

Gaspar, Beatriz; Moreira, António Carrizo; Cercas, Carolina; Queirós, Rafaela; Campos, Salomé

Article

The internationalization of nongovernmental organizations: Characteristics and challenges

Administrative Sciences

Provided in Cooperation with:

MDPI – Multidisciplinary Digital Publishing Institute, Basel

Suggested Citation: Gaspar, Beatriz; Moreira, António Carrizo; Cercas, Carolina; Queirós, Rafaela; Campos, Salomé (2022) : The internationalization of nongovernmental organizations: Characteristics and challenges, Administrative Sciences, ISSN 2076-3387, MDPI, Basel, Vol. 12, Iss. 4, pp. 1-23,
<https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci12040140>

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/275410>

Standard-Nutzungsbedingungen:

Die Dokumente auf EconStor dürfen zu eigenen wissenschaftlichen Zwecken und zum Privatgebrauch gespeichert und kopiert werden.

Sie dürfen die Dokumente nicht für öffentliche oder kommerzielle Zwecke vervielfältigen, öffentlich ausstellen, öffentlich zugänglich machen, vertreiben oder anderweitig nutzen.

Sofern die Verfasser die Dokumente unter Open-Content-Lizenzen (insbesondere CC-Lizenzen) zur Verfügung gestellt haben sollten, gelten abweichend von diesen Nutzungsbedingungen die in der dort genannten Lizenz gewährten Nutzungsrechte.

Terms of use:

Documents in EconStor may be saved and copied for your personal and scholarly purposes.

You are not to copy documents for public or commercial purposes, to exhibit the documents publicly, to make them publicly available on the internet, or to distribute or otherwise use the documents in public.


If the documents have been made available under an Open Content Licence (especially Creative Commons Licences), you may exercise further usage rights as specified in the indicated licence.



<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Review

The Internationalization of Nongovernmental Organizations: Characteristics and Challenges

Beatriz Gaspar ^{1,2}, António Carrizo Moreira ^{1,2,3,*}, Carolina Cercas ¹, Rafaela Queirós ¹ and Salomé Campos ¹

¹ Department of Economics, Management, Industrial Engineering and Tourism, University of Aveiro, 3810-193 Aveiro, Portugal

² GOVCOPP—Research Unit on Governance, Competitiveness and Public Policies, University of Aveiro, 3810-193 Aveiro, Portugal

³ INESCITEC—Institute for Systems and Computer Engineering, Technology and Science, 4200-465 Porto, Portugal

* Correspondence: amoreira@ua.pt

Abstract: Although the internationalization of business firms has been intensively studied, the internationalization of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) is still in a growing-up stage as NGOs are focused on serving specific social interests. They may not only be influenced by social, political, and economic goals, but also cater to social or humanitarian services dealing with health, environmental protection, and human rights. Based on the importance of NGOs and the lack of previous studies on their internationalization process, this paper analyzes the results of a systematic literature review (SLR) on the internationalization of NGOs. It is possible to conclude that this topic is under-researched and fragmented and has been dealt with by following qualitative studies. Moreover, the internationalization of NGOs is far from similar to the models that explain the internationalization of for-profit businesses. NGOs are clearly tuned to the services they provide and seek complementary resources from governmental sources and state agencies so that they are capable of providing a variety of human and financial resources. The main limitation of this study is that it is based solely on two academic databases: SCOPUS and WoS.

Keywords: NGOs; nongovernmental organizations; internationalization; social movements; SLR; drivers; outcomes



Citation: Gaspar, Beatriz, António Carrizo Moreira, Carolina Cercas, Rafaela Queirós, and Salomé Campos. 2022. The Internationalization of Nongovernmental Organizations: Characteristics and Challenges. *Administrative Sciences* 12: 140. <https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci12040140>

Received: 5 September 2022

Accepted: 14 October 2022

Published: 17 October 2022

Publisher's Note: MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.



Copyright: © 2022 by the authors. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

1. Introduction

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) can be defined as private nonprofit organizations that aim to address specific social interests by focusing on supporting social, political, and economic goals, including equity, education, health, environmental protection, and humanitarian causes that serve social or political goals (Martens 2002). They are characterized as organizations that provide services and/or functions of a social or humanitarian nature and are nonprofit and independent of governments or states, playing major roles in international aid, development, and philanthropy. In this sense, they do not share profits among members, but use them to promote their goals (Galkina and Yang 2020).

In contrast with other organizations that compete in the business arena in order to generate profits, NGOs are legal entities—e.g., business associations, cooperatives, social clubs, and churches, among others—that are organized to serve public and social benefits. One important characteristic of these nonprofit organizations is that any economic surplus that results from their activities and exceeds their expenses needs to be reinvested in the organization (Anheier 2005). As such, NGOs are normally nonprofit organizations but not all nonprofit institutions are NGOs.

NGOs assume an important role in combating the problems of the neediest communities, adopting measures to raise awareness and educate public opinion (Tomé 2016; Lan 2018). One of the strongest characteristics of these organizations is the fact that they are

independent of the government or commitments to other entities (Junkui 2012; Porto and da Rocha 2021; Vassele 2019).

The complexity of the international environment is growing with the influences of a variety of social, cultural, political, and business perspectives. This plural and intertwined world has been analyzed from several perspectives.

Businesswise, internationalization has been studied taking into account how different business and economic theories explain/address the international paths of countries, multinational firms, and small and medium-sized firms as a result of the increasing interest of the academic community (Etemad 2004; Ietto-Gillies 2012; Jones et al. 2011; Paul and Sánchez-Morcilio 2019; Ribau et al. 2015, 2018).

Internationalization is one of several growth strategies adopted by both profit and nonprofit organizations (Ruiz 2012). International development involves a number of socio-economic factors and political development activities sponsored by developed countries or multilateral agencies to help developing and underdeveloped countries (Lan 2018). Some NGOs actively engage in foreign affairs and eventually become internationalized. However, while the literature on business internationalization is vast, the literature on the internationalization of social enterprises or nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) is somewhat scarce (Alon et al. 2020).

The increase in NGOs is explained by reasons such as the weakening of national/domestic policies and the growing complexities of global socioeconomic emergencies, with these organizations going global with the aim of finding new donors, expanding their resource pool, and increasing their competitiveness (Lee and Han 2020). In this sense, Galkina and Yang (2020) define international NGOs as those that expand their operations beyond national borders. However, Marchisio (1985) and Mauri (2013) claim that an international NGO must meet five requirements: be an international organization that encompasses working with foreign countries; have an open structure with readiness for multi-domestic membership; have multinational objectives; be a nonprofit organization; and have permanent headquarters.

Despite their relevance in almost all aspects of aid and development and as actors in global governance, the internationalization of NGOs has received little attention in the international business literature, (Porto and da Rocha 2021; Teegen et al. 2004), namely combating crucial problems such as climate change, access to education and healthcare, poverty, and human rights, activities that have allowed them to gain huge global impact and significant political influence (Galkina and Yang 2020).

Although there are several theories explaining the different paths used by firms when internationalizing (Ribau et al. 2015, 2018), the Uppsala model is used extensively to explain the incremental perspective that firms tend to use to become gradually involved in international markets through a series of evolutionary stages (Chetty and Campbell-Hunt 2003; Johanson and Vahlne 1990; Ribau et al. 2015). However, with the growing market globalization, agile and flexible firms, known as early internationalizers or born globals, have implemented new internationalization models (Coviello 2006; Coviello 2015; Ribau et al. 2015). However, if international NGOs are not new, their internationalization process is under-represented (Sinkovics et al. 2019), and the way international NGOs deploy their resources, strategies, and responses are still not clearly analyzed in the way that they differ from those of for-profit firms (Buckley et al. 2017).

As a result of the specific nature of NGOs, the aim of this article is to assess how NGOs internationalize in terms of the drivers and outcomes and, complementarily, if the typical behavioral models of internationalization strategies, which are very common among for-profit firms (Ribau et al. 2015), are also followed by NGOs. As such, the research question of this paper is: what are the main drivers and outcomes of the internationalization process of NGOs? For that, the internationalization process of NGOs is going to be addressed. In order to answer the research question, a systematic literature review (SLR) was carried out in order to categorize, synthesize, and interpret the internationalization of NGOs, as well as their drivers and outcomes. To this end, we reviewed and thoroughly analyzed

16 international published journal articles that represent the core of the present knowledge on the internationalization of NGOs.

This work is divided into five sections. After this introduction, Section 2 presents the methodology used to carry out an SLR protocol. Section 3 presents the main results. Section 4 presents a critical discussion of the results and, finally, in Section 5, relevant conclusions on the theme are drawn, highlighting the limitations and future research.

2. Methodology

This study is based on a systematic literature review (SLR), which consists of the identification, selection, analysis, and synthesis of research, with the purpose of clearly and concisely presenting what is known (or not) about the topic under study (Denyer and Tranfield 2009; Moher et al. 2009). An SLR is based on three fundamental principles—rigor, transparency, and replicability—which allow for increased knowledge about a certain topic (Mallett et al. 2012) and help identify gaps in knowledge (Petticrew and Roberts 2008). The SLR adopted in this article follows the PRISMA protocol (Moher et al. 2009), which was originally developed and implemented in healthcare research. The number of stages of the PRISMA protocol varies according to the authors (Balcerzak et al. 2022; Lim and Rasul 2022). In this article, we synthesized the version into the following three steps:

- Step 1—Conduct a review plan, which consists of identifying the purpose of the study, supplementary questions, and keywords;
- Step 2—Conduct the literature review, using the Scopus platform as a research source, in order to guide the search. In this step, the inclusion and exclusion criteria are established, allowing the filtering of the best results;
- Step 3—Analysis, dissemination, and discussion of the results.

