewee, contrasted with the previous period in which the INGOs were doing their operations independently and with minimum interest in the capacity building processes of the local organizations (SLoC11, personal communication, December 2022). So, the transition to partnering with local NGOs was more of a process characterized by "needs than by interest" (SLoC11, personal communication, December 2022).

The cross-border resolution and the subsequent set-up of the cluster system led to a more inclusive network of NGOs coming together under the same platform for sharing information in each cluster. This helped with pinpointing gaps and removing duplication to a greater extent, as has been suggested by many interviewees. One interviewee stated the long-confirmed effectiveness of the UN cluster system and emphasized the *standardization* that the cluster system enabled, which in turn led to a more balanced and equitable distribution of aid:

> *The money was coming from Gulf to do what they want, so it was not equality. When you are speaking, people start having their houses, and other people cannot find tent… And they are neighbors. Someone gets fund from this organization so he can build house and someone gets only tent and even tents cannot reach. So this was, uh, inequality. So the coordination and standardized the response, it wasn't the same before it. And coordination increased accountability, which is very good, people feel about accountability.* (SLoC5, personal communication, November 2022)

The 4 Ws[55]—the framework of collecting and managing information within each cluster—was required of each organization with a view to preventing aid duplication, avoiding gaps, and allowing for better strategic planning for the allocation of resources. However, initially there was a reluctance on the part of the local Syrian NGOs to do such reporting in the clusters on two grounds: a) they did not have enough of experience about such reporting, b) for them, such reporting meant extra jobs or positions, thus personnel and related costs (SLoC3, personal communication, January 2023). This is illustrated by the remarks of one interviewee: "*People, especially Syrian NGOs, underestimated this mechanism before; who would accept extra work?"* (SLoC3, personal communication, January 2023). This obstacle was in a way navigated when the funding coming from INGOs and UNOCHA was received by the local NGOs, and subsequently, such reporting was made obligatory by such fund-giving bodies (SLoC3, personal communication, January 2023). Perhaps the most important contributing effect of the UN cluster system has been that it has mitigated the previous competitive atmosphere among the local NGOs (INGO2, personal communication, December 2022). Another interviewee, however, has pointed out the underlying sense of competition in some NGOs wanting to serve in some specific areas, which suggests that even in the presence of a more structured coordinative body, the cluster system, the local bodies have pursued more influence, access and visibility, and this has taken place despite discrepancies between the program needs and the organizations' budget to cover such needs (SLoC8, personal communication, November 2022).

[55] These 4 Ws stand for Who, What, Where and When

5.11.3. Coordination challenges from the perspective of local NGOs

An account of early coordination efforts in terms of the cross-border mechanism as well as the post-resolution period coordination, as highlighted as per the experiences of the local NGOs and a few INGO professionals, has been presented above, and some emerging themes regarding the coordination challenges are provided below from the experiences of both local NGOs and INGO professionals.

Need for Maximizing Use of Resources

The efficient use of existing resources has been touched upon as a limitation in the coordination efforts. The Syrian local NGOs, in their arguments, highlight the importance of using the already limited resources effectively.

> *…if you have a team for making your MEAL activity as example. And it's more than enough for projects related five organization. Why does every organization need to have it? These resources need to go to another. If I have the capacity for a certain type of project to cover more than what I need, why don't you use this? This is the coordination. It needs to be real, but just to avoid duplication.* (SLoC5, personal communication, November 2022)

In a similar vein, a local NGO respondent emphasized the efficiency of the use of the existing resources from the perspective of sharing these resources between the parties (stakeholders) instead of each one of them doing the same thing and causing duplication and wasting of resources in a different way:

> *So sometimes as somebody in the camp. Three organizations visit you to do assessments. And this is a lot of time and effort. Sometimes, one NGO comes and conducts assessments, but they don't distribute them or don't respond. They are not able to secure money for this activity. So it's a waste of time, and duplication of efforts.* (SLoC12, personal communication, November 2022)

Constant Abrupt Emergencies

The emergencies that occur in the dynamic nature of the Syrian crisis, be they man-made or a natural disaster, are what an interviewee considers as posing challenges when it comes to coordination. In such individual cases, the humanitarian organizations are reported the case by the local authorities as to the need in question and inform the NGOs about the situation and ask their availability to respond, upon which NGOs try to secure funds with their donors, but without any information sharing regarding the fund securing processes and the subsequent response plans, which leads to many organizations securing a fund at the same time, and as the abrupt nature of the situation may require, they may respond independently and without informing their counterparts (SLoc12, personal communication, November 2022). One of the other issues with such emerging cases is that the urgency of the situation that arises may lose its real-time need until the organizations secure funding, and even that not being a problem, the bureaucratic hurdles of informing all the coordinative bodies involved, such as the clusters, AFAD, and the local councils, about the response as well as finding suppliers for the needed products may take time that goes beyond the emergency nature of the situation (SLoC12, personal communication, November 2022).

Multiple Actors on the Ground

It has so far been settled that there are two coordination fields for the cross-border aid mechanism needed in the NWS. One is in the Türkiye-Gaziantep hub, and the other is in the NWS. This naturally also shows that there are two levels of coordination, one happening at the inter-organizational level in the Gaziantep hub involving administrative and information sharing, while the other is about the operational level of coordination in the NWS in the field. The former takes place in a cross-border environment where the strong infrastructure of the host country and the delineated roles and responsibilities of the organizations operating from there are well specified. However, at the field level where the operations of delivering the aid to the beneficiaries, the core of the humanitarian services, take place, the rules and procedures of the coordination are not only dependent on the abiding of the coordinating bodies to them. Especially, the distinct and unique dynamics of conflict and the diversity of the actors have also caused the *regionalization* of the zone and the geographic division of the area under the influence and control of different groups. As we have indicated in Chapter 2 (see control maps, Figs. 2.6. and 2.7.), there is a constant shift of control between different actors at the field level, which affects the humanitarian operations as such operations require interactions with these actors at various levels. See also one of the most recent maps of control, with the areas of the earthquake indicated.

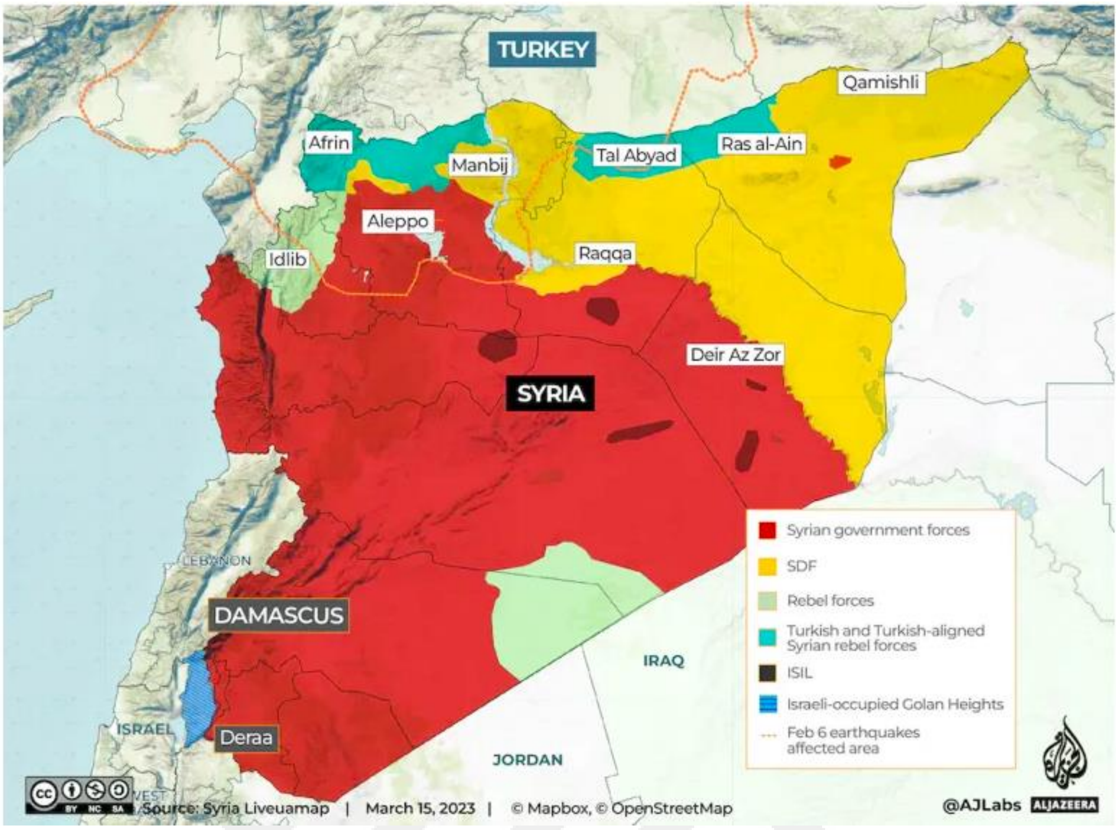

Figure 5.1. Syria: control map with the earthquake affected areas (taken from Aljazeera, 2023).

It has been suggested by the interviews that dealing with different actors, such as AFAD and local councils, can cause bureaucratic delays in coordinative efforts. Pointing out to the NWS, particularly, the control of the area is under different groups. In the areas controlled by Türkiye in the *Olive Branch* and *Euphrates Shield* (see map below), the NGOs wanting to respond need to go through AFAD and TRC. Only through the protocols signed with these entities can NGOs operate in the Turkish-controlled areas (SLoC3, personal communication, January 2023). In Idlib, where the control is largely under the HTS, the situation is a bit more complicated. Indeed, this is where the dilemma comes into play. The main issue is that the HTS, as an armed group, is viewed with concern by humanitarian donors and international bodies due to its origins being of the Nusra Front, which is an Al-Qaeda affiliate. The concern of the donors to get the aid to into the hands of civilians without any aid diversion,[56] i.e., without indirectly supporting

[56] In the humanitarian context, aid diversion refers to the situations in which the humanitarian aid of any sort aimed for the needy and vulnerable is used or misappropriated for other purposes. This can happen due to various reasons such as corruption, conflict, poor management of funds, etc. It remains one of the main concerns of donors.

the HTS, comes in the form of strong regulations and compliance rules for the NGOs to abide by. The inability to do so on the part of an NGO can mean an altogether breakdown of relationships with donors and INGOs and thus face closures.[57] The interviewees have pointed out the difficulty of implementing responses in an environment in which you need to deal with some actors, with which any kind of engagement is strictly prohibited and could be a factor directly affecting the survival of an NGO (INGO3, personal communication, November 2022). However, the NGOs accept that they do not coordinate with such bodies but that their existence cannot be condoned: *"We don't coordinate with them, but we acknowledge that they exist. We go through checkpoints. They ask us: what are you doing? We show the card; we show the mission requests and stuff* (SLoC12, personal communication, November 2022). In a way, the local NGOs are stuck between the donors' regulations, rules, and compliance and having to navigate the armed groups. One interviewee highlights this paradox and the inevitability of dealing with such bodies as follows:

> *…when we need to go into the camps, camp management is all linked to the Salvation Government, to the ministry of one of the ministries. Now we can't, we need to ask for permission to enter the camps to distribute or to do any awareness. But at the same time, how can we enter the camp without the permission they wouldn't allow you? But if you go and speak to them, then that's a violation. Or working with designated authorities with listed authorities, for example. So it is really troubling us. We don't want to coordinate with them. Because if we do, we'll be on the blacklist with the donors. But also, we are under pressure from them to coordinate. Because if we don't coordinate, we don't get access.* (SLoC8, personal communication, November 2022).

[57] Even the biggest and most capacitated local NGOs can face suspension of their funding and thus ongoing projects in the event of their poor management of operations inside Syria, especially in terms of their relations with the terrorist designated groups. Such incidents have happened during the Syrian crisis, and the local NGOs face such a risk in their daily operations in the areas controlled by such groups.

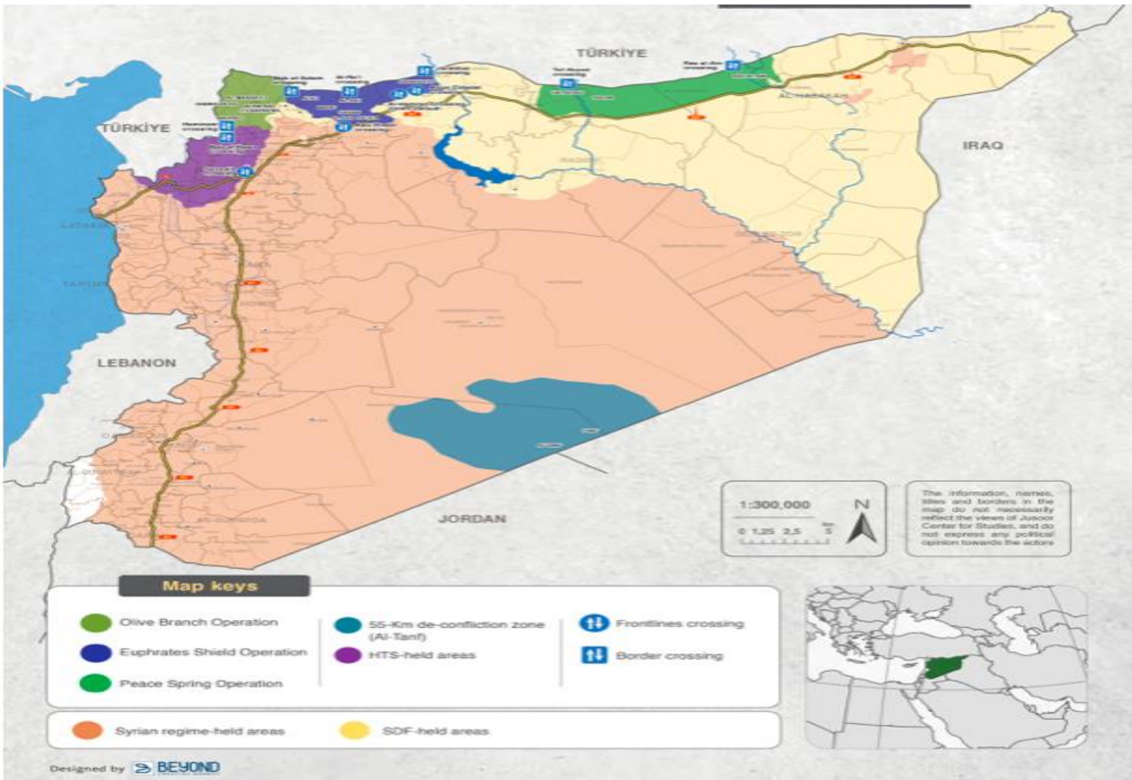

Figure 5.2. Syria control map with border crossings, December 2022, (taken from Jusoor, 2023)

<u>Funding Limitations</u>

The funds have decreased over the years during the Syrian crisis. This, of course, has been in parallel with the high impact of macro-level developments such as the surge of COVID-19 and the post-Covid-19 economic repercussions that have had global impacts, which have also affected the volume of humanitarian funds despite the ever-growing needs (Bond, 2020; Development Initiatives, 2021).

