



## 1. Introduction

The non-profit organization NomAid<sup>1</sup> is a registered charitable association in its home country. As is common for non-profit organizations, NomAid's mission is creating value for society as a whole (Ebrahim *et al.*, 2014; Lettieri *et al.*, 2004). The organization strives to support ethnic minority groups within less affluent European countries. In the project analyzed, the organization aims to improve the living conditions of a minority group, which is considered to be among the most discriminated against and destitute in Europe, by engaging families in cultivating and processing a delicatessen product for the market in other, more affluent European countries. The product is a cultural heritage product of the region, where the minority group lives. When the project was conceived, minority families cultivated produce in their home gardens, processed and packaged it, and stored it in their homes. NomAid collected the product from each family and transported it to more affluent European countries to be sold. The product was sold in parishes, on local farmers markets, in organic grocery stores, and through consumer cooperatives. In addition, volunteers of the organization distributed the product through their private networks. Marketing focused on poverty alleviation. All NomAid members are volunteers and income generated is reinvested into this and other social projects, because as a charitable non-profit organization NomAid is not allowed to generate profits (Battilana *et al.*, 2015; Doherty *et al.*, 2014; Hull and Lio, 2006).

The project was initiated spontaneously, and its implementation can be described as giving aid with a rather informal approach. It started in the late 2000s after members of the non-profit organization participated in a government organized tasting of regional products. The parties agreed that a trial batch would be taken to potential markets, and sold to support the minority community. As the first batch was a success, production increased over time from 2,000 units in the first year to approximately 20,000 units at present. In the first year, a single family cultivated and processed the product. By the mid-2010s, 20 families were involved in cultivating and processing, and benefited directly from the project. Furthermore, surplus from product sales was invested into social projects and to support even poorer families who did not have the minimal resources required to participate in the project.

As the project kept growing, NomAid members became concerned regarding potential liability in the context of food safety. They insisted on professionalization and the implementation of European food safety standards (HACCP certification) in processing. The revised project concept was to transfer processing to a centralized location, fulfilling food safety requirements. The cultivation of the produce was to remain with the minority families. NomAid collaborated with a for-profit intermediary to oversee the processing process, employ members of the minority in the processing facility, and organize the sourcing of the produce from the minority cultivators. However, even though NomAid entered into a contract with the intermediary, it did not seek legal support in preparing contractual agreements, but rather continued the informal trust-based approach. The contract stipulated price and volumes, the product recipe as well as a wage subsidy for ethnic minority employees in the first year. Each year, between 15,000 and 20,000 glasses of the delicatessen product shall be prepared, depending on the quantities of expected yield. The contract had no specifications for the procurement of raw materials.

Omar *et al.* (2014) stated that in collaborations between non-profit and for-profit organizations, the partners should be able to deliver value to one another. Ideally, common objectives reinforce the collaboration, and the creation of positive social change for the target group is desirable (Bies *et al.*, 2007; Kaan and Liese, 2011). The inclusion of a for-profit intermediary is likely to lead to organizational and operational changes within the project. These changes can negatively or positively affect actors within the project. Negative impacts on the minority families would have also negative reputational effects on NomAid as a non-profit organization. Following Meyer *et al.* (2013) and Herlin (2015), the organization may lose its legitimacy and, in the worst case, its existence. Therefore, the present study investigates the inter-organizational

<sup>1</sup> The name of all organizations and countries involved have been changed due to confidentiality concerns. Therefore, sources with identifying information also have been deleted from the text. While detailed information is available from the authors, disguising specific details is necessary because of the contentious nature of the findings.

interactions and evaluates the benefits and drawbacks for NomAid that resulted from the collaboration with an intermediary for processing purposes. The case of NomAid serves as an example of how the collaboration of a for-profit and a non-profit organization in the production of an agricultural delicatessen product can achieve both, a profit and serving the poor. Furthermore, the case also investigates and evaluates effects and functionality of the work relationships between both organizations. Further, the purpose of the case is to illustrate the combination of two threads of theory, multi-layer agency problems and factors affecting cross-sectoral collaborations.

## 2. Literature review

Various political, economic and social pressures lead to collaboration between different types of organizations. Organizations face increased resource dependency or strive for legitimacy, market power and functionality (Austin and Seitanidi, 2012a; Gazley and Brudney, 2007). Clarke and Fuller (2010) added sustainable development as a reason for more cross-sectoral collaborations. In the context of sustainability, Jamali and Keshishian (2009) as well as Austin and Seitanidi (2012a) emphasized the willingness of for-profit organizations to engage in activities of corporate social responsibility, and consider cross-sectoral collaborations with non-profit organizations as a way to show environmental and social commitment. Both, non-profit and for-profit organizations seek benefits and competitive advantages from these collaborations (Austin and Seitanidi, 2012b; Seitanidi and Crane, 2009; Selsky and Parker, 2005).