Regarding the first step, the objective of the paper is centered on conducting a bibliographical study on the theme of the internationalization of nongovernmental organizations, as well as understanding the strategies used, inherent processes in the internationalization path, impacts, and relationships established with the states and society. To this end, a set of keywords were identified, highlighting: Internationalization, NGO, Non-Governmental Organizations, nonprofit and not-for-profit. Boolean operators such as “AND” and “OR” were used, and the search focused on finding the expressions in the title, keywords, and abstracts of the results in the most commonly used academic databases: Scopus and WoS. A TITLE-ABS-KEY query was constructed (“Internationalization” AND “Non-Governmental Organization*” OR NGO* OR “Not-for-profit” OR “Nonprofit Organization”). The same search words were used in the Web of Science (WoS) database; the selection started with a specific type of edition: “Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI)–1956–present”.

Complementarily, and to be as inclusive, specific, and effective as possible, it was decided to broaden the search question to capture the internationalization path of NGOs using the following query within TITLE-ABS-KEY: “International* Non-Governmental Organization*” OR “International* NGO*” OR “International* Not-for-profit*” OR “International* Nonprofit Organization*”.

The selection criteria for the information sources adopted followed the recommendations of David and Han (2004) and Light and Pillemer (1984), using only journal articles and reviews published in peer-reviewed academic journals. Furthermore, only documents written in English were included in the search. Afterwards, all titles and abstracts were read in order to understand the relevance and relationship of the articles to the subject under analysis.

In order to select the articles, it was decided to follow the definition of international NGO proposed by Galkina and Yang (2020), as referred above, and not the one proposed by Marchisio (1985) and Mauri (2013) since it was impossible to pinpoint the five requirements they propose, as they were not explicitly mentioned in the articles consulted. Moreover, the focus of the analysis was on the organization as the unit of analysis, and the path it follows during the internationalization process. As such, when articles analyzed, for example, organizational structures or service quality provided by those firms, they were excluded

from the analysis. Furthermore, as the focus of our search was on the drivers and the outcomes, it was decided to aim for the internationalization process of the NGOs. After a thorough analysis of the articles, 16 documents served as the basis for the study of the internationalization of NGOs.

The selection process and the results are shown in Tables 1 and 2. To complement our understanding of the internationalization of NGOs, the internationalization of social enterprises and nonprofit organizations was also carried out. However, the results found for the former did not complement our original search as they dealt with different issues such as social innovation and social entrepreneurship, which are tangential to this study.

Table 1. Results of the search process with the Scopus database.

Number of Filter	Description	Total	Excluded	Included
1	All articles covering words such as “Internationalization” AND “Non-Governmental Organization*” OR NGO* OR “Not-for-profit” OR “Nonprofit Organization” in the title, abstract and keywords from the Scopus database.	94	-	94
2	Selection of “Article” or “Review”.	94	19	75
3	Analysis of the titles and abstracts of the articles to ascertain their quality and relevance.	75	51	24
4	In-depth analysis of the articles from a theoretical/conceptual perspective to understand their relevance to the study.	24	12	12
5	All articles covering words such as “International* Non-Governmental Organization*” OR “International* NGO*” OR “International* Not-for-profit*” OR “International* Nonprofit Organization*” in the title, abstract, and keywords from the Scopus database.	1603	-	1603
6	Selection of “Article” or “Review”.	1603	372	1231
7	Analysis of the titles and abstracts of the articles to ascertain their quality and relevance.	1231	1084	147
8	In-depth analysis of the articles from a theoretical/conceptual perspective to understand their relevance to the study. Elimination of repeated articles (1-2-3-4).	147	144	3

Note: Numbers in Bold signify the number of articles selected and analyzed.

Table 2. Results of the search process with the WoS database.

Number of Filter	Description	Total	Excluded	Included
1	All articles covering words such as “Internationalization” AND “Not-for-Profit” in the title, summary, author keywords, and Keywords Plus from the Web of Science database.	3	-	3
2	Elimination of duplicates.	3	2	1
3	Analysis of the titles and abstracts of the articles to ascertain their quality and relevance.	1	0	1
4	In-depth analysis of the articles from a theoretical/conceptual perspective to understand their relevance to the study.	1	0	1
5	All articles covering words such as “Internationalization” AND “Non-Governmental Organization*” in the title, summary, author keywords, and Keywords Plus from the Web of Science database.	13	-	13
6	Elimination of duplicates.	13	9	4

Table 2. *Cont.*

Number of Filter	Description	Total	Excluded	Included
7	Analysis of the titles and abstracts of the articles to ascertain their quality and relevance.	4	2	2
8	In-depth analysis of the articles from a theoretical/conceptual perspective to understand their relevance to the study.	2	2	0
9	All articles covering words such as “Internationalization” AND “NGO*” in the title, summary, author keywords, and Keywords Plus from the Web of Science database.	24	-	24
10	Elimination of duplicates.	24	21	3
11	Analysis of the titles and abstracts of the articles to ascertain their quality and relevance.	3	2	1
12	In-depth analysis of the articles from a theoretical/conceptual perspective to understand their relevance to the study.	1	1	0
13	All articles covering words such as “Internationalization” AND “nonprofit organization” in the title, summary, author keywords, and Keywords Plus from the Web of Science database.	0	-	0

Note: Numbers in Bold signify the number of articles selected and analyzed.

3. Results

3.1. Characterization of the Sample

The sample of 16 articles were written by 26 different authors who work for 21 different institutions. Together, these articles amount to 323 total global citations (TGCs), as shown in Table 3. TGCs denote the number of times an article was cited based on the full count of the SCOPUS or WoS platform (Alon et al. 2018). This number reflects the interdisciplinary nature of the articles, as well as their overall impact on academic research. Additionally, total local citations (TLCs) are presented, which indicate the number of times an article has been cited by other articles within the selected literature (Alon et al. 2018). In the present sample, only the Siméant (2005) article was cited once by Lee and Han (2020); Gálvez-Rodríguez et al. (2012) was cited by Gálvez-Rodríguez et al. (2014); and Teegen (2003) was cited by Galkina and Yang (2020). Thus, it can be seen that TGCs are much higher than TLCs, which indicates that if the theme of internationalization of NGOs can be considered as being in expansion, the low TLC indicates that the internationalization of NGOs is far from being consolidated and the themes covered are scattered within the broad analysis of internationalization topics. This may derive from the fact that the internationalization of NGOs is a relatively recent and little-studied theme.

Table 3. Ranking of the articles based on TGC and TLC scores.

	Article	Authors	TGC	TLC
1	Global strategy and the collaboration of MNEs, NGOs, and governments for the provisioning of collective goods in emerging markets	Boddewyn and Doh (2011)	92	0
2	Competencies of project managers in international NGOs: perceptions of practitioners	Brière et al. (2015)	66	0
3	Determining Factors in Online Transparency of NGOs: A Spanish Case Study	Gálvez-Rodríguez et al. (2012)	58	1
4	What is going global? The internationalization of French NGOs ‘without borders’	Siméant (2005)	38	1

Table 3. Cont.

	Article	Authors	TGC	TLC
5	International NGOs as global institutions: using social capital to impact multinational enterprises and governments	Teegen (2003)	36	1
6	Building and valuing global brands in the nonprofit sector	Laidler-Kylander et al. (2007)	32	0
7	Drivers for the proactive online disclosure of information in the NGO sector: the Colombian case	Gálvez-Rodríguez et al. (2014)	12	0
8	National and Supranational Government–NGO Relations: Anti-Discrimination Policy Formation in the European Union	Bouget and Prouteau (2002)	12	0
9	Chinese NGOs are “going out”: History, Scale, Characteristics, Outcomes, and Barriers	Li and Dong (2018)	3	0
10	Bringing Nordic Slush to Asia: Entrepreneurial internationalization of an NGO as a social movement	Galkina and Yang (2020)	2	0
11	Dysfunctions of NPOS and NGOS in Poland in the global context: some international comparisons	Fudaliński (2014)	2	0
12	Chinese foundations and the challenge of ‘Going international’	Tan and Huyse (2021)	0	0
13	The Resource-Seeking Internationalization Process of a Nongovernmental Organization	Porto and da Rocha (2021)	0	0
14	Becoming INGO: A Case Study on Taiwan’s Tzu-Chi in the United States	Lee and Han (2020)	0	0
15	History and Paradigm Shift: NGOs in International Development Aid	Lan (2018)	0	0
16	Foreign NGOs in China in the Context of a Global Civil Society—with a Discussion of the Internationalization of Chinese NGOs	Junkui (2012)	0	0

NGOs are frequently studied by researchers as their actions have repercussions in socioeconomic, political, legal, cultural, and historical contexts. However, when addressing their internationalization path, the number of studies drops dramatically. It was aspects such as the international growth of markets and globalization that triggered the interest in this area, and a greater number of studies on the subject began to appear at the beginning of the 21st century. In this sense, four relevant articles were identified between the years 2001 to 2010. From 2011 on, the theme begins to be studied more frequently, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Evolution of publications over time.