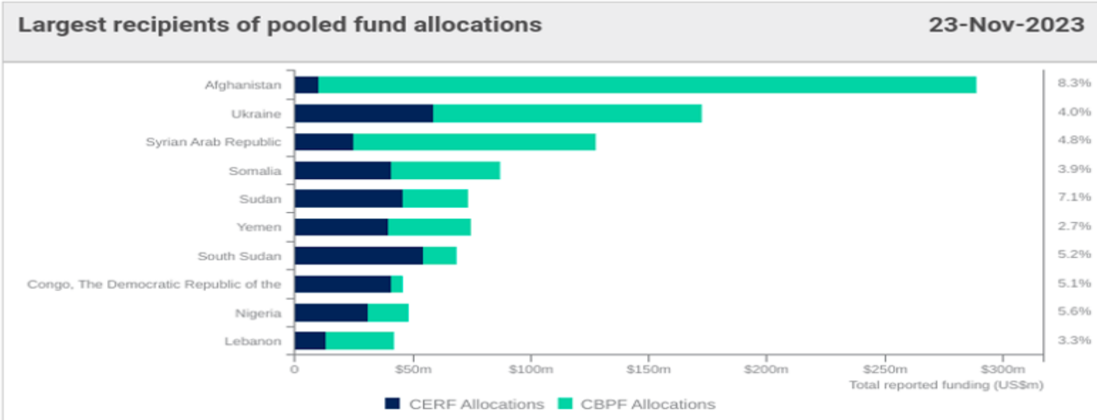

Figure 5.3. Largest recipient countries of the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) and Country-based Pooled Fund (CBPF) allocations in 2022 (UNOCHA-FTS, 2023)

The interview findings suggest that after the UN Resolution and the decrease of the Gulf funds, the pooled funds became main sources of funding, if not the only one for many Syrian local NGOs (SLoC3, personal communication, January 2023). Due to some other conflicts, disasters and political developments in the world, the allocation of the pooled fund can change. As can be seen in Fig. 5.3**.**, in 2022, for instance, two countries, Afghanistan and Ukraine, have taken the lead in terms of the allocation of the pooled funds, which was led by Syrian Republic the preceding two years (see UNOCHA-FTS). Indeed, as the political and other major developments can affect such trends, the country of most recipient aid, the main funding trends as in the pooled funding in Fig.5.4. show there is a fluctuation of the pooled funding in the post Covid-19 period, before which the trend was mainly upward. This, of course, is in disproportional to the increasing needs. To give a rough example of the people in humanitarian need in the last three years, we would come across with such numbers: in 2021 the number was 255.1 million, in 2022 it increased to 324.3 million and in the two-thirds of 2023 that stood number at 363.3 million people (Efesoy, 2023).

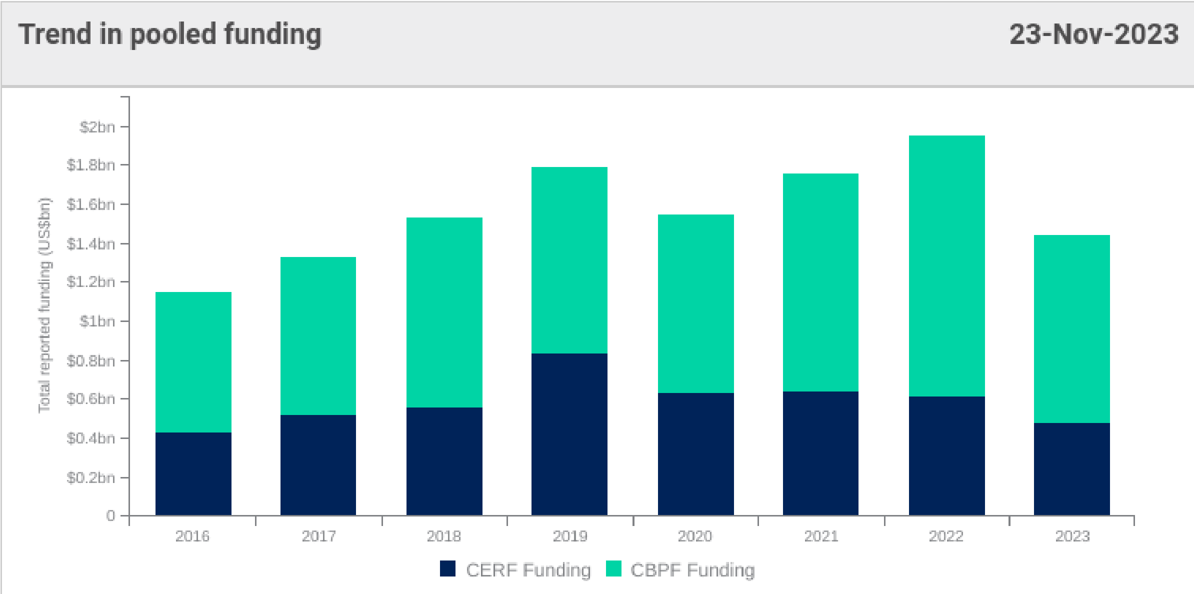

Figure 5.4. Trends in Pooled Funds between 2016 and 2023 (UNOCHA-FTS, 2023)

After the Resolution in 2014 and the extension of the cluster system to the Gaziantep hub for cross-border operations, the funding mechanism set up for this purpose is the Syrian Cross-Border Humanitarian Fund (SCHF). In line with the Resolution date, the data for this funding has been available since 2014; see Fig. 5.5. The decrease in funds, as has also been stated by the interviewees, is observed from the chart as well. Especially after 2020, there is a substantial decrease in funds as opposed to increasing needs; data provided by OCHA sources shows that there has been a 20% increase in the number of people in need in NWS between 2021 and 2022; from 3.4 million people to 4.5 million (Reliefweb, 2023a). The devastating earthquake in the region in February 2023 is likely the source of the increase in funding in 2023, as it has further exacerbated the situation in the region, contributing to the needs.

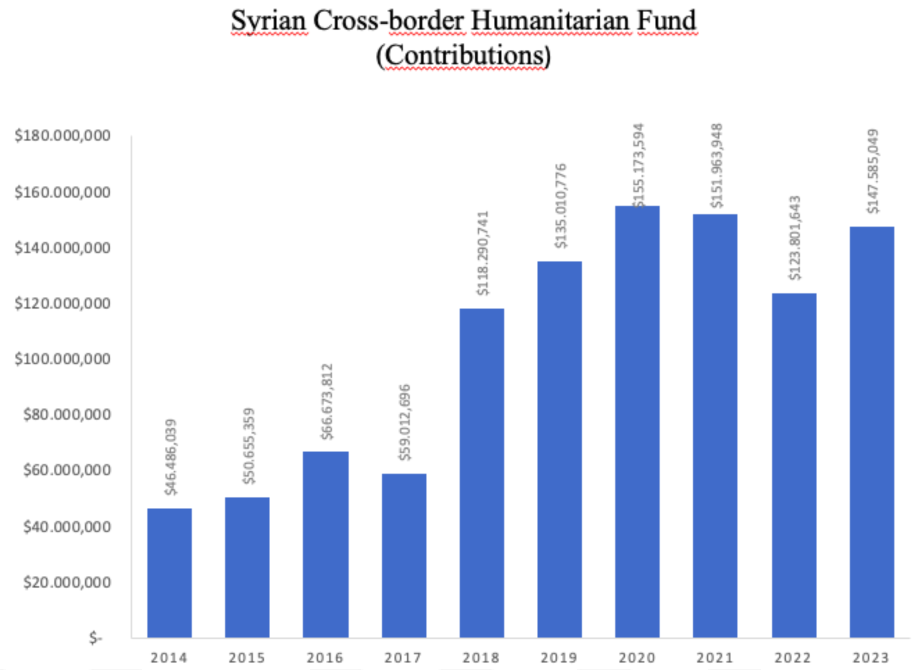

Figure 5.5. Syrian Cross-border humanitarian fund (taken from the Financial Tracking System and compiled by the author)

Distrust with the UN and other international bodies

As previously tackled, after the cluster system came in place, there was a reluctance on the part of the local NGOs to take part in the cluster system, which emanated from reasons such as a lack of experience and the extra costs associated with it. Perhaps the most important reason, however, lay in the possibility of any information sharing of the international bodies with the Assad regime as has been multiple times repeated by the interviewees (MisC1, personal communication, January 2023; SLoC11, personal communication, December 2022; SLoC2, personal communication, 2023). The reasons for such apprehension stemmed from: a) the cluster system was still connected with the already established system in which all data from the crossline and cross-border would be collected and evaluated, b) the local entities feared that such information sharing could take place because some international organizations had been based in Damascus many years, even prior to the Civil War, and they feared of any such ties (SLoC11, personal communication, December 2022). Such distrust was overcome by the assurances in the cluster, even according to one interviewee (SLoC2, personal communication, 2023), this distrust was perceived before the cluster system was put in place and the opening of an office by the UN in Gaziantep, as well as the UN's other initiatives to get informed of the situation inside Syria and its efforts to reach out to local entities and get them familiar with the system and how the information they share would be protected, etc. Accordingly, at the initial phases, the number of organizations in the clusters was not high, and it was also thanks to the "information sharing protocol"—which gave guarantees to local NGOs with issues such as not sharing the name of the organization, the name of the facility (its sectoral affiliation), and the name of the person—that was agreed upon that helped with the trust building in the cluster system in general (MisC3, personal communication, January 2023). Indeed, one other reason for the locals to be reluctant to participate in the cluster system—also closely related to the issues of extra work requiring the nature of the process of being part of the cluster—was that many local NGOs were getting funds from the Gulf, which, as many interviewees have stated, are easier to manage or more "flexible" in terms of paperwork asked for, etc., and the fear of losing such flexible funding (MisC3, personal communication, January 2023; SLoC2, personal communication, January 2023).

Decreased Leadership for Local NGOs

In the negotiation phase of the renewal of the cross-border resolution, the atmosphere for the humanitarian organizations is that of high uncertainty, and search for alternative practical solutions in case there is a non-renewal. At the time these interviews were conducted (roughly between November 2022 and the third week of January 2023), the interviewees expressed their concern in the case of such a non-renewal and a possible practical solution that could be adopted. In December 2022, when the uncertainty around such a renewal was at its peak, the alternative solution to the existing coordination mechanism through the cluster system was viewed by many and confirmed by different interviewees as being the so-called INSAF system[58] through which the status quo of the existing coordination system would be achieved. In such a case (that of a non-renewal of the resolution), the local NGOs expressed faith in the self-sustaining power of the system when the official cluster system is not in place. Part of the reason being the protracted nature of the crisis and the functioning system in place, and the other reason, closely related to the functioning system, has been the existence of an *NGO Forum* and *ACU* as structures of coordination even before the cluster system came in place, and also during the cluster system, the co-leading of some INGOs and local Syrian NGOs was seen in a way that these bodies could take up the lead if the cluster system is out of the game. Most

[58] The Interim North Syria Aid Fund (INSAF), a mechanism as an alternative pool fund, thought of maintaining the flow of funds to international and Syrian-led NGOs in the event of a non-renewal of the cross-border resolution in January 2022 (Khan, 2022).

of the co-leading mechanism of including the Syrian local NGOs in the cluster system, however, has been replaced by the INGOs taking over, and this is viewed as a challenge in coordination: "*…the level of participation in the leadership of the coordination, the coordination system for the local NGOs were also negatively affected. So now we have only maybe one co-coordinator position. Before we had four"* (SLoC4, personal communication, January 2023). This decreased role of the Syrian local NGOs in the space of the cluster coordination, according to one interviewee, is because of the relations of the UN with the Syrian regime and the latter's increasing role (SLoC4, personal communication, January 2023).

