

From New Humanitarianism to Total Defence: Conceptualising a New Dimension of Aid Organisations in Ukraine's War Effort

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Abstract

A new wave of organisations, primarily established after February 2022 in response to the Russian military aggression against Ukraine, provide aid to civilians while also contributing to Ukraine's military defence. This hybrid set of activities challenges the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence, rendering the existing frameworks of humanitarianism and new humanitarianism inadequate to describe their operations. This paper tackles these conceptual shortcomings and the difficulties in finding appropriate terminology to characterise such activities by introducing the alternative framework of total defence. The research focuses on an organisation founded by Ukrainians in Sweden, active in both Sweden and Ukraine, and examines its approach in relation to the frameworks of humanitarianism, new humanitarianism and total defence. The findings indicate that this novel hybrid approach represents a paradigm shift in the discourse between humanitarianism and new humanitarianism, suggesting that the organisation is better characterised as part of a total defence mechanism rather than a conventional humanitarian response.

Keywords: humanitarianism, total defence, humanitarian principles, neutrality, civil military cooperation, Ukraine

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Introduction

The Russian military aggression against Ukraine in February 2022 is a pivotal moment in contemporary history and across various academic fields (Scholz 2022; Tharoor 2022). The scale of the armed conflict, and the magnitude of the resulting humanitarian crises, as well as the widespread engagement of communities and civil societies across borders, were unparalleled (Cullen Dunn & Kaliszewska 2023; Grünewald 2022; Moallin, Hargrave & Saez 2023; Politi et al. 2023).

This research draws from the author's first-hand observations in the field and from previous scholarly works (Cullen Dunn & Kaliszewska 2023; DIIS 2024; Fedorchak 2024), and focuses on the *modus operandi* characterising those civil society organisations responding to the Russian military aggression against Ukraine in February 2022 by providing aid and support to civilians, and at the same time by contributing to the Ukrainian military defence system. More specifically, this work is an attempt to address the rising conceptual shortcomings and the difficulties in finding adequate terminology to characterise organisations implementing such hybrid activities through the leading paradigms of humanitarianism and new humanitarianism developed by scholars and practitioners in the humanitarian sector.

Despite significant differences in the interpretation of their relevance, humanitarianism and new humanitarianism are centred around the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence (Barnett & Weiss 2008; Egeland, Harmer & Stoddard 2011; Haug 1993; Macintosh 2000; Pictet 1979, 1956; Schenkenberg van Mierop 2015; Scott-Smith 2016; Sphere Association 2018). Hence, humanitarianism and new humanitarianism seem inadequate to define operations aimed at providing aid and support to civilians, and at the same time contributing to the Ukrainian military defence system. To address these shortcomings, the study suggests the alternative conceptual approach of total defence (TD).

Through the analysis of a case study centred on the Help Ukraine Gothenburg organisation (HUG), this research aims at examining the driving forces that led to the establishment of such organisations and their activities. The objective is to characterise their nature and *modus operandi* through the interpretative lenses of humanitarianism, new humanitarianism and TD, and to identify which framework offers a better characterisation.

Through this novel approach, this research establishes a baseline for further research on the impacts that such a hybrid approach may have on humanitarian operations. This is particularly relevant considering that similar hybrid activities

may contribute to the erosion of the humanitarian space (Sida 2005), or at least to the reshaping of forms of civil-military cooperation on the battlefield (Franke 2006; Moses 2020; Roberts 2010), with potential ramifications on, e.g., the understanding of humanitarian principles, and the international humanitarian law obligations of parties to the conflict (Bouchet-Saulnier 2015; Macintosh 2000). These aspects are increasingly critical given the evolving dynamics of global conflicts and the growing importance of humanitarian negotiations, e.g., for establishing humanitarian corridors or for humanitarian access (Cuscunà 2023).

By establishing this baseline, the study outlines humanitarian dilemmas deserving scholarly attention and is a starting point for wider research within the fields of international and security studies, and humanitarian affairs, at a crucial and topical time.

The Ukrainian context and the hybrid response to the crisis

The attack launched by the Russian Federation against Ukraine in February 2022 was qualified by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) as an act of aggression and a violation of the United Nations (UN) Charter (HRMMU 2022: 1; UNGA 1974, 2022: 3; Wilmshurst 1974). According to international organisations monitoring and reporting on the events, e.g. the mission of experts established under the Moscow Mechanism in 2022, and the Ukraine Monitoring Initiative (UMI) of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) within the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the resulting armed conflict still unfolding is an international armed conflict (Benedek, Bílková & Sassòli 2022: 5; UMI 2023a).

After the launch of the attack and the following escalation of the armed conflict, a large flux of Ukrainians began fleeing from the areas affected by the hostilities, triggering an unprecedented wave of internal and international displacement (IOM 2022a, 2022b, 2022c, 2022d). At the same time, the situation of those who stayed or were trapped in populated areas that became the frontline of intense and often indiscriminate military operations soon became dreadful (HRMMU 2022; ICRC 2022a, 2022b, 2022c; OSCE 2022a, 2022b, 2022c).

As part of the response to the military invasion, in the days following 24 February 2022, Ukrainian authorities called civilians to actively participate in the defence of the country and in the resistance against Russian forces (Benedek, Bílková & Sassòli 2022: 34–35). At the same time, a large internal and international mobilisation of people and resources began providing support to those impacted by the armed conflict and those fleeing Ukraine (for an overview on the role played by the Ukrainian diaspora and civil society organisations, see e.g. ODIHR, 2024). Weisser (2023) shows how in the first weeks after the invasion, the level of interaction with and support towards refugees by civil society in Europe, and especially in neighbouring countries to Ukraine, increased signifi-

cantly. Politi et al. (2023) investigated this phenomenon through the lenses of individual prosocial dispositions and superordinate European identity, showing how the cumulative effect of these factors intensified the helping intentions towards Ukrainians in Europe.

According to Cullen Dunn and Kaliszewska (2023), self-organised informal civil society initiatives played a significant role in creating *ad hoc* platforms to provide urgent and direct support inside Ukraine and in the areas at the Ukrainian-Polish border. This initial fast mobilisation at least partially counterweighed the more bureaucratic and less flexible traditional international humanitarian response mechanisms.

Zaremba and Martin (2023) focus on this ‘informal action’ (Krasynska & Martin 2017, cited in Zaremba & Martin 2023: 2) as social phenomenon characterising the response of Ukrainians to the Russian aggression in 2022, and on the social and political mobilisation during the so-called Euromaidan movement in 2013–2014. The notion that this mobilisation was not entirely new is reinforced by other studies on the Euromaidan events and on the non-international armed conflict in eastern Ukraine (e.g. Worschech 2017; Zaremba 2017; Stepaniuk 2022),¹ and on the role of social media and information technology as tools facilitating the mobilisation (Asmolov 2022; Boichak 2017; Boichak & Jackson 2020).

Other similar, but different and not un-controversial forms of social engagements are at the centre of other studies. Examples are the establishment and expansion of volunteer battalions and other forms of civilian participation in the conflict and the impact of this participation on civilians at the outbreak of the armed conflict in 2014 (Saressalo & Huhtinen 2018; Umland 2019; Mironova & Whitt 2020; Aliyev 2021; Asmolov 2022; Wood 2022; Phillips & Martsenyuk 2023), and in the aftermath of the Russian aggression in 2022 (Pavlova et al. 2022; Phillips & Martsenyuk 2023; Pugliese 2023).

The fluid and hybrid approach adopted by some groups providing support to both civilians and combatants in the response to the Russian invasion is the focus of growing scholarship. Fedorchak (2024) outlines how civil society initiatives have been contributing to total defence mechanisms throughout the armed conflicts unfolding in Ukraine since 2014, and after the Russian military aggression launched in 2022 and focuses on civilian organisations and groups dedicating their efforts to supporting the military infrastructures. Cullen Dunn and Kaliszewska (2023) and the Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS 2024) describe the role of aid initiatives implementing hybrid activities, providing support to civilians while simultaneously contributing to Ukraine’s military defence. Similar observations are also included in the evaluation of

1 Reference is made considering the subject of the volunteer mobilisation, and not to the description and definition of the conflict dynamics.

the humanitarian response to the crisis resulting from the war in Ukraine by Grünewald (2022).