Collaborators can share funds, skills, and risk, and improve organizational effectiveness through their collaborations. Common meta-goals are important to avoid tensions and conflicts over priorities and organizational directions (Austin and Seitanidi, 2012a). Kolk *et al.* (2010) described collaborations between for-profit and non-profit organizations as joint involvements that create opportunities to build social capital and reach broader societal goals, because partners should ideally practice joint decision making, have open communication and equal power (Van Tulder *et al.*, 2016). Kolk *et al.* (2010) also emphasized the importance of meta-goals for successful cross-sectoral collaborations. The authors further discussed benefits for the individual collaborators, namely access to resources and competencies, which they do not possess individually. Austin (2000) addressed learning opportunities, such as acquiring or improving technical or interpersonal skills as possibilities to increase social capital, and expand networks through the collaboration. For-profit organizations perceive the collaboration as an opportunity to enhance their corporate image, their brand reputation, and increase profits. Non-profit organizations seek public attention and resources, for example, funds, volunteers, services and management skills (Kolk *et al.*, 2010; Vurro *et al.*, 2010).

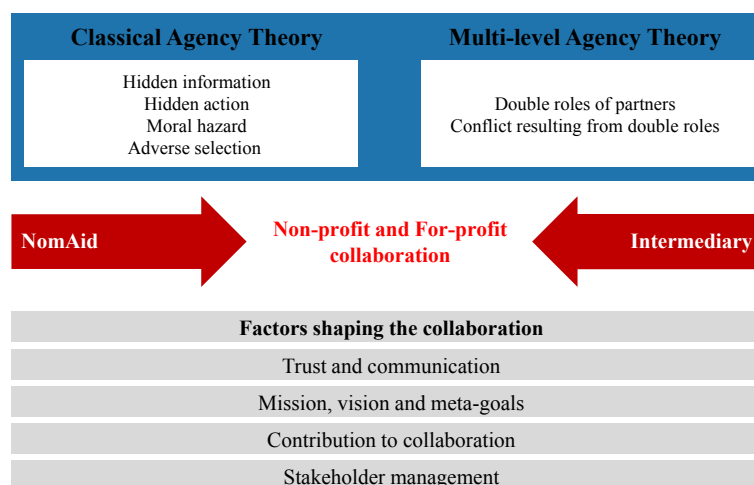
Barriers to establish a successful cross-sectoral collaboration are different viewpoints on how to conduct business, social priorities and distrust (Babiak and Thiebault, 2009). Some non-profit organizations are skeptical of the motivations of their collaboration partners and fear damages to their organization, in case a partner is involved in business activities that society deems inappropriate. Further, they fear reputational damages if the collaboration fails (Selsky and Parker, 2005). Communication is essential to overcome these barriers (Austin, 2000; Babiak and Thiebault, 2009). Collaboration partners need to make sure that they use the same terminology, and share a common understanding of the terminology (Selsky and Parker, 2005). It is important that the collaboration parties state their goals, intentions, and concerns (Koschmann *et al.*, 2012). Inadequate communication often leads to failure of collaborations (Selsky and Parker, 2005). Besides communication, power is another aspect emphasized in the literature. They consider power imbalance between collaborators as problematic, as it can lead to opportunistic behavior with negative effects for the collaboration (Parker and Selsky, 2004; Selsky and Parker, 2005).

Another aspect in cross-sectoral collaborations is the management of external and internal stakeholders, which is likely to become more complex due to the collaboration (Jiang and Ritchie, 2017). Selsky and Parker (2005) emphasized that in a collaboration between non-profit and for-profit organizations, the non-profit partners often have stronger skills in stakeholder management, and tend to include stakeholders in decision making more than their for-profit partners. The authors explained that both parties need to assure that stakeholders'

interests are not neglected. Kolk *et al.* (2010) emphasized the importance of inter-organizational and intra-organizational identification among employees and managers, as well as the potential to improve employee loyalty, trust and organizational commitment through stakeholder management.

The body of literature on cross-sectoral collaborations between non-profit and for-profit organizations is rather diverse. It draws from sociological, political, managerial, organizational and business ethics studies. Different terminologies and definitions coexist, even though similar concepts and topics are discussed (Austin, 2000; Babiak and Thiebault, 2009; Selsky and Parker, 2005). Gazley and Brudney (2007) contributed to systemization of cross-sectoral collaborations and defined them as collaborations of at least two collaborators who are contractually bound. Each collaborator needs to provide either symbolic or material contributions. They share a common responsibility for the organizational activities. Further, the authors related cross-sectoral collaborations to agency theory, as such collaborations have failed at times due to mistrust, opportunistic behavior, asymmetric information, and differing goals, which implies agency problems (Anderson and Jap, 2005; Gray, 1985; Hardy *et al.*, 2006; Rivera Santos *et al.*, 2010). As the present study explores interactions in a cross-sectoral collaboration between a non-profit and a for-profit organization and its effects, agency theory is included in the literature review (Figure 1).