The UN's Limited Role inside Syria

The UN's coordinative role in the cross-border aid mechanism, especially through the cluster system—the Gaziantep hub—working as an information collecting and managing tool has been confirmed by many interviewees as being effective in terms of standardization, transparency, accountability, and equality with regards to the distribution of funding. However, its effective role in the cross-border mechanism is also coupled with its aloofness from the field, and its physical non-presence in the field where operations take place. This effective tool of coordination working on the level of the Gaziantep hub is not physically present in NWS, and it is monitoring the project implementations through third-party monitoring, remote monitoring technologies, beneficiary feedback mechanisms, etc. The physical non-presence of UN coordination in the field at the operational level is emphasized as lacking in terms of effective coordination. Nevertheless, despite the fact that local NGOs, in their operations in the field, are required not to deal with the armed groups, at times there are access issues which they cannot navigate such armed groups and that is when OCHA's Access Group comes into play. One of the most important functions of this group, according to the interviewees, has been its role of negotiating access with such groups when there is a need. As one interviewee points out, even if these groups in their areas of influence could have access by way of asking for information about NGO's projects and implementations, there are some red lines for these groups that they cannot cross, namely, interfering with the work of the humanitarian organizations or having access to the beneficiary lists (SLoC7, personal communication, 2022). In case there are such issues reported by the NGOs, local or international, then the OCHA Access Group intervenes (SLOC7, personal communication, 2022). From an INGO professional perspective, the role that Access

Groups assumes in NWS rests on the political side and not on coordination (INGO5, personal communication, December 2022).

5.11.4. Coordination challenges from the perspective of INGOs

Data Collection and the Nature of the Data

The data collected sometimes may not be used for real-time projects; rather, they could be used for project plannings that are to be implemented a few months from the time when the data were collected. This naturally creates question marks as to the nature and validity of the data (INGO5, personal communication, December 2022). The interviewee also questioned the authenticity of such data in the non-presence of the cluster people in the field in NWS:

> *Because they're doing huge exercise in all of Northwest Syria, where you have thousands of locations, right? So the data is not very reliable in this case. And then, when it comes to the authenticity of this data, it is not very reliable because the people are not in the field. Most of the clusters, uh, staff, they did not see Syria. It is unlike other contexts. (INGO5, personal communication, December 2022)*

Political Uncertainty

In Chapter 2, we have elaborated on the legal intricacies of the UNSC cross-border resolutions and why they matter so much for the continuation of the humanitarian aid into the NWS. It also comes out as an important theme in terms of coordination. The uncertainty around the issue of the annual renewal of resolution affects the coordination in the NWS on several fronts. First of all, it deepens the ever-increasing political nature of the crisis with the involvement of various actors inside the country. Secondly, it affects the planning and resource allocation of NGOs. As one of the previous themes, this was already touched upon as being one of the challenges of cooperation. According to one interviewee, having a practical solution in place instead of the uncertainty and debates around the cross-border resolution every year lies in the capacity of the UN, and the willingness to do that on the part of the UN lies in deeply political issues and power politics at the UNSC (INGO5, personal communication, December 2022).

> *Because this is a risk that we are having since three years [referring to the non-renewal of the Resolution]. It is not new that we are talking about it. If they want to have it, they can develop it in three months. But you know why they don't want to do it? Because if there is a plan B, Russia, Russia will tell you, okay, it means that you do not need the cross-border resolution.* (INGO5, personal communication, December 2022)

UN’s Double Role

One interviewee, referring to the UN’s role as a fund-providing body and coordinating body, questioned this dual role as being counterproductive: “*The UN often has a double role. They are donors and they are coordinators. And this is not always good. It messes up things at times”* (INGO3, personal communication, November 2022).

Cultural Competency Gaps

The international staff’s—both at the level of the UN and other international organizations—lack of linguistic knowledge of the host country—Türkiye—and that of the country of operation inevitably brings about issues related to understanding or lack of it in terms of cultural sensitivities as well as the context of the crisis itself (INGO2, personal communication, December 2022), which are essential elements for understanding the dynamics of coordination. This theme is also closely related to the theme of turnover of international staff, which was tackled above as a cooperation challenge and is stressed as an important issue in terms of attaining the “sustainability of staff” at the UN for effective and continuous coordination (INGO7, personal communication, June 2023). In the same manner, the frequent turnover of staff at the UN agencies could lead to the newcomers’ lacking contextual knowledge of the crisis:

> *…I mean, this coordination mechanism, I mean, it is not perfect. Usually there's somebody, I mean, all of these, let's say there's a meeting for the health NGOs, then there's a UN person, then maybe after six months that UN person leaves*. (INGO2, personal communication, December 2022)

This, according to the interviewee (INGO2), is combined with the at times arrogant approach of the international staff at the UN agencies towards the locals. It is also emphasized that the fact that the cluster meetings take place in Türkiye, in the Gaziantep hub, gives the impression that the UN staff is aloof from the field, and so is their knowledge of the context (INGO2, personal communication, December 2022). Perhaps this, in turn, is being reflected in the perceptions of the local NGOs of the UN staff and the efficiency of the UN in general, as is exemplified by what an interviewee expressed:

> *The issue of the UN is, if you calculate this amount they are spending versus actual and the quality of their deliverables, you will be shocked. They should be more [unclear word]. Before, when we heard about the UN we think this, this is very huge, this is one of the top, but now when we work with them…* (SLoC7, personal communication, 2022)

5.12. Localization Challenges

The findings from the interviews conducted suggest that localization is perceived as rather unrealistic project, as the facial gestures of the interviewees upon hearing the word have pointed that out, or later, the comments they have made on the issue. One interviewee put it this way while mentioning the cooperation challenges between the local NGOs and the INGOs:

> *…there is a new word these days, we are all hearing that: 'localization.' But how is it implemented? How effectively is it implemented? You know, it is a very fancy word, but in reality, there are a lot of things we need to do in order to, let's say, reach localization, not achieve it.* (SLoC7, personal communication, November 2022)

In terms of definition of what localization means, there does not exist a substantial difference between the two groups of respondents, the Syrian-led local NGOs and the INGO professionals, as the view from both groups is that the 'empowerment' of the local entities should be prioritized (SLoC4, January 2023), and accordingly, it should mean the phasing out of international bodies (SLoC7 2022; INGO2, December 2022), and it should ultimately go beyond solely being a humanitarian response and contributing fundamentally to the grassroots civil society (INGO5, personal communication, December 2022). The definition of 'localization' by the main actors stresses putting the local actors in the lead. The European Commission, for example, defines localization as "empowering" local actors in the crisis-hit countries to lead the relief efforts, aiming to strengthen the capacities and resources of the local actors with a view to fostering long-term sustainability (European Commission, n.d.-b). Similarly, the definition of localization by the USAID is that the leadership should be put on the local actors, with the system being more aligned with the needs of the community and strengthening local capacities by way of "internal reforms" and initiatives (USAID n.d.). The IFRC definition, with a focus on external inputs, comes out as enhancing "international investment" and acknowledgement of local stakeholders' roles with a view to attaining effectiveness and accountability in humanitarian action (IFRC n.d.). The definitions of "localization" by the main donors as well as the leading humanitarian organizations do not seem to differ much from each other; all in a way taking to the center the *empowerment* of the local actors in the response, though some of them emphasize different aspects of it and from a different methodological point of view. The interviewees' definitions in this study bear parallel lines with the definitions of the leading actors in the field, with the local respondents' emphasis being more on the *direct funding* commitment to the local responders as is in the Grand Bargain of 2016.

Risk and localization

One of the primary challenges surging in the context of localization in humanitarian action seems to be risk factor. Also being one of the most highlighted challenges in the way of cooperation among the NGOs, the risk factor takes a similar emphasis in the localization efforts as well. According to one interviewee, the main aspect of the risk is from the donor's perspective in that the very existence of risk being on the foreground means that donors' priorities are related more to good documentation and reporting in terms of financial requirements (INGO1, personal communication, January 2023). Another interviewee, somehow similarly, touched upon the issue of "accountability," pointing out that once the international existence comes to an end, this would mean the going down of accountability:

> *"… let's say if you remove all of the reporting, checking, and auditing, external evaluations, and third-party monitoring and all these things; if you removed some of that stuff, local NGOs wouldn't be accountable to anyone, and there is a strong cultural difference between, let's say Syria and Europe…"* (MisC3, personal communication, January 2023)

5.12.1. Localization from the perspective of local NGOs

Reactive Approach and Uncertainty

The interview findings suggest that the approach to humanitarian aid in the Syrian crisis— the Syrian cross-border for that matter— has been a *reactive* one. This has been, to a large extent, in line with the ongoing political and conflict-driven landscape in the crisis, which has given the humanitarian response an ad-hoc and reactive nature. As one interviewee highlights: *"whenever you see, because it's a lot of, let's say it's like a jungle, you know, you don't predict what's your next step because you are waiting for others to act and then you respond"* (SLoC3, personal communication, January 2022). As the maps of control in Chapter 2 (Fig. 2.6 and 2.7.) show, the conflicts and thereby areas of control inside Syria have been constantly shifting between different actors, inevitably affecting how the humanitarian response is being implemented. Coupled with the dynamic nature of the conflict inside the country is also the donors' skeptical approach to local organizations' capacity as well as the existence of designated groups in the field of operations, which have made the localization efforts delayed (SLoC13, personal communication, November 2022; SLoC3, personal communication, January 2022). This skepticism, according to the interviewees, is being reflected in the small number of local NGOs that can have direct access to funding from an institutional donor without any intermediary. Having access to direct funding[59] from institutional donors or donors at large is one of the most voiced aspects of localization interpreted by the local NGOs (SLoC6, personal communication, November 2022; SLoC4, personal communication, January 2023).

Ideal Localization

One point of localization pointed out is regarding the real nature of the localization process, which should be internally driven rather than externally driven. One, through which local stakeholders can have their own voice and determine the nature, methodology, and allocation of the resources independently: *"Localization should give the power of leading the response to the local community."* (SLoC4, personal communication, January 2023). In general, the main point emphasized is that there is a visible discrepancy between words and deeds in the localization process. The commitments in the Grand Bargain, according to an interviewee, are not "realistic" and that even he would not see attending meetings on localization as worthwhile (SLoC8, personal communication, November 2023). This has been attributed to the unwillingness of the donors (SLoC4, 2023) and "competition" between the INGOs and local NGOs, due to which the former would not lend away its status in the power dynamics that exist (SLoC8, 2022). The main argument is that practical requirements—which are quintessential for localization—in the field are not seen as having been met, as the interviewee conveys:

> *…when you look at it, I think the capacity building was one of the components. Uh, we, my organization has been operating for [X] years and they always come back to us and say, oh, you know, you, you need some capacity building in what? Uh, when you ask them in what, they just go quiet.* (SLoC8, personal communication, November 2022)

[59] One of the most voiced commitments in the Grand Bargain was the provision of 25% of the global humanitarian funding to local and national responders by 2020. However, five years after the Grand Bargain in 2021, one independent review showed that there had been some progress in some workstreams. For instance, in workstream 3 (localization), some progress, such as the number of signatories (from 5 in 2017 to 13 by 2020) to allocate 25% of their total funding to local responders as much as possible, was pointed out. The same report also mentioned a marginal increase in the allocation of the global fund to the local and national responders (Metcalfe-Hough et al., 2021). The adoption of the Grand Bargain 2.0 in the same year as the independent report, according to one interviewee, was a result of no progress in the original Grand Bargain, and that is why now there is Grand Bargain 2.0 (SLoC8, personal communication, November 2022).

Closely related to such a line of argument is that there are not enough of field-level structures from the donors' side to support and promote relationships with the local entities, which could help build or sustain localization efforts. One such deficiency is the lack of donor staff at the field level to engage and interact with locals (MisC3, personal communication, January 2023). And not only at field level, but even at the headquarters level, the choice of the main donors to let only a few local partners on board is that they would not have enough capacity to do the vetting (SLoC8, personal communication, November 2022). In this criticism lies the view that donors could opt to extend and expand their relations with the existing partners if they are not capacitated to take on new partners (SLoC8, personal communication, November 2022).

Syrian Fatigue

Because of the duration of the crisis, it is highlighted by the interviewees that attention to the Syrian humanitarian crisis is diminishing, which is affecting the movement of staff as well, something detrimental to the localization process as good staff means good capacity and ultimately means improved response (SLoC7, personal communication, 2022; SLoC10, personal communication, January 2023). One important point causing such a fatigue and thus delay in localization is the *protracted* nature of the Syrian crisis (INGO6, personal communication, December 2022). One interviewee described the nature of the humanitarian crisis as being a "chronic" one:

> *You know, because in the first five years of conflict is different, after five years, because some donors say: 'I work in for five years and I will suspend my activity;' it will be chronic crisis. So not all people, not all organizations prefer working in chronic crisis; they withdraw and start working in emergency area.* (SLoC9, personal communication, January 2023)

This is clearly in reference to the donors' appetite for a protracted crisis, as well as the willingness of the humanitarian workers in the same crisis. Indeed, the same respondent (SLoC9, 2023) also refers to the fact that other emerging crises are also becoming fields of opportunity for the Syrian NGOs to interact with new donors who have not been involved in the Syrian context. As a matter of fact, the researcher himself has observed that he has met many Syrian humanitarian workers who, previously working in the Syrian context, have now shifted to other contexts working in crises, such a those in Afghanistan and Ukraine. This clearly shows a high degree of internationalization of the local responders, although the true localization of the response in the Syrian crisis is one to be questioned, as the interview findings show.

Another aspect of the Syrian fatigue is that many local responders think that for the UN, for instance, it is just another crisis and there is no such personal affect for the crisis as a Syrian local would have (INGO2, personal communication, December 2022). This issue is also closely related to the high turnover of international staff at both UN agencies and other international organizations. Such a line of thought, however, leads to, on the part of the local Syrian responders, a "learned hopelessness" that is enmeshed in the thought that there will never be a political solution to the Syrian crisis that will play in their favor, and thus the chronic state of the crisis will continue.