Theoretical framework: Humanitarianism, new humanitarianism and total defence

Originally the humanitarian sector was developed around the principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence, part of the Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and later known as the humanitarian principles (Barnett & Weiss 2008; Bouchet-Saulnier 2015; Egeland, Harmer & Stoddard 2011; Macintosh 2000; Schenkenberg van Mierop 2015; Scott-Smith 2016; Sphere Association 2018). Once widely accepted, the humanitarian principles and approach were at the centre of debate after the Cold War due to the changing international dynamics and a series of failures of the traditional humanitarian system. These debates took place within the sector and among scholars, and a cleavage grew hastily between traditional humanitarians and those looking for a radical rights-based change – the new humanitarians (Adami 2021; Gordon & Donini 2015).

A source of friction is the interpretation of the scope of the humanitarian action. Adami (2021) provides an account of the differences between ‘the old humanitarianism, based on neutrality and short-term, relief-based assistance, and new humanitarianism, centring on advocacy and development’ (403). And according to Gordon and Donini (2015), new humanitarians are pushing for ‘more political and emancipatory forms of humanitarianism . . . that promised to support transformative, developmental outcomes and even peacebuilding initiatives’ (88).

Scholars and practitioners have been debating on the opportunity and the implications for humanitarians to implement politically inspired and motivated operations, or to engage in cooperation with non-neutral actors (Bouchet-Saulnier 2015; Fox 2001; Gordon & Donini 2015; Mačák 2015; Mills 2005; Rieffer-Flanagan 2009; Schenkenberg van Mierop 2015; Slim 1997, 2020a). In *To stay and deliver, good practice for humanitarians in complex security environments*, Egeland, Harmer and Stoddard (2011) firmly outline how ‘the core humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, and impartiality underpin acceptance and provide the basis for warring parties to accept humanitarian action in situations of armed conflict’ (4). And while acceptance and access appear to be increasingly critical and difficult to secure in contemporary armed conflicts, such as in Syria and Ukraine, humanitarian negotiations for establishing humanitarian corridors or securing humanitarian access have shown their potential as powerful tools in ensuring not only the delivery of lifesaving humanitarian aid, but also in upholding IHL, and contributing to de-escalation attempts (Cuscunà 2023).

The idea of neutrality, defined by Mačák (2015) as the principle that ‘requires the provider of humanitarian action to abstain from associating with the ideological or political aims of any of the parties to the conflict’ (161), is perceived by some scholars and practitioners as particularly challenging. To at least partially address this, Hugo Slim has been consistently arguing for a more nuanced view of humanitarianism that moves beyond strict neutrality and suggests that in some situations, taking sides may be ethically justifiable or a moral duty, especially when faced with gross injustices or atrocities (Slim 1997, 2020a, 2020b). Slim outlines a form of humanitarianism based on solidarity, characterised by an explicit moral and ideological stance and a commitment to a common cause, but without a clearly defined operational framework for providing actual support. He further develops the concept of ‘humanitarian resistance’, in which ‘humanitarian activists’ can hold political or moral positions and provide aid. In this model, aid workers consciously resist injustice, not by remaining neutral, but by actively choosing sides to protect vulnerable populations. The only limitation provided is that the support should not offer a definite military advantage to any party to the conflict (Slim 2022).

Bryant, Saez and Redd (2022) and Moallin, Hargrave and Saez (2023) elaborate on the entanglements between the narratives that characterised the responses to the Russian military aggression against Ukraine in 2022 and the consequent humanitarian crises, and the support and humanitarian actions activated by different actors. In their works, the scholars highlight the contradictions between narratives strongly rooted in values connected to solidarity and resistance, and the humanitarian principles.

Schenkenberg van Mierop (2015), Gordon and Donini (2015) and Adami (2021) offer a comprehensive analysis of the relevance of the principles, and try to untangle some of the dilemmas arising from the apparent incompatibility between the principle of neutrality and the advocacy role played by many humanitarian actors especially since the 1990s. Franke (2006) outlines the complexity of contemporary crises, often requiring forms of civil-military cooperation (CIMIC), and underlines how the mechanisms to ensure a degree of coordination can challenge – and have challenged – the humanitarian principles. Interestingly for the subject of this research, in Franke’s (2006) study, the distinction between CIMIC, as a doctrine for both military and civilian actors to collaboratively address humanitarian needs, and civil affairs (CA) activities, as military efforts to sway civilian actors into supporting military needs, is subtle yet present.

To minimise the risks associated with the politicisation of aid, the humanitarian community developed the concept of humanitarian space, where aid operations can take place free from influence or interference from governmental actors and parties to the conflict, and can be implemented in compliance with the humanitarian principles (Sida 2005). But maybe more importantly, despite rec-

ognising an unbridgeable gap between them, Adami (2021) explores mechanisms that would allow the two competing approaches of humanitarianism and new humanitarianism to function complementarily, enhancing their strengths and partially compensating their weaknesses (Adami 2021). Adami's efforts and the interplay among different humanitarian actors make it possible to group them under the label of (new) humanitarianism.

The concept of TD is characterised by a paradigm shift in the approach to the problems of CIMIC and CA that arose in humanitarianism and new humanitarianism. In fact, neither the humanitarian dilemma surrounding the understanding of neutrality nor the limitation on providing support that may offer a decisive military advantage to a party in the conflict are applicable to the TD framework. In his research on the topic, Wither (2020) defines TD as 'a whole of society approach to national security intended to deter a potential enemy by raising the cost of aggression and lowering the chances of its success', where 'infrastructure and societal resilience jointly constitute national resilience, a cornerstone of total defence' (Wither 2020: 62; for similar accounts see e.g. Swedish Defence Commission 2017; Swedish Ministry of Defence 1991). This characterisation is also reflected in various policy documents shaping TD defence policies, e.g. by NATO (NATO SOF HQ 2020), Sweden (Swedish Defence Commission 2017, 2023; Swedish Ministry of Defence 1991, 2023) and Ukraine (Presidency of Ukraine 2021, cited by Fedorchak 2024).

According to the interim report on the orientation of TD and the design of civil defence by the Swedish Defence Commission (2023), the objectives of civil defence within a TD approach are: '[to] ensure the most important social functions, . . . [to] contribute to the capability of the military defence, [to] protect the civilian population, maintaining the will to defend and society's resilience against external pressures' (4).² A similar operationalisation of TD can be identified in the relevant policy documents developed in Ukraine (Fedorchak 2024). Considering the complex network of partnership and cooperation between the military dimension and civilian public and private institutions and actors required in a comprehensive TD mechanism (Swedish Defence Commission 2017), the development and establishment of an overall structure for the implementation of TD is challenging, as also highlighted in a report by the Swedish Red Cross on the topic (Forsberg 2024). Finally, the population of a country embracing a TD approach is likely to experience significant repercussions from an armed conflict, as evidenced by Wither (2020).

In the analysis, discussion, and conclusion, the interrelations between the proposed theoretical frameworks and the potential impacts of the hybrid approach at the centre of this analysis on the humanitarian system are made explicit. By

2 Original in Swedish. Author's translation.

examining the case study through the interpretative lenses of humanitarianism, new humanitarianism and TD, it appears that TD offers a solution to the conceptual shortcomings of both humanitarianism and new humanitarianism. However, this paper also highlights consequential humanitarian dilemmas – with potential normative and operational ramifications – that should be taken into account when humanitarian and TD actors operate alongside one another, or when TD policies are being developed.

