

Environmental NGOs at war: The transformation of ENGO agency in Ukraine after 2022

KINGA SZÁLKAI^{1,*} 

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ABSTRACT: The main aim of this article is to examine how the Russia–Ukraine war has affected the agency of Ukrainian environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGOs), hypothesizing that the conflict has expanded their role beyond traditional conservation activities, enhancing their capacity to influence governance and develop active agency to contribute to the recovery of Ukraine in both domestic and international politics. To explore these dynamics, the research triangulates among three types of sources: academic journal articles, policy documents, and a comparative analysis of the activities of three Ukrainian ENGOs before, in, and after 2022.

KEYWORDS: ENGO, Russia-Ukraine war, agency, governance, recovery

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1. Introduction

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has created unprecedented pressure on Ukrainian society and the natural environment. Utilizing their specific expertise and resources, environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGOs) are at the forefront of reacting to the emerging challenges. This level of engagement may sound unexpected, as ENGOs are, in general, not among the most active and influential non-state actors under the conditions of armed

1 Institute of Social Sciences and European Studies, Budapest Metropolitan University, Budapest, Hungary

* Corresponding author: kinga.szalkai@gmail.com

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conflict in the international arena. In Ukraine, these organizations operated locally and largely in the background before the start of the Russia-Ukraine war. Being small, specialized, and focused on traditional environmental conservation, advocacy, or activism, their influence over policy and governance was limited. They were mostly peripheral actors, addressing habitat preservation, sustainable development, public awareness, or local community projects, without broader structural impact.

The outbreak of war, however, has altered this landscape. The very notion of environmental protection has shifted: ENGOs must protect ecosystems not only from traditional threats, such as industrial pollution, inefficient energy use, or legislative loopholes, but also from destruction caused by warfare, infrastructural collapse, and militarized decision-making (Bezsonov 2024; Leal Filho et al. 2024). In Ukraine, as one of the largest ENGOs, Ecoaction, states:

[N]uclear power plants, seaports, hazardous waste storage facilities ... are now in the zone of active hostilities ... There is also a direct impact on ecosystems through fires and the destruction of rare species and habitats, as well as nature reserves and ecosystems of forests, steppes and seas. (Ecoaction 2022a)

As state capacities are redirected toward defense and weaken under the strain of armed conflict, gaps emerge in environmental governance and the ability of the state to address related challenges and provide resources (Barra et al. 2026). ENGOs increasingly mobilize to fill the gaps, thus their engagement is no longer confined to routine environmental conservation activities. Since the beginning of the war, they have needed to mitigate environmental damage caused by armed conflict and contribute to “green recovery” strategies that integrate ecological protection with post-war reconstruction. They address immediate ecological risks, safeguard environmental resources, and coordinate direct initiatives to improve living conditions in war-ridden parts of Ukraine across multiple levels, from local communities to international donors and partners. This shift has had significant implications for ENGO agency: organizations move beyond their conventional domains, building structurally significant capacities.

Assessing these practical developments, the main aim of this article is to examine how the Russia-Ukraine war has affected the agency of Ukrainian ENGOs, hypothesizing that the conflict has expanded their role beyond traditional conservation activities, enhancing their capacity to influence governance and develop active agency in both domestic and international politics.

To explore these dynamics, the research triangulates three types of sources: academic journal articles, policy documents, and a comparative analysis of the activities of three Ukrainian ENGOs before, in, and after 2022. The compara-

tive analysis focuses on changes in the thematic focus, financial resources, and international network leverage of these ENGOs. Three cases were selected to allow for reflection on three different types of organizations: 1) Ecoaction, a state-wide, broadly environmentalist, sustainability-oriented ENGO with a strong advocacy and policy focus; 2) Ecoclub, a locally active, energy-focused ENGO with a vested interest in technical projects and community-based activism; and 3) WWF-UA, a traditional conservationist ENGO that is an integral part of a large and influential global network. By comparing them across three periods (pre-war period, 2017-2021; the turning-point year of 2022; and thereafter, 2023-2024), the article explores the mechanisms by which their agency has broadened under conditions of armed conflict. This framework enables the detailed examination of how Ukrainian ENGOs turn from peripheral actors into structurally impactful agents.

The comparative analysis relies predominantly on the analysis of primary sources, in particular the organizations' annual reports, complemented by information from their websites, news items, publications, databases, and other forms of public communication. The potential bias inherent in working primarily with materials produced by the organizations under examination must be acknowledged. For this, the review of secondary academic sources and policy documents on ENGO activities in Ukraine during the examined period may compensate, along with the consideration of data used in an analysis of the income trends and changes in the partnership networks of the three organizations, to corroborate the assessment of their changing agency.

2. ENGO agency: A review of the literature

ENGOs are, applying Marton's concept, plausible sites of political agency and probable sites of domain-specific agency (Marton 2024: 20). They have become visible in academic literature since the 1970s, when they began participating more systematically in decision-making across emerging forms of multi-level governance. Since then, a substantial body of research has examined how ENGOs under general peacetime conditions are able to influence policy, either indirectly through lobbying, campaigning, and public pressure, or directly through contributions to planning, drafting, and implementing environmental regulations (Böhmelt et al. 2015; Berny and Rootes 2018). In spite of this attention, ENGO activities under the circumstances of armed conflict have remained underexplored.

At the same time, the role of NGOs in conflict settings has been widely examined within the broader literature on war, humanitarianism, and post-conflict governance, with scholars recognizing these actors as significant, although

often contested participants in contemporary conflict environments. The following section reviews both of the abovementioned bodies of scholarship to inform the analysis of the changing agency of Ukrainian NGOs during the Russia-Ukraine war.

2.1. NGOs in peace and war

To answer the question of “what NGOs can do,” Jeffrey identified a broad array of activities as early as 2001. NGOs can:

Provide inputs to policy, express opinions on current issues, foster environmental awareness and education, advise on technical matters, engage in political lobbying, interact with international agencies, form coalitions, influence development planning, litigate and undertake direct action.
(Jeffrey 2001: 154)

Mermet added mobilization, pressure, and empowerment to the list in his 2018 study (Mermet 2018). At the core of these functions lies expertise. As Corell and Betsill argue, “the provision of knowledge and information is the key NGO resource for influence” (2001: 87). NGOs generate and interpret data, provide expertise and policy advice, and represent marginalized environmental interests and groups. They also contribute to the legitimacy of environmental decisions, promote transparency, and monitor commitments within cross-level governance frameworks (Böhmelt et al. 2015; Berny and Rootes 2018).

In the 2000s and early 2010s, a broad consensus emerged that NGOs “do make a difference” (Gulbrandsen and Andersen 2004), particularly in the negotiation and implementation of environmental treaties. Through norm diffusion, agenda-setting, and coalition-building, they have often been credited not only with influencing specific policy outcomes but also with contributing to broader systemic transformations in environmental governance. Even in this more optimistic scholarship, however, their agency has not been examined under conditions of armed conflict.