5.12.2. Localization from the perspective of INGOs

Localness of the Response

One issue of high importance touched upon has been the questioning of the localness of the local NGOs in the view of the localization discourse in the Syrian context. This, of course, is caused by the cross-border nature of the crisis, which makes some believe that the localness of the NGOs and, thus, of the civil society movement is not truly transferred to the site of the crisis where the aiding and other onsite activities take place.

> *…in the humanitarian context, when we are saying the local partner, usually we are talking about the organization that will stay after the international NGOs have left. So, they are more sustainable. They are the long-term solution. But unfortunately, in the Syria situation, especially in Northwest Syria organizations working in Idlib and Northern Aleppo, there is a difference between the international NGOs and the local NGOs in terms of the structure. A lot of them have their base in Turkiye, in Europe, in the USA, this is where their headquarters are based.* (INGO5, personal communication, December 2022)

This point is in reference to the Syrian local organizations that have had a long existence in the Syrian cross-border context and are known to have strong organizational capacity. Most of these organizations, as has previously been touched upon, have either the whole of their foundation emanating and led from overseas or part of it by the Syrian diaspora. It is also true that some of these local entities have been taking active roles in Yemen or Ukraine crises, expanding well beyond their local response boundaries in the Syrian cross-border context in the NWS.

Misalignment of Discourse and Practice

The interviews suggest that the localization discourse encapsulated in the Grand Bargain did not go beyond the commitments made, and in practice, the realities do not match. An interviewee stated that the Grand Bargain project was an "overambitious" project and that at the time these commitments were made unconsciously, totally uttering them as "unrealistic" (SLoC8, personal communication, November 2022). It is also emphasized that international organizations deem localization as doable only when it fits into their contextual needs and practices: "*So, localization was only, kind of, implemented when it was necessary from an operational perspective"* (INGO11, personal communication, June 2023). The interviewee referred to this point with regards to the point that where the access was possible for them, they would prefer to do the implementation themselves, but where the access was problematic, they opted to go through local partners. In that sense, partnerships are seen as expensive ways of delivering aid, and the interviewee suggests that the delivery of aid through partnerships is a challenge for the success of the localization; working directly is the easier path to the realization of localization (INGO11, personal communication, June 2023).

5.13. COVID-19 and the Challenges in Terms of Cooperation and Coordination

The findings about the challenges faced as a result of COVID suggest that COVID did not play a substantial role in the relationships between the INGOs and the local NGOs (at least it has to be highlighted that these interviews took place while COVID was receding, in its last days).This seems to have stemmed from the fact that the impacts of COVID were not felt in the cross-border areas where the aid was distributed until only the recent phases of COVID and also from the fact that the physical relations between the INGOs and local Syrian NGOs operating in the Gaziantep hub have been minimal, mostly being confined to a couple of times per project implementation. The rest of the transactions part of the partnership agreement are carried out virtually by way of reporting, with the INGOs being the receiving end of this reporting. Even so, some challenges that COVID brought about were articulated by both the INGO professionals and the local Syrian NGOs, and in line with this, the following themes have been explored.

Preserving the Status quo

The interview findings suggest that the outbreak of the COVID pandemic has impacted inter-NGO relations in such a way that the INGOs have chosen to stay with their existing partners and not take on any new members. As stated by one INGO professional: *"I think the main challenges were that the already existing relationships* *continued to do so, but the new ones couldn't prosper"* (INGO6, personal communication, December 2022).

Lack of Physical Presence

Although it is clear that the ongoing projects were not affected by the outbreak of COVID, the lack of physical presence between the INGOs and the local NGOs, despite their limited interactions during the project implementation, seems to play a key role. *"I mean, we still have emails; we still have…but meeting in person has a huge impact on leaving an impact of an organization."*

One INGO professional defines the era as being one of risk reduction; although the organizations have funding priorities they had to see to, the safety of the staff was another issue to be considered (INGO11, personal communication, June 2023).

It is also true that these organizations do not only have physical interaction in their collaborative partnerships, but also that cluster meetings, social gatherings, workshops, and related activities, which have important implications for boundary spanning, were all suspended. Thus, the lack of physical presence moved the meetings to a virtual world. This, an INGO professional conveyed, caused an increase in the number of meetings that used to be held in normal times, with the number of physical meetings doubling in the virtual world (INGO10, personal communication, 2022). Regarding the nature of the meetings turning into a virtual world, an interviewee stated, as a post-covid repercussion, that *"So before COVID 19, if there was online meeting, it was really very strange, but after COVID 19, 60-70 percent of my meetings still are online meetings* (INGO7, personal communication, June 2023).

5.14. Other Emerging Themes

Archaic Discourse

Perhaps one of the most interesting findings in this research has been that, through a couple of interviews, it became clear that the discourse of humanitarian organizations, especially that of the international ones, was being perceived by the local NGOs as being irrelevant after some time of interaction with each other. One of such words becoming a buzzword or cliché in the ears of the local NGOs is "capacity building." The interview findings suggest that at the initial phases of the interaction, these may not be so perceived, but after that phase, especially when the locals realize that the discourse of capacity building is not changing even after the action meets the standards asked for, i.e., when there is not much else left on the part of the local NGOs to do regarding the enhancement of capacity building, that is, when the local NGOs have reached the desired level of technical and administrative capacity and still the INGOs keep using the same discourse. One respondent's outcry (dissatisfaction) about this approach was very illustrative: *"They (INGOs) cannot find anything else to say, and still they keep saying 'capacity building,' 'capacity building…'"* (SLoC8, personal communication, November 2022). And another interviewee put it a bit ironically: *"Now, we have been trained for 11 years, but we have never graduated"* (SLoC7, personal communication, 2022).

Working Cultures and Adaptation

The findings of the research suggest that there is a need to analyze the adaptation of the local NGOs to the working culture or structures of the INGOs based on two factors. First, the Syrians who emerged from the Syrian crisis, people with no substantive NGO background or civil society tradition; and secondly, those people who are part of the Syrian community and come from the diaspora, working in different corporations and organizations. This was reflected in the difference in the organization's implementing team inside Syria and the team working in the Turkiye hub (INGO6, personal communication, December 2022). The findings suggest that there is a great adaptation of working culture on the part of the Syrian local NGOs to the working of the international organizations, this has been in line with the funding requirements and capacity-building processes conducted both by the UN, INGOs, and some other emerging local entities providing such services. However, the findings do not give the same stream of reasoning about the Turkish local NGOs involved in the cross-border context. This is for two reasons: first, there are not many NGOs taking part in the cross-border context except for AFAD, TRC, and IHH. Most of other Turkish entities taking part in the cross-border humanitarian context are charities, and since they have their traditional fund-raising activities and mostly offer in-kind services, they seem to be differing from fully-fledged NGOs. Their traditional way of working is reflected in their not being part of the official coordination mechanism, the cluster system, for that matter. Accordingly, most mid-sized NGOs are working in the Turkish response.

6. DISCUSSION

6.1.Context and Methodology

Research overview: This study investigates dynamics of trust in the light of *cooperation* and *coordination* in the relationships between local Syrian-led, Turkish NGOs and INGOs within the Syrian-cross-border humanitarian aid context, specifically in Northwest Syria (NWS). It aims to shed light on how these organizations navigate the challenges of cooperation and coordination in a complex and evolving crisis environment.

Methodological Approach: Qualitative data was collected by key informant interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis through a hybrid approach (inductive and deductive) within a framework of *social exchange* and *neo-institutional* theories. The questions in the interview guideline were prepared and directed at respondents by the adoption of a process tracing approach, delving into past relationships among I/NGOs to better investigate and unravel patterns of relationships and the contextual environment in which these relationships took place.

6.2.Theoretical Framework Revisited

Application of Theories: The adoption of the social exchange theory helps to understand reciprocal and yet complex relationships and the intertwined power dynamics between NGOs. Neo-institutional theory, on the other hand, offers insights into how external developments and pressures lead to *isomorphic* changes and *decoupling* strategies for these organizations.

Connecting Theory and Context: The Syrian cross-border aid mechanism represents a unique setting where the relevancy of these theories become highly important. Due to its cross-border nature, the setting involves various actors such as global and regional players and their political interests, which are already reflected in the dilemmas and impasses regarding the cross-border resolution and other macro-level decision making processes that directly affect the nature and practical setting of the crisis. The host state (Türkiye), with its norms and regulations, as well as its regional influence and presence in Northern Syria, can have significant impact on how NGOs organize, cooperate and coordinate. The various factions in the opposition areas are also directly affecting the operation leg of humanitarian aid, particularly through their areas of influence, which directly affect access and other operational capabilities of the local NGOs. That being the case, social exchange theory's power to explore and explain reciprocal relationships between NGOs, as well as power dynamics in these relationships, makes it highly relevant. Neo-institutional theory's catch on environmental (external) influences of the actions and interactions of NGOs is highly essential and relevant in the sense that the external pressure—political, legal and social—are effective in NGOs responding to these pressures by adapting and conforming *(isomorphism)* to similar patterns and standards or finding a fine balance between preserving their legitimacy through formal structures and policies and still having practical operational flexibility *(decoupling)* in their actual practices regarding their inter-organizational relations.

6.3.Summary of Key Findings

Cooperation challenges: Key findings suggest significant *power imbalances* between local NGOs and INGOs, with the former often trying to meet high operational standards set by the latter or through NGO donors which affect partnership dynamics and thus the role of trust in these dynamics. These power imbalances are also a result of lack of access to resources and decision-making processes by the local NGOs. Key themes arising through cooperation challenges between local NGOs and INGOs are *alignment of priorities and expertise*, *the impact of old relationships on new ones*, *accountability and compliance*, *survival*, and *the status of contractors vs. real partnership.*

Trust definition: The field definitions of trust among both INGOs and local NGOs seem to overlap in themes such as *communication and transparency*, *honesty and integrity* and *cultural norms.* There are variations regarding emphasis on themes such as *risk management* (a point more emphasized by the local NGOs), *organizational comfort and past experience* (a point more emphasized by the INGO professionals), *approach to problem solving and communication* (with emphasis by the local NGOs regarding collective action and solidarity and by the INGO professionals who emphasize *effective communication* and *selective honesty, short-term projects* and *institutional development*).

Trustworthiness: The trustworthiness perceptions of INGOs regarding local NGOs is linked to the willingness by the local NGOs to accept criticism and demonstrate robust technical capacity and compliance with rules and regulations.

Coordination Challenges: The local NGOs have stressed the need for better use of existing resources, the challenges of dealing with multiple actors on the ground, decreasing funding, and bureaucracy. The INGO professionals, on the other hand, highlight issues like reliability, data collection, and the UN's role both as a funder and coordinative body, among others. These challenges, of course, have shown variations across different periods such as before the cross-border resolution and after the cross-border resolution, as especially the local NGOs have pointed out the effective role of the UN formal mechanism (cluster system) in terms of its impacts regarding standardization and transparency among the humanitarian actors.

Localization and challenges: There is a substantial degree of alignment between how the local NGOs and INGOs perceive the localization concept in terms of definition, as they both believe localization should be empowerment of local communities which agrees with the definitions of other international actors such as USAID and the European Commission. The focus for both is investment in local leadership and strengthening of the local capacities. There is also consensus that localization should involve the phasing out of international actors and that it should not be seen as a process confined solely to a humanitarian response, it should involve contributions to the development of grassroots civil society. The main challenges of localization in the Syrian cross-border context are envisioned as the gap between rhetoric and practice, skepticism over the capacity of the local NGOs, field-level challenges, the ongoing conflict situation inside the country, etc.

COVID-19 and its impacts: As a period of high health risks and uncertainty associated with it, Covid-19 does not seem to have had a substantial impact on cooperation and coordination of the I/NGOs in the Syrian cross-border context. The main challenges have been unwillingness of international donors and NGOs to start new partnerships, but rather continue with the existing ones. As an act to compensate for the loss of physical meetings, the number of virtual meetings has increased; something that has been transferred to the post-humanitarian work setting. At this time the impacts of Covid-19 were not felt in NWS that much, although at a later phase, issues of procurement and unspent funds were pointed out by respondents.

6.4.Trust, Cooperation and Coordination

Before a discussion of emerging themes in relation to the role of trust and social exchange with regard to neo-institutional theories, an interpretation of the key findings through the analytic framework that was compiled and presented in Chapter 3 follows here. In synthesizing the theoretical perspectives on the role of trust in inter-organizational relationships, with a focus on cooperation and coordination, the discussion draws upon the tenets of Social Exchange Theory and Neo-institutional Theory. Referring to our analytical table in Chapter 3, where the role of trust, vis-à-vis cooperation and coordination through the lenses of the Social Exchange Theory and Neo-institutional

Theory are encapsulated. Social Exchange Theory views trust as emerging as a result of positive interactions, and it is essential in mitigating opportunism and thus facilitating norms of inter-organizational relationships. Such a perspective suggests that trust alleviates concerns about opportunism and breaches of trust, which in turn strengthens relationship-specific norms in dyadic exchanges. Moreover, trust is expected to indirectly aid in coordination by allowing more flexible task coordination and playing a vital role in setting mutual expectations through serial equity and repeated exchanges. Neo-institutionalism, on the other hand, views trust as an inherent omnipresence within all relationships, highlighting the more abstract, institutionalized aspect of trust that contribute to stability and predictability. In such a view, the failure of cooperation is not seen as a central component of trust, rather as an outcome of various factors within institutionalized contexts. Thus, institutionalized trust is viewed as contributing to *stabilization* and *predictability* necessary for increasing inter-organizational coordination.

