

# How environmentalists deal with (jet another) global crisis: resilience, vulnerability and coping strategies of environmental movement in Croatia

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— The post-pandemic world:

A bad picture or a good opportunity? —

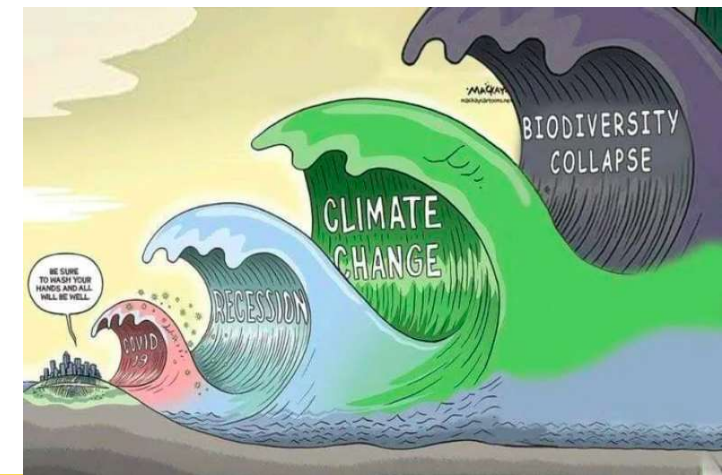


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# New 'landscape'

- Pandemic vs. climate crisis vs. environmental crisis...?
- These are interdependent crises, and that to solve them we must consider their mutual connections and interactions (*EEA 2020; Van Langevelde et al. 2020; Malm, 2020; UNCTAD 2020; Gibb et al. 2020; Espjo et al. 2020*)
- Short-term impacts vs long-term trends
- in the meantime, CO2 concentrations continue to rise, we have lost 68% of wildlife since '70es (*NOAA, WWF*)
- Plans for climate mitigation postponed...



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# When talking about building resilience...

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- Civil sector has an important social role to play in **promoting the public interest** and strengthening the role of citizens in democratic societies enabling them to **participate in society's development**.
- As such, the civil sector does not only work with their beneficiaries, but is also expected to **contribute to policy proposals** in the area in which they operate.
- NGOs as „watch dogs”



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# ENGOS in 21st century

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- since 2009 → climate justice movement has been growing → **environmental justice concept** (*Dawson, 2010; Della Porta & Parks, 2014; Fisher 2016; Wahlström et al., 2010*).
  - Environmental degradation and climate change → human rights → social justice → injustices in the economic system
- Environment protection × building resilience of human communities, especially marginalized groups.
- **Intersectionalism** of the movement → with regard to complex and long term interactions of society and nature, involving the current pandemic.



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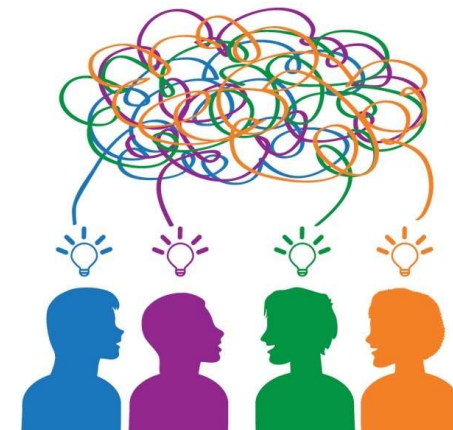
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- **Qualitative research**
- Semi-structured interviews with five environmental NGOs in Croatia (spatial variability) (*full sample includes interviewees from three more NGO sectors: art and culture, womens rights, education*)
- Thematic analysis



# Research questions:

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- In what way Covid-19 pandemic changed their attitude towards the concepts of **RESILIENCE** and **VULNERABILITY** regarding their field of interest?
- How it affected the civil society sector and what strategies they applied to **ADAPT** to the new situation?
- What are their **FUTURE** expectations of trends to which their activism refers?