More recently, this view has been challenged. The decline of the “environmental nation state” (Mol 2016), growing controversies around international environmental agreements, and broader crises of multilateralism have undermined NGO legitimacy. In several countries, including parts of Western Europe where NGOs have historically exerted significant influence, they face a shrinking civic space and political backlash; in other regions, such as Russia and India, they may even be portrayed as agents of foreign influence (Matejova 2018).

At the same time, crises in general are widely assumed to push environmental issues into the background (Burns and Tobin 2017; Heininen 2024). Recent research suggests that security and military priorities relegate environmental monitoring, protection, and restoration to the background, making environmental concerns a lower-priority policy domain during and immediately after war (Kaplan et al. 2022; Meaza et al. 2024). Even if international law protects the environment in armed conflicts, parties to conflict routinely award environmental damage secondary importance because the dominant framing is military and immediate-threat-driven (Bothe et al. 2010; Hakala and van der Vet 2021). Although there are movements led by non-governmental actors to strengthen the norms and rules of warfare related to the environment and codify ecocide or “crimes against the environment” in international law, environmental concerns in wartime are often sidelined. Under such conditions, it appears highly unlikely that ENGOs may exercise significant influence, let alone structurally significant agency. This highlights a fundamental puzzle regarding the current situation in Ukraine, where ENGOs seem to have considerably extended their agency.

2.2. NGOs and their wartime activities

The role of NGOs in armed conflict has attracted scholarly attention since the end of the Cold War, when changing patterns of warfare challenged traditional, state-centric understandings of conflict management. The rise of intrastate wars, complex emergencies, and prolonged humanitarian crises created new spaces for non-state actors, particularly NGOs, to assume functions previously associated primarily with states or intergovernmental organizations (Natsios 1995; Stein 2001; Goodhand 2006). It was in this context that scholarship began to recognize NGOs as significant actors in conflict settings, not only in humanitarian response but also in broader processes of governance and stabilization. As early as 2001, Aall distinguished between two broad categories of NGOs involved in conflict: practical operational NGOs, including those involved in humanitarian assistance, rehabilitation, and conflict resolution, and political advocacy NGOs, which shape norms, mobilize transnational support, and influence international policy responses (Aall 1996: v). Aall identified four basic interrelated roles through which NGOs make an impact: early warning functions, human rights monitoring, relief and rehabilitation, and conflict resolution (Aall 1996: vi).

This suggests that NGO action in war cannot be reduced to providing short-term relief alone: NGOs are seen as contributing to social and economic reconstruction in ways that other actors often cannot, going beyond the role of mere

passive service providers, becoming participants in the governance and outcome of modern warfare (Karampini 2023).

At the same time, NGOs' effectiveness may depend on their interaction with states, international institutions, and local communities (Karampini 2023). Recent academic literature (Wall and Hedlund 2016) and policy papers (Cohen et al. 2016; De Geoffroy and Grunewald 2017; Barbelet 2018) emphasize that NGOs can support the "localization" of conflict management and humanitarian action. Based on their field experience and local networks, the assumption is that they may function as intermediaries between affected communities and broader institutional processes. They are able to support recovery processes from within, helping reactivate basic governance structures and revive post-conflict economies. The localization turn reframes NGOs as agents shaping the governance of conflict from below, even as it is also acknowledged that they often face systemic marginalization in funding and decision-making processes (Mulder 2023).

Meanwhile, in the area of advocacy, NGOs are increasingly conceptualized as norm entrepreneurs and transnational political actors. Through documentation, advocacy campaigns, and agenda-setting, they can elevate otherwise marginalized crises, pressure international actors, and influence diplomatic or humanitarian interventions (Corell and Betsill 2001; Hall et al. 2020). In a contingent manner, ENGOs may be considered to have similar potential in terms of their expertise, network access, and advocacy skills both domestically and beyond.

3. Wartime changes in the Ukrainian NGO ecosystem

3.1. Main trends of civil society mobilization

Between 2017 and February 2022, Ukrainian NGOs operated within a relatively pluralistic but resource-constrained environment, shaped by the legacy of Euro-maidan and the continuing low-intensity conflict in Donbas. This period was characterized by professionalization and diversification. Many organizations moved beyond post-2014 emergency volunteerism into institutionalized advocacy, anti-corruption monitoring, decentralization support, information, and service delivery (Andrieiva et al. 2023; Kostiv et al. 2025). They provided assistance to the state and supported EU alignment to prepare for accession. International donor support, especially from the EU, USAID, and major foundations, encouraged project-based development and the growth of policy-oriented civil society. This ecosystem remained fragmented and financially vulnerable, while

concerns persisted over dependency on donors and limited inclusion beyond major urban centers (Andrieieva et al. 2023).

Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022 triggered an unprecedented surge of civil society organizations, at the same time forcing NGOs to adapt to wartime needs, causing a rupture in their original functioning. Civil society in the broadest sense mobilized promptly (Kravets and Barvinenko 2024), and an extraordinary 33-fold rise in volunteering took place, including first-time civic participation, while numerous organizations founded after 2014 scaled up dramatically or repurposed existing infrastructure (Leonchuk et al. 2023; Ednannia 2025). Many NGOs rapidly transformed from advocacy-oriented or development-focused entities into emergency humanitarian responders and fundraisers, or became involved in providing resources to the armed forces (Kostiv et al. 2025). Organizational boundaries between NGOs, volunteer networks, informal groups, and military-related structures blurred significantly. NGOs also became important actors in wartime mobilization (Leonchuk et al. 2023). In terms of numbers, NGO registrations decreased sharply while newly registered charitable organizations reached a historic peak (Ednannia 2025).

From late 2022 onward, registrations in the NGO sector began to recover, leading to an increase in their total number by 10% compared to pre-war statistics. In Spring 2025, the number of NGOs reached 106,720 (Ednannia 2025). Rather than returning to the pre-war model, a more complex ecosystem developed, in which humanitarian response, wartime governance support, and longer-term reconstruction agendas coexist.

Academic literature discusses the mobilization of Ukrainian civil society, including NGOs, in superlative terms. There have been many critical observations and controversies regarding their roles, nonetheless. The militarization of civil society raises concerns (Kostiv et al. 2025), while the changing commitments of NGOs trigger accusations of professional overstretch. Large amounts of funding have created more space for corruption, while Ukrainian NGOs have often criticized international humanitarian actors in relation to the above-described localization debate regarding their unequal access to resources and hierarchical funding structures that marginalize local organizations with specific expertise and network access (Barbelet 2017; Leonchuk et al. 2023). At the same time, a large number of NGOs are inactive. According to Ednannia (2025), in 2024, only 11% submitted an annual financial report. Although the level of trust in NGOs increased from 47% to 66% between 2021 and 2023, it has since declined to 55% by 2024, showing signs of mobilization fatigue (Ednannia 2025).