For the purpose of this research, an organisation carrying out humanitarian activities upholding the humanitarian principles falls within the framework of humanitarianism. This can be at least superficially determined through the assessment toolkit developed by Schenkenberg van Mierop (2015) and the framework by Gordon and Donini (2015), looking at elements unveiling the respect of the principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence. Following the same logic, an organisation carrying out humanitarian activities, with also political and ideological commitments and not fully upholding the humanitarian principles, falls within the framework of new humanitarianism. An organisation carrying out humanitarian and other activities, and also contributing to the military defence of a party to the conflict may be considered part of a TD mechanism, and not a mere (new) humanitarian actor. The qualifying elements are the objectives of civil defence within a TD approach as outlined by the Swedish Defence Commission (2023): '[to] ensure the most important social functions, . . . [to] contribute to the capability of the military defence, [to] protect the civilian population, maintaining the will to defend and society's resilience against external pressures'³ (4).

Methodology and limitations

The research is centred around an *exemplifying* case of a more general phenomenon (Yin 2009 cited in Bryman 2012: 70), as substantiated by the identification of organisations implementing at least partially comparable activities in previous scholarship (Cullen Dunn & Kaliszewska 2023; DIIS 2024; Grünwald 2022) and in the early extended overview of online data covering other organisations operating in Sweden and Ukraine that have not been selected as subject for this research.⁴

The selection of HUG as the subject is based on its relevance to the study, and the researcher's access to the organisation and its members. In the spring of 2023, a year prior to the development and design of the study, the researcher had approximately three informal introductory meetings with representatives of the organisation to gain an understanding its activities. This initial understanding of the wide range of activities implemented both in Sweden and Ukraine allowed

³ Original in Swedish. Author's translation.

⁴ E.g. operationaid (<https://operationaid.org/>); Blågula Bilen (<https://www.blagulabilen.se/>); Ukrainian Volunteer Hub (<https://www.facebook.com/uavhub.stockholm>)

for a preliminary assessment of the relevance of these activities to the research. This preliminary assessment was reinforced by an early overview of the online social media contents of the organisation. The decision to adopt a single case study design was based on the objective and scope of the research, which does not aim to measure the extent of the phenomenon but rather to provide a reference framework and baseline for further analysis.

The research entails the collection and analysis of qualitative semi-structured interviews with four key informants within the organisation and is complemented with the analysis of the organisation's public communication through a selection of its Instagram posts⁵. The objective is to explore the self-representation of the organisation through the words that the interlocutors used during the interviews with the researcher, and through the words and the aesthetic of the online content shared by the organisation during its operations outside the research setting (Bouvier & Rasmussen 2022; Leaver, Highfield & Abidin 2020; Manovich 2017).

The four key informants were selected considering their initial role in the establishment of the organisation and their current involvement in the management and strategic decision-making processes of the organisation. The participants were selected using a snowball sampling technique. The sample size was considered adequate given the limited size of the organisation's management team and the distinct patterns that emerged from the information collected, indicating that the relevant coding for the research had likely reached saturation. Similar considerations determined the sample size of the online content selected and analysed in this research (Bryman 2012; Fusch & Ness 2015; Guest, Bunce & Johnson 2006).

The interview guide was developed based on the assessment toolkit proposed by Schenkenberg van Mierop (2015), along with the frameworks by Gordon and Donini (2015) and Pringle and Hunt (2016). Questions aimed to collect information and data enabling a characterisation of the organisation's values and *modus operandi* in relation to the criteria specific to the theoretical frameworks of humanitarianism, new humanitarianism and TD. The interview guide consisted of 22 questions divided into six macro categories covering: 1) introductory information about the interlocutor, 2) the establishment of the organisation and the activities launched in the initial phase, 3) the development of the organisation and its activities throughout the first two years of operations, 4) elements relevant to the principle of neutrality, 5) elements relevant to the principle of independence and 6) elements relevant to the subject of TD. While adhering to the interview guide, a flexible approach to questioning was maintained, ensuring the gathering of comprehensive information while also acknowledging and respecting any emotional aspects that may have arisen for participants (OHCHR 2011; UMI 2023b).

5 At the time of publication, the referenced Instagram posts were all publicly accessible.

Drawing from Bryman (2012), interviews with key informants were analysed thematically. For online materials, visual components were analysed using Bouvier and Rasmussen's (2022) methods, while Bryman's (2012) guidelines informed the analysis of textual components. The coding for the thematic analyses of the interviews and of the online data draws from, and at the same time brings back to, the three theoretical frameworks of humanitarianism, new humanitarianism and TD. The identified themes stem from the information provided by the key informants during the interviews, and from the online content, hence they have been extrapolated using an inductive approach. Attention was also given to the different or developing discourses or plots from the interviews and the online content (Elliott 2005: 17–19, 53–56). The goal, without adopting a narrative analysis, is to identify variations in the themes and content through time.

While there is growing literature around the nature and roles of diaspora mobilisation amid crises and tensions (e.g. Koinova 2018), this approach has not been included in this research. Diaspora communities have mobilised in different difficult contexts, to defend human rights and democracy in Hong Kong (Lee 2023), to promote political participation and protest repressive regimes in the Arab Springs (Beaugrand & Geisser 2016; Moss 2016, 2020), to advocate for transitional justice (Koinova & Karabegović 2019; Stokke & Wiebelhaus-Brahm 2019), and for other reasons (Feron 2017; Quinsaats 2022). And the role of Ukrainians abroad, also in relation to the armed conflicts unfolding in Ukraine since 2014, has been explored by researchers such as Nikolko (2019), Özgür and Deniz (2023) and by the ODIHR (2024). However, diaspora mobilisation is inherently defined and constrained by the identities of the individuals involved (Feron 2017; Quinsaats 2022), and while organisations stemming from diaspora mobilisation may offer aid or support hybrid activities with a humanitarian, new humanitarian or TD approach, not all organisations engaged in such activities originate from diaspora mobilisation.

Humanitarianism, new humanitarianism and TD were therefore deemed more suitable for addressing the research problem due to their operational focus and emphasis on implementation. This evaluation is supported by the fact that not all organisations providing aid to civilians and contributing to the Ukrainian military defence system are Ukrainian or connected to diaspora communities. Consequently, using a diaspora mobilisation framework would limit the applicability of the approach and restrict the generalisability of the findings. By focusing on humanitarianism, new humanitarianism and TD, this research aims to encompass a wider range of organisations and contributions.

Also, though conflict transportation may provide a lens for interpreting certain behavioural patterns, narratives and decisions within the organisation from political, discursive and symbolic viewpoints (Feron 2017), these aspects are outside the scope of this research.

Finally, this study does not seek to offer a thorough analysis of the methods and impacts of Ukrainian civil society initiatives established to provide aid in response to the humanitarian crisis caused by the attack launched by the Russian Federation against Ukraine. Similarly, the objective is neither to exhaustively verify the compliance of such initiatives to humanitarian principles, nor to address the ramifications that the hybrid approach adopted by some groups providing aid to civilians and at the same time contributing to the Ukrainian military defence system may have on humanitarian operations, on the humanitarian sector or on the international humanitarian law (IHL) obligations of parties to the conflict.

In line with ethical standards, the research upholds the principles of do-no-harm, informed consent and confidentiality; hence all the identifiable features present in the interviews, as well as in the online content, have been omitted or masked (Bryman 2012; Swedish Research Council 2017, 2023).

The organisation's founder consented to the disclosure of the organisation's name for research purposes and resulting academic works. Nevertheless, the author explored the option of redacting information that could expose the organisation. Considering that the organisation and its members communicate openly about their activities and approach on social media, and other open sources, and that the online data used are both publicly available and intended as part of the communication channels of the organisation (Ravn, Barnwell & Neves 2020), the risks associated with the disclosure of the organisation were assessed as low. Hence, to ensure access to the sources, the name of the organisation and its identifiable features have not been redacted.