Year of Publication	Number of Articles	% of Total Publications	Cumulative Percentage
2017–2021	6	37.5	37.5
2011–2016	6	37.5	75.0
2001–2010	4	25.0	100

The scientific articles under analysis were published in 16 different outlets. *The China Nonprofit Review* and *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* have two publications each. The rest have only one publication, as shown in Table 5. Thus, the first two journals present a concentration of 25%, and the remaining articles are scattered in different outlets. This is an indication that the topic under analysis is still in an embryonic stage.

Table 5. Main outlets of publication.

Source of Publication	Number of Articles	% of Total Publications	Cumulative Percentage
<i>The China Nonprofit Review</i>	2	12.5	12.50
<i>VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations</i>	2	12.5	25.00
<i>Brazilian Administration Review</i>	1	6.25	31.25
<i>Entrepreneurial Business and Economics Review</i>	1	6.25	37.50
<i>Global Strategy Journal</i>	1	6.25	43.75
<i>IDS Bulletin</i>	1	6.25	50.00
<i>International Business Review</i>	1	6.25	56.25
<i>International Journal of Project Management</i>	1	6.25	62.50
<i>Journal of International Management</i>	1	6.25	68.75
<i>Nonprofit Policy Forum</i>	1	6.25	75.00
<i>Nonprofit Management and Leadership</i>	1	6.25	81.25
<i>Online Information Review</i>	1	6.25	87.50
<i>Public Administration and Development</i>	1	6.25	93.75
<i>Review of International Political Economy</i>	1	6.25	100.00

Hoshin Kanri is a strategic planning method extensively used for the coordination of operations (Akao 1991). Although there is no single representation of the Hoshin Kanri models (Witcher and Butterworth 2001), the X matrix has been used as a correlation matrix to establish the relationship between targets and actions or topics and variables used to represent the outcomes analyzed (Silveira et al. 2018; Patrício et al. 2018).

In order to classify the 16 articles under study with regard to several topics, an X matrix was developed, as shown in Figure 1, based on Patrício et al. (2018). This matrix consists of four sections: (a) main topics, regarding the internationalization of NGOs and case studies of international NGOs; (b) main approaches used; (c) countries of origin and destination of the NGOs studied; and (d) data collection and method of analysis.

This matrix can be interpreted by taking the example of the article by Bouget and Prouteau (2002), as exhibited in Figure 1, on national and supranational relations between governments and NGOs, which takes NGO–state and NGO–society relations as its main approach. In contrast to other articles, this article does not study any particular NGO and thus neither countries of origin nor countries of destination are specified. Finally, data were collected through both printed and online available material. The article followed a qualitative method of analysis.

Based on the 16 articles studied, two typologies of data analysis methods were considered: qualitative and quantitative. Fourteen of the articles followed qualitative approaches, which indicate a concern for in-depth studies that focus on the construction and/or development of theories and models and study other authors and theoretical perspectives. Only two articles presented a quantitative methodology, based on an online transparency index to analyze several international NGOs from Colombia (Gálvez-Rodríguez et al. 2014) and the capacity for international cooperation of Chinese NGOs (Tan and Huyse 2021).

Countries of Origin															
8			8											8	
		13												13	
		16												16	
				11										11	
		4			4									4	
		14												14	
		15												15	
		9												9	
				10										10	
		6			6									6	
		3												3	
5														5	
		7												7	
	12													12	
		2												2	
		1	→											1	
Countries of Destination															
	12													12	
		4			4									4	
		6	↑		6									6	
		14												14	
		3												3	
5														5	
		7												7	
8					8									8	
		9												9	
				10										10	
		↑			11									11	
		13												13	
15														15	
		16												16	
		2												2	
		1	→											1	
Main Approaches Used															
Main Approaches Used															
Data Collection Methods															
Data Collection Methods															
Data Analysis Methods															
Data Analysis Methods															
Main Topics															
Main Topics															
Internationalization of NGOs															
			1	←											
			2												
			3												
			4												
5															
			6												
			7												
8															
Case Studies of International NGOs															
			9												
					10										
					11										
			12												
			13												
			14												
			15												
			16												

Figure 1. Characterization of the sample with X matrix (Bouget and Prouteau 2002; Boddewyn and Doh 2011; Brière et al. 2015; Galkina and Yang 2020; Laidler-Kylander et al. 2007; Lee and Han 2020; Teegen 2003; Lan 2018; Fudaliński 2014; Gálvez-Rodríguez et al. 2012, 2014; Junkui 2012; Li and Dong 2018; Porto and da Rocha 2021; Siméant 2005; Tan and Huyse 2021).

As far as the samples under study are concerned, the NGOs analyzed were classified according to the country of origin and the country of destination. Applying this classification, the predominant sample consists of international NGOs from Europe, where five articles address the different factors related to NGOs in different European countries (Galkina and Yang 2020; Gálvez-Rodríguez et al. 2012; Porto and da Rocha 2021; Siméant 2005). Four of the articles investigate international NGOs from Asia (Lee and Han 2020; Li and Dong 2018; Tan and Huyse 2021; Lan 2018) and only one article looks in depth at the factors that lead to the proactive electronic dissemination of information in Colombian NGOs (Gálvez-Rodríguez et al. 2014). Six of the articles do not present a specific geographic sample, given that they address the topics under analysis without specifying any country of origin (Boddewyn and Doh 2011; Bouget and Prouteau 2002; Brière et al. 2015; Junkui 2012). As for the countries of destination, two articles study the internationalization of NGOs to Asia (Junkui 2012; Galkina and Yang 2020) and one to the United States of America (Lee and Han 2020). One article has an intrafirm-multi-country perspective on the internationalization of various French NGOs (Porto and da Rocha 2021) and, finally, twelve articles do not study specific destination countries (Boddewyn and Doh 2011; Bouget and Prouteau 2002; Brière et al. 2015; Gálvez-Rodríguez et al. 2012, 2014; Laidler-Kylander et al. 2007; Lan 2018; Li and Dong 2018; Tan and Huyse 2021; Siméant 2005; Teegen 2003).

Regarding the main approaches, the internationalization process of NGOs is studied in seven articles (Brière et al. 2015; Fudaliński 2014; Galkina and Yang 2020; Lee and Han 2020; Li and Dong 2018; Tan and Huyse 2021; Porto and da Rocha 2021) and covers a more qualitative perspective. In turn, the evolution and transformation of international NGOs is only addressed in two articles (Laidler-Kylander et al. 2007; Lan 2018). The NGO–state and NGO–society relations are mentioned in four studies (Boddewyn and Doh 2011; Bouget and Prouteau 2002; Lan 2018; Teegen 2003), and lastly, the topics Global Civil Society (Junkui 2012; Siméant 2005); online disclosure of information (Gálvez-Rodríguez et al. 2012, 2014); and the Social Movement theory (Galkina and Yang 2020; Lee and Han 2020) are referenced in two articles each.

3.2. Evolution of NGOs

The history of international NGOs goes back to the abolitionist movement, where peace, labor, and free trade were major issues and activities related to charity, education, health, women, and children were carried out by Western religious organizations and charity groups in overseas colonies in the 19th century. The two world wars in the early 20th century gave rise to some humanitarian aid NGOs and the period between the 1960s and 1970s was an important phase. Against the backdrop of post-industrial economic development, frequent international conflicts of the Cold War, and increasing crises, movements for human rights, feminism, peace, and environmental protection began to emerge and various social forces asserted their influence. These movements stimulated public interest and NGOs emerged in large numbers in Western countries and became involved in situations at the international level (Lan 2018).

After the Cold War, between 1980 and 1990, NGOs experienced exponential growth (Lan 2018), a result of the investments made by the European Union (Siméant 2005) and the organizational capacity of civil society (Lee and Han 2020). The internationalization of NGOs began in the 1980s, but was hastened in the 1990s with the founding of the European Commission's Humanitarian Office (ECHO). ECHO coordinated and monitored the European Union's emergency activities and became the main supporter of European humanitarian NGOs. With the confidence of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, there was an increase in public and private funding directed to humanitarian NGOs and, in the process, a corresponding increase in attempts to obtain these funds (Siméant 2005).

The increasing number of NGOs is now changing the way they interact with their public, using new technological and communicational advances. Globalization has caused many organizations to internationalize, and their leaders are opening their minds to new areas, such as building a global brand and the importance of consumer trust. These brands

focus on strategic positioning and advertising, and are concerned with how homogeneous the brand identity and image are understood throughout the different countries where NGOs are present. Typically, the more relevance and visibility the organizations have, the bigger the challenges for both the trust and value that the NGOs want to convey, which will help them create a brand identity in order to display brand meaning and a clear brand positioning. In some cases, situations such as scandals, bad associations, or criticisms can damage the long-term image and brand value of the organization (Laidler-Kylander et al. 2007).

An NGO brand needs to display the present mission of the organization, because it embodies the reason behind the NGOs' existence. Moreover, taking into account the different stakeholders NGOs are involved with—individual donors, institutional donors, employees, volunteers, beneficiaries, and potential partners—all their upstream and downstream activities that are focused on fundraising and program implementation need to be tuned to the brand image and values that NGOs stand by. Some characteristics such as decentralized structures with low control by headquarters, an informal hierarchy and a culture based on consensus-building by workers make the implementation of a strong global brand identity a challenge. Finally, it is important to note that any international NGO that wants to effectively create a global brand identity should follow four principles (Laidler-Kylander et al. 2007): encouraging the sharing of the best practices and knowledge between countries; supporting the process of commonly planning a global brand; allocating responsibilities to create synergies; and performing brand-building strategies to the best of their abilities.