ENGOS are rarely mentioned specifically in reports on NGO activities. According to Ednannia's 2025 survey, the majority of active citizens work in areas related to the war. Only 11% of respondents reported that their civil society organizations focus on environmental issues (Ednannia 2025: 13). The number of respondent

organizations in this field slightly declined between 2022 and 2024, in line with the tendencies seen among non-war-related NGOs (Ednannia 2025: 52). At the same time, the environmental field is one of those areas where the greatest increase in priority was observed, as 11.6% of organizations active in this area became more committed after the start of the war (Ednannia 2025: 56–58). The Ednannia report explicitly mentions the importance of ENGOs to the “green recovery” of Ukraine, mentioning Ecodiya and Ecoclub as core actors (Ednannia 2025: 180).

3.2. Expanding ENGO agency

3.2.1. *Green recovery as a catalyst of expanded ENGO agency*

Beyond civil society mobilization, the war has generated the specific impetus to foster and reorganize ENGO activities, contributing to an expansion of their agency. This is particularly visible through the discourse and practice of “green recovery” and “building back better.” Green recovery refers to reconstruction strategies that embed ecological sustainability, decarbonization, ecosystem restoration, and the energy transition into post-crisis recovery, rather than subordinating environmental objectives to economic reconstruction (Flamm and Kroll 2024; Lysokolenko and Buturlina 2025). “Building back better” means recovery that not only restores damaged infrastructure and institutions but also improves resilience, sustainability, and social inclusion (Clinton 2006; Mannakkara and Wilkinson 2014; Shevchenko et al. 2025).

The interests of three actors are assumed to converge in ways that enhance ENGO leverage: ENGOs themselves, the European Union, and the Ukrainian government. For ENGOs, green recovery provides an opportunity to advance long-standing agendas related to conservation, sustainable development, and advocacy, while embedding these priorities into the exceptional politics of wartime reconstruction. The prioritization of energy transformation toward decentralized, low-carbon, resilient models has been particularly relevant (Zvarych – Masna 2023).

For the European Union, green recovery extends to environmental and energy policies associated with the European Green Deal. Accession conditionality can only succeed if the latter are implemented credibly by both Member States and aspiring members. Through the prospect of accession, the EU has gained leverage to incentivize reforms aligned with ambitious European environmental and energy objectives (Ráti 2025). At the same time, the EU has material and strategic interests associated with this agenda. Stability in the EU’s neighborhood intersects with its substantial economic and financial commitments to Ukrainian recovery, giving the EU a stake in ensuring that its investments sup-

port sustainability and regulatory convergence rather than reproduce environmentally damaging or inefficient systems (Shevchenko et al. 2025).

The third actor is the Ukrainian government, whose interests align with green recovery primarily in pragmatic terms. Under wartime conditions, ENGOs gain relevance not only as advocates but as substitutes for state capacities – providers of technical expertise, local networks, and policy input. Limited state capacities heighten the importance of EU financing, technology transfer, and regulatory guidance, creating opportunities for ENGOs to exercise influence that would not be possible under ordinary circumstances (Andrieieva et al. 2023; Andrusyevych and Kozak 2024). At the same time, ENGOs emerge as partners rather than merely pressure groups. Their expertise in the environmental *acquis*, sustainable energy, and participatory governance can facilitate compliance-oriented reform, shifting part of their agency from oppositional advocacy toward cooperative governance (CEOBS 2022; Flamm – Kroll 2024). Donors increasingly link support to principles associated with “green recovery” and “building back better,” enabling domestic actors to articulate and operationalize such approaches and leverage them (Ecoaction 2023; Andrusyevych and Kozak 2024; Ráti 2025). A further source of expanded agency lies in the intermediary functions that ENGOs perform, often serving as distributors of information and mediators among international actors, Ukrainian authorities, and local communities. Under fragmented wartime governance, where informational asymmetries and coordination gaps proliferate, these functions are particularly important (van der Vet 2024). In this setting, the agency of Ukrainian ENGOs has been substantively reinforced.

3.2.2. *Institutionalization of ENGO agency*

This expansion of agency has increasingly acquired institutional expression. Both the Ukrainian government and the European Union have become more open to working with ENGOs, and this openness is observable in increasingly formalized participatory arrangements.

On the Ukrainian side, this can be traced in three principal ways. First, ENGOs have been incorporated as consultative actors into major strategic policy documents that are shaping wartime recovery and long-term reconstruction. This happened in the case of the National Recovery Plan (2022), the Ukraine Plan under the EU Ukraine Facility (2024), and the updating of the National Energy and Climate Plan, where civil society expertise has been mobilized around alignment with the EU climate *acquis*. The pattern extends to sectoral strategies such as the Green Industrial Recovery Programme (2024–2028). Second, agency has been institutionalized through participa-

tion in standing platforms for green recovery coordination. Most notably, this includes the Platform for Action on the Green Recovery of Ukraine, as well as structures associated with the EU Ukraine Facility and the Multi-Agency Donor Coordination Platform for Ukraine. Across these fora, ENGOs increasingly operate not as peripheral observers but as recognized participants in governance coordination. Third, expanded agency is visible in assessment and monitoring processes, where environmental NGOs contribute knowledge and evaluative expertise. This includes the National Green Transition Assessment Report, environmental damage assessments linked to recovery planning, contributions to Rapid Damage and Needs Assessments, shadow reporting on environmental *acquis* obligations, and analytical inputs that feed into reform-monitoring.

The European Union has similarly become more open to cooperation with ENGOs, particularly in three interconnected fields. The first concerns the diffusion of shared norms and the circulation of information related to those norms. This is particularly visible in the National Recovery Plan and the Ukraine Plan under the EU Ukraine Facility, where principles associated with the European Green Deal, decarbonization, and climate resilience were incorporated as outcomes of convergent interests. In this process, ENGOs have functioned as translators and transmitters of norms, linking European regulatory expectations with domestic policy debates. Second, ENGO agency has expanded through participation in international conferences where Ukraine's reconstruction is framed and negotiated, particularly the successive Ukraine Recovery Conferences from 2022 onward. These have become key sites where Ukrainian actors, donors, international institutions, and civil society articulate recovery priorities. In these venues, ENGOs have participated not only as representatives of Ukrainian perspectives but in shaping the framing of recovery itself. Third, the EU's mediating role in donor funding has generated additional opportunities for ENGO influence through several channels: the Ukraine Facility and its investment framework; the Ukraine Donor Platform; financing through institutions such as the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development; guarantee and grant mechanisms under the Ukraine Investment Framework; and emerging sustainable finance coordination initiatives linking reconstruction funding to green transition principles. In many of these arrangements, ENGOs play mediating and agenda-shaping roles by linking donor priorities, domestic implementation needs, and local concerns.

Overall, through consultative inclusion, platform participation, assessment functions, norm mediation, conference diplomacy, and funding mediation, ENGOs have become embedded more deeply in the governance architecture of recovery. This institutionalization is what gives the earlier alignment of interests and consequent opportunities for ENGOs real political significance.

4. Case analysis

The following comparative analysis of three Ukrainian ENGOs investigates the changing scope and themes of their agency, the funding of these activities, and their partner networks, exploring how environmental NGOs can become structurally consequential participants in environmental governance in the context of war.