Results: A matter of needs and defence

As part of this research project, interviews with four key informants actively involved in the establishment and management of the organisation were conducted in April 2024. The participants, comprising three women and one man, included three individuals of Ukrainian origins and one Swede.

As emerged from the interviews with the four interlocutors, HUG was established in the aftermath of the military aggression launched by the Russian Federation against Ukraine on 24 February 2022. The organisation was a grassroots initiative aimed at contributing to the global response to the humanitarian crisis unfolding within Ukraine and neighbouring countries, led by a relatively small group of (mainly) Ukrainian citizens or members of the Ukrainian diaspora in Sweden. With the support of the Ukrainian community in Sweden, members of the Swedish community in Gothenburg, and Swedish civil society and religious organisations, HUG launched a range of activities in both Sweden and Ukraine, supporting Ukrainian refugees in Sweden and internally displaced people within Ukraine. The key components of HUG's operations include the collection and

provision of medical supplies to Ukrainian health institutions, the fundraising, purchase and delivery of rescue vehicles and tactical medical equipment to various operational actors in Ukraine, the collection and delivery of food and non-food items to affected communities in Ukraine and the provision of psycho-social support services in both Ukraine and Sweden.

The common themes relevant to this research emerging from the interviews are a) *attention trigger*, b) *doing good*, c) *initial chaos*, d) *humanitarian imperative*, e) *aid operations*, f) *ensure the most important social functions* and g) *contribute to the military defence system*. Another theme identified in the analysis of the interviews is h) *identity*.

Three out of four interlocutors defined the mounting threats of a possible Russian invasion of Ukraine in the months prior to the 24 February 2022, and the actual invasion, as an *attention trigger* towards the events unfolding in Ukraine. Referring to the armed conflict unfolding in the Eastern regions of Ukraine since 2014, one interlocutor said:

I can admit I was not aware, or I did not make myself aware of the situation in Ukraine. But . . . in the months before . . . February, I followed the news constantly, that was not so usual for me. (Int. 1, para. 8–10)

In all three cases, this *attention trigger* sparked the determination of *doing good*, and the intention to find a way to proactively respond to the events. One interlocutor recalled how ‘when the war started, the full invasion started . . . it is maybe the most terrible day in my life, because I tried to understand . . . “do I need to go home?”, “how can I help my family?”’ and how a family member in Ukraine advised ‘to concentrate on the kind of things that I can do’ (Int. 4, pars. 17–19). Another interlocutor explained how (s)he ‘had the possibility to do nothing’ but ‘felt suddenly that I can’t live like this . . . and need to do something . . . So, I chose Ukraine instead’ (Int. 3, pars. 10–11).

While reflecting on the active role played within the organisation, one interlocutor associated the themes of *attention trigger* and *doing good* with the theme of *identity*:

When I came to Sweden . . . nobody knew what Ukraine was, so as a child I used to say that I am from Russia, because people can relate to that. After few years here . . . I did consider myself being more a Swedish person than Ukrainian . . . But the situation changed completely. Maybe not from the beginning of the full-scale invasion, because I did this not because of my nationality, I did this for the people, and for the fact that this should not happen anywhere in the world . . . [But] after two years working with this, I am definitely shifting towards identifying myself as Ukrainian in Sweden and having it as a big part of who I am today. (Int. 1, para. 12–15)

This connection between the themes of *doing good* and *identity* is reinforced by the questions that an interlocutor asked h**self: “do I need to go home?”, “how can I help my family?”, and by the fact that the roots of the organisation are within the *glocal* movement protesting the Russian invasion of Ukraine, as outlined by three interlocutors who first connected during a demonstration outside a Russian consulate in Sweden. In three interviews this event was mentioned as the initial step of the mobilisation of the Ukrainian community in the area.

When describing the immediate aftermath of the 24 February 2022, all interlocutors referred to the theme of *chaos*. They specifically mentioned it when outlining the situation at the Polish-Ukrainian border, the evident and disconcerting initial lack of comprehensive response mechanisms by traditional humanitarian actors, and the vital role played by a wide range of solidarity and volunteer formal and informal organisations that self-organise in the area, as also described by Cullen Dunn and Kaliszewska (2023).

From the interviews, it seems that this initial *chaos* pushed the general wish of *doing good* and facilitated its development towards more and more structured operations. In this phase, ideas and dynamics started to evolve and to be increasingly relatable to the theme of *aid operations*.

The initial evolution from simply *doing good* to a more comprehensive response to a rising *humanitarian imperative* was summarised by two interlocutors when recalling how the buses initially used to transport basic items at the Polish-Ukrainian border and in Western Ukraine soon and purposefully became the means of transport for the first Ukrainian refugees arriving in Sweden, despite the opposing indication of institutions:

We sent buses with everything . . . from food to power banks, to strollers . . . clothes, you name it . . . blankets, everything that was needed in the first phases of the humanitarian crisis, or war. Everything, most of it, was coordinated with the Ukrainian embassy in Sweden. What we were not prepared for, was that these buses would be filled with people who tried to go further and come to Sweden. And in that moment Sweden was not accepting refugees from Ukraine yet, because the Maastricht directive was activated on 4 March. This is something we were in close discussion with the embassy . . . ‘how do we do this?’ . . . but they said ‘stop’. But I . . . we . . . due to my engagement in 2015 [with Syrian refugees] I knew that people would anyway cross the border and come here, so we did not stop the buses. (Int. 1, para. 22–27)

All interlocutors portrayed the organisation’s development, noting increases in both the scale and scope of its activities, as well as a growth in the expertise and capacity of its members. This evolution is the red thread marking the path from the early theme of *doing good*, to the more structured theme of *aid operations*,

centred around the *humanitarian imperative*. From the early ‘room for humanity’ where volunteers ‘came and gave consultation or filled . . . immigration papers’ (Int. 4, par. 45) or were ‘cooking *borsh* for refugees’, explaining ‘how the Swedish system works’ (Int. 4, par. 46), to the establishment of ‘one of the largest volunteer organisations in Sweden’ (Int. 3, par. 63). ‘From . . . filling the basic forms, we are now at the stage where we are providing psychological help and . . . professional help to find . . . a job or an education’ (Int. 2, par. 53).

The interlocutors outlined a similar trajectory in the Ukrainian operational component as well, where the organisation was able to establish a network of partnership and cooperation with several actors at different levels, with activities focused on, but not limited to, supporting the health sector through the provision of vehicles, equipment and psychosocial support. For example, one interlocutor underlined how the decision to support hospitals with limited access to financial resources and equipment ‘outside Kyiv, . . . Kharkiv, outside Odessa . . . made the difference’ as these critical institutions otherwise ‘would never get the ambulances through the governmental funding’ (Int. 2, par. 113).

The *modus operandi* and the wording used by the interlocutors to describe it is associated to the theme of *aid operations* as well. For example, operations are described as being ‘adaptive, based on the needs that were needed in different point of time’ (Int. 2, par. 53), and addressing ‘acute needs’ within the healthcare system, while the organisation was also developing a more strategic ‘long-term plan . . . working with children and mental health rehabilitation’ (Int. 1, par. 44). Regarding funding, the organisation successfully established and secured various funding streams, ranging from individual contributions to substantial financial and in-kind support from both private and public entities, including local, national and international grants. As all interlocutors explicitly and implicitly outlined, this diversification proved to be effective in safeguarding a high level of operational flexibility and independence. Elements that are also part of the *aid operations* theme.