3.3. NGOs' Internationalization and Institutional Characteristics and Factors

NGOs are considered as third-sector organizations and present a strong diversity of national and international institutions and organizations, making it difficult to reach a consensus as to their definition. Globalization and the interactions that NGOs have with the state have complicated this issue, where the internationalization of NGOs emerges as a response to ongoing globalization. The state is not immune to global influences and ends up interacting through supranational bodies to address issues that cross national borders. NGOs, in turn, seek some support from government entities (Bouget and Prouteau 2002). When it comes to the global business environment, this is characterized by dynamic collaborations between public and private actors, as well as non-profit organizations. These collaborations will be further explored in this section (Boddewyn and Doh 2011).

There are various patterns of interaction between NGOs and the state, from independence, where NGOs operate relatively autonomously, to the strict control that states have over these organizations (Bouget and Prouteau 2002). History reveals that it was not until the 1980s that NGOs were able to gradually break away from the private sector to move into the public sector. In the first instance, NGOs worked independently, without any government intervention. However, NGOs began to play a role in aid projects promoted by the American government and took over some public functions. Subsequently, there was a change in the trajectory of NGO activities, which evolved from direct charitable aid to public policy advocacy to change the environment of the community system after the 1980s, coupled with efforts to formulate public policy around the world, starting in 1990. Additionally, in this context, the values by which NGOs were governed shifted from sympathy, mutual aid, philanthropy, dignity, and voluntary spirit, to public values such as democracy, law, participation, and government (Lan 2018). From the state's perspective, NGOs are increasingly seen as efficient and effective actors capable of providing social services to disadvantaged populations (Bouget and Prouteau 2002).

This relationship forces a mixture of states' political ideologies with NGOs' universal values of kindness and humanitarianism, which can somehow hurt their credibility. Despite this, their cooperation and growing presence from the private to the public sector is inevitable. As such, it is possible to ask: In what ways can NGOs maintain their independent discourses and behavior, but expand into the public sector represented by the government? The relationship between NGOs and the state does not mean that NGOs lose their inde-

pendence, only that they need to grow and develop, which leads to a diversification of behaviors. Thus, it is expected that there will be a diversification of activities within NGOs as well as among the various NGOs. Furthermore, even if NGOs rely on government funding, they still depend on private sector resources. Thus, unilateral dependence on government-based resources does not necessarily mean a loss of independence. In cases such as the U.S. and Switzerland, the proportion of government funding is so high that NGOs retain the ability to affect government aid (Lan 2018).

The internationalization process of NGOs has been very dependent on states, given that government entities maintain a strong influence on the identity of NGOs and on the reasons that justify their internationalization (Siméant 2005). The Internet and new communication technologies have aided in the growth of international NGOs, which has fostered the development of alliances and, in certain cases, favors the international path vis-à-vis the national one (Bouget and Prouteau 2002).

The relationship between NGOs and the state also appears to have a negative side, marked by frequent tensions in which organizations exert pressure on governments. This tension brings with it some repercussions for employees, highlighting the issue of mistrust and conflict in relations between volunteering and the public sector. Another negative factor is the fear of state control, derived from the historical facts that have marked the NGOs' past. In this sense, it is necessary to establish a certain degree of trust until NGOs can integrate themselves into government service-delivery systems and political debates, ensuring some representativeness on the part of NGOs. The greater the political presence and representativeness in constituencies, the greater the willingness of governments to listen to NGOs and treat them as legitimate partners (Bouget and Prouteau 2002). Clearly, working together in cooperation and continuous interaction is necessary to establish a symbiotic relationship (Lan 2018).

Although most NGOs are considered non-profit organizations, they look for ways to collaborate with private and public sectors involving multinational enterprises (MNEs) as well as the states of each country. NGOs seek to protect welfare interests and facilitate the creation of value in the global exchanges of collective goods. This phenomenon results from the inability of states to provide collective goods—what are called “institutional voids”—the supranational venue of these collaborations, and the lack of institutional legitimacy in the public and private sectors. As such, NGOs are considered the ideal institutions to facilitate, engage, and leverage social relationships between states and MNEs, while they create value for various stakeholders. They help bridge the relationships between organizations and others, and the bonding concerning the relationships among members of a specific organization or aggregation (Boddewyn and Doh 2011).

Collective goods are considered rivalrous and exclusive and are characterized as commodities, functions, and services that provide positive externalities such as health, education, transportation, water, communication, and electricity to local communities, being fundamental for modern life (Boddewyn and Doh 2011). These goods are less readily available in countries with emerging economies due to deficits and institutional gaps, where collaborative participation of companies and NGOs help overcome these problems, while strengthening or replacing public bodies. This allows the development of various types of collaborations, at the national and international levels, between these three parties—enterprises, non-governmental organizations, and states (Boddewyn and Doh 2011).

These collaborations can take different forms. Factors such as the asset specificity of the investment needed to supply the necessary collective goods, institutional characteristics such as the type of ordering system prevailing in emerging markets, and pressures for legitimacy and tensions between corporate and national cultures can negatively affect this type of collaboration, and it is essential to work together to overcome them (Boddewyn and Doh 2011).

Collaborations bring benefits to all of the stakeholders. For companies, more specifically MNEs, it is essential to ensure the supply of local collective assets, from the safety of

facilities to the training of workers, as it will allow them to carry out their commercial activities and develop the places where these goods will be supplied. Non-profit actors such as NGOs can accept various types of donations and gain greater political influence, and there is an incentive for future collaborations between non-commercial public agencies, states, local communities, and private companies (Boddewyn and Doh 2011). In general, social relationships become valuable to their stakeholders when they are converted into goodwill or social capital through the adequacy of social structures, which refers to the ability to leverage relationships with others for the benefit of the institution. The bridge that helps with converting social capital into benefits is constructed through information, influence, or power, and solidarity. For this transaction to happen, three conditions are required: firstly, an opportunity or an appropriate occasion to apply social relations; secondly, a specific motivation or will between both parties to engage; and lastly, the capacity or ability to meaningfully engage in social relationships to produce valuable results (Teegen 2003).

Volunteerism is extremely important for NGOs, as a large part of their workforce is supplied on this basis. Investors also play an important role; however, the high dependence on these two stakeholders limits the transparency practices of NGOs (Lan 2018). The institutional theory proves that public access to information on all aspects of the organization is the best way to meet the information needs of its stakeholders (Gálvez-Rodríguez et al. 2014).

As NGOs grow, they are more project-oriented and incorporate more professionals compared to the number of volunteers. They also rely more and more on local partners, spending much of their time and resources on managing these projects. The more NGOs incorporate professional managers and business-like management tools, the more they seek to achieve social and organizational goals. As a result, development support funds concentrate more on large, highly professional NGOs (Lan 2018).

In recent decades, NGOs have been moving away from both traditional values and their reliance on voluntarism. Professional organizations have sought to invest in social enterprises and in the training of professionals and specialists. This transformation has only been possible with the increase in development aid funds, mainly from states, and with the involvement of increasingly specialized management professionals (Lan 2018).

This growth of NGOs leads to a greater separation between members of the organization, coupled with greater cooperation between international NGOs and local community entities, which makes the relationship with societies increasingly indirect (Lan 2018). In the process of NGO growth, NGOs begin to present a global scope, becoming more visible and vulnerable to public scrutiny; thus, proactively disseminating information may be the solution to strengthen their image across societies (Gálvez-Rodríguez et al. 2014).

As national NGOs gain strength and experience and begin to look beyond borders and establish relations with civil societies abroad (Bouget and Prouteau 2002), the integration of international NGOs with the government is increasingly prominent and has become a tool for promoting diplomacy (Junkui 2012). The line between the public and private sectors becomes increasingly tenuous due to the privatization of public bodies, the deregulation of economic activities, the liberalization of national economies, and the increase in non-governmental organizations; all of these are factors that provide more opportunities for the growth and internationalization of non-governmental organizations (Boddewyn and Doh 2011).

3.4. Main Drivers of Internationalization

NGOs are founded for different reasons and pursue different goals. While originally NGOs sought to establish local objectives and did not feel the need to conduct activities abroad, there are also NGOs that set internationalization as their primary objective (Lee and Han 2020).

The international expansion of NGOs is mainly due to the demand to provide their services on wider geographic horizons and to find new donors in order to increase their competitiveness. Equally, there are also structural factors that determine political and social conditions, which have fostered an uneven distribution of NGOs around the world. The

global structure and internal conditions are important factors that condition the internationalization of NGOs (Lee and Han 2020).

Although internationalization is considered a careful and linear process, in the case of NGOs, it can also be explained by the need to implement unplanned activities abroad, which result from interactive processes between the NGO's foreign branches and headquarters (Lee and Han 2020). Thus, it is argued that there is a link between social movements and international NGOs, which is essentially explained through collective actions carried out abroad and oriented towards social change (Galkina and Yang 2020).

The particularity of some NGOs is that their internationalization is completed through projects, where project managers and their personal and practical skills play a key role in the delivery of the services they provide to society, as well as in the international success of the projects (Brière et al. 2015). Moreover, despite international NGO project managers being challenged to solve problems and to come up with tools for effective solutions, they also need to involve stakeholders. Furthermore, the communication and trust between the project manager of local government institutions and the stakeholders within NGOs are considered a success factor (Brière et al. 2015). For that, the following skills need to be considered when undertaking international projects, such as Brière et al. (2015): understanding the perspectives and roles of different project stakeholders; understanding and demonstrating cultural sensitivity; and addressing safety and security concerns/risks associated with the project. For that, beyond organizational, managerial, and technical competencies, human competencies are key for succeeding in the deployment of the international projects with which NGOs are involved.