4.1. Changing scope and themes of agency

4.1.1 *Ecoaction*

Established in 2017, the Center for Environmental Initiatives “Ecoaction” is a Ukrainian NGO headquartered in Kyiv and operating statewide. From its beginnings, its main focus has been to “bring environmental consideration into the core of any decision,” working to “bring [the] concerns of [the] local population and experts to [...] politicians, to redesign strategies and projects” (*sic!*) (Ecoaction 2018: 8). Ecoaction’s activities range from traditional conservation (“save nature”; “maintaining and creating new protected areas”; “decrease human impact on the environment” [Ecoaction 2018: 8]) to sustainable development (“renewable energy, countering climate change, clean air for all and sustainable development of transport and agriculture” [Ecoaction 2021: 7]) with a growing emphasis on the latter than before 2022.

Ecoaction focuses on advocacy: it unites experts and activists to influence decision-makers to pursue environmentally sound policies. In 2021, it worked on the “just energy transition,” a sustainable, renewable energy system; emissions reduction in line with the Paris Agreement and the European Union; national adaptation to climate change; and the greening of transport, industry, and agriculture (Ecoaction 2021). Ecoaction also prioritizes community-building, seeking to develop an active and influential civil society capable of fostering environmental reforms (Ecoaction 2025a). It continues to pursue these objectives post-2022.

The environmental and political impact of armed conflict intensified the urgency of Ecoaction’s priorities and reframed them within a narrative of green recovery. Targeted Russian attacks on centralized energy infrastructure have made decentralization and energy diversification not primarily environmental goals but elements of national security. “Building back better” also supports accession to the European Union, a political priority of the Ukrainian government, whose environmental governance requirements cannot be met without ENGO expertise, further increasing Ecoaction’s advocacy potential (Ecoaction 2025b).

In 2022, Ecoaction declared a shift “to a green reconstruction of Ukraine, a reconstruction with renewables and energy efficiency measures and without new fossil and nuclear projects” (Ecoaction 2022b: 7). This meant adapting its sustainable development agenda to wartime realities, exploiting new opportunities for advocacy and community-building. Ecoaction approaches reconstruction as an opportunity for systemic transformation, promoting principles that emphasize systemic sustainability, best available renewable technologies, sustainable regional development, transparency, and public participation (Ecoaction 2024).

The just energy transition has been embedded into a new narrative viewed “through the lenses of energy security and energy resilience” (Ecoaction 2023: 8). One of Ecoaction’s prominent initiatives, the Platform for Sustainable Development of Coal Towns of the Donetsk Region, already existed before 2022, supporting planning processes, local consultations, and collaboration among municipalities, experts, and civil society actors (Ecoaction 2021). Since the beginning of the war, Ecoaction has continued to support coal communities in Donetsk while broadening its scope to include towns in Dnipropetrovsk, Lviv, and Volyn, combining humanitarian support, community planning, and renewable energy implementation – working with more than twenty communities by 2023 (Ecoaction 2023).

Ecoaction also engages directly in reconstruction planning. In partnership with German actors, it contributes to Bucha’s reconstruction strategy, including a solar power plant and a Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plan. Meanwhile, the Sun4Ukraine project supports 12 communities, including war-affected areas, in developing and implementing climate-neutrality plans (Ecoaction 2024). These initiatives allow Ecoaction to embed its environmental agenda into concrete recovery processes, linking local transitions to broader national and European frameworks.

Ecoaction’s adaptation illustrates how a broadly environmentalist, advocacy-oriented ENGO can convert pre-war consolidation into wartime structurally significant agency. Before 2022, the organization had developed a vision of Ukraine’s transformation built on sustainability, just energy transition, and participatory environmental governance. The war did not displace these priorities; rather, it recontextualized them within a security-inflected narrative of green recovery, in which decentralized renewables, energy efficiency, and transparent planning became prerequisites for service provision, EU accession, and societal resilience.

4.1.2. Ecoclub

Ecoclub is one of Ukraine’s longest-standing environmental actors, established in 1997 and based in Rivne. Unlike the newer, Kyiv-centered Ecoaction, shaped by post-Euromaidan political dynamics, Ecoclub reflects gradual, community-

rooted evolution. Over time, this evolution led to a narrow but deep focus on the energy sector, developed more than ten years ago, even before the 2014 intensification of the Russia–Ukraine conflict. The organization defines itself as “an energy-oriented environmental protection NGO,” working for “a safe future with affordable energy” (Ecoclub 2019: 2), grounded in the assumption that “energy has the most detrimental effect on the environment” (Ecoclub 2025). This orientation positions Ecoclub as an advocate for structural energy transformation, “creating a future with green energy by empowering communities and influencing policy” (Ecoclub 2025). It has built substantial expertise in the technical dimensions of energy efficiency and renewable energy, alongside long-term practical experience in applying this expertise in community-level planning and implementation.

Before 2022, Ecoclub’s activities concentrated primarily on local-level interventions designed to improve energy efficiency, expand renewable energy sources, mitigate climate change, and strengthen environmental governance. In practice, this meant blending technical assistance with community-building and advocacy. Typical activities included supporting public institutions and households to improve energy efficiency, promoting solar energy, reducing industrial impacts, and building local civil society capacity (Ecoclub 2021). Through a multi-stakeholder approach, Ecoclub seeks to establish fora involving government, the public, businesses, experts, local communities, and the media (Ecoclub 2018: 10).

Similar to Ecoaction, Ecoclub received a strong impetus for its original activities at the beginning of the war, but articulated this through a distinct energy-centered narrative. In 2022, it stated that...

[T]he full-scale war in Ukraine has shown that everything that the Ecoclub has been working on for more than 20 years – the transition of communities to the use of RES [Renewable Energy Sources], energy efficiency, adaptation to climate change – is important for the future green reconstruction of the country. (Ecoclub 2022)

A narrower focus enabled the development of an explicit interpretation of the war in energy terms. Ecoclub’s most important claim is that fossil fuel use is not only a major vulnerability during the war, but one of its structural causes:

One of the front lines of the attack (...) was the long-term export of Russian oil, gas, and coal to the West and Ukraine. Thus, another urgent task has been added to the global task of stopping climate change – stopping the financing of the Russian military machine. The best way to achieve both of these goals is to completely stop using fossil fuels. (Ecoclub 2022)

The most important change is the emergence of a strong humanitarian dimension. In 2022, board members and volunteers partially postponed the implementation of energy projects to establish the Help for Rivne initiative, which raised funds, distributed aid, and integrated humanitarian work into Ecoclub's daily activities. With 170,000 EUR collected, ten tons of aid distributed, fifty municipalities assisted, and significant financial flows channeled through partners (Ecoclub 2022: 5–6), this engagement demonstrated the scale of Ecoclub's trust networks and logistical capacities. The humanitarian role enhanced Ecoclub's visibility, legitimacy, and attractiveness to donors, with long-term institutional consequences.