The *aid operations* theme is intertwined with the theme *ensure the most important social functions*. This appears unequivocal when interlocutors describe the importance of providing support to both individuals and institutions within the health sector. For example, one interlocutor said: ‘when you support for example this doctor . . . [it] gives him the power to go longer and continue his work more and keep society working’ (Int. 4, par. 119), and:

when we support hospitals with ambulances it means that the hospitals can do their work longer or do their work just. In the small villages and cities these special cars keep these hospitals and societies working around, with old people who live in these villages and have no choice, from some perspective, to leave. (Int. 4, par. 118)

When outlining the activities implemented by the organisation aimed at supporting a functional society, all interlocutors explicitly mentioned the delivery of equipment, with a focus on lifesaving tactical medical equipment, to groups directly involved in the national military defence system of Ukraine. All interlocutors also specified that the organisation decided unambiguously neither to provide support for, nor supply of, weapon systems. The theme *contribute to the military defence system* is centred around the description of activities indirectly or directly supporting organisations of tactical volunteer medics training and aiding army detachments at the frontline, or directly medics within the Ukrainian army. The support consists mainly in the provision of tactical medical equipment, e.g. 'tourniquets . . . special needles, special compression bandages' (Int. 4, par. 124), and 'ambulances, most of them . . . 4x4 wheel drive' (Int.1, par. 64). The vehicles are sometimes 'painted green, . . . because . . . they [the soldiers of the Russian Federation] shoot at them' and now have to be supplied with 'jamming devices' for protection against drones (Int. 3, par. 83, also Int. 1, par. 90).

One interlocutor explained this approach saying:

It is a holistic picture of what does it mean to be a country at war, and what does it mean to be a defender. For me it is crystal clear, either I come with diapers, or I come with very specific tactical medicines gadgets, I am a part of the defence, however it is. (Int. 1, par. 112)

Another interlocutor further elaborated the impacts that such a comprehensive approach can have on the different levels of a functional society at war, including its military defence system:

the soldier who is in the battlefield, he needs to know that his family is fine, secure, and healthy and all of that. And that is where volunteers and the organisation can help. They can help the children of those soldiers, they can help the mothers, wives, and the sisters and so on, and that is one part.

Another part is that the soldier needs to know that if he is injured, he will get the medical help, because the matter of survival is there.

And then of course the military themselves need all the ammunition and the equipment they need to work there. We are not helping obviously, that is the government and all the ministers that are working on that, but our part is secure those two first: that the soldiers out there in the field, they know that someone is having their back. (Int. 2, para. 122–124)

In the preliminary review of the online data of the organisation's Instagram feed, a consistent recurrence of themes among the 440 posts shared between 9 March 2022 and 6 January 2024 has been observed. Echoing Guest, Bunce and

Johnson (2006), Bryman (2012) and Fusch and Ness (2015), it feels safe to say that distinct patterns emerged from the online content, indicating that the relevant coding for the research had reached a saturation point within the initial 329 posts posted between 9 March 2022 and 27 August 2023. These 329 posts, spanning the first 18 months following 24 February 2022, allows a comprehensive examination of the initial humanitarian response to the sudden-onset crisis, alongside the IASC System-Wide Scale-Up, and the initial phases of the protracted crisis (IASC 2018, 2023a, 2023b, n.d.).

An initial relevant element is the self-representation of the organisation in regard to its nature. In one of the textual contents of its Instagram feed the organisation defines itself as a

non-profit charity organisation that was started on February 26, 2022 in response to Russia's full scaled invasion of Ukraine, and is run by people for people. (HUG 2022b)

Similarly to the themes identified in the analysis of the interviews, those emerging from the textual online contents are a) *aid operations*, b) *ensure the most important social functions*, c) *indirect contribution to the military defence system*, d) *hybridity* and e) *direct contribution to the military defence system*.

The majority of the posts and relative textual content are relatable to themes a) *aid operations* and b) *ensure the most important social functions*. The main subjects of such posts refer to the wide range of activities carried out by the organisation supporting internally displaced people in Ukraine, Ukrainian refugees in Sweden, raising funds and awareness around the events unfolding in Ukraine, for example:

When the cold hits, you as a private person and business can be the lifeline for children and families struggling to survive.

HUG's Christmas gift can provide people in Ukraine with warming winter packages to cope with the cold winter months and survive the lack of food. Each package for a family includes: Warm light[,] Food package[,] Heating stove.⁶ (HUG 2022e)

Thank you Gothenburg for your warm Christmas presents! We have now delivered over 400 stoves to people in eastern parts of Ukraine. Warm thanks.⁷ (HUG 2023c)

The posts referring to the operations implemented in Ukraine are closely connected to the theme b) *ensure the most important social functions*. Such

6 Original in Swedish. Author's translation.

7 Original in Swedish. Author's translation.

posts outline how the operations of the organisation either support Ukrainian institutions and society (e.g. providing vehicles and equipment to rescue and emergency services) or directly implement such activities in complementarity with national institutions. For example:

All of us are different, speak different languages, lived different lives but then the war came and we came together to start assisting, rescuing, supporting and continuously working to help civilians and healthcare in Ukraine.⁸ (HUG 2023a)

On 21/5, an unusual ambulance discharge went from Högsbo in Gothenburg, consisting of 9 better used ambulances that [will] drive all the way to Lviv in Ukraine. The cars are full of supplies and medical equipment and are driven by Swedish and Ukrainian volunteers.

The effort is led and coordinated by the organisation Help Ukraine Gothenburg, which works tirelessly with support both for war refugees in Gothenburg and the civilian population on the ground in Ukraine.⁹ (HUG 2023f)

At a time when the presence of government agencies can be difficult to access, our team has stood up for the value of humanity and support. These people have decided not to leave their homes, and it is our duty to ensure that help reaches where it is most needed. Being able to offer medical care and supportive treatment in these challenging circumstances is more than a task – it is an honor.¹⁰ (HUG 2023m)

Some posts introduce the partnerships developed in Ukraine with other non-governmental organisations (NGOs), some of which are operating in support of the Ukrainian national military defence system. Themes c) *indirect contribution to the military defence system*, is exemplified e.g. in the following posts:

Two weeks ago we started a collection for your rescue vehicle number 7.

A sum that was missing to carry out HUG's largest effort for Ukraine to date, namely the purchase of an ambulance bus for the Медичний Добровольчий Батальйон Госпитальєри • Hospitallers Paramedics.¹¹ (HUG 2022d)

8 Original in Swedish. Author's translation.

9 Original in Swedish. Author's translation.

10 Original in Swedish. Author's translation.

11 Original in Swedish. Author's translation.

Ambulance No. 8 No. is here! . . . MedStar Медзв'язок ПДМШ has received one of the most important additions – VW Amarok, the perfect front ambulance!¹² (HUG 2023b)

Here you can see the paramedics from Тактична медицина Північ who today received both an ambulance and lots of materials thanks to your donations!¹³ (HUG 2023j)

The posts show how the operations implemented by the organisation in certain cases include a degree of hybridity with activities supporting both civilians and the national military defence system, as also observed by other scholars and presented in earlier sections. Examples of the *hybridity* theme can be found for example in the following posts:

Collection Ukraine! Examples of field food (turmat) that are needed in Ukraine right now. This is an incredibly important resource and is in huge demand by heroes on the front but also civilians in shelters. Help us send our next car away already on Saturday.¹⁴ (HUG 2022a)

After just over a week in Ukraine, we have now completed the delivery of 9 ambulances and an evacuation vehicle to the military, evacuees and hospitals.¹⁵ (HUG 2023e)

🇺🇦 We got your back mother Ukraine!

Today we sent off #HUG transport no. 126 filled with hospital beds, fire extinguishers and medical supplies. This is an incredibly valuable delivery that will go to the military hospital, the rescue service and the healthcare in Ukraine UA.¹⁶ (HUG 2023g)

This hybridity is more pronounced in the theme *direct contribution to the military defence system*:

Thanks to everyone who contributed to the collection for tourniquets for Ukraine!

These will be sent to Ukraine already this week and distributed to the offensive in eastern parts of Ukraine.