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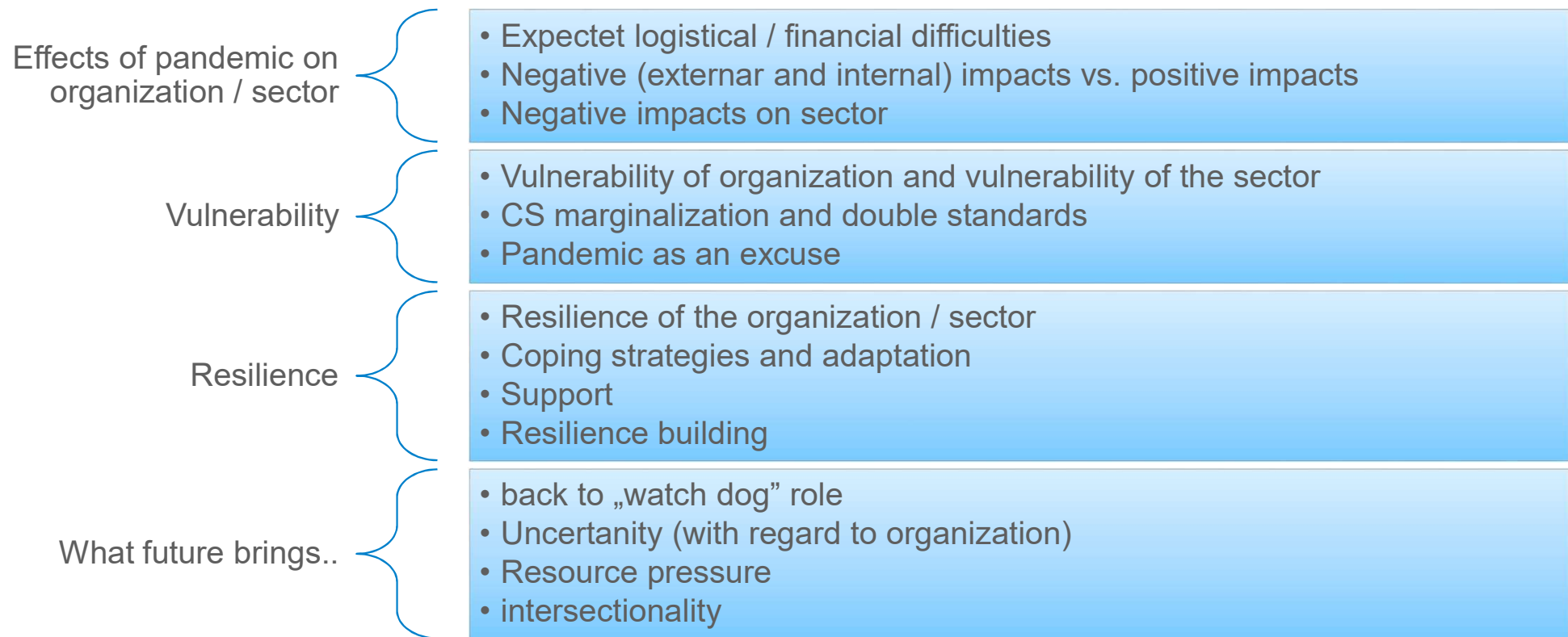


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# Preliminary results:

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# AFFECTS OF PANDEMIC ON SECTOR / ORGANIZATION

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## EXPECTED LOGISTICAL AND FINANCIAL DIFFICULTIES

- Not being able to conduct activities in public spaces / with public members...
- Adjusting to on-line work and work from home
- Not being able to conduct cross border activities due to travel restrictions...
- Organizations were able to adjust to new work organization

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# AFFECTS OF PANDEMIC ON SECTOR / ORGANIZATION

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## EXPECTED LOGISTICAL AND FINANCIAL DIFFICULTIES

*We could continue our research, but there are a lot of activities for public and with our members that had to be canceled, or put on-line if possible.. There were also extra cost for digital tools.*

*It depended on project. On most european projects there was clear message that all activities will be put on hold, and project deadlines were prolonged, but state bodies that act as mediators for some EU funds were totaly uncooperative, unflexible and weren't able to adapt to this new situation*

*Most of our activities are cross border activities, and since there was no traveling we had to reconceptualize most of our projects activities. We have also decided to shut down our social entrepreneurship for a year since it relied mostly on „school in nature” programs..*

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# AFFECTS OF PANDEMIC ON SECTOR / ORGANIZATION

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## NEGATIVE (EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL) IMPACTS VS. POSITIVE IMPACTS (ORGANIZATION)

- Lack of clear information and cooperation with state bodies
- Withdrawal of finances (tenders) from national organizations
- Internal difficulties regarding maintaining of motivation, team spirit and work efficiency
- Positive effects are rare and on organizational not program level

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## NEGATIVE (EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL) IMPACTS VS. POSITIVE IMPACTS (ORGANIZATION)

*The worst was that we couldn't get passes for our employees –some idiots in civil protection refused to admit to us that we have the right to issue passes as employers, while state donors expected us to continue our research and activities...*

*State cofunding and tenders have been shut down and that was quite a financial strike for us, since we rely on those finances as well for paychecks*

*With all this online work and work from home it is really difficult to keep the team spirit, and that was quite a challenge for our organization since it turned out that half of our staff left during 2020. We then realized that we have to work on our people not only on project goals*