As municipalities responsible for water supply, hospitals, schools, and administrative services faced unprecedented demand for decentralized renewable energy, Ecoclub rapidly specialized in deploying solar power plants (SPPs) to reconstruct critical services at the community level. Within the Solar Aid for Ukraine project, launched in October 2022, it prepared dozens of preliminary feasibility studies, engaged in fundraising at international donor forums, and, with the resources it obtained, installed 50 SPPs by December 2024, with a total capacity of 2,094.77 kW and generation of over 1,123 MWh (Ecoclub 2024). In parallel, it was also involved in installing heat pumps as a low-carbon solution and provided one-time financial support to energy managers working in frontline or heavily bombed areas (Ecoclub 2024).

Through the installation of decentralized, renewable-based critical services, the organization has been able to capitalize on its long-term field experience and the societal trust it has accumulated over more than a decade of energy-related activities. This position has enabled Ecoclub to mediate efficiently between international donors and local communities, attracting external resources and channeling them to municipalities in need. As a result, Ecoclub has not only strengthened its agency and entered a new domain of NGO activity but has also begun to operate as a structurally significant participant across multiple levels of governance. Its activities now shape local recovery trajectories, contribute to national debates on energy resilience and fossil fuel phase-out, and influence the broader vision of post-conflict reconstruction in Ukraine.

4.1.3. WWF-UA

WWF-UA (Public Union World Wide Fund for Nature Ukraine), headquartered in Kyiv, is the Ukrainian office of the WWF network. Unlike Ecoaction and Ecoclub, which are autonomous national actors, WWF-UA is embedded in the wider WWF structure. Established in 2019 as a national public union, it operates within the framework of WWF-CEE (WWF in the Central and Eastern European region),

itself part of WWF International. Its mandate, priorities, and capacities are anchored in the cross-level governance structures of this transnational network. It is, thus, an all the more interesting case of how the war has shaped ENGOs' activities in Ukraine.

WWF's global mission is to "stop the degradation of the planet's natural systems and build a future in which humanity lives in harmony with nature" (WWF 2025). This provides the foundation for WWF-UA's work. Nationally, its statute further defines its mission as the "conserv[ation of] the natural environment and ecological processes" while "developing moral and financial support for the conservation of nature in Ukraine" (WWF-UA 2019: 4 and 5(d)), emphasizing resource mobilization and societal engagement. Its activities follow a traditional conservationist agenda, grounded in ecological science, multistakeholder cooperation, and long-term ecosystem stewardship, with a focus on forests, water, and rare species.

The roots of WWF-UA lie in the WWF Danube–Carpathian Programme (WWF-DCP), founded in 1998 to coordinate WWF's work in the Danube basin and the Carpathian ecoregion. WWF-DCP operated across Central and Eastern Europe, including Ukraine, implementing conservation, restoration, and sustainable resource management projects (WWF-DCP 2018). When WWF-DCP evolved into WWF-CEE in 2019, the Ukrainian office was formally established within a seven-country regional structure (Bulgaria, Czechia, Hungary, Moldova, Romania, Slovakia, Ukraine), governed by an independent board (WWF-CEE 2019).

WWF-CEE shares its European network with WWF-UA, including the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR), the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR), and the Carpathian Convention, which lend leverage to WWF-UA in representing Ukraine's interests. Ukraine's EU accession is a central agenda item for WWF-CEE, which seeks to prepare the country "for key EU legislation and policies related to nature conservation, water and rural development" and to play a leading role in their implementation (WWF-CEE 2019). WWF-UA cooperates with other WWF offices in Western and Central Europe and with the WWF European Policy Office.

The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and the resulting ecosystem damage constrained WWF-UA's traditional agenda. Conservation projects continued with adjustments to security and logistics. Ecosystem monitoring, forest and freshwater restoration, environmental policy advice, and collaboration with neighboring WWF offices persisted. The WWF network provided predictable funding, institutional stability, and international partnerships, enabling WWF-UA to uphold commitments (WWF-CEE 2022).

As in the cases of Ecoaction and Ecoclub, scientific and technical expertise remained in demand among Ukrainian authorities and donors shaping environmental and reconstruction policies, allowing WWF-UA to expand its agency –

although to a lesser extent and without transforming its core agenda. One illustrative wartime initiative is the Shelterbelts: Restoration and Resilience program launched in 2024 in Mykolaiv Oblast. Shelterbelts that protect agricultural land have been heavily damaged by military operations; WWF-UA's program integrates ecological restoration with demining, underlining that recovery involves not only removing explosives but also rebuilding natural infrastructure essential for climate adaptation, biodiversity, and agriculture. At the same time, it exposes governance gaps, as shelterbelts remain under-regulated in Ukrainian law (WWF-CEE 2025).

WWF-UA's most important wartime activity lies in raising international awareness of the environmental consequences of the war. Leveraging the global WWF network constitutes a communication resource that has increased WWF-UA's agency as a provider of data and narratives for European institutions and donor organizations. Together with the Boston Consulting Group (BCG), WWF-CEE and WWF-UA (2022) produced the report *Ukraine – A Sustainable Economic Recovery for People and Nature*, which serves as input for green reconstruction debates and the design of Ukraine's recovery plan.

WWF-UA's adaptation to wartime conditions thus differs from the trajectories of Ecoaction and Ecoclub. Its embeddedness in a global conservation organization enables the continuation of its traditional agenda and ecological commitments, supported by stable structures and international backing. While its priorities and practices have not undergone a radical transformation, WWF-UA's agency has expanded within these boundaries as it addresses war-related damage more directly, intensifies communication on the environmental impacts of war, and increases the significance of its advocacy within debates on Ukraine's environmental governance and green recovery.

4.1.4. Information, knowledge, and the expansion of ENGO agency

The websites, news, publications, and annual reports of Ecoaction, Ecoclub, and WWF-UA indicate that they have all experienced a remarkable expansion of agency in one common field under wartime conditions: the production, circulation, and strategic use of information. Armed conflict both multiplies information needs and increases the political salience of those who are able to meet them.

At the domestic level, all three organizations have intensified their roles as knowledge producers and intermediaries. They collect, systematize, and analyze data on wartime environmental impacts, energy and infrastructure damage, and local recovery needs, and disseminate the results in the form of news articles, expert analysis, policy briefs, public reports, accessible online resources,

and in-person forums. In some cases, they also create and maintain dedicated databases, such as Ecoaction's interactive map of the potential environmental impacts of Russian aggression in Ukraine (Ecoaction 2022a). These knowledge practices provide a basis for debates on green reconstruction, environmental accountability, and long-term adaptation.

At the same time, their informational role has scaled up through international networks. Ecoaction, Ecoclub, and WWF-UA all act as key "translators" of local realities for transnational partners, informing donors and allied organizations about concrete needs, risks, and opportunities. They supply structured information that helps external actors to identify priorities and target their support more effectively, whether toward renewable-based critical infrastructure, community-level adaptation, or ecosystem restoration. In doing so, they shape not only the volume but also the direction of international assistance.