These theoretical lenses are to provide us with a manifold understanding of the role of trust in inter-organizational cooperation and coordination. This way, it sets the stage for our examination of how these dynamics function in a practical setting, in the inter-organizational relationship between the INGOs and local NGOs working in the Türkiye hub.

The main tenet of social exchange theory is the repeated exchanges and thus development of trust as a result of these repeated exchanges. The prolongation of the Syrian political and humanitarian crisis and the long existence of humanitarian organizations in the same setting is expected to lead to these repeated exchanges and formation of trusting relations, particularly considering the low number of INGOs doing direct implementation inside Syria and the rest of the bulk of humanitarian aid being done by the *partnership* agreements between INGOs and local Syrian organizations. As the nature of these partnerships depend on agreements and terms of such agreements, relationships under *negotiated exchanges* in social exchange theory are considered.

In the case of the Syrian cross-border humanitarian response, the protracted nature of the crisis makes us consider both *trust* and *cooperation* in a different way. Although, at the initial phase, the humanitarian actors acted in line with their short-term interests (not particularly meaning any specific benefit, but acting on freshness of the crisis) and that is how we see as “swift trust” in action. However, as the duration of the crisis lengthened and the actors got into a long-term relationship, they altered the meaning to their exchange relationship. The assumption is that long-term relationships will affect the behaviors of actors involved positively; that is, making them more cooperative in view of their long-term interests (Good 1988: 34). In their investigations of Prisoner's Dilemma game, Pruitt and Kimmel (1977: 375) make the point that *short-term thinking* leads to non-cooperation, even though the other party (B) in the prisoner's dilemma is to cooperate, the non-cooperative party (A) is to make the largest benefit (exploitation) and if B chooses not to cooperate and instead defect, it only gives A the justification of not having cooperated in the first place, since the non-cooperative behavior of B will justify A's action. Conversely, cooperation takes place as a result of *long-term thinking* as the goal is to "establish and/or maintain continued mutual cooperation." While at the same time it would be feasible to think that one party (A) could resort to defection at a later stage once the cooperation of B is attained, although for long-term engagements it is "unproductive" (Pruitt and Kimmel 1977: 375). Accordingly, one assumption of social exchange theory would be that in a protracted crisis setting where actors work and interact with each other over the years, it would lead to repeated and reciprocal exchanges. In the Syrian crisis, however, this has been challenged by short-term project allocation[60] and funding schemes that impede long-term planning and trust-based relationships that, in turn, foster cooperation. Such nature of projects hinders *predictability*, meaningful connections, and relationships, instead causing confusion, uncertainty, and insecurity regarding the future of the work the local organizations are doing. What has made this worse in the Syrian cross-border context is the sudden interference by donors in long-existing partnerships between INGOs and local NGOs. These interferences[61] usually lead to break-up of the relations between the INGOs and local NGOs, and since the reasons for such interference are usually not explicit, but are only implicit and not spelled out, leaving the general ambiance in the micro society of the humanitarian actors in a state of uncertainty, which naturally affects the upcoming relations or leave the existing ones in suspicion.

[60] Rajjoub (2020:61) sees the preference for short-term project allocation by INGOs as a strategy that INGOs adopt so as not to take risks related with the local NGOs' potential political background and by short-term dealings they want to decrease the risk of being involved with organizations that might have some undesired political tendencies, not liked by the donors.

[61] This refers to the breaking up of the relationship between the INGOs and local NGOs and in some cases, it could go to the lengths that it would mean the latter's suspension of its activities due to the suspension of the funds. These type of interferences by the donors usually sideline the dyadic relationship between the INGOs and local NGOs and leave no say to either party, since the donors are at the highest echelon of the power hierarchy as the holders of the resources.

In a similar vein, the turnover of staff is an important factor that disrupts the sustainability of the long-term relations that could lead to repeated and uninterrupted exchanges between organizations. The constant change of international staff at INGOs lead to the interruption of the previous exchange processes and to start anew with the newcomers who are usually not knowledgeable of the contexts and the specific norms of the inter-organizational relationships. This is also related to the effectiveness of communication parties can have with one another, since more communication leads to more cooperation (Wichman, 1970). What communication leads to in the end is less ambiguity; the more we know about others, the more clarity and thus less ambiguity, which fosters a stronger basis for trust. In the protracted nature of the Syrian crisis, one could assume that the local NGOs would be more concerned about their long-term interest instead of short-term transactions[62]—which is how the INGOs see them, as transactional partners—since what is at stake in the long-run is also their survival. Such a long-term view of their interests will also put them into a more successful communication, which will lead to less ambiguity and thus cooperation and a certain level of trust (Good, 1988:37). Communication, especially a healthy and timely communication, is an important factor leading to transparency. For instance, lack of communication is one of the exchange interrupters in the Syrian cross-border context, with cultural characteristics playing a significant role. The cultural understanding of both parties (INGOs and local NGOs) becomes vital in communication, although so-called "cultural translation" is something not much appreciated for the sake of equality between the international humanitarian organizations and local entities (Begum, 2020). A mutual understanding of cultural dynamics helps with transparency and thus trust building processes.

The issue of organizational capacity of the local NGOs to meet the standards set by the INGOs and donors, is one of the essential elements posing a barrier in the way of cooperation and thus affecting trust formation or showing lack of trust thereof. Indeed, the current findings support this in a way, as is shown in the trust definitions of the INGOs and their trustworthiness perception of the local NGOs. On the other hand, such perception of the INGOs regarding locals' technical capacity is found to be groundless by the local NGOs and at times even considered as a pretext by the INGOs not to further deepen the relations. Indeed, it is even argued that such policies of international bodies towards local NGOs is also a kind of evaluation of local bodies to see which of them fit

[62] This is also related to the realization that the Civil War would be prolonged in nature, as initially it was seen that the war would end earlier.

into their (INGOs') working frame through a capacity building process and fitting them into a so-called "*professionalized"* category, while others who are not part of this process are alienated and isolated (Begum, 2020). These capacity building processes of INGOs, coupled with excessive needs assessment procedures, are viewed to be detrimental to the practical and local humanitarian reflexes (responses) that are unique and needed on the ground.

In a related line of argument, there is a bidirectional relation between cooperation and trust, with the latter seen to foster cooperation (Brattström and Bachmann, 2017) and the most salient aspect of cooperation involves the alignment of goals (Gulati et al. 2012); the misalignment or lack of alignment of priorities between the INGOs and NGOs can lead to cooperation failures resulting in the non-continuation of the partnerships or eliminating any such possibility from the start. Such lack of alignment is not only related to organizational capacity and areas of expertise between the parties, but has been suggested by the findings that such misalignment can arise from misinterpretation of cultural and contextual norms and lack of adaptation to Western norms. The expectation of such cultural and contextual norms to be adapted to the donor or international culture is already a theme that is under critique, and it is associated with underlying structural inequalities enmeshed between the actors in Global North and those in the Global South (Begum, 2020).

Although the preference of INGOs to go with their old partners, which hinders new local NGOs' getting into working relationships with INGOs, may seem to be a product of repeated exchanges over time, producing trusting relationships with the local NGOs in the existing partnerships. The data show that it is rather a constrained preference and a reflection of cost and benefit analysis by the INGOs. As one interviewee puts it: *"…because working through partners is always more expensive. Um, because you need in your own office, you need people that work with the partner and you pay the salaries of the partner and blah, blah, like, like the project people, salaries and things*" (INGO11, personal communication, June 2023). Similarly, an approach to end an existing relationship and evaluate new potential partners come with an extra cost for INGOs, which are reflected in efforts of new assessments, due diligence, and associated costs (INGO3, 2023).

Although meetings of formal character such as cluster meetings have been designed to help and inform the local NGOs' capacity building processes, their main impact has been in promotion of the networking activities and connections. Indeed, one point not to be overlooked is the power of the informal leg of such formal meetings, *i.e*. what the stakeholders talk about during the breaks or after the meetings. Some participants have gone so far as to state that such meetings are seen by the participants, not as contributing to them in terms of technical expertise and the like, but rather as a window of opportunity to network with people in the field and thus cooperate on future occasions (TLoC1, personal communication, October 2022). Indeed, it has also been suggested that the informal nature of such networking led to more sharing of information among partners, thus more transparency, while in the formal proceedings the information sharing remained limited (MisC3, personal communication, January 2023).

In terms of *coordination*, the humanitarian environment lacking a formal structure before the UN Resolution is also characterized by lack of trust, a situational view of the local actors stemming from three important reasons: 1) The newness of these organizations in the humanitarian sector and the freshness of the crisis affecting their ambivalent role enmeshed in an uncertainty regarding the end of the civil war; 2) The distrust in other international humanitarian bodies due to the fears that they could have an association with regime or connection with bodies close to the Syrian regime; 3) The hesitancy among the local NGOs to share information fearing that this could end up in the hands of regime affiliates, and due to the negative competition which led to the fear of losing their funding sources to their counterparts. Of course, the distrust in international organizations was mutual, since the INGOs had the fear that newly formed local NGOs could potentially have connections with designated extremist groups (Rajjoub, 2020). As the crisis got prolonged and went beyond 2013, this is also when the new local Syrian NGOs started humanitarian aid with more of an organizational character; *uncertainty* around a formal legal structure for delivering humanitarian aid across the border remained in place as discussed in Chapter 2. The political landscape around a cross-border resolution or simply the legitimacy of delivering aid from across the border and operating in a host country came out as an essential force triggering such a lack of trust in the general environment in the inter-organizational context. It should also be noted that at the time, the political repercussions of the crisis at macro, meso (at the host state level) and micro (involving the dynamics inside Syria as well as the dyadic relationships between the actors) levels were more in the foreground than the humanitarian tier of it. With the latter’s slowly evolving nature in the opposition held-areas, and this being reflected by the reshuffling of the military and civil forces inside the opposition areas, which somehow also helped with the clearing of the blurry roles of the actors inside the country and thus those of the newly emerging Syrian humanitarian organizations.

The most such defining of roles was by the set-up of the Syrian Interim Government (SIG) and its arms of civil administrative structures in the opposition-held areas, the Local Councils, that filled the gap of providing civil services beginning of the civil war, gaps that came about as a result of regime forces withdrawing from these areas, and later with their more defined roles as civil administrative bodies started running schools, hospital and other public amenities. Particularly after the Resolution and with the formal mechanism in place, the air of distrust emanating from the unwillingness to share information was overcome thanks to OCHA's trust building initiatives, both before the resolution and at the cluster level after the resolution helped with clearing that air of distrust. However, it is also well-acknowledged that the local NGOs' increasing numbers in the cluster system, their softening on the information sharing processes, and their active participation in such processes was also due to decreasing so-called Gulf funds, particularly from Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates due to the deteriorating relations of these countries with Türkiye as a result of Türkiye supporting Qatar in the so-called Gulf Crisis which led to the Qatar Blockade in which Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates and Egypt cut their ties with Qatar and blockaded it (Aljazeera, 2017).

In terms of coordination of dyadic nature in inter-organizational relations, it could be argued that the duration of cooperation between NGOs, especially those working on relatively longer projects helped with flexibility on the part of INGOs in dealing with some transactional technicalities such as flexibility in reporting frequency (reduction in frequency of reporting) or flexibility with the deadlines.

6.5. Social Exchange, Power and Dependence

According to Emerson (1962), power is an attribute of social relations. Defining an actor alone as powerful will not signify much unless we associate it with another actor or actors in a social relation. Thus, saying actor A is powerful would not signify much until we compare the power of actor A over actor B. Mutual *dependence*, is the attainment of A's goals through the actions of B. For the sake of *mutual dependency*, such an exchange requires that each party has the capability to control or influence the other's conduct, which puts each actor in a position to provide or withhold, enable or hinder the satisfaction of the other party (Emerson, 1962). This implies that controlling what is valued for the other actor in a relationship signifies power: *"power resides implicitly in the other's dependency"* as Emerson (1962) puts it. If we break down what Emerson (1962) formulates, that is, the dependence of A on B is proportional to A's *"motivational investment in goals mediated"* by B and inversely proportional to the availability of those goals to A outside of the A-B relationship. In other words, the more needs A has that can be a provided by B, the more dependent A is on B. In this relationship A values something and B has the power to respond. In the inverse proportionality, the availability of other options to A outside of its relationship with B will make A's dependency on B decrease. This is an important issue since in a social structure, relations are not based on dyads only. The dyadic relationship between A and B, as formulated by Emerson, is enmeshed in a network of "exchange opportunities" with other actors (Cook et al., 2022).

Thus, the *inequality* in the exchange relations between two actors, as can be fathomed, stems from one party's controlling more of the valued resources. While reciprocal exchange of services leads to mutual dependence (interdependence), which can balance power dynamics, one-sided reliance (unilateral) on services perpetuates power imbalances (Blau, 1964), which can potentially lead to or exacerbate inequality. The dynamics of subordination by the less powerful or domination from the more powerful thus continue to maintain themselves in an exchange relationship, they become self-perpetuating, forming the base of power *inequalities* in an exchange relationship (Cook et al., 2022). Similarly, mutual dependence is a question of balance between the *contributions* and *benefits* received in the partnership or alliance, the non-achievement of which could lead to cooperation failure (Gulati et al., 2012).

The power imbalances between INGOs and local NGOs, although contextual in the case study at hand, have their roots in the structural inequality of the distribution of resources. The power of INGOs over local NGOs increase as the latter is often not in a position to have alternative funds or lacks legitimacy and access to donors' networks.