12 Original in Swedish. Author's translation.

13 Original in Swedish. Author's translation.

14 Original in Swedish. Author's translation.

15 Original in Swedish. Author's translation.

16 The first sentence is originally in English. The rest is originally in Swedish. Author's translation.

Together for peace and survival.¹⁷ (HUG 2022c)

UA Large amounts of help to the heroes of the counteroffensive 🇺🇦 🇸🇪

Volunteers play a vital role in supporting the Ukrainian soldiers by providing vital resources. On site, it is the volunteers who provide the *soldiers with the essentials – food, clothing, camping equipment, sleeping bags, mats and fire extinguishers. Help Ukraine Gothenburg is an essential part of the aid that reaches the front.*

📖 This continued effort to donate material is extremely important, not only for Ukraine but also for all of Europe. By supporting the Ukrainian army, we contribute to stability and peace in the region. ¹⁸ (HUG 2023k)

Ukraine daily stands in 🇺🇦 from the Russian aggression. Healthcare, infrastructure and civilians are constantly a target for attacks and bombings.

We continue to support Ukraine amid ongoing challenges by supplying essential protective equipment and fire extinguishers to the military and emergency services. This time a large batch donated from Alwico Brand 🇺🇦 has now been distributed in several regions and the need is huge. Continued donations are essential to protect the civilian population and the country's vital resources.¹⁹ (HUG 2023l)

Finally, it feels safe to say that there are two additional common themes emerging and conveying a sense of *patriotism* and more broadly a certain (*transnational*) *will to participate in the Ukrainian struggle*. This is best exemplified by the post shared by a partner organisation and visible on the organisation's timeline:

Sweden and its people actively continue to support and help Ukraine in its struggle for victory. It was this common goal that united our foundation with the “Help Ukraine in Gothenburg” Charitable Foundation.

But . . . as soon as you start talking about the “Help Ukraine in Gothenburg” team, it is difficult to stop describing the motivation, strong spirit and will to change, the will to victory, the will to peace! We sincerely thank you for your steadfast position, principles and faith in the great future of Ukraine! (Hope UA 2023)

17 Original in Swedish. Author's translation.

18 Original in Swedish. Author's translation.

19 Original in Swedish. Author's translation.

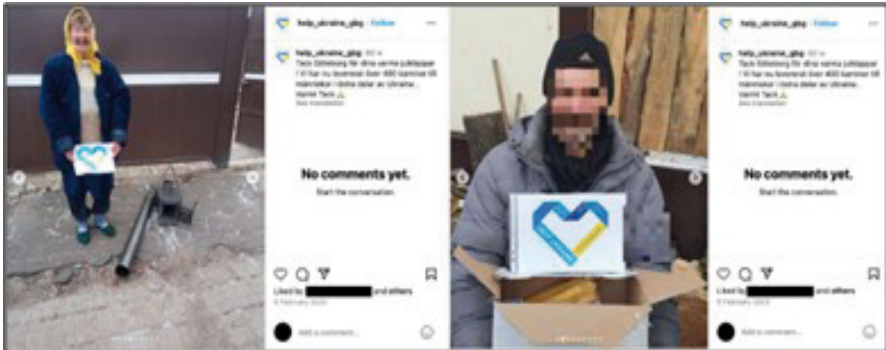
The two additional themes of *patriotism* and (*transnational*) *will to participate in the Ukrainian struggle* are reinforced by expressions like ‘🇺🇦 We got your back mother Ukraine!’ (HUG 2023g) and the use of patriotic symbols and slogans, e.g. the use of an emoji depicting the Ukrainian flag (🇺🇦, e.g. in HUG 2023n), or the use of the slogan ‘glory to Ukraine’ in its Ukrainian version ‘Слава Україні!’ (using visual content in e.g. HUG 2023d) or in its Latin alphabet transliteration ‘Slava Ukraini’ (e.g. HUG 2023h, 2023i) or other patriotic expressions, e.g. in artistic forms. An example is the poem ‘When I am dead, bury me . . .’ by Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko shared on the organisation’s Instagram feed:

To my Dear mother Ukraine 🇺🇦 . . .
 When I am dead, bury me
 In my beloved Ukraine,
 My tomb upon a grave mound high
 Amid the spreading plain,
 So that the fields, the boundless steppes,
 The Dnieper’s plunging shore
 My eyes could see, my ears could hear
 The mighty river roar.
 When from Ukraine the Dnieper bears
 Into the deep blue sea
 The blood of foes . . . then will I leave
 These hills and fertile fields —
 I’ll leave them all and fly away
 To the abode of God,
 And then I’ll pray . . . But till that day
 I nothing know of God.
 Oh bury me, then rise ye up
 And break your heavy chains
 And water with the tyrants’ blood
 The freedom you have gained.
 And in the great new family,
 The family of the free,
 With softly spoken, kindly word
 Remember also me. (HUG 2023n)

The themes emerging from the visual online content of the Instagram feed are related to a) *aid operations*, b) *ensure the most important social functions*, c) *indirect contribution to the military defence system*, d) *hybridity* and e) *direct contribution to the military defence system*. The definition of the organisation as a 'non-profit charity organisation . . . started . . . in response to Russia's full scale invasion of Ukraine' is explicit part of the visual content (HUG 2022b), and refers to the *aid operation* theme.

In line with the observations covering the textual contents, most of the visual material revolve around two primary themes: *aid operations* and *ensure the most important social functions*. These posts predominantly depict the initiatives undertaken by the organisation aiming at (e.g.) supporting internally displaced people in Ukraine (Picture 1), and providing health services to those in need through mobile units (Picture 2), as illustrated in the following images:

Picture 1: Delivery of parcels to people in need



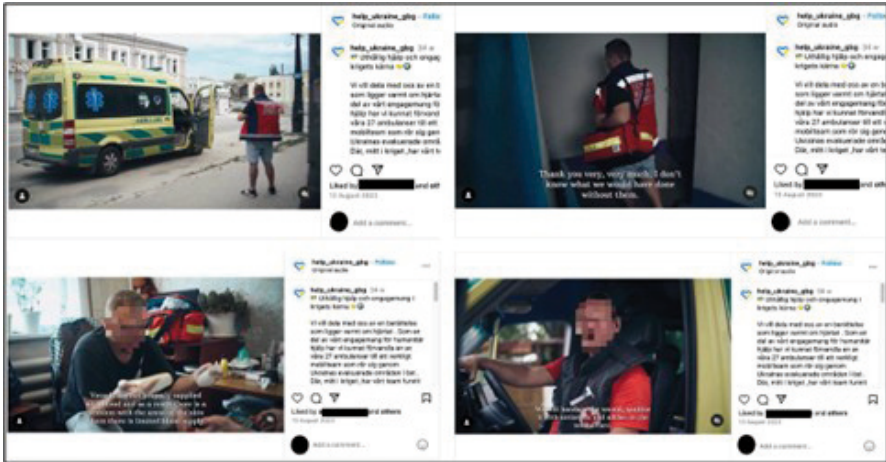
Source: HUG 2023c

In the visual content, the distinction among the different themes appears more blurred, especially considering the distinction between the themes of *aid operations* and *ensure the most important social functions* and the themes suggesting or implicating a degree of association with the Ukrainian military defence system, i.e. *indirect contribution to the military defence system*, *hybridity* and *direct contribution to the military defence system*. This is shown in some of the posts related to the *aid operations* theme, when comparable items were distributed to civilian institutions and personnel and groups of the national military defence system, as depicted for example in the posts shown in Picture 3.

The theme of *hybridity* is also noticeable in some of the collaborations developed by HUG with NGOs providing services and support to the military defence system, as depicted, for example, in Picture 4 and on the websites of the partner organisations themselves²⁰.