These informational activities increasingly manifest on the policy level. All three organizations advise state institutions on wartime environmental policies and, in some cases, on draft legislation. Their expertise contributes to the integration of environmental concerns into national strategies and accelerates alignment with the EU environmental *acquis*. By providing data, scenarios, and normative arguments, they influence how Ukrainian authorities and international partners conceptualize "green recovery" and which instruments are considered legitimate and feasible.

The same dynamic is visible in international recovery conferences and sectoral donor forums. Ecoaction, Ecoclub, and WWF-UA participate as speakers, experts, and advocates, linking domestic knowledge to international agenda-setting. They lobby for specific green solutions and seek to inscribe these priorities into conference outcomes, pledging documents, and funding frameworks. The effects of this engagement are twofold: they contribute to shaping the frameworks and content of recovery debates, and they enhance the organizations' own legitimacy as indispensable mediators between Ukraine and the international community.

Finally, all three organizations participate, to varying degrees, in framing Russian aggression as an environmental crime, from time to time drawing on the language of "ecocide." By documenting damage, articulating it through this ecocide framework, and channeling their findings into transnational legal and advocacy discussions, they contribute to the evolving international discourse on the applicability of this concept, which has been present since the Vietnam War but has not yet been codified as an international crime. In this way, the implications of their informational agency extend beyond Ukraine, in broader debates on the development of international law and the environmental values of the international community.

4.2. Annual income analysis

The examination of the annual income trends of Ecoaction, Ecoclub, and WWF-UA, as stated in their annual reports for the same three periods, adds a further dimension to the analysis of how the impact of the Russia-Ukraine war has increased the capacity for agency of ENGOs in Ukraine. Annual income trends between 2017 and 2021 indicate the pre-war developmental paths of the three organizations. This period also creates a clear basis for comparison with the post-2022 period.

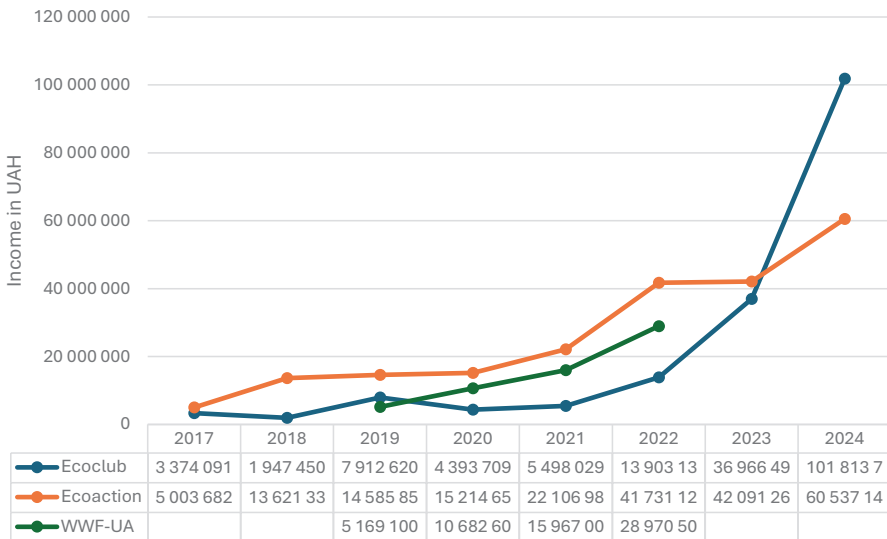


Figure 1. Comparative annual income (2017-2024)

Source: author, based on annual reports of Ecoaction, Ecoclub, and WWF-UA.

4.2.1. Pre-war period (2017–2021)

Between 2017 and 2021, the annual income of the examined organizations increased gradually but remained relatively modest. Ecoaction displays the most coherent pattern. From 5 million UAH at its establishment in 2017, its income rose to 8.6 million UAH in 2018 and had reached 22.1 million UAH by 2021, roughly quadrupling its starting level. This trajectory signals consolidation and professionalization and indicates the organization’s early embeddedness in European donor networks that prioritize sustainable development, climate mitigation, and a just energy transition. Stable growth suggests the capacity to secure multi-year grants and diversified partnerships, creating

financial resilience that later facilitated adaptation when environmental security and green reconstruction became central wartime concerns.

Ecoclub's pre-war development follows a more irregular rhythm, reflecting its smaller scale and strong local embeddedness. From 3.37 million UAH in 2017 to 5.5 million UAH in 2021, its trajectory is upward but weaker and punctuated by volatility. A sharp drop in 2018, followed by a surge of almost 6 million UAH in 2019, and another decline in 2020, highlight the vulnerability of NGOs that rely on a limited number of project grants. Yet the upward trajectory suggests the organization's growing recognition as a credible actor in energy efficiency and community-level renewable projects, and its entry into the wartime period as a respected, technically specialized organization, while remaining exposed to project-based funding risks.

WWF-UA appears later in the timeline and with a different institutional background. Data are available from its establishment in 2019 until 2022, making the analytical window shorter but still revealing. In the pre-war period, it showed steady annual growth, reaching nearly 16 million UAH by 2021. Embedded in a global conservation network, WWF-UA benefited from established fundraising mechanisms and access to large international donors. Its pre-war activities focused mainly on conservation and biodiversity protection, supported by relatively predictable funding flows. Although its scale remained modest compared to older WWF offices, its position within WWF-CEE provided institutional stability and a channel for mobilizing resources when the war began.

Taken together, the pre-war period can be characterized as one of moderate but meaningful expansion.

4.2.2. 2022: A critical turning point

The year 2022 constitutes a clear turning point in the financial trajectories of all three organizations. Ecoaction's budget nearly doubled from 22.1 to 41.73 million UAH; Ecoclub's income rose from 5.5 to 13.9 million UAH; and WWF-UA's from 15.97 to 28.97 million UAH. No comparable leaps occurred in the pre-war period; the scale and simultaneity of these increases cannot be explained by gradual maturation alone. Rather, the 2022 figures reflect a rapid reorientation in the international funding environment, in which Ukrainian ENGOs became strategic partners in documenting and mitigating the war's ecological consequences and preparing for green reconstruction. Ecoaction's expertise in sustainability, policy advocacy, and monitoring positioned it as a central actor in crisis-oriented analysis and debates on green reconstruction. Ecoclub's experience with decentralized energy solutions and community planning became crucial as municipalities sought to restore critical services. WWF-UA, embedded in a global conser-

vation network, could mobilize international concern and resources associated with biodiversity and ecosystem impacts, serving as a key interface between Ukrainian realities and international institutions. Overall, the beginning of the Russia-Ukraine war in 2022 generated a sudden, outstanding increase in income across the examined ENGOs, regardless of their different scales, missions, and institutional structures. In this sense, the growth in their incomes means more than just an increase in financial resources: it marks the expansion of the agency of ENGOs under the conditions of armed conflict in Ukraine.