The hard-to-achieve conditions by donors to have access to direct funding puts local NGOs in a position that is nothing but *dependency*. One of the main principles of the social exchange theory is that parties in an exchange relation are ultimately concerned about the cost and benefits; they will make an effort of maximizing their benefits and minimizing their costs (Homans, 1961). This is also in line with what Gulati et al. (2012) point out as the failure of cooperation in the case of one party's discrepancy between *contributions* and *benefits*. In this study, some of the themes identified as cooperation challenges further reflect such power imbalances between INGOs and local NGOs.

Organizational capacity, for instance, is what is expected of the local NGOs in order for them to be able to obtain the resources that are in control of the INGOs, either the INGO's resources or those to be allocated through donors. In the same way, the norms, regulations and standards are set by donors or INGOs as they are the powerful party in the relationship.

Although if we apply Emerson's power formulation and the decisive factor of the value of resources in exchange relations determining the dependency of one actor and thus the nature of the power relations, we will see that the inter-NGO relations in the context of the Syrian cross-border situation are not translated into a relationship of equal partnership or mutual dependence, although the INGOs lack crucial in-field contextual knowledge and community reach that local NGOs possess. Indeed, as the findings have suggested, the INGOs' move to partner with local NGOs is borne out of necessity rather than preference, as exemplified by the unique case of the Syrian cross-border context in which the existence of international bodies, including the UN, has been minimal or nonexistent due to security reasons emanating from the existence of different radical groups active in the country. The "partnership" being by necessity rather than preference, also makes the power relation in the partnership tilted towards the INGOs, since within the networks of exchange, local NGOs have but few options. Local NGOs are not entitled to apply for direct funding from major donors (of hundreds, a small number of them have been eligible so far), consequently the dependency of the INGOs on the local NGOs on issues such as access and community in the end does not bring the local NGOs to a favorable position and does not empower them. Such an *inequality* embedded in structural realities seems to be working differently for the INGOs themselves in their relations with donors. For instance, the securing of funding from major donors by INGOs means the provision of the whole package, *i.e.*, costs related to project implementation, such as procurement of goods, logistics, overhead costs, program and support costs, while securing of the funding for local Syrian NGOs from INGOs does not come with such a full package (Rajjoub, 2020). For the local Syrian NGOs to secure funding, such as overhead costs and supports costs, they usually depend on their bargaining power in the partnership, and they must do it by negotiation. The weak bargaining power of local Syrian NGOs, despite the *comparative advantage* of their access, contextual knowledge, and operational capabilities, lead them to have a lower hand in the negotiations with INGOs. This is also closely related to the wider exchange network in which the bilateral exchange relationship is taking place, namely INGOs' access to other alternative relationship opportunities.

In the *negotiated exchanges* mentioned earlier, the main risk factor for the dependent (less powerful) player is that of being *excluded* in case an agreement is not reached (Molm, 2003). Such a decision to exclude another actor from getting a deal in the negotiation, according to Molm (2003), does not result from strategic decisions of the powerful actors; rather, it stems from structural realities, which are characterized by the disparity in availability of actors in a *"negatively connected network."* Accordingly, to avoid the risk of *exclusion*, the dependent party (the more available in the exchange network, say B) must increase the offers to be able to get a deal with A. While such a move will save B from exclusion, the increase of offers will mean greater power of A over B (Molm, 2003). Although the interview data show there is marked advocacy among the Syrian local NGOs, uniting them over the same cause when it comes to defending the opposition or advocating for humanitarian needs in NWS, the data also show that the local NGOs have another level of inter-organizational relations, which is characterized by *negative competition* regarding access to funding, truly reflecting Molm's (2003) conceptualization of *negatively connected networks*. In that sense, the negative competition of local NGOs for funding on the one hand, and their *availability* and *value* not being different from each other[63] on the other hand, have increased the alternatives for the INGOs to form possible partnerships, hence low bargaining power for local NGOs in the partnership. At times, the practical translation of such reasoning has led some INGOs to ignore such costs altogether when signing agreements with local NGOs or financing only one staff member to take care of several projects.

Indeed, what seems to be igniting factor hindering mutual dependence in the partnership agreements between the INGOs and local NGOs is associated with the risk factor and thus closely related to the trust issue. In the action of trusting, there is vulnerability by the trustor towards trustee and the vulnerability requires risk, thus by act of trusting the trustor is also exposing itself to the risk involved (van Knippenberg, 2018). In such an action of transferring the risk to the local NGOs and leaving them alone in the

[63] This statement could especially be true during the initial years of the Syrian crisis since all these organizations more or less had the same or similar organizational capacity, while almost none had a prior history of working as a full-fledged organizational structure nor did their members have experience in humanitarian action. This naturally positioned Syrian local NGOs in a similar position of organizational capacity. However, after some years this would change as some local NGOs would stand out from others owing to their increased capacities now matching that of the INGOs'.

ever-changing dynamics of NWS humanitarian setting is a manifestation of lack of trusting and power imbalances as driving force behind it. This is made more concrete by the following excerpt: "*We can, I can give you examples, uh, dealing with the local authorities, especially some designated groups on the ground. So if, if anything happened on the ground, they will put all their liabilities on your side and they will get away"* (SLOC7, 2022). In fact, this is also invalidating the often talked of capacity building discourse repeated by the INGO or donors with regard to standing in the way of cooperation with the local authorities, since even the most qualified local NGOs working many years in partnership with INGOs or major donors can face suspension of fundings overnight. This has already happened in the case of local NGOs operating from Türkiye and the commonly cited reason for such suspension of fundings are rumored to be the engagement of local entities with the designated groups in the field, or as conveyed in the interviews, there is a total uncertainty regarding the causes. This, in turn, also affects the communication approach of the local NGOs with their INGO partners, since acknowledging any arising difficulties would also mean damage to their reputation. This further reflects the dependence of local NGOs on the resources of INGOs and donors' and thus creates a sense of 'infallibility' stemming from the perception that their power in the exchange relationship, which is driven from performance and reputation, may be in jeopardy if the emerging issues (problems) are communicated to funding parties (donors and INGOs) in the exchange relationship. Such a risk-aversion approach is further reflected in the nature of partnerships between INGOs and local NGOs; instead of a real "partnership" in which mutual terms and benefits are calculated, the INGOs' preference is tilted towards *subcontractor* types of "partnerships" in which local NGOs have little or no say.

6.6.Institutional Isomorphism and Power Dynamics

The capacity building of local NGOs is an isomorphic force that is essential to attain international legitimacy. The capacity building processes serve as evaluative benchmarks for most INGOs and donors, determining funding eligibility and enabling local NGOs to secure their survival and sustain their operations within the humanitarian sector. These processes involve adoption, adaptation and improvements across a wide variety of mostly technical issues, such as organizational capacity to go through due diligence procedures, which include areas such as governance, administration, finances, procurement, human resources, humanitarian principles, external financial audit, etc.

That is, these are efforts for local NGOs to have organizational capacity and robustness to comply with donor and INGO requirements, as well as those of the host state in which they have their operational space.

The argument is that INGOs expect the local NGOs to resemble them at both technical and normative levels. This is best reflected in their definitions of inter-organizational trust and the benchmarks for trustworthiness. This isomorphism may take place either coercively, such as by rules and regulations of the INGOs, or mimetic with local NGOs wanting to adopt these features. In a way, the adoption of such features at both technical and normative levels are seen as acts of gaining or preserving their legitimacy to operate in the environment or get acceptance by the humanitarian community at large, and more importantly it is seen as forming a base for trusting relationships. One could argue that such acts of isomorphism also increase the role of trust or trustworthiness of the local NGOs in the eyes of international actors, since local NGOs increase their chances of survival by becoming more legitimate, by *isomorphing* with the rules and regulations of the organizational environment in which they operate. Isomorphism for the INGOs and local NGOs in Syrian cross-border humanitarian aid have developed at three levels: macro, meso, and micro. The macro level has involved the action or inaction of international actors with self-interest in Syria, which affects the dynamics of relations between the INGOs and local NGOs. The meso level has involved the policies and actions of the host state, Türkiye, and their wider implications for operations of the INGOs and local NGOs, both in terms of their administrative location in Gaziantep and their in-field operations inside Syria.

Isomorphism at three levels: The main argument for this line of reasoning is that forces and dynamics that affected the cooperative and coordinating relations between the INGOs and NGOs operating in NWS from Türkiye have been effective at all three levels. Although most of these isomorphic forces have taken place in a coercive nature, which for local NGOs means adoption or adaptation to formal and informal pressures arising from organizational and cultural expectations of the environment in which these organizations operate. In this sense, especially at the meso level (host state), INGOs have also gone through a coercive isomorphic process to secure their operations and survival inside the host country. To some extent there are also normative and mimetic levels, particularly regarding the former, where both INGOs and local NGOs have to incorporate into their policies and procedures general norms and related discourses *e.g.,* the *localization* that has been put in place as a result of broader political agendas. With the issue of capacity building, there is a blend of *coercive*, *mimetic*, and *normative* influences for the local NGOs, since it is through capacity building processes that local NGOs can secure funding from INGOs or donors, or simply work as legitimate actors. While this aspect seems to be coercive, it has elements of mimetic isomorphism, since it does not include a coercive driver behind the action, but instead imitates the structures in the environment as a consequence of uncertainty and imitation could take place intentionally or unintentionally by various factors such as turnover of staff and personnel movement (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991). Although there is not coercion in this process, there is willingness on the part of organizations to look more legitimate or emulate other organizations that are more legitimate or more successful. The normative aspect of it comes from the diffusion of norms and practices and is closely related with professionalization, hence capacity building for the local NGOs means improving perception, adoption of norms and expertise of certain professions, and making the traits and characteristics of the local humanitarian workers homogeneous. Socialization is an important case in point in normative isomorphism, especially the capacity building workshops and cluster meetings that are examples to be given for the normative isomorphism, through which professional homogeneity across humanitarian workers is attained. It is also true that such isomorphism is not working in favor of the local NGOs, since the experienced staff are finding their way into INGOs or other international bodies' ranks when the opportunity arises.

Macro Level: The isomorphic forces at this level have been due to political interests of the big players and their roles and influences in Syria. The primary starting point for such an impact is at the highest political level, at the UNSC, regarding the cross-border resolution of humanitarian aid that led to an unstructured delivery of aid across the board with high uncertainty around its future. Even though this period is characterized by high uncertainty, non-existence of a formal coordination structure, and limited humanitarian aid both in volume and scope, this has led to the self-adjustment efforts of actors to come together over some networks and alliances that have functioned at both advocacy and operational levels serving as platforms of both coordination and cooperation. The practices of other countries inside Syria, as well as their alliances, also shifted some of the power structures inside the country affecting access of the local humanitarian organizations to the people in need, for example that of the US with the SDF and those of Russia and Iran. Specifically, Russian support for the regime has shifted the power dynamics in favor of the Syrian regime in areas that were previously under opposition control. Of course, the international relations and their impacts on the distribution of funding have also affected how local organizations have reacted and taken action. Particularly, the local NGOs' perception that the Gulf funds are more flexibly used in comparison with the Western-derived funds, since the latter have more strict compliance regulations.

Meso level: The meso level is characterized by the host state Türkiye having served as an isomorphic force affecting the dynamics of the relationship between the INGOs and local Syrian NGOs. First, it should be noted that Türkiye's response to the humanitarian crisis at its immediate border has been two-fold: 1) its open-door policy, especially at the initial phases of the crisis, has led to thousands of refugees crossing the border into the country, later these numbers reached millions (the latest number of Syrian refugees in the country is 3.7 million (Reliefweb, 2022); 2) for the first time the country is hosting not only a large number of refugees on its lands, but also for the first time it is encountering such a large scale of humanitarian aid from across the border into a neighboring state.[64] Although one could argue that these two processes are detached from each other, refugee management has indeed proceeded in line with the management of the humanitarian crisis at its border. The latter process has also involved the management of large numbers of international and Syrian-led NGOs operating on Turkish land. Management of the refugees has also been part of Türkiye's EU accession process since its candidacy in 1999 and has been covered in EU accession progress reports. These efforts culminated in the founding of The Presidency of the Migration Management following the Law on Foreigners and International Protection in 2013. At the same time, Türkiye's concerns over the takeover of lands by the Syrian affiliate of Kurdistan Worker Party (PKK), People's Protection Units (YPG) in the northeast of Syria, triggered the securitization policies of Türkiye in the region, which culminated in Turkish military mobilization, first in 2016 with the *Euphrates Shield* taking control of a stretch of territory from Jarabulus to Al-Bab, then *Operation Olive Branch* in 2018 in Afrin, and lastly with *Operation Peace Spring* in the area between Tel Abyad and Ras al-Ayn. One can argue

[64] Türkiye had such crises at its contiguous border with the Iraqi refugees during the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988) and the Gulf War (1991), and historically it has been a pathway for refugees from the Greater Middle East or Western Asia on their way to European and other Western soils. The policy of the Turkish Republic during such crises was that of high securitization. Also, its signature on the UN Refugee Convention of 1951 and its special reservation of 1967 that deems only those entering the country from the Western border as refugees creates dilemmas regarding those on its land. With the Syrian refugees arriving in Türkiye as a result of open-door policy, they have been protected by the Law on Foreigners and International Protection (2013) and the subsequent Temporary Protection Regulation (2014).

that a combination of these factors have affected the administrative and operational space of both INGOs and NGOs. Particularly, since the coup attempt in 2016, the securitization and control policies of Türkiye have become more salient towards the INGOs and other humanitarian organizations working in the cross-border region from Türkiye (Rajjoub, 2020). Particularly, the issue of working permits getting denied or delayed are not uncommon. For the INGOs to be able to work with a local NGO, they must comply with Turkish laws and regulations concerning not only registration inside the country but also staffing requirements, financial audits, and the transfer of funds, etc.