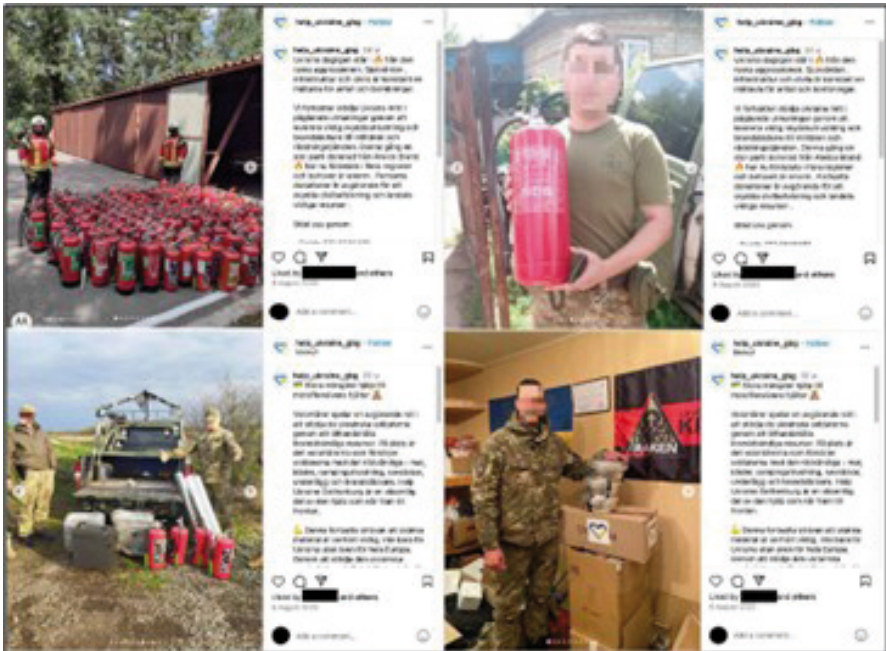
20 E.g. <https://tacmednorth.com/en/about/>, <https://www.medbat.org.ua/en/about-pfvmh/>

Picture 2: Provision of health services – still images from video published on Instagram



Source: HUG 2023m

Picture 3: Delivery of equipment supporting civilian institutions, and the national military defence system



Source: Top row pictures from HUG 2023j; bottom row pictures from HUG 2023k

Picture 4: NGOs providing services and support to the military defence system



Source: HUG 2023j

From the visual content, it feels safe to say that the emerging image is one of an NGO engaged in a wide range of aid operations supporting civilians and Ukrainian society and civil institutions, as well as the Ukrainian military defence system. This comprehensive approach may be relatable to the additional themes centred around symbols of *patriotism* and the *will to participate in the Ukrainian struggle*. These additional themes are exemplified for example by the use of patriotic symbols and slogans, e.g. the use of videos depicting the Ukrainian flag and the national anthem (e.g. HUG 2023n), or the use of the slogan ‘glory to Ukraine’ in its Ukrainian version ‘Слава Україні!’ (e.g. HUG 2023d).

Analysis and discussion

The first observation emerging from the research is that there is coherence across the various sources examined in this study. This is manifest considering: the internal coherence among interviews with key informants; the anchoring between online textual and visual contents, since the textual component often supports the visual material (Bouvier & Rasmussen 2022; Grange & Lian 2022); the overall internal coherence within the online content; and the comprehensive internal coherence between interviews and online content.

The second observation is that common themes have been identified in the analysis of the interviews and of the online textual and visual contents. These are a) *aid operations*, b) *ensure the most important social functions* and themes related to c) *patriotism* and d) *contribution to the military defence system*.

Based on the results of the research activities, and in line with previous scholarly observation (Cullen Dunn & Kaliszewska 2023; DIIS 2024), the organisation subject of the research was established as part of a wider effort of the Ukrainian and international civil society to respond to the humanitarian catastrophe caused by the Russian military aggression of Ukraine in early 2022. The driving force was the urgency of doing good, providing immediate humanitarian aid and assistance

to refugees fleeing the country, and those affected by the armed conflict inside Ukraine. After the initial phases characterised by chaos, the organisation was able to stabilise and establish long lasting partnerships in Sweden and Ukraine, securing a certain degree of both operational and financial sustainability and independence.

Both the interviews and online contents highlight the organisation's evolution over the course of two years, illustrating how its activities have been shaped according to the needs recorded on the ground during field visits, and through a network of partners and local sources. They also show how the organisation has been gradually focusing its activities on specific sectors, notably prioritising the support of basic needs and the provision of psychosocial support to adults and children in Sweden and Ukraine, supplying medical equipment and supporting the healthcare sector in Ukraine.

At this stage, it feels safe to say that the organisation has been established to answer the humanitarian imperative to 'bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, . . . to prevent and alleviate human suffering . . . to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being' (Pictet 1979: 4), at least partially in line with the humanitarian principle of humanity. Furthermore, the organisation operates without discrimination, based on the needs observed and reported on the ground, in line with the principle of impartiality (Pictet 1979). The wide range of funding resources and the network with diverse actors, e.g. civil society organisations, NGOs, and Ukrainian and Swedish private and public institutions, allow the organisation to ensure autonomy in its decision making while upholding relevant applicable national laws in line with the principle of independence.

The findings of the research activities reveal that since its inception, the organisation has been actively involved in the Ukrainian struggle, with patriotic values and ideals. But as Slim (2020b) puts it: 'political neutrality is not legally required under international humanitarian law[;] . . . [and] neutral humanitarianism is not necessarily ethically desirable when we see people as enemies for good reasons' (Slim 2020a). The scholar further argues that 'legally, operationally, and morally, we can take sides and still be humanitarians. . . . This all means that legally, operationally, and morally, we can take sides and still be humanitarians' (Slim 2020a), as various humanitarians did in the past (Slim 2020b).

Hence, by applying the assessment toolkit proposed by Schenkenberg van Mierop (2015), along with the frameworks by Gordon and Donini (2015) and Pringle and Hunt (2016), to characterise the values and *modus operandi* of the organisation as emerged from this initial analysis, it can be argued that the organisation could align with the criteria specific to the theoretical framework of new humanitarianism (for a problematisation of the potential dilution of the humanitarian identity, see DIIS [2024]).

However, the research activities provide a comprehensive overview of an additional component of the activities implemented by the organisation, illustrated through the themes connected to the indirect and direct contribution to the Ukrainian military defence system. This component includes the supply of (e.g.) 4x4 ambulances and special evacuation vehicles, tactical medical supplies (e.g. tourniquets, pressure bandages and other medical equipment), and other items to volunteer tactical medic organisations and directly to groups within the Ukrainian army active along the frontline. While arguing that neutrality is neither an essential nor a required feature of humanitarian actors, in his paper Slim (2020b) clarifies that ‘the Geneva Conventions recognise a range of relief providers, most of whom are not politically neutral . . . like . . . military medics, and civilian associations of various kinds (though the law does require relief to be impartial; support the greatest human need; and not give “definite [military] advantage” to one side)’ (Slim 2020a).

Whether the organisation’s contribution to the Ukrainian military defence system constitutes a ‘definitive [military] advantage’ (Slim 2020a, 2022) from a legal perspective is beyond the scope of this work and would deserve further dedicated analysis. Nevertheless, the objective of this research is to identify the theoretical framework that better represents the approach followed by the organisation among humanitarianism, new humanitarianism and TD.

In its interim report on the orientation of TD and the design of civil defence, the Swedish Defence Commission (2023) defines three objectives qualifying the civil defence component within a TD approach that are relevant to the framework of this research. These objectives are: ‘[to] ensure the most important social functions, . . . [to] contribute to the capability of the military defence, [to] protect the civilian population, maintaining the will to defend and society’s resilience against external pressures’²¹ (4). While the contribution to maintain the most important social functions and the society’s resilience, and the protection of the civilian populations are elements that can fall at least partially within the scope of (new) humanitarianism, the contribution to the capability of the military defence and to the will to defend, are at least specific to a TD approach, if not incompatible to the (new) humanitarian framework. These two elements mark a paradigm shift between (new) humanitarianism and TD, especially because of their different implications on the concept of humanitarian space.