4.2.3. After 2022

The years following 2022 reveal diverging patterns of wartime adaptation. Ecoclub underwent the most radical transformation. From 13.9 million UAH in 2022, its income grew to nearly 37 million UAH in 2023 and 101.8 million UAH in 2024. This almost threefold increase over two years indicates a major upscaling of its role as an implementing partner in programs focused on community energy resilience, decentralized renewables, and local climate adaptation. Given Ecoclub's earlier volatility, this expansion suggests a qualitative shift, moving it from a relatively fragile, project-dependent actor to a structurally significant organization whose technical expertise and community-based engagement closely match wartime donor priorities.

Ecoaction's post-2022 trajectory is more moderate but substantial. Its income remained high and stable in the second year of the war (41.73 million UAH in 2022 and 42.1 million UAH in 2023), followed by a rise to 60.5 million UAH in 2024. Rather than signaling explosive expansion, this pattern indicates consolidation of its role in long-term sustainability governance and green reconstruction. Ecoaction anchors its wartime activities in multi-year projects with governmental and international partners, and its financial growth reflects deeper embeddedness in strategic policy processes linked to Ukraine's green recovery.

WWF-UA is more difficult to assess in the longer term due to the absence of income data for 2023 and 2024. Its substantial increase in 2022 nonetheless situates it within the broader pattern of wartime expansion even as its precise post-2022 trajectory remains analytically indeterminate.

4.3. Partner network analysis

The analysis of annual income trends has already highlighted how the Russia-Ukraine war transformed the donor environment, enabling a significant expansion of ENGO agency. This section examines the composition of the interna-

tional and domestic partners of Ecoaction, Ecoclub, and WWF-UA, providing a third lens on the transformation of their agency. Again, data presented in annual reports serves as the main source for the analysis.

4.3.1. Ecoaction

Ecoaction entered the 2020s with a relatively stable, professionalized, and predominantly international partner architecture. Between 2017 and 2021, it worked with roughly 11–16 partners annually, with limited fluctuation. This continuity indicates a consolidated and well-institutionalized network. Core partners included major international environmental and philanthropic actors such as Heinrich Böll Stiftung, the German-Russian Exchange (Austausch e.V. since 2022), the International Renaissance Foundation, BUND/Friends of the Earth Germany, Germanwatch, Arnika, Friends of the Earth Norway, and the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (SSNC), alongside global foundations like Mott and Grassroots.

Ecoaction also played an active role in regional and global networks (e.g., Climate Action Network, CEE Bankwatch, INFORSE Europe, Land Matrix, Transport and Environment) and participated in several national coalitions in Ukraine on climate, rural development, urban governance, and energy transition. The European Commission emerged as a major supporter in 2021 with an exceptional grant of 245,291 EUR, while in the pre-war years, support from only SSNC and BUND exceeded 100,000 EUR. The resulting structure is typical of a professional advocacy ENGO embedded in transnational networks: partners are mainly foreign and sector-specific, with no systematic involvement of Ukrainian ministries, municipalities, or domestic NGOs as funders.

The outbreak of full-scale war in 2022 did not immediately change this configuration. The core partner set remained largely intact; Greenpeace was the only major new entrant. Total donor funding even decreased slightly, suggesting that Ecoaction's network needed time to recalibrate and that the initial wartime agency manifested more as continuity than expansion.

From 2023 onwards, the structural effects of the war became clearer. Ecoaction's donor income increased to 1.16 million and 1.21 million EUR in 2023 and 2024, respectively. The European Commission reappeared after an absence in 2022 and stabilized as the single most important donor (200,000 EUR in 2023 and 240,000 EUR in 2024), confirming Ecoaction's role in EU-linked environmental and reconstruction initiatives. Ecoclub emerged as one of Ecoaction's main donors: by 2024, it had become its third-largest funder (132,122 EUR), signaling Ecoclub's rapid upscaling and a reconfiguration of relations within the Ukrainian ENGO field.

Ecoaction's publicly listed partners now number around 35 and include traditional environmental NGOs, foundations, humanitarian actors, and govern-

mental organizations from Germany, Sweden, Norway, and the EU. Network participation has also broadened, with new memberships such as the European Environmental Bureau, Beyond Fossil Fuels, Nuclear Transparency Watch, the Coalition for Human Rights in Development, and the national coalition RISE Ukraine. Ecoaction also shifted from CAN EECCA to CAN Europe, signaling closer alignment with EU-level advocacy (Ecoaction 2025).

Thus, Ecoaction has largely preserved its pre-war partner base while moderately increasing volumes and adding a few key high-level contributors of different categories (European Commission, Ecoclub, Greenpeace).

4.3.2. *Ecoclub*

Ecoclub's partnership landscape evolved along a markedly different trajectory, reflecting its local embeddedness and wartime functional transformation. Between 2017 and 2021, the number of partners remained relatively stable (15–20 annually), yet the internal composition already pointed toward a more heterogeneous, cross-level architecture than in Ecoaction's case. At the same time, Ecoclub shared several core partners with Ecoaction (International Renaissance Foundation, Heinrich Böll Stiftung, CEE Bankwatch, German-Russian Exchange) and cooperated with European NGOs such as BUND and NESEHNUTÍ, as well as foundations like the Global Greengrants Fund and networks such as Women Engage for a Common Future.

However, Ecoclub's architecture was more accessible to community-level and public-sector actors. It cultivated links not only with European governmental bodies (Denmark, Germany, France, Norway, the UK) but also with Ukrainian municipalities such as Zhytomyr, Korosten, and Slavutych. This hybrid configuration combined "classic" international partners with municipal- and state-affiliated actors, reflecting Ecoclub's dual role as a technical expert in energy and the environment and as a community-level mediator, translating that expertise into local projects.

The onset of the war in 2022 did not immediately transform this structure. Traditional donors maintained or increased support, with some (especially Heinrich Böll Stiftung and Austausch e.V.) providing targeted wartime funding. Charitable donations grew, and Ecoclub distinguished that year between "regular" income (13.42 million UAH) and "wartime" income (479,535 UAH), but the total number of partners remained unchanged. As with Ecoaction, the initial wartime impact manifested mainly as strengthened continuity.

However, in this case, the composition of partners was thoroughly transformed and significantly increased in number during 2023–2024. In 2023, Ecoclub cooperated with 36 partners; by 2024, this number had risen to 117, includ-

ing 58 organizations and 59 Ukrainian communities. This dramatic expansion reflects Ecoclub's emergence as a central actor in energy resilience, decentralized reconstruction, and community-level recovery. It has increasingly functioned as an intermediary, linking international donors, national institutions, and local communities.

Alongside longstanding partners, a broad constellation of Ukrainian NGOs and networks (RePower Ukraine, Yellowblue Force Foundation, Ekoltava, Ekosfera, Zelena Khvyliia, Covenant of Mayors, Energy Act for Ukraine), major international ENGOs (Greenpeace, WWF), and humanitarian organizations (notably Oxfam) entered Ecoclub's network. Governmental partnerships diversified as well: these included new ties with the Netherlands (via VNG International), intensified engagement from Denmark and Norway, expanded German involvement (GIZ, IKI), and a rising profile for EU and European Climate Foundation funding. Direct cooperation with Ukrainian ministries and state funds signaled Ecoclub's move into structurally significant roles within domestic governance.