Micro Level: Isomorphism at the micro level takes place through socialization and professionalization processes. The professional capacities of the staff working for the local NGOs are essential for the legitimacy and survival of these organizations. In that sense, the capacity-building workshops, cluster meetings, and even daily social gatherings in the micro environment of humanitarian workers serve as platforms where they get to increase their knowledge and expertise at the local level, and consequently the overall legitimacy of the local organization with which they are affiliated. The newness of the civil society initiatives and humanitarian action efforts for the Syrian opposition, as well as the cross-border nature in which Türkiye serves as the administrative base of the local organizations, may have facilitated and further encouraged such socialization and professionalization processes. In terms of cooperation, such socialization and subsequent professionalization processes, especially through boundary spanners, contribute to creating a sense of community. Specifically, the role of social gatherings and the vitality of informal communication channels for cooperation have already been touched upon by the interviewees. Professionalization of local humanitarian workers also facilitates coordination by way of increasing technical capacities of staff, thus making it easier for local NGOs to meet the requirements of donors, INGOs, and other coordination actors. These isomorphic pressures, however, do not always work to the benefit of the local NGOs, since it turns into a vicious cycle in which local humanitarian workers find themselves in pursuit of opportunities with UN agencies or INGOs, while local NGOs in turn must make additional efforts to fill vacant positions.

6.7.Trust and Localization as an Institution

In the parlance of institutionalism and neo-institutional theory, talking about institution is indispensable with respect to the question: "what is an institution?" There is not an answer whose boundaries have been marked and clear-cut. It can be argued that anything can be an institution. An institution, according to Jepperson (1991), is a *"social structure that reveals a particular reproduction process."* In his argument, an institution is "chronically reproduced" and its survival is dependent on "relatively self-activating social process." The continuation of such patterns does not depend on collective mobilization, an action that is repeatedly reactivated and reconstructed to ensure that the pattern is reproduced (Jepperson, 1991:145). Accordingly, we argue that in the world of humanitarianism, the current trendy phenomenon of "localization" could be considered as an *emerging institution.* The current state of this phenomenon may not automatically position it as an institution, since we understand what Jepperson (1991) posits as an institution may not align with the localization wholly on the grounds that it still may not have the power of self-activating itself and thus reproducing. In that sense, it still needs mobilization of agendas by leading actors such as international organizations, donors, and governments. Moreover, the defining challenges and ambivalence as to what localization stands for (as some interviewees have pointed out) makes it not easy for actors in the humanitarian world to see it applicable as a standardized concept. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee did not make a definition of the term but left it to the IASC members and other signatories of the Grand Bargain to interpret the term and make it operational on an individual basis (Peace Direct, 2022). However, as the international or local organizations go about defining and interpreting it, a process of conceptual tightening and definitional alignments across different actors emerge.[65] In the case of this study, for instance, there does not seem to be much difference among respondents as to what localization signifies, since the common denominator of their definitions is the *empowerment* of local initiatives and local actors from both a financial and norm-based approach with a view to ultimately strengthening civil society.

With such a perspective in mind, we argue that localization is an emerging institution for the following reasons: 1) It has been effective in changing the general view and priorities of actors in the humanitarian world, and now makes a substantial part of their spoken and written discourse.[66] It is about the attempt to shift the norms and practices, advocating for a change in the way humanitarian aid is conceptualized and delivered. 2) It has become part of the priorities of major donors (see for example the EU Commission, USAID, etc.). 3) It has secured a place as being one of the main

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[65] See "Findings" section on "Localization."

[66] This can be observed by the coverage on their respective websites, their vision statements, the partnership agreements, the workshops organized, etc.

humanitarian reforms representing main initiatives in the humanitarian sector after the *Transformative Agenda* in 2011. Indeed, at the very core of the *Grand Bargain* in 2016 lies *localization*, as this involves a unique agreement between some of the largest donors and aid providers with a view to get more of the means into the hands of people in need and more support for the local response. Of course, the Grand Bargain of 2016 setting the stage for the localization agenda has not been immune from criticism, including the localization tier of it. In fact, our assumption is that localization can serve as a bridge to close the gaps in structural issues between the Global North as the main donor countries and the Global South. In this sense, the perception of the localization agenda by the NGOs, as actors involved in humanitarian aid, is also to signal challenges of cooperation and guide us into the structural problems of humanitarianism on an inter-organizational level.

6.7.1. Localization as an isomorphic force and decoupling

For institutions, increasing legitimacy by way of incorporating practices and procedures shaped by the "prevailing rationalized concept" of the organizational work to be able to function and survive in the institutionalized environment in which they are present is a general practice (Meyer and Rowan, 1991). Accordingly, it would not be wrong to assume that localization has functioned as an isomorphic force not only for local NGOs, but also for the INGOs. For the latter, it has been at a *normative* level, which implies adoption of norms and principles. That is, INGOs, to align with the norms and policies of the major international donors and other funding bodies, employ *isomorphism*, which is reflected in their vision and strategies. While these strategies and visions are visible in written and spoken discourse, the realities on the ground do not match with them (Peace Direct, 2022). A successful process of localization is seen as the shifting of power from INGOs to the local responders or a share of it with such actors (Shifting the Power, 2017). The contractor vs. real partnership dilemma in our findings demonstrates the non-existence of such a power-share as discussed above, including other issues such as the INGOs in their policies aiming to diversify the local actors on the ground, with the assumption that the creation of new local NGOs should be seen as a result of increasing needs. But in reality, as one INGO professional (INGO7, June 2023) emphasizes, it is still a "business," implying the rational choice of INGOs to go with fewer partners to avoid costs and efforts of creating new partnerships.

The perceptions and approaches by local NGOs toward localization is altogether negative as per the results of interviews and data in the literature. A great part of such an approach lies in the structural problems that exist in the sector. The view that the localization process is a power shift away from the actors in the Global North is perceived to be a mere reflection of structural power imbalances, as it denotes the local NGOs as merely passive recipients (Peace Direct, 2022). The tendency to refer to structural issues, which are also the same issues already tackled as cooperation challenges, emanates from distrust in the political drivers and motives, which are believed to rest on power hierarchies and that INGOs as actors already perceiving local NGOs as "competitors" have no logical reason and motives to concede the power that they hold (SLoC8). The willingness to hold on to power is reflected in the discourse of 'capacity building' put forward by the INGOs as a benchmark that local NGOs should attain, even though the interviewees have told the researcher that some of the local NGOs have now reached levels of organizational capacities that equal those of the INGOs, or in some cases, are even superior. Another missing link between the local NGOs and their direct access to the donors is the latter's argument that they do not have enough capacity to take on board new partners. Although this could be a result of a tradition of working together more than 70 years with INGOs and thus the unwillingness to break such a continuity, it is also part of the belief by the donors that local actors are not as capable and resourceful as INGOs, not only in terms of material reserves, but also of the know-how and related expertise.

Although localization has functioned as an *isomorphic* force for the INGOs, directing them to adopt policies and norms in a broader humanitarian world, which nowadays are aligned with the localization discourse, the findings from the field show that the transfer of these policies to practice is minimal. Thus, INGOs and other international organizations are also adopting *decoupling* strategies as their practices in the field seem to be differing from their actual policies. The perception of the local NGOs about the localization of humanitarian aid bears a parallel with what they consider as cooperation challenges. They see that the commitments in the Grand Bargain regarding localization are too far and "unrealistic" to reach. The best reflection of this being the local NGOs' limited access to direct funding, which for the local NGOs working in the Syrian context, only a few of them can have such a privilege. Part of such negative reasoning is that the process of localization for INGOs is seen more as a technocratic process in which the local entities are being prepared or *professionalized* in a way that the only thing that is transferred is the knowledge and expertise to the local level—usually so that they can be competent enough to do proper reporting and without an altogether transformation of the civil society (Peace Direct, 2022). Indeed, in the case of the Syrian crisis, it could well be argued that there is a high percentage of internationalization of the local staff, which is also seen by the local NGOs as a paradoxical situation because, on the one hand, the INGOs are concerned about capacity building of the local NGOs, and on the other hand, the so-called *professionalized* staff of local entities migrate to the INGOs, UN, or other international organizations. The researcher himself has been a firsthand witness to the highly internationalized Syrian staff now working for INGOs and other bodies, even in many other contexts abroad, such as in Afghanistan and Ukraine, for instance.

7. CONCLUSION

The main purpose of this study has been to explore the role of trust in cooperation and coordination among the I/NGOs in the Syrian cross-border context. To achieve this, the main objective has been to unravel the challenges in cooperation and coordination between the local NGOs and INGOs. The exploration of such challenges has been more holistic with the application of “social exchange” and “neo-institutional theories,” since the assumption is that the challenges go well beyond the dynamics at micro level dyadic or embedded network relationships and thus it becomes useful to combine these theories to see the dynamics beyond that. The social exchange theory has helped provide lenses through which it has been possible to see how the dyadic inter-NGO relations shed light on micro-level challenges; on the other hand, the neo-institutional theory has provided broader lenses to see contextual drivers leading to challenges.

In general, the findings have shown that in the definitions and perceptions of humanitarian professionals, the competence-based trust is more prevalent than affect-based trust, with the latter being only minimally observed in the initial phase of the crisis when there was no formal coordination structure, and there was also a high uncertainty as to the future and direction of the crisis. It is also noteworthy to stress that the conceptual definitions of trust by the local NGOs have given the impression that their conceptualization has reflected not what they would see from their view as a local NGO, but rather shaped by what an INGO would expect of a local NGO, *i.e.*, the INGOs’ view of trust, so to speak.

In this exploration of the initial state of trust versus its current role in the cooperation and coordination between INGOs and NGOs in NWS, it has become clear that different dynamics at different timelines during the crisis have had impacts on cooperation and coordination which are related to the role of trust. In that respect, concepts of Social Exchange Theory such as *negotiated exchange*, *power and dependence* have particularly been helpful in interpreting the relationship dynamics between INGOs and Syrian local NGOs at the *micro level* while the neo-institutional perspective has expanded this view beyond micro level to meso and macro levels. Although the nature of the crisis is protracted and the expected outcome of it is that the humanitarian actors are to have continuous, repeated exchange relations, the structural problems latent in the humanitarian sector as well as context specific dynamics have led to disruption of the exchange relations. The most salient dynamics include the perception of local NGOs by INGOs as mere service providers, the allocation of funds to short-term projects, external interference by donors, and consequently, the diminishing collaborative space among humanitarian actors.

Contextually, some political events or critical junctures have disrupted the continuity of exchange relations, affecting the reciprocal relationships between organizations and thus diminishing the role of trust. These disruptions have been on many levels; at the macro level they have involved the political landscape, particularly the power struggle of the main international actors such as the US and Russia with their respective interests in Syria. This has affected not only the security dynamics inside the country, but also the operational capabilities of the local humanitarian aid bodies. This turf battle has also manifested itself at the level of political and humanitarian solutions at the UNSC, which has increased the uncertainty and hindered long-term planning of the local NGOs in the application of their projects.

Again, at the macro level we see localization influencing both the INGOs and local NGOs as the process itself has reshuffled priorities, challenging their policies in a practical sense. Localization as an institution is closely related to the issue of trust and cooperation, and indeed it is also at the very core of the power dynamics, although power imbalances and other structural problems are not projected in the localization discourse (Peace Direct 2022). The issue of decreasing funds also has its origins at this level. The ever-increasing humanitarian needs and the emerging new crises around the world, such as in Afghanistan and Ukraine, and the decrease in so-called "flexible Gulf" funding for the Syrian crisis due to deterioration of relations between Türkiye and Gulf states such Saudi Arabia and UAE have all led to impacts on inter-NGO relations.

At the meso level, the securitization policies of Türkiye in the face of the high influxes of the refugees entering through its borders, as well as the security threats and its spillover into the country have made it take some measures regarding the management of migration and accommodating the vast numbers of humanitarian organizations inside the country. This period has also witnessed the coup attempt, which has further bolstered the securitization policies of the country reflected in strict control on the foreign and other humanitarian organizations working in the cross-border. Due to the security concerns, Türkiye subsequently established control over part of northern Syria with a view to forming a buffer zone between its territories and those of Syria. This development has likely prompted shifts in operational strategies among both international and local NGOs.

These changes may have influenced how NGOs interact and collaborate in the region as they adapt to shift in power dynamics. Thus, one could argue that, such geopolitical dynamics, have led to *coercive isomorphic processes* on the part of humanitarian organizations, especially with regard to their adaptation to and compliance with the legal and financial issues of the host country, through which the procurement of goods as well as the cash-based aid into NWS are carried out.

Among the predetermined periods and their impact on the cooperative and coordinative behaviors of the I/NGOs, the data have shown that COVID-19 did not seem to have much impact on the coordination of these systems for two reasons: 1) the coordinative structure in Gaziantep hub was not affected much as the remote working system was already long in place even before the pandemic, although it affected the physical meetings and increased the number of virtual meetings to compensate for the absence of physical meetings; 2) the coordinative structure in NWS was not impacted according to interviewees, though the first case of Covid in NWS was seen as early as July 2020 (Reliefweb, 2020).

Particularly, in the pre-resolution period the distrust of INGOs and local organizations was mutual, the former fearing the extremist tendencies of the locals and the latter fearing any connection of international body with the regime. This prevalent mutual distrust is dissolved by the UNSC Resolution 2165 and the subsequent installation of a formal coordination mechanism which has increased transparency and predictability.