Social movement theory—which seeks to explain social mobilization and collective actions, their manifestations, as well as possible cultural, social, and political effects—has been used to explain how NGOs have been internationalized (Galkina and Yang 2020). Furthermore, it has also been used to explain the individual, collective, and public identities of social movements. Individual identity is characterized by the personal traits that are internalized and imported into social movement participation. Collective identity, on the other hand, refers to an individual's cognitive, moral, and emotional attachment to a community, category, practice, or institution. Finally, public identity captures the influences that external audiences have on how social movement supporters think about themselves (Galkina and Yang 2020).

In conclusion, the main reasons that NGOs seek to become internationalized are dissatisfaction with the actual conditions of the global environment and the need to provide more support abroad and develop commitments with local partners. In addition, the collective mobilization of resources, through volunteer work, influences the development of external relations and learning. The internationalization of NGOs seeks to overcome three types of liabilities: the liability of newness, which highlights the need for NGOs to overcome their inexperience and which limits access to resources and networks and restricts their expansion and credibility. This is followed by the liability of smallness, which is related to the lack of resources, which can challenge their internationalization, and, finally, the liability of foreignness, related to the NGO's needs to overcome barriers to entering new foreign markets and establishing new relationships in these markets (Galkina and Yang 2020).

3.5. Case Studies

The internationalization process of NGOs may differ depending on several factors such as their size, purpose, and the countries of origin and destination. Thus, taking into consideration the plurality of situations, it was decided to present some specific situations of NGOs in several different countries and contexts.

The activities of NGOs in China are not recent. These organizations have carried out a series of programs mostly in the areas of public health, education, and cultural exchange, very much in tune with the sociocultural perspective of the time of their investment. In addition to the traditional fields of charity work, foreign NGOs in China have focused

on new fields such as environmental protection, women and children, AIDS prevention, domestic violence, protection of migrant workers and their rights, social enterprises, fair trade, natural disaster response, and rural governance (Junkui 2012).

Based on Junkui (2012), NGOs in China concentrate their activities in regions, cities, or municipalities due to Chinese regulations that constrain NGO activities. Thus, NGOs have their bases in large cities where they conduct their primary project operations, and then establish offices in multiple locations in order to more easily deal with China's economic and social development policies. Despite the restrictions imposed, foreign NGOs in China have successfully implemented several programs within the country through cooperation with domestic NGOs and the government. The results show that 74.5% of foreign NGOs in China frequently choose to work with the government.

The internationalization of Chinese NGOs implies an internal cultural force, driven by their strong economy and utilitarian factors. Specifically, there are three types of incentives: (i) Political—Chinese NGOs are naturally close to and typically aligned with the government, and this is the main pattern of behavior; (ii) Resources—China's "One Belt, One Road" initiative generates demands for new investment opportunities abroad, and Chinese NGOs can take this opportunity to obtain more resources from the government and business by launching projects abroad; (iii) Competition—From 2007 to 2016, the number of NGOs in China increased, forcing them to specialize and explore new markets abroad (Li and Dong 2018).

Despite the efforts put into the internationalization of Chinese NGOs, this process is still in its early stages, highlighting the main characteristics of their expansion abroad: (i) the internationalization of Chinese NGOs started late and spontaneously, they have not yet fully developed, and they also do not focus on or know much about brand advertising, which is crucial for organizational communication. These factors lead to limited influence in international society and indicate the willingness of Chinese foundations to participate in foreign donations; (ii) emergency relief work is always disconnected from post-disaster development projects in later stages; (iii) Chinese NGOs work closely with Chinese companies in their corporate social responsibility projects abroad; and, (iv) Chinese NGOs incorporate their brand of domestic projects and experiences into international projects (Li and Dong 2018).

In their initial phase of internationalization, Chinese NGOs tend to adopt low-risk strategies, combining their fully developed projects with resources from foreign Chinese companies, behavior that is considered unsustainable due to a lack of capacity and resources. In addition, they similarly assume a number of problems that include a lack of strategic planning, poor sustainability, and weak organizational management. The current exploration suggests that Chinese NGOs first need to outline strategic goals for participation abroad and secondly, strengthen their international operation capabilities. Chinese NGOs lack detailed project disclosures and a transparent system of accountability, justifying the adoption of new projects, use of funds, and post-completion evaluation. These aspects can negatively influence the credibility of NGOs (Li and Dong 2018).

The major internal challenge for NGOs is their transnational management, especially regarding partnership building, registration, setting up of offices, staff management, fund transfers, fundraising, and project management. In addition, Chinese NGOs lack the professional competence needed for international practice (Li and Dong 2018).

Currently, Chinese NGOs mainly adopt two methods to bridge this gap in the internationalization process. One way is to cooperate with international NGOs and jointly launch projects abroad, thus taking advantage of experienced professionals from these international NGOs. The other way is to recruit Chinese professionals with experience of working abroad. In addition, Chinese NGOs have also developed four principles for a proper and effective internationalization of an NGO: civil mutual assistance; respect for local requirements; cooperation with local organizations; and sustainable development (Li and Dong 2018).

Tan and Huyse (2021) consider that Chinese organizations have a long history of involvement in international cooperation. The authors found that Chinese NGOs had to

operate within an inadequate policy framework and lacked human resources and financial support, resulting in poor performance and impact. The United Nations Development Program in China assessed the challenges faced by 18 Chinese foreign-related NGOs in their international cooperation activities based on three factors: type of organization; geographical distribution; and business area. [Tan and Huyse \(2021\)](#) conclude that the Chinese were only in the early stages of “going out,” resulting in low scores for performance. Although, they noted a serious lack of technical support, legal guarantees, professional staff, and funds during international projects ([Tan and Huyse 2021](#)).

Only a few Chinese foundations that have large budgets are encouraged by the positive policy framework to truly “go out”, although in a careful and modest way. Foundations that are not yet adequately staffed and funded might be a priority for the Chinese government to support their involvement in international cooperation voluntarily and proactively. Most foundations that lack the experience and enthusiasm to engage in international cooperation due to concerns of political risk, lack of funding, and lack of talent are not quite ready to “go all out” ([Tan and Huyse 2021](#)).

The sector of Non-Profit Organizations (NPOs) and NGOs in Poland has been substantially developing, and the globalization and internationalization of the operations of these organizations have become a common phenomenon. NPOs in Poland entered a new stage of internationalization at the moment the country became a part of the European Union (EU) in May 2004. The EU influenced issues such as: opening a uniform European market for entrepreneurs; developing an information society and information technology; professional stimulation for older people; and levelling differences in socio-economic development by financing structural funds and life-long education ([Fudaliński 2014](#)).

The development of the NPOs and NGOs sector in Poland depends on internationalization and globalization aspects, since these are determinants of the development of the third sector, and any dysfunctions in these processes should be eliminated. Therefore, these organizations are advised to take action in terms of monitoring present pathological phenomena, undertaking preventive actions in this respect, creating mechanisms for their elimination, seeking benchmarks with regard to solutions verified in the whole world, creating a code of good practices related to non-profit organizations’ operations, supporting initiatives stimulating the internationalization of the third sector, and building awareness of the civil society in the international dimension ([Fudaliński 2014](#)).

[Siméant \(2005\)](#) studied the internationalization process of four French humanitarian NGOs and the strategies developed to adapt to an unstable and highly competitive environment. Some NGOs opted for private funding strategies as they avoided dependence on public funds and decreased the risk of unpredictable national complications. However, other NGOs chose to rely entirely on public funds, which was also shaped and facilitated by internationalization. It was possible to conclude that internationalization tends to encourage a universal identity, this being evidenced by: the uniformity of the acronym and slogan worldwide; the presentation of shared values throughout the organization; the use of English as the working language; the internationalization of volunteer recruitment; the ability to intervene worldwide; and the movement of expatriates within the organization.

One strategy that prevents organizational corruption and promotes an organization’s credibility and accountability is transparency in the proactive disclosure of information, regardless of whether it was previously requested or not. Additionally, organizations of international scope are the most interested in information disclosure in order to reduce funding costs and information asymmetries between outsiders and insiders. In this context, ([Gálvez-Rodríguez et al. 2014](#)) concluded that internationalization has a positive influence on the online transparency of the organizational profile in NGOs in Colombia. On the other hand, although it can be assumed that NGOs working abroad exhibit greater visibility on the Internet, ([Gálvez-Rodríguez et al. 2012](#)) concluded that Spanish NGOs indicate that internationalization does not affect the online information transparency index.

Finally, the results of the study of the NGO *Médecins Sans Frontières* (MSF) suggested that the theories developed to explain the companies’ internationalization process can

also be used to analyze the internationalization process of NGOs, with regard to their actions aimed at raising human and financial resources. However, there are differences in the internationalization process, the most important of which lies in the choice of countries to offer humanitarian aid, which depends on where MSF's services are needed. Moreover, despite the French division's efforts to maintain control over other MSF units, the relationship between units in different parts of the world and the French founding unit is quite different in terms of structure, power, and control from typical headquarter–subsidiary relationships (Porto and da Rocha 2021).