While the provision of medical assistance to injured combatants is one of the founding principles that led to the development, negotiation and adoption of the Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocols – not coincidentally the title of the first Geneva Convention of 12 August 1949 is *Convention (I) for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded and Sick in Armed Forces in the Field* (Sassòli,

21 Original in Swedish. Author’s translation.

Bouvier & Quintin 2011) – and of the genesis of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, the difference emerging from the interviews and online content is that, in HUG's case, the support has a wider scope. It includes, for example, the direct provision of equipment and vehicles to one specific party to the conflict, rather than the independent, impartial and neutral provision of assistance to the wounded and sick in armed forces in the field. Further reinforcing this difference is the fact that HUG's operations are inspired by, and conducted with, a strong sense of *patriotism* and a desire to *contribute to the military defence* of Ukraine. While specific assessments and considerations regarding the actual adherence to humanitarian principles by individual National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies are beyond the scope of this paper, it seems reasonable to state that this difference in principle marks a distinction between organisations involved in a TD mechanism and humanitarian or new humanitarian organisations.

Following this comprehensive analysis, it feels safe to argue that the contribution to the military defence system of Ukraine can constitute a problematic element within a (new) humanitarian framework. However, it does reflect a core characterising objective of a civilian defence component within a TD system, as outlined for example by the Swedish Defence Commission (2023). Hence the theoretical framework that better represents the approach followed by the organisation among humanitarianism, new humanitarianism and TD, appears to be TD.

The TD framework, as a novel paradigm to characterise organisations implementing activities with an analogous *modus operandi* to the one outlined in this research, contributes to addressing, or at least to partially delimiting, issues connected to the concept of neutrality in humanitarian action and the consequent dilemmas surrounding humanitarian narratives. The competing narratives between international humanitarian actors and local aid organisations, highlighted by Moallin, Hargrave and Saez (2023), may be exacerbated by the conceptual shortcomings and the difficulties in finding adequate terminology to characterise organisations implementing hybrid activities through the traditional paradigms of humanitarianism and new humanitarianism. The possibility of describing their approach as part of a TD mechanism offers a more nuanced overview of the different actors operating in the field and following different sets of values and principles.

At the same time, the TD framework as a novel paradigm to characterise certain aid organisations unveils further dilemmas. The interactions between aid organisations engaged in similar hybrid activities and humanitarians warrant further scholarly attention. They might contribute to the further erosion of the humanitarian space (Sida 2005), or at least to the reshaping of forms of civil-military cooperation on the battlefield (Franke 2006; Moses 2020; Roberts 2010), with potential ramifications, for example, on the understanding of humanitarian principles and the international humanitarian law obligations of parties to

the conflict (Bouchet-Saulnier 2015; Macintosh 2000). These aspects are critical given the evolving dynamics of global conflicts and the growing importance of humanitarian negotiations, e.g., for establishing humanitarian corridors or for humanitarian access (Cuscunà 2023). And while, in the context of Ukraine, a certain degree of overlap or blurriness between humanitarian and TD actors may be considered less problematic by countries and institutions acting in solidarity with Ukraine, a similar blurriness may pose significant challenges in other contexts. From this perspective, this study contributes to the debate surrounding the rising calls for localising and decolonising aid (IASC 2016), allowing for a critical problematisation of some potential challenges that these processes may pose.

This baseline study is potentially the first step for further research focusing on the social and institutional interplay between (new) humanitarians and TD defence actors. This appears to be a topical and critical moment, not only considering the current development of TD policies, for example in Sweden (MSB 2023; Swedish Defence Commission 2023; Forsberg 2024), but also the worrying trends of attacks against health workers and first responders recorded in Ukraine (WHO 2024), and the lessons that could be learned from them.

While in TD environments much attention is given to the establishment of coordination and cooperation mechanisms from a TD perspective with a focus on civil-military cooperation, this paper and the possible further research are characterised by a humanitarian angle, adding a distinctive layer of analysis with a multidisciplinary reach.

Conclusion

The first part of this paper outlined the historical backdrop and the previous research around the new wave of aid initiatives established in response to the armed conflict unfolding in Ukraine after the Russian military aggression in February 2022, and the resulting humanitarian crises. It also introduced the idea of specific conceptual shortcomings to characterise those organisations providing aid to civilians affected by the armed conflict, and at the same time contributing to the military defence system of one of the parties to the conflict, especially through the leading paradigms of humanitarianism and new humanitarianism. In an attempt to fill this gap, the concept of TD was introduced as a potential alternative.

The research shows that the organisation subject of this research was established after the Russian military aggression against Ukraine, and the consequent humanitarian crisis. Its primary purpose was to answer the humanitarian imperative addressing the most urgent needs of those affected by the armed conflict. The activities evolved and addressed different issues, with a certain degree of impartiality and independence, and with the goal of contributing to the Ukrainian struggle. Alongside the activities aimed at providing aid and support to the

civilian population affected by the armed conflict, the organisation contributed to the military defence system of Ukraine, providing tactical medical equipment and other supplies to the Ukrainian army and groups connected to the Ukrainian army.

Through the elements emerged in the analysis and discussion, it is possible to argue that the theoretical framework better representing the approach followed by the organisation among humanitarianism, new humanitarianism and TD, appears to be TD. This conclusion is determined by the activities of the organisation contributing to the military defence system of Ukraine that reflect the specific and significant defining elements of the civilian defence component of a TD system, as outlined by the Swedish Defence Commission (2023) and also by Ukrainian institutions (Fedorchak 2024). This conclusion appears to be relevant and also applicable to other organisations implementing similar activities in Ukraine and elsewhere.

Overall, this research contributes to the academic analysis of the complex and multifaceted developments of humanitarian and societal response to armed conflicts and crises, exploring the role played by the new wave of aid that emerged after the Russian aggression against Ukraine in February 2022. This work establishes a baseline for possible further research centred around the interplay between these new actors, and the traditional humanitarian sector. This fits into the larger academic and humanitarian scholarship aimed at identifying patterns of change triggered or influenced by societies' responses to armed conflicts.

This study further contributes to the debate around the rising calls for localising and decolonising aid, making it possible to problematise some potential challenges that these processes may pose. This is crucial considering the efforts of the international community on these issues (e.g. IASC 2016), the patterns of attacks against ambulances and emergency teams identified in Ukraine (WHO 2024), and the fact that in Ukraine often high-risk operations are carried out by organisations implementing similar hybrid activities (DIIS 2024).

Focusing on the social and institutional phenomena that lay at the centre of the convergent boundary between (new) humanitarianism and TD is topical. These paradigmatic frameworks are shaping decisions and power dynamics across borders, institutions and communities. The international attention is focused on interpreting the events unfolding in and around Ukraine, redefining Ukrainian institutions and society. This is particularly relevant in Europe, and in the Baltic and Nordic countries, considering the current development of TD policies, e.g. in Sweden (MSB 2023; Swedish Defence Commission 2023; Forsberg 2024). And while much of the focus is on the establishment of coordination and cooperation mechanisms from a TD perspective, additional research characterised by a humanitarian angle would add a distinctive layer of analysis.

Tangible questions impacting the design and implementation of crises management plans and humanitarian operations arise. What legal implications do

activities involving the provision of aid to civilians and the contribution to the military defence of a party to the conflict have on the IHL obligations of conflict parties? What is the level of (in)compatibility between the (new) humanitarian system and organisations implementing such activities? What degree of partnership and/or complementarity can be envisaged between them?



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List of interviews

- Interview 1, Representative of HUG, 11 April 2024, Gothenburg, Sweden.
- Interview 2, Representative of HUG, 15 April 2024, On-line (video-call).
- Interview 3, Representative of HUG, 16 April 2024, Gothenburg, Sweden.
- Interview 4, Representative of HUG, 18 April 2024, Gothenburg, Sweden.