*It's a stretch to think of positive effects.. Maybe the positive thing is that these on-line meetings have gotten more effective and we are now thinking that we don't need to travel to brussels every time for network meeting*

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## NEGATIVE IMPACTS ON SECTOR

- Long term financial insecurity and reduction in state funding
- Crisis competition

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## NEGATIVE IMPACTS ON SECTOR

*A high level of **insecurity** has entered the sector because we **depended heavily on national donations** and structural funds that are now gone. I think **people feel that kind of financial insecurity and instability** that they might not have felt if it weren't for the pandemic. We know now is that there will be a **reduction in funding** for the NGO sector and a lot of funding focus on health so that additionally introduces a higher level of insecurity, and you can't even get answers from the association's office...*

*And at that whole higher level - first we have a situation **within the sector** where **climate change and the biodiversity loss** that are two related things sometimes are sometimes seen as essentially **competing for attention** in the media. And then when it comes to all **that in relation to the pandemic, and finally the earthquake** - you can absolutely see the **turn of society**, and that is understandable...that the priorities are different.*

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## VULNERABILITY OF ORGANIZATION AND VULNERABILITY OF THE SECTOR

- Size of the organization as both advantage and disadvantage
- Dependence on donors and state funds – lack of self financing
- Lack of state support and financing (disastrous for small associations)
- Importance of team cohesion and institutional knowledge

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## VULNERABILITY OF ORGANIZATION AND VULNERABILITY OF THE SECTOR

*We are relatively **large organization** and we could say that we have some advantages and some level of security but on the other hand we need 300K kn for salaries every month which is a challenge. So I would say that our size is **both advantage and disadvantage** because it is not easy in times like these plan ahead and adapt*

*We are systematically working to try to **diversify our revenues**, it is hard but we realize that we have to do it precisely because of that vulnerability. And we are succeeding in some way but **we are still not in position endure crisis for a long time.***

*We lost half of the staff last year and with them **institutional knowledge**, which contributed to the insecurity of the organization. And we realized how **dependent** we are **on those outside factors**, that the funds we planned and relied on could overnight be gone*

## CS MARGINALIZATION AND DOUBLE STANDARDS

- Unproportionally strict rules for NGOs in comparison to public and private actors, and lack of national support
- State failure to fulfill obligations towards NGOs but expects full compliance
- Existing problems



## CS MARGINALIZATION AND DOUBLE STANDARDS

*when applying for a tender and obtaining European funds, all other actors and local government units have automatic insurance for co-funding, **except for civil society** organizations that can get only 70% - which puts us at a **disadvantage** automatically, especially since last year when these tenders were suspended all together.*

*There is new programming period ahead, and as it is one of the EU's goals to involve civil society in the process of decision making we find it troubling that state and ministry **did not include us**. They say that it is because there are no meetings, no legal bodies, it's pandemic blah blah - most often when you ask anything a ministry tells you "we don't work in full capacity because it is a pandemic".. and when you need to report to them then they do not allow you to have the same excuse, because **your deadline is tight and theirs are not** ..*

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## PANDEMIC AS AN EXCUSE

- Disregard for environmental standards
- Lack of transparency and cooperation from the state towards civil sector
- Delays and enactment of (environmental) laws
- Low media representation on other (environmentally harmful) issues

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# VULNERABILITY

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## PANDEMIC AS AN EXCUSE

*In Croatia we literally have feedback from various sectors that since there are now **emergency measures** state bodies and investors will attempt **to disregard all environmental standards***

*For a long time we didn't even have a representative on the civil society council. There are a lot of things for which a pandemic is an excuse for not being able to do better .. So I think the **pandemic will certainly bring an extra level of non-transparency** and non-cooperation from the government.*

*In matters where you cooperate with the Foundation or with the ministries **pandemic is** used as an **excuse** for a lot of **delays and enactment of laws**, harmonization with the *acquis communautaire*. There are several laws that should have been adopted last year in the energy sector and they are not and then the Ministry of Economy said they moved it to this year because they couldn't work at full capacity.*

*we have noticed that under the cover of pandemic a lot of **things go under the radar** because **all the media attention is on pandemics and earthquakes**. So we had a few situations when we had to react to the local authorities and the Ministry regarding some harmful activities, specifically on the river Drava and the Danube, the process of excavating the sand has continued despite the EU directives for the protection of habitats and Natura2000*

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## RESILIENCE OF THE ORGANIZATION / SECTOR

- Adaptability and flexibility
- Diversification of revenue
- Networking with international platforms
- Depending on large projects and previously built experience
- Togetherness (both inside organization and on national level as sector)

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# RESILIENCE

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## RESILIENCE OF THE ORGANIZATION / SECTOR