The international trajectory of MSF shows similarities with the internationalization of born globals and with the Uppsala model. However, none of the theoretical perspectives were able, on their own, to explain the international trajectory of this NGO. During the pre-internationalization phase, MSF's trajectory is quite similar to the linear and sequential process in the Uppsala model. In the second phase, gradual internationalization, MSF shows a growing interest in internationalization, but still cautiously and toward countries that are psychically close. The entrepreneurial actions of the external network members were the driving force for internationalization, and trust and collective learning played a crucial role. Finally, the third phase, planned internationalization, is marked by substantial changes in terms of international orientation and proactivity and the born global perspective is very useful to understand this phase. At this point, the logic of the NGO internationalization process becomes risk-neutral in the sense that it approaches psychically distant countries and unknown potential partners and invests in internationalization. The selection criterion is no longer based on trust, but on strategic partners capable of donating substantial resources (Porto and da Rocha 2021).

4. Discussion

Currently, NGOs appear to play a fundamental role in societies, insofar as they defend the interests of communities and champion public policies and solidarity movements aimed at social welfare (Galkina and Yang 2020). As organizations operating in the private sector, they are independent of state policies or any other government entity (Vassele 2019), although they always maintain some nondependent connection with the state. As a result of increasing socioeconomic globalization and the transnationality of civil society, the internationalization of NGOs is becoming an increasingly explored topic, as a result of the demand in responding to different requests for aid abroad, which affects the very evolution and development of NGOs and their human resources.

The development of the research that led to this systematic review has made it possible to collect information for understanding and analyzing the role of internationally oriented NGOs. There are several factors that help explain why NGOs choose internationalization. On one hand, the main reason is the weakening of the country's national policies and the increasing complexity of global emergencies. These two perspectives are intertwined and give rise to international NGOs. On the other hand, from the perspective of resources, it is also argued that the main reasons are governed by the dependency on resources at the national level and the structural opportunities of each country, which may or may not favor this process.

In this sense, for the internationalization process to work, it is necessary to raise human and financial resources to be able to cope with the global emergencies that arise. In addition, the economic development of the country in which NGOs operate influences the respective demand. From another perspective, but equally interconnected, the dissatisfaction with a common situation that is shared by the population at a global level, which potentiates the generation of social movements, influences the creation of NGOs—or international NGOs in the case where they operate overseas. These movements can be carefully planned or, on the other hand, result from unplanned activities, always with the primary objective of generating change. The internationalization of NGOs opens avenues for entrepreneurship as a social phenomenon on a global scale and as a collective instrument for social change. Social movement theory has been used to study this phenomenon. Globally, the identity

of a social movement depends on favorable or unfavorable public opinion, which can facilitate as well as inhibit that social movement, which may in turn condition the resources available to the movement, facilitating or inhibiting the internationalization of NGOs.

Despite the different reasons that support the internationalization of NGOs, there are some important obstacles. At an initial stage, and especially when there is not much information about the NGO, there are the problems of credibility, transparency, and veracity that NGOs have to face. Besides this aspect, the lack of considerable resources can hinder the internationalization process of NGOs. Overcoming sociocultural and language barriers is important for the establishment of new international interinstitutional relationships.

If traditional theories can explain the internationalization process based on the Uppsala model, on the network-based approach, and on early and rapid internationalization approaches, it is possible to conclude that the level of commitment of internationalized NGOs is supported by low-risk strategies to support social movements. For that, NGOs need to balance the portfolio of activities they provide so that they can manage their staff, set up their offices abroad, and implement their fundraising activities to manage the internationalization path according to their strategic goals. In order to legitimize their cross-country growth and their links with social movements and governments, it is important not only to overcome institutional barriers, but also to overcome the liability of foreignness and to set up activities abroad more easily.

Globalization and internationalization of NGOs have intensified the importance of the role of civil society. As such, NGOs emerge as an essential intermediary to break down the barriers between citizens and governments and to expedite the political dialogue between them. The role of NGOs in the relationship with the state and society is increasingly important: NGOs work around the defense and well-being of communities, and therefore have a pressing need to create links and fruitful relationships with states, so that they can have a voice in political decision-making and benefit from state support and aid. Consequently, when internationalizing, NGOs need to maintain their independence and their status in the private sector, as well as the integrity of their values as members of civil society, seeking to promote relationships with different states and between states and communities.

The internationalization process of NGOs may differ depending on factors such as their size, purpose, and countries of origin and destination. Given these factors, NGOs have to decide on the different activities to undertake, e.g., deciding whether to restrict their activities to only one city, region, or country and opting for public or private funding. Despite the difference in results found regarding the transparency of online information, the transparency of NGOs is recommended. Additionally, although the 'traditional' theories developed to explain the internationalization process of business companies can also be used for NGOs with regard to the resources' perspectives, there are significant differences, mainly in the choice of countries to offer humanitarian aid, which depends on where the NGOs' services are needed.

Based on the aforementioned factors, it is possible to consider that the internationalization process itself is not a subject that has been deeply studied given that, based on the documents analyzed, there is no process per se but rather several reasons why NGOs choose internationalization. As such, it is possible to argue that there are several factors that influence the process that is essentially fueled by the concern with generating responsible, credible, and well-founded change.

To simplify the understanding of the reasons and factors that underpin the internationalization of NGOs and the results of this process, Figure 2 depicts the main drivers and outcomes that emerged from this SLR.

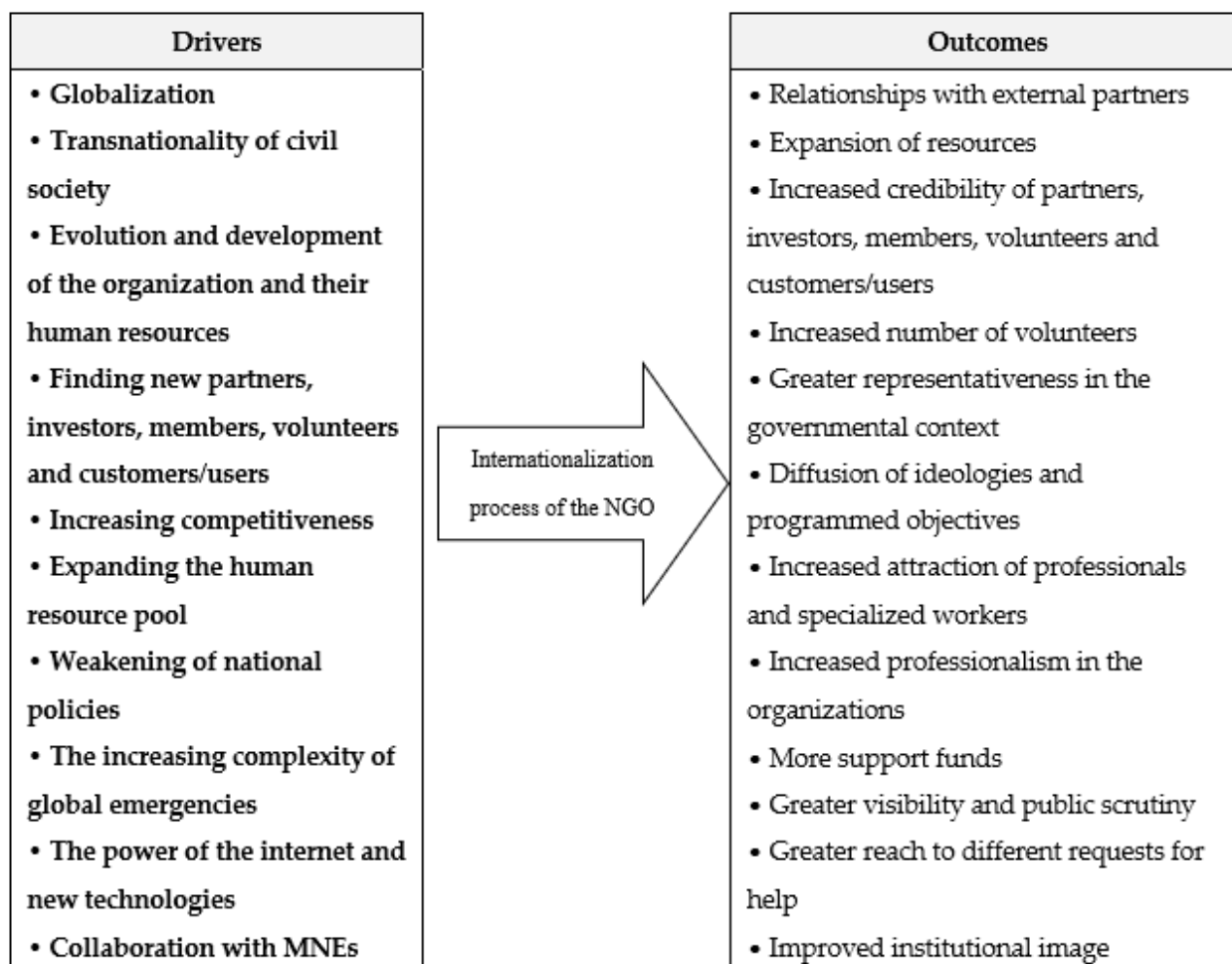


Figure 2. Synthesis of the main drivers and outcomes of the internationalization process of NGOs.

Globalization emerges as one of the main drivers of the internationalization process of NGOs (Bouget and Prouteau 2002), given that organizations go along with the continuous evolution of the world community and benefit from aspects such as the increase in trade, the development and diffusion of new technologies, economic growth, and plural socio-cultural development. The transnationality of civil society is also an important driver, since citizens begin to establish relationships across borders and increasingly have a greater voice in government policies and influence the direction that societies take (Bouget and Prouteau 2002). The evolution and development of an ONG as an organization, and its human resources, is one of the main drivers of these organizations, as internal and external development stems from the gradual transformation from faith-based community organizations and social movements to professional organizations (Lan 2018).