To sum up, although there is a thin line in the relationship between trust and cooperation to the degree that they get to be used interchangeably at times, the former is known to foster the latter, and it is never a prerequisite for the latter to take place; indeed, actors can cooperate without having to trust each other (Mayer et al., 1995). Trust, however, can facilitate c*oordination* by increasing stability and predictability in inter-organizational relations (Brattström and Bachmann, 2017). In the inter-NGO relations tackled in this study one could argue that there is an ambivalent role of trust in cooperation and coordination, particularly in the cooperative relations, since many interviewees agree on the relevancy of trust in their relationship with their partners, but the numerous cooperation barriers challenge this view and show how weak the overall role of trust is.

7.1. Limitations

It should also be noted that the Syrian crisis and naturally the humanitarian leg of it is an ever-dynamic crisis with the actors and areas of conflict among these actors constantly changing hands. Added to this complexity and dynamism has been the recent earthquake that struck vast areas of Southern Türkiye and Northwest Syria, which had unexpected impacts on the study at hand as well. As can be seen, the link with the Turkish NGOs is missing for the reason that Turkish NGOs are more active in the Turkish response and thus not visible in the cross-border context, except for some charities which do not work under the formal coordination system and their cooperation with the Syrian NGOs or INGOs is minimal. Even so, the planning to do interviews with some of the charities and the TRC was disrupted by the earthquake taking place when the planning was underway.

Lastly, this is a case study within the boundaries of the case at hand. The data is not to be generalized to other humanitarian settings, even though the findings represent structural realities latent in the humanitarian sphere.

7.2. Future Research

This study has tried applying *Social Exchange Theory* to protracted crisis situations across some important periods. However, it is vital to consider that a longitudinal perspective into evolution of the role of trust across different periods and various relationship dynamics among the humanitarian actors could give a more nuanced understanding of the changes across different timelines, evolving exchange relations, real time reading of the context, as well as some causality and emerging patterns as a result of mechanisms of informal and formal coordination affecting the collaborative processes among the actors.

We argue that doing comparative case studies in the cross-border context, especially those of a protracted nature, would give us more nuanced data to compare the results of this case study, which would allow for cross-case analyses and may validate these findings. While still limited, as is the nature of case studies, such an approach could support the transfer of these findings to other contexts.

7.3. Recommendations

- Localization should not be seen as a product to be exported or imposed unilaterally; the alignment of needs and priorities in this sense is essential and this requires mutual trust which is to reinforce cooperation between the actors in the Global North and those in the Global South.

- There is a close connection between trust-building processes and alliance formation, especially in the context of civil war, where there is a high level of distrust among external actors emanating from the uncertainty of the crisis. The existence of such alliances could serve as platforms for dialogue, and thanks to direct communication between the stakeholders, they could contribute to cooperation and coordination. Such alliances, be they local, international, or a mix of both, will also serve to bring about more practical and local solutions.
- At the universities, there is a building up of literature on many aspects of the Syrian crisis, including discussions of the newly emerging Syrian civil society. The dissemination of this literature and its further implications could help with identifying the challenges in the field and thus improving not only inter-organizational cooperation but also civil society and its wider role in sociopolitical and socioeconomic dynamics of the Syrian crisis.
- In the post-COVID period, the tradition of online meetings has extended beyond the pandemic and has become routine nowadays. However, as findings suggest, more physical meetings, be they formal or informal, in which all stakeholders (including those in the Turkish response) are involved will bring about more transparency at many levels, which not only helps build trust but also increases the awareness of the actors regarding the context and dynamics of the crisis. Such physical meetings were also deemed valuable for initiating networking and the exchange of ideas among participants.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Interview Consent Form

I want to thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. My name is **Salih Aydemir** and I would like to talk to you about your experiences as a part of your work in the humanitarian relief domain in the case of the Syrian Crisis. Specifically, as a part of my PhD project I am exploring the role of ***trust*** on dynamics of ***cooperation*** and ***coordination*** amongst the humanitarian organizations (INGOs or NGOs) in Gaziantep working in the Syrian cross-border humanitarian aid operations.

The interview should take about an hour. I will be taping the session because I don't want to miss any of your comments. Although I will be taking some notes during the session, I can't possibly write fast enough to get it all down.

All responses will be kept ***anonymous*** and ***confidential***. This means that your interview responses will only be shared with my PhD supervisor, and we will ensure that any information we include in our report does not identify you as the respondent. Remember, you don't have to talk about anything you don't want to and you may end the interview at any time.

Are there any questions about what I have just explained? Are you willing to participate in this interview?

Interviewee **Date**

APPENDIX B: Interview Questions for INGO Professionals

1. What do you see as minimum requirements for initiating a cooperative relationship with an INGO?
2. What do you think are the main challenges in maintaining cooperation with INGOs?
3. What do you see as minimum requirements for starting a cooperative relationship with a local NGO (Turkish or refugee-led)?
4. What makes an NGO trustworthy? Do you think that you are taking risks when you have to cooperate?
5. Which of the following do you think are the most important in forming cooperative relations? Why?

a. Sectoral similarities (the sectors in which both partners work)

b. Size and historical experience of the would-be-partner

c. Working culture of the would-be-partner

d. The organizational structure (the openness, adaptation, or flexibility of the would-be-partner or how exacting it is to the cooperation or coordination)

e. International or local recognition or the popularity level of the would-be-partner (asset)

f. Interests of the would-be-partner

g. Capacity of the would-be-partner (both financial and operational resources and capabilities)

h. Mission and vision of the would-be-partner

i. Familiarity with the region of operation

6. How do you define trust?
7. How relevant is trust in your relations with other humanitarian aid organizations?
8. Do you think cultural characteristics play an important role in cooperative relations with other humanitarian agencies? If so, how?
9. Which of the following do you consider as being the most essential in initiating cooperative relations? Why?

a. Trust

b. An official framework (agreement)

c. Cultural (common) characteristics

10. Do you see the Syrian crisis as a continuation of different humanitarian crises? In that respect, is your relationship with INGOs in the Syrian Crisis based on previous experiences (interactions) with such bodies or are they peculiar to the Syrian Crisis?

11. To what extent do you think the reputation of an INGO in a different crisis around the world makes you see it as a potential partner?

12. To what extent do the experiences of a partner INGO with a local NGO affect your attitude of starting a relationship with that NGO? In case of uncertainty, do you resort to their experiences?

13. What do you see as the main limitations for **coordination** among humanitarian agencies in the Syrian crisis?

14. Which of the following external elements do you think is more important in coordination of humanitarian aid? Why?

a. Security

b. Funding resources

c. Authorities in the region

15. What do you think is the role of local authorities in your attempts at coordinative relations with your counterparts?

16. Do you think that every crisis generates its own coordination mechanism or external dynamic (such as funding mechanisms, infrastructure, laws in the country or security challenges, etc.) which is more prominent in leading the humanitarian agencies into having coordinative relations?

17. To what extent do you think that the **UN** and its bodies are effective in the **coordination** of humanitarian activities in the Syrian Crisis?

18. What do you think of the localization process?

19. How would you describe your relations with other NGOs before and after the COVID-19 pandemic?

20. What would be your recommendations or suggestions for a more trustful atmosphere among humanitarian agencies working the Syrian Crisis in this region?

APPENDIX C: Interview Questions for Syrian-led NGO Professionals

1. What do you think are some of the challenges in developing cooperative relations with INGOs?
2. What do you think are some of the challenges in developing cooperation with Turkish NGOs?
3. Do you think that being a Syrian-led NGO has certain advantages? If so, how?
4. Do you feel that the success/survival of an NGO depends on cooperation with INGOs, or do you think NGOs can thrive independently? What factors could affect this?
5. Do you think there is a salient inequality among the humanitarian agencies in the scope of the Syrian crisis?
6. Do you feel that you must prove your efficiency to secure future partnerships with INGOs? How?
7. How do you define trust?
8. How relevant is "trust" in your relations with INGOs or other NGOs?
9. What do you see as the main limitations for **coordination** among the humanitarian agencies in the Syrian crisis?
10. What do you think is the role of local authorities in your attempts at coordinative relations with your counterparts?
11. Which of the following external elements do you think is the greatest determinant in coordination of humanitarian aid? Why?

a. Security

b. Funding resources

c. Laws of the host country

12. To what extent do you think that the **UN** and its bodies are effective in the **coordination** of humanitarian activities in the Syrian Crisis?
13. How would you describe the general ambience among the humanitarian agencies in this region?
14. What do you think of the localization process?
15. How would you define your relationship with other humanitarian agencies before and after the COVID-19 pandemic?
16. What would be your recommendations or suggestions for a more trustful atmosphere among humanitarian agencies working for the Syrian Crisis in this region?

APPENDIX D: Interview Questions for Turkish NGO Professionals

1. What do you think are some of the challenges in developing cooperative relations with INGOs?
2. What do you think are some of the challenges in developing cooperation with Syrian-led NGOs?
3. Do you think being a Turkish NGO facilitates your humanitarian response endeavors? In what ways do you think you have advantages or disadvantages?
4. Do you think that the thriving of local NGOs depends on good relations with the INGOs, or do you think NGOs can thrive independently? What factors could affect this?
5. Do you feel that you must prove your efficiency to secure future partnerships with INGOs?
6. How do you define trust?
7. Do you think there is a salient inequality among the humanitarian agencies in the scope of the Syrian crisis?
8. How relevant is "trust" in your relations with INGOs or other NGOs?
9. Which of the following do you consider as being the most essential in initiating cooperative relations? Why?

a. Trust

b. An official framework (agreement)

10. What do you see as the main limitations for **coordination** among the humanitarian agencies in the Syrian crisis?
11. Which of the following external elements do you think is the biggest challenge in coordination of humanitarian aid? Why?

a. Security

b. Funding resources

c. Laws of the host country

12. What do you think is the role of local authorities in your attempts at coordinative relations with your counterparts?
13. To what extent do you think that the ***UN*** and its bodies are effective in the ***coordination*** of humanitarian activities in the Syrian cross-border operations?
14. Do you think cultural characteristics (working cultures, routines) play an important role in coordination among humanitarian agencies? If so, how?

15. How would you describe the general ambience among the humanitarian agencies in in this region?

16. How would you define your relationship with other humanitarian agencies before and after the Covid-19 pandemic?

17. Do you think the inter-organizational interactions with your partners over the years have increased transparency and flexibility? How do you think these have affected cooperation and coordination?

18. How often does your relationship with your partners goes beyond inter-organizational level?

19. What would be your recommendations or suggestions for a more trustful atmosphere among humanitarian agencies in this region (NWS) working for the Syrian Crisis?

APPENDIX E: Interview Questions for the UN Professionals in the Syrian Crisis

1. How do you see the coordination between the UN mechanisms involved in the Syrian Crisis?
2. What do you think are the main challenges in terms of coordination among the humanitarian agencies in the Syrian Crisis?
3. Can you talk of the "trust" between the UN and other NGOs? Do you think it exists and if so how does it function?
4. Do you think that the NGOs involved in the Syrian Crisis are satisfied (are happy) with the existence of the UN as a coordination mechanism (with the leadership)? Is there a tendency to think that a localized and crisis-unique mechanism would serve better?
5. Do you agree with the statement that "every crisis is unique"? Can you think of its application to the Syrian Crisis in terms of the coordination of the aid or rather you see the Syrian Crisis in terms of the UN coordination mechanism being like other ones?
6. If you are to compare pre-Covid and post-Covid humanitarian environment among the humanitarian agencies, what would you see being different in terms of communication, cooperation, and coordination, etc. between them?
7. What do you think could have been done differently in the Syrian Crisis for more effective coordination? What are your recommendations for the future coordination of the humanitarian situation in the Syrian Crisis?
8. What is your opinion about the involvement of the many UN agencies in the crisis? Do you think it is facilitating the coordination or making it more difficult?
9. Do you think there is an uneven distribution of NGOs in terms of technical capacity and expertise?

APPENDIX F: Ethics Committee Approval Report

Evrak Tarih ve Sayısı: 31.03.2022-12802

HASAN KALYONCU ÜNİVERSİTESİ	**T.C. HASAN KALYONCU ÜNİVERSİTESİ BİLİMSEL ARAŞTIRMA VE YAYIN ETİĞİ KURULU KARARLARI**

TOPLANTI TARİHİ	**TOPLANTI NO**
29.03.2022	**2022-006**

Sayı : E-97105791-050.01.01-12802
Konu : Etik Kurul Hk.

Çalışmanın Türü	Doktora Tezi
Konu	Anket Uygulama
Başlık	"The Role of Trust in Cooperation and Coordination Amongst NGOs in Syrian Crisis. An Analysis through Social Exchange and Neo-institutional Perspective: The Case of NGOs in Gaziantep Province (Suriye göç krizinde STK'lar Arası İşbirliği ve Koordinasyonda Güvenin Rolü. Sosyal Değişim ve Yeni-Kurumsalcılık Bakış Açısından Bir Analiz: Gaziantep İlindeki STK'lar Örneği)"
Yürütücü / Danışman	Prof. Dr. Emel TOPÇU
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Etik Kurul Üyesi

Ek:
1- EThicscommiteeInterview QuestionsUpdated (1)
2- Etik komite taranmis 12-12-2021 19.33

Bu belge, güvenli elektronik imza ile imzalanmıştır.

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Kitap Bölümü: Decades of Relations Between African Countries and Turkey (Ed. Kieran E. Uchehara), İstanbul: Kriter Yayınları, 2018.