*I would say we succeeded to adapt to this new way of working, and I have confidence in our team. We also have space for further adjustments, and I think that's good resilience. I would mention again that our **flexibility and ability to adjust quickly** is terribly important.*

*It is obvious now that we need to **diversify our revenue**, and there is room to do that, but you know, it's hard...we are all three months away from loan payment*

*it was important to have strong and good consortia from outside where it is somehow easier to get foreign funding because you are not so subject to national political changes. So I think resilience is definitely related to adaptation, to the ability to think and cooperate out of box and **good networking ability with organizations outside Croatia**.*

*It helped us that **we have a relatively large number of ongoing projects** that have been going on for a long time, so we have some sustainability and continuity. We also rely on our **social enterprise** that it is self-financing - we are simply quite adaptable in difficult situations.*

*As far as the sector is concerned, I can say that are a bunch of things that are failing in the civil sector, but still, thanks to the pandemic, **NGOs are rising voice and trying to fight for change** and not allow the violation of democratic standards.*

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## COPING STRATEGIES AND ADAPTATION

### ➤ Commercialisation of activities

*Last year we got some new donors we hadn't worked with before. Just because it was not necessary and we were not in crisis. But we were **forced to seek some funds** that we wouldn't even expect a year ago, so last year we finally started applying for a number of **comercial projects**, that is projects that are not financed from structural funds or EU programs, and it turned out that we have more opportunities for cooperation than we thought.*

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# RESILIENCE

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## SUPPORT

- Networking and self-organization (in providing help)

*What was happening is this **connection** that developed amongst NGOs, and thanks to the **international** and european **networks** where we were able to communicate more and share experiences*

*by being a member of that network we got support there and even had the opportunity to go to webinars on how to reorganize work, how to take care of team and be efficient. And emergency fund was organized to help the organizations that needed it most..*

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## RESILIENCE BUILDING

### ➤ Strategic planning for resilience building

*Much of the planning had been devoted to this new structure and **how to strengthen the resilience** of the organization, where to find **new opportunities**, how to **commercialize** work that so far we did through projects or with volunteers. We started working on a **new work structure** to reduce or increase the number of people in the team working on similar projects.*

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# WHAT FUTURE BRINGS...

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## BACK TO „WATCH DOG” ROLE

- - Corrective role seen as a downgrade of NGO sector

*We realised that now, and at the whole european level, we as NGOs will now have to put much more energy on **preventing these negative projects** in the following years*

*we **will not be able to focus on new things and new solutions**, instead we will be preventing these negative projects that have surfaced from 30 years ago. And it's not a matter that these projects shouldn't exist but it's a matter that something that is 30 years old should be harmonized with today's standards, and investors now think that because it is emergency they will be able to skip every procedure.*

*I think it will be very The big problem will be **to monitor the implementation of measures from the national energy and climate plan**, and I think that environmental NGOs will play a key role as correctives*

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# WHAT FUTURE BRINGS...

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## UNCERTANTY (WITH REGARD TO ORGANIZATION)

*We expect in future, especially from the co-financing we receive through the Environmental Protection Fund and the Office for associations that **there may be problems given the whole economic situation**. And we even worked within the Green Forum, it's an informal group - we made a mini survey and found smaller organizations are threatend greatly.*

*Just this morning the two of us talked, like, we are afraid of this financial crisis. We now have secured funds for the next two years, but then **if there are no tenders** that we will be able to apply for, this and next year, then we will certainly be in the financial crisis.*

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# WHAT FUTURE BRINGS...

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## RESOURCE PRESSURE

- Ongoing and expected resource exploitation in (financial) crisis periods

*I expect that there will be pressure on the exploitation of natural resources because the state will definitely experience a financial setback which is already obvious, and then one of the **easiest ways to procure financial resources is through the exploitation of resources**, that is, through the exploitation of gravel and deforestation, which are methods that are very invasive for nature but a fast and efficient way fill the budget.*

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# WHAT FUTURE BRINGS...

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## INTERSECTIONALITY

➤ Emphasis on further raising awareness of the interconnectedness

*if we look at it from the aspect of nature protection we really feel that we have to communicate the importance and interconnectedness of everything and we believe that if people become more aware that they will become... now it's a little pathetic, but better people. But yes, we also know that while digging in the trash, people really don't care if the eagle still exists in Croatia or not.*

*much of our activities consist of communicating to the public the importance of nature protection and in the context of the connection with the climate change, and also connection between this pandemic and human impact on biodiversity*

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# Instead of a conclusion

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- Need for further analysis
- Comparative analysis on vulnerability, resilience and future accounts from NGOs in different areas
- ....

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