Contrary to what happens in most of the literature on the internationalization of for-profit firms, international projects are interesting means for NGOs to provide their services abroad (Brière et al. 2015; Lan 2018). Moreover, international projects demand that project managers across the organization provide solutions in different socio-cultural environments, which demand not only managerial and technical competencies, but also cultural acumen to make projects succeed in international environments.

The search for new partners, investors, members, and clients emerges as the fourth main driver of internationalization as new resources and more manpower can open new opportunities (Lee and Han 2020; Lan 2018). Increasing competitiveness and an expanding human resource pool (Lee and Han 2020) were presented as two other drivers that lead NGOs to want to embrace the global market. The weakening of national policies (Lee and Han 2020) is very much linked to the close relationship that NGOs have with nation-

states because even though these organizations are characterized as independent, states and certain government policies can somehow affect NGOs positively or negatively. The increasing complexity of global emergencies (Lee and Han 2020), on the other hand, can be central to NGOs' ability to understand where they should act and direct their efforts. In the case of a humanitarian crisis, NGOs, by nature, have some readiness and speed in their actions. The last driver is related to the power of the Internet and new technologies (Bouget and Prouteau 2002), a factor closely associated with globalization, which helps in the development of alliances and facilitates the expansion process of NGOs.

As international NGOs grow abroad and their consolidated image needs to be developed, they need to work on their external credibility and transparency. For that, NGOs need to develop a unique identity based on their values to display a credible brand image across counties and among their stakeholders (Laidler-Kylander et al. 2007).

There are many outcomes that can arise from the internationalization process of NGOs, depending on the context where they operate. First, there is the building of relationships with external resources and partners (Lan 2018), since the development and growth of NGOs imply greater involvement and more resources; however, with an international scope, the number of options is also greater. New investors mean increasing competitiveness. When internationalizing, NGOs need to have greater credibility from and about partners, investors, members, and clients (Gálvez-Rodríguez et al. 2014) so that they can build a better reputation abroad, join networks, and develop inter-organizational relationships with local partners. For greater credibility, it is essential for NGOs to maintain transparency and ensure truthfulness in their actions. Another important outcome is that the increase in the number of volunteers (Galkina and Yang 2020) results from a greater collective mobilization of resources, since the larger the NGO, the greater the need to engage with and retain volunteers.

Internationalization also allows greater representativeness in the governmental context (Bouget and Prouteau 2002), i.e., NGOs have a greater openness to representing local or particular interests, which allows for streamlining the input of new policies, connecting citizens to political life, and facilitating civil dialogue, while also fortifying their political presence and representativeness in constituencies. The increased attraction of professionals and skilled workers is directly related to the increased professionalism in organizations (Lan 2018); with the development of these organizations, their goals are drawn to a more professional end, and there is a growing number of more specialized professionals who are able to manage complex projects.

Based on the discussion presented above, the following propositions can be put forward:

- Proposition 1—International NGOs emerge, in general, as the result of global needs, emergencies, and events, which constitute excellent opportunities for their expansion;
- Proposition 2—Challenges of the internationalization process of NGOs are overcome by the main internal drivers, such as the development of the human resource pool of the organization, the need to increase the NGO's competition, and the capabilities to find findings through new partners, investors, volunteers, members, among others;
- Proposition 3—The main external drivers, such as the transnationality of civil society, the increasing global emergencies, the weakening of national policies, and the broad human resource pool across countries, complement the internal drivers for NGOs to expand abroad;
- Proposition 4—The internationalization process of NGOs can be explained by the match of external opportunities, in which the preservation of global well-being of global emergencies and events is necessary, with the internal competencies to respond to those needs, which can be achieved based on network-based activities involving several stakeholders and experiential knowledge while providing those services;
- Proposition 5—If born globals and international new ventures are very common among for-profit firms and are based on the international entrepreneurship theory, the internationalization of NGOs seems to rest more on the traditional Uppsala and networked-based theory;

- Proposition 6—International NGOs seem to be a curse and a blessing, as they need to develop close relationships with several stakeholders, but the more credible, and transparent they are, the more they consolidate their image, and the more they manage to obtain their funds;
- Proposition 7—States seem to have bi-univocal characteristics: they are funding sources and client partners, playing a key role as NGO stakeholders.

5. Conclusions

Based on the content of the 16 papers, this paper provides an analysis of the internationalization of NGOs, has advanced seven propositions, and synthesized the main driver and outcomes. It used the X matrix, based on the Hoshin Kanri model, to provide a rich and simple visualization of the findings.

With this exploratory study, it is possible to conclude that study of the internationalization of NGOs is not a new phenomenon; however, the actual knowledge of the process is still under-investigated. Moreover, this paper also shows that, despite the possible similarities involved in the internationalization process, how NGOs embrace their international path and how they take on and exploit new opportunities abroad is far from similar to the models that explain the internationalization of for-profit businesses.

There are internal and external drivers that underpin the internationalization of NGOs which complement each other. It is also clear that the outcomes are clearly tuned to the services they provide and with the need for complementary resources that a clear institutional image demands, the support of governmental and state agencies provide the variety of human and financial resources that are provided by the stakeholders and the greater visibility they achieve.

It is clear that the internationalization challenge has been a growing concern among academics regarding NGOs. It is possible to assert that, despite the several drivers and outcomes found about the internationalization process of NGOs, its study is still in an growing-up stage. The same conclusion can be reached by analyzing the limited number of total local citations *vis-à-vis* the total global citations.

The main contribution of this work concerns the construction of a consistent body of theory regarding the internationalization of NGOs, as well as the various factors that influence it and the various interactions that take place during the process. It is important to refer to the dynamic mechanisms that explain the internationalization process of NGOs and are the result of incremental decisions in which decision-makers seek and acquire experiential knowledge to expand their activities. Moreover, network-based activities with local communities, social movements, and governments help to develop ties with several stakeholders that underpin experiential knowledge and knowledge-based learning, which further develops opportunities abroad and solidifies the international path that NGOs embrace. However, new theories and new frameworks are in high demand.

Another important aspect that deserves future research is the perspective of the society or the state; it would be beneficial to study these topics further and understand how they influence the internationalization of NGOs both in terms of supply and demand. This could be analyzed by taking comparative studies into account from sociological and anthropological perspectives.

If the internationalization path of NGOs seems to rest on a dynamic approach based on experiential knowledge and network-based learning sparked by the commitment to reach international markets, there is room for further studies to address the eclectic paradigm and explore how NGOs' ownership advantages are internalized and what role location advantages play in their paths abroad. Moreover, this could open new paths regarding how important NGOs' endogenous resources could be used to expand abroad to provide their services.

The main limitation of this study is that it is based on a reduced number of 16 papers, which were found in the two most important academic databases: SCOPUS and WoS. We resisted the temptation of searching for more documents in less prolific databases, based

on high-quality academic purposes. However, future studies could involve searching in EBSCO Host and Redalyc databases, which could improve the reach of the search covering other geographical and academic areas. Moreover, enlarging a search to book chapters and case studies could improve the understanding of the difficulty involved in the internationalization process of NGOs.

To enhance future prospective studies, it is possible to recommend more quantitative studies to try to generalize the results. Moreover, it would be interesting to underpin future studies and test the validity of the propositions put forward in the previous section. As further research is necessary, it was decided to reveal some of the still many open aspects that can be dealt with: How are different contextual perspectives understood and turned into social business-like opportunities?; How market oriented are those NGOs when providing their services?; How are knowledge management activities shared, if at all, from the headquarters to the units and between different units?; How are international mandates won and lost?; How is performance—financial, social, human, and cultural, among others—measured among NGOs and their units?; How are adaptation/standardization strategies being implemented?; How is the business model, if any, implemented to support the internationalization of the NGO?; What are the main sought-after international opportunities among NGOs?; How are those international opportunities embraced by project managers across the organization?; How fast are the international mandates implemented (and withdrawn)?; How influential or detrimental can volunteers be in the provision of social services in the internationalization process?; How does the home/host country's political divide influence the internationalization process of an NGO?; How effective are the social changes brought about by the provision of services by those internationalized NGOs?; How are brand image and brand identity managed across the international NGO and how is the image formed according to the different emergencies or events catered for by the NGO?; Does the geographical origin of the NGO have any influence on its international path? Clearly, there are still many open avenues for future research. They could open new windows of opportunities to address how business-like NGOs' organizational perspective is and how closely they behave vis-à-vis other internationalizing entities.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, B.G., A.C.M., C.C., R.Q., and S.C.; methodology, B.G., A.C.M., C.C., R.Q., and S.C.; formal analysis, B.G., A.C.M., C.C., R.Q., and S.C.; investigation, B.G., A.C.M., C.C., R.Q., and S.C.; writing—original draft preparation, B.G., C.C., R.Q., and S.C.; writing—review and editing, B.G., A.C.M., C.C., R.Q., and S.C.; supervision, A.C.M.; funding acquisition, A.C.M. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This work was financially supported by the research unit on Governance, Competitiveness and Public Policy (UIDB/04058/2020), funded by national funds through FCT—Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References