Network engagement broadened in parallel: Ecoclub joined the European Environmental Bureau, CAN Europe, the Global WASH Cluster, and other platforms integrating environmental, water, sanitation, and humanitarian agendas. Charitable donations continued to flow, particularly for small-scale renewable installations in war-affected areas.

Compared to Ecoaction, Ecoclub's partner network underwent a far more substantial wartime transformation. It not only multiplied the number of partners but also diversified across sectors, governance levels, and actor types as it evolved into a key intermediary in green reconstruction and resilience.

4.3.3. WWF-UA

WWF-UA occupies a distinct position due to its deep integration within the global WWF network. Its primary partners are internal: WWF-CEE and other WWF national offices provide the main sources of financial, technical, and strategic support. Offices in Austria, Belgium, Germany, Sweden, the Netherlands, and Poland collaborate on projects related to ecological connectivity, wildlife conservation, large carnivores, illegal logging, and wetland and river restoration. The WWF European Policy Office supports EU-level advocacy, while the EU LIFE Programme functions as the principal external donor.

WWF-UA also participates in regional governance platforms, most notably the EUSDR and ICPDR, which grant access to high-level environmental policy processes and transboundary coordination. In contrast to Ecoaction and Ecoclub, whose cooperation intensified through shared projects and mutual funding, WWF-UA does not appear as a major institutional partner in their networks.

Its domestic links are typically channeled through broader coalitions, policy forums, and joint campaigns rather than through deeply institutionalized project-based collaboration.

In terms of its partner network, WWF-UA thus represents a model of transnationally anchored conservationism, relying on network-internal solidarity and EU instruments rather than diversified community-based or humanitarian partnerships. Its wartime agency has expanded primarily within these existing structures, through enhanced communication, agenda-setting, and advocacy regarding war-related environmental damage.

4.3.4. Overall assessment

The comparative analysis of partner structures shows that wartime shifts in ENGO agency are strongly conditioned by preexisting forms of institutional embeddedness, even as an expansion of the overall partner network was clearly visible in Ecoclub's case. Ecoaction's largely stable but deepening transnational partner network supported an intensification of its advocacy-oriented role; Ecoclub's rapidly proliferating and diversifying partnerships underpin its transformation into a structurally significant intermediary that connects international, national, and community levels, while WWF-UA's internally anchored network reinforces its influence within transnational conservation and regional governance.

4.4. Summary: ENGO agency in wartime Ukraine

ENGOS appear as plausible agents of system transformation: they diffuse norms, reframe problems, and build coalitions across scales. Yet, even where their influence is recognized, their work is often framed as long-term, technical, costly, and only indirectly connected to "high politics" and security. Before 2022, this was broadly the situation in Ukraine. Ecoaction and Ecoclub were respected but still peripheral actors, and WWF-UA, despite its strong international embeddedness, remained confined to a largely conservationist niche. None of the three could be described as a structurally significant participant in national governance.

The Russia-Ukraine war fundamentally altered their positions. Armed conflict created new environmental risks and governance gaps, while simultaneously raising the strategic value of the expertise, information, and networks that ENGOS possess. Across the three cases, their activities evolved along several interconnected dimensions.

First, principles of sustainable development were translated into immediate tools for survival and resilience. Ecoaction's long-term agenda of sustainability and participation was reframed through a security lens, making the decentralization and diversification of energy systems through a just energy transition essential to maintaining critical services and advancing EU accession. Ecoclub's technically grounded focus on energy efficiency and renewables was transformed into the large-scale deployment of solar power plants and other aid for municipalities, directly mitigating wartime vulnerability. WWF-UA maintained the continuity of its long-term forest, water, and rare-species projects, and linked conservation and restoration projects, as illustrated by its shelterbelt initiative.

Second, all three organizations intensified their work with local communities, combining environmental objectives with humanitarian functions. Ecoaction's coal town platform broadened into a multi-region support scheme that integrates humanitarian assistance with participatory recovery planning. Ecoclub's Help for Rivne initiative and subsequent Solar Aid for Ukraine program exemplify how humanitarian aid, technical implementation, and community planning became intertwined. WWF-UA increasingly worked with local partners to address war-related damage in ways that preserved long-term ecological processes.

Third, their information-generating and analyzing capacities shifted toward documenting the environmental impacts of war and exploring pathways to recovery. Ecoaction expanded its work on recording war damage to the environment and on the environmental implications of reconstruction choices. Ecoclub produced detailed assessments of local energy vulnerabilities and the potential of decentralized renewables. WWF-UA intensified ecosystem monitoring in war-affected regions and highlighted less visible impacts, such as damage to shelterbelts and river systems. In each case, the general awareness-fostering functions of ENGOs were reoriented: the primary focus moved to environmentally harmful military acts and war-related destruction.

These functional shifts translated into an expansion of political agency. At the local level, communities came to view ENGOs as reliable partners capable of delivering concrete solutions under extreme conditions. At the national level, state institutions relied more heavily on ENGO expertise when designing environmental policies, energy strategies, and recovery plans aligned with EU requirements. At the international level, Ecoaction, Ecoclub, and WWF-UA emerged as key intermediaries for donors, providing information on needs, advising on priorities, and lobbying for green conditionalities in financial support.

5. Conclusions

Taken together, the case studies of Ukrainian ENGOs presented in this article show that war does not automatically marginalize environmental concerns or ENGOs. Under specific conditions, armed conflict can catalyze a shift from background participation to structurally significant agency. The Ukrainian experience therefore helps address a gap in academic literature, which has hitherto either discussed or even celebrated ENGO influence in relatively stable contexts or assumed their marginalization in times of crisis. This suggests that where ENGOs have accumulated specific, localized expertise, information, and network embeddedness in peacetime, armed conflict can activate latent potential, making them structurally significant. Rather than being relegated to the background, they may become indispensable mediators in reconfiguring environmental governance and shaping the normative and material foundations of post-war reconstruction.

Attempting to generalize from the analysis of Ukrainian ENGOs under conditions of armed conflict, it is clear that war may create a political impetus that allows ENGOs to activate and expand their existing potential for agency. The resources they possess in peacetime, such as their expertise, information, and networks, tend to have greater impact in wartime, while their agency grows as they gain more partners, funding, and visibility. In addition, ENGOs may be able to position themselves in the space between multilateral institutions and their member states, forming a triangular relationship in which they can act as important points of contact for both. By operating simultaneously across all levels of environmental governance, ENGOs may be able to influence both high-level policy and grassroots outcomes, addressing the environmental consequences of war more effectively while also enhancing the political leverage and agency of individual organizations.

In sum, the conditions that apply in the context of armed conflicts can create unexpected but extensive opportunities for ENGOs. Their growing agency in the Ukrainian case challenges traditional assumptions about the role of ENGOs in conflict and underscores the importance of integrating the investigation of their agency into studies of war and security.

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