- Akao, Yoji. 1991. *Hoshin Kanri, Policy Deployment for Successful TQM*. Cambridge: Productivity Press.
- Alon, Ilan, John Anderson, Ziaul Haque Munim, and Alice Ho. 2018. A review of the internationalization of Chinese enterprises. *Asia Pacific Journal of Management* 35: 573–605. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Alon, Ilan, Roy Mersland, Martina Musteen, and Trond Randøy. 2020. The research frontier on internationalization of social enterprises. *Journal of World Business* 55: 101091. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Anheier, Helmut. 2005. *Nonprofit Organizations: An Introduction*. New York: Routledge.
- Balcerzak, Adam, Elvira Nica, Elzbieta Rogalska, Miloš Poliak, Tomáš Klieštík, and Oana-Matilda Sabie. 2022. Blockchain technology and smart contracts in decentralized governance systems. *Administrative Sciences* 12: 96. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Boddewyn, Jean, and Jonathan Doh. 2011. Global strategy and the collaboration of MNEs, NGOs, and governments for the provisioning of collective goods in emerging markets. *Global Strategy Journal* 1: 345–61. [\[CrossRef\]](#)

- Bouget, Denis, and Lionel Prouteau. 2002. National and supranational government-NGO relations: Anti-discrimination policy formation in the European Union. *Public Administration and Development* 22: 31–37. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Brière, Sophie, Denis Proulx, Olga Navaro Flores, and Mélissa Laporte. 2015. Competencies of Project Managers in International NGOs: Perceptions of Practitioners. *International Journal of Project Management* 33: 116–25. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Buckley, Peter, Jonathan Doh, and Mirko Benischke. 2017. Towards a renaissance in international business research? Big questions, grand challenges, and the Future of IB scholarship. *Journal of International Business Studies* 48: 1045–64. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Chetty, Sylvie, and Colin Campbell-Hunt. 2003. Paths to internationalisation among small to medium-sized firms: A global versus regional approach. *European Journal of Marketing* 37: 796–820. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Coviello, Nicole. 2006. The network dynamics of international new ventures. *Journal of International Business Studies* 37: 713–31. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Coviello, Nicole. 2015. Re-thinking research on born globals. *Journal of International Business Studies* 46: 17–26. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- David, Robert, and Shin-Kap Han. 2004. A Systematic Assessment of the Empirical Support for Transaction Cost Economics. *Strategic Management Journal* 25: 39–58. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Denyer, David, and David Tranfield. 2009. Producing a Systematic Review. In *The SAGE Handbook of Organizational Research Methods*. Edited by David Buchanan and Alan Bryman. London: Sage, pp. 671–89.
- Etemad, Hamid. 2004. Internationalisation of small and medium-sized enterprises: A grounded theoretical framework and an overview. *Canadian Journal of Administrative Sciences* 21: 1–21. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Fudaliński, Janusz. 2014. Dysfunctions of NPOS and NGOs in Poland in the global context: Some international comparisons. *Entrepreneurial Business and Economics Review* 2: 81–94. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Galkina, Tamara, and Man Yang. 2020. Bringing Nordic slush to Asia: Entrepreneurial internationalization of an NGO as a social movement. *International Business Review* 29: 101749. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Gálvez-Rodríguez, María, María Caba-Pérez, and Manuel López-Godoy. 2012. Determining Factors in Online Transparency of NGOs: A Spanish Case Study. *International Society for Third-Sector Research* 23: 661–83. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Gálvez-Rodríguez, María, María Caba-Pérez, and Manuel López-Godoy. 2014. Drivers for the Proactive Online Disclosure of Information in the NGO Sector: The Colombian Case. *Online Information Review* 38: 769–87. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Ietto-Gillies, Grazia. 2012. *Transnational Corporations: Fragmentation Amidst Integration*. London: Routledge.
- Johanson, Jan, and Jan-Erik Vahlne. 1990. The mechanism of internationalisation. *International Marketing Review* 7. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Jones, Marian, Nicole Coviello, and Yee Kwan Tang. 2011. International entrepreneurship research (1989–2009): A domain ontology and thematic analysis. *Journal of Business Venturing* 26: 632–59. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Junkui, Han. 2012. Foreign NGOs in China in the context of a global civil society—With a discussion of the internationalization of Chinese NGOs. *China Nonprofit Review* 4: 3–24. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Laidler-Kylander, Nathalie, John Quelch, and Bernard Simonin. 2007. Building and valuing global brands in the nonprofit sector. *Nonprofit Management and Leadership* 17: 253–77. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Lan, Yuxin. 2018. History and paradigm shift: NGOs in international development aid. *China Nonprofit Review* 10: 108–33. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Lee, Chenpang, and Ling Han. 2020. Becoming INGO: A case study on Taiwan's Tzu-Chi in the United States. *International Society for Third-Sector Research* 31: 1201–11. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Li, Xiaoyun, and Qiang Dong. 2018. Chinese NGOs are 'Going Out': History, scale, characteristics, outcomes, and barriers. *Nonprofit Policy Forum* 9: 20170038. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Light, Richard, and David Pillemer. 1984. *Summing Up: The Science of Reviewing Research*. Boston: Harvard University Press.
- Lim, Weng Marc, and Tareq Rasul. 2022. Customer engagement and social media: Revisiting the past to inform the future. *Journal of Business Research* 148: 325–42. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Mallett, Richard, Jessica Hagen-Zanker, Rachel Slater, and Maren Duvendack. 2012. The benefits and challenges of using systematic reviews in international development research. *Journal of Development Effectiveness* 4: 445–55. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Marchisio, Sergio. 1985. *Le Organizzazioni Non Governative Internazionali e la Cooperazione allo Sviluppo*. Rome: Fratelli Palombi.
- Martens, Kerstin. 2002. Mission impossible? Defining nongovernmental organizations. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* 27: 271–85. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Mauri, Giulia. 2013. Organizações Não Governamentais e Desenvolvimento—Análise do trabalho de algumas ONG em Moçambique. Unpublished Master Dissertation, Universidade Técnica de Lisboa, Lisbon, Portugal.
- Moher, David, Alessandro Liberati, Jennifer Tetzlaff, and Douglas Altman. 2009. Preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analyses: The PRISMA statement. *Annals of Internal Medicine* 15: 264–69. [\[CrossRef\]](#) [\[PubMed\]](#)
- Patrício, Rui, António Moreira, and Francesco Zurlo. 2018. Gamification approaches to the early stage of innovation. *Creativity and Innovation Management* 27: 499–511. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Paul, Justin, and Rosarito Sánchez-Morcilio. 2019. Toward a new model for firm internationalization: Conservative, predictable, and pacemaker companies and markets. *Canadian Journal of Administrative Sciences* 36: 336–49. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Petticrew, Mark, and Helen Roberts. 2008. *Systematic Reviews in the Social Sciences. A Practical Guide*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Porto, Paula, and Angela da Rocha. 2021. The Resource-Seeking Internationalization Process of a Nongovernmental Organization. *BAR—Brazilian Administration Review* 18: e190138. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Ribau, Cláudia, António Moreira, and Mário Raposo. 2015. Internationalisation of the firm theories: A schematic synthesis. *International Journal of Business and Globalisation* 15: 508–54. [\[CrossRef\]](#)

- Ribau, Cláudia, António Moreira, and Mário Raposo. 2018. SME internationalization research: Mapping the state of the art. *Canadian Journal of Administrative Sciences* 35: 280–303. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Ruiz, Fernando. 2012. Estratégias de Internacionalização de Organizações Não Governamentais Sem Fins Lucrativos: Um Estudo Multi-Método. Unpublished Master Dissertation, Fundação Getulio Vargas—Escola de Administração de Empresas de São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil.
- Silveira, William, Edson Lima, Fernando Deschamps, and Sergio Costa. 2018. Identification of guidelines for Hoshin Kanri initiatives. *International Journal of Productivity and Performance Management* 67: 85–110. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Siméant, Johanna. 2005. What is going global? 'The internationalization of French NGOs 'without borders.' *Review of International Political Economy* 12: 851–83. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Sinkovics, Noemi, Rudolf Sinkovics, and Jason Archie-Acheampong. 2019. An Overview of Social Responsibility Dimensions in International Business. In *Socially Responsible International Business: Critical Issues and the Way Forward*. Edited by Leonidas Leonidou, Constantine Katsikeas, Saeed Samiee and Constantinos Leonidou. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, pp. 29–72.
- Tan, Lindan, and Huib Huyse. 2021. Chinese foundations and the challenge of 'Going international'. *IDS Bulletin* 52: 121–38. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Teegen, Hildy. 2003. International NGOs as global institutions: Using social capital to impact multinational enterprises and governments. *Journal of International Management* 9: 271–85. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Teegen, Hildy, Jonathan Doh, and Sushil Vachani. 2004. The importance of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in global governance and value creation: An international business research agenda. *Journal of International Business Studies* 35: 463–83. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Tomé, Ricardo. 2016. A Importância do Marketing Digital nas Organizações Não-Governamentais: O Caso APAV. Unpublished Master Dissertation, University of Coimbra, Coimbra, Portugal.
- Vassele, Vilma. 2019. O Papel das Organizações não Governamentais na Implementação de Políticas Públicas de Desenvolvimento Sustentável em Moçambique. Unpublished Master Dissertation, University of Aveiro, Aveiro, Portugal.
- Witcher, Barry, and Rosemary Butterworth. 2001. Hoshin Kanri: Policy management in Japanese-owned UK subsidiaries. *Journal of Management Studies* 38: 651–74. [\[CrossRef\]](#)