Agency theory is widely used as a theoretical framework in different disciplines, such as sociology, political science and economics (Dalton *et al.*, 2007; Lan and Heracleous, 2010). Agency theory builds on the following assumptions: actors are expected to behave rationally and try to maximize their utility in accordance with their interests. Institutions can shape actors' behavior through contract design. Agency theory discusses the interaction of two parties, where an agent acts on behalf of a principal. The agent is expected to carry out work for the principal, and both parties are contractually bound. A conflict between these parties can occur due to differing interests and asymmetric information (Jensen and Meckling, 1976). In terms of order, execution and information, the agent has an advantage over the principal, and may act opportunistically (Ross, 1973). This includes acting deceitful, lying, cheating, stealing, and shirking (Williamson, 1985). More recent studies of agency theory acknowledged that economic actors are not purely self-interested but guided by bounded self-interest (Bosse and Philipps, 2016). They seek to maximize their own interest, but to not violate perceived norms of fairness. If these agents receive appropriate treatment in given situations, they respond through positive reciprocal behavior. If they perceive the treatment as inappropriate or unfair, they respond with negative reciprocal behavior (Bosse *et al.*, 2009; Hahn, 2015). This theory extension built on findings in political science, management, organizational behavior, psychology and sociology.



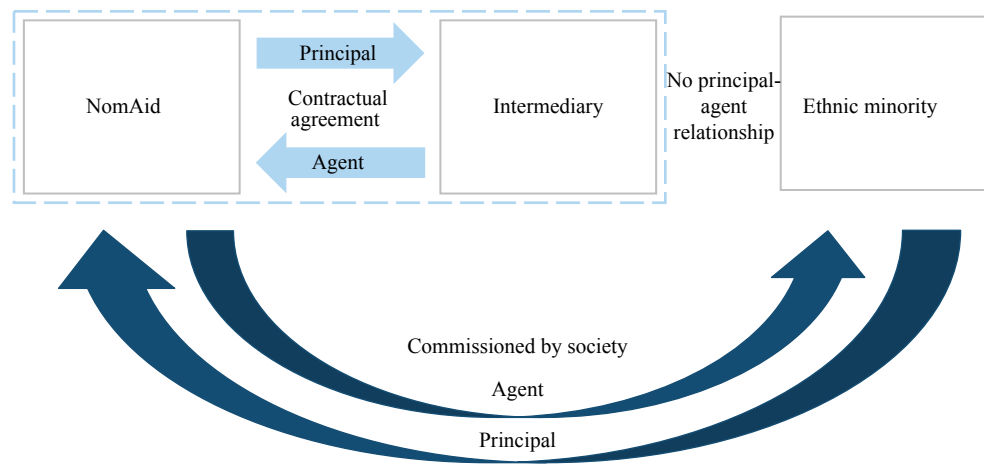
**Figure 1.** Framework for cross sector collaboration.

Hidden action, hidden information and hidden characteristics are scenarios of asymmetric information that are considered in agency theory. Hidden action commonly occurs after contract formation and relates to the principal's inability to respond to the agent's actions. The principal is unable to observe the agent's actions and is unable to evaluate them retrospectively (Eisenhardt, 1989a; Sognini and Gnan, 2015). Similarly, hidden information also occurs during the contractual relationship. In this case, the principal is able to observe the agent's actions but is unable to penalize the agent in retrospective. In the prior scenarios, asymmetric information occurs after contract formation. Here, the agent is able to behave opportunistically, and to execute actions reflecting his or her interests; this is called moral hazard (Eisenhardt, 1989a). Hidden characteristics occur before contract formation. Due to lack of information, the principal chooses an agent who is not as capable, committed or ethical in his or her actions as expected. It is assumed that the agent deceives the principal, because the agent knows in advance that his or her interests and the principal's interests are incompatible (Pouryousefi and Frooman, 2017).

Following the assumptions that information is costless and perfect, and people act fully rational, moral hazard problems should not occur. In these cases, agents would have to cope with contractual consequences for opportunistic behavior. The assumption would allow designing contracts for any circumstances (Braun and Guston, 2003; Williamson, 1975). Since in reality, information is imperfect and costly, and rationality is bounded, principals have search and verification costs to overcome the adverse selection problem. As a means to reduce moral hazard problems, principals need to provide incentives (rewards or punishments). Incentives allow monitoring and directing the agent's actions according to the principal's interests (Jensen and Meckling, 1976; Eisenhardt, 1989a). Therefore, asymmetric information results in agency costs (Fama and Jense, 1983). There are monitoring costs for the principal to reduce the information disadvantages and costs for the agent to expand and exploit existing information asymmetries (Biesenthal and Wilden, 2014; Kozlenkova *et al.*, 2014).

In addition to the traditional agency problems, literature on cross-sectoral collaboration between for-profit and non-profit collaborations discusses so called 'multi-level agency problems' (Rivera-Santos *et al.*, 2017). According to Rivera-Santos *et al.* (2017) these kinds of problems may occur, as one party or both take on the role of the principal as well as the agent depending on the scenario. Within a cross-sectoral collaboration they take on one of these roles, but in relationships with other parties that are closely related to the specific cross-sectoral collaboration they take on the other role. The double role leads to conflicts of interest when acting in either role. Rivera Santos *et al.* (2017) analyzed examples of multi-level problems, for instance collaborations which were related to public goods, food aid and poverty alleviation.

The collaboration between NomAid and the intermediary in charge of processing takes place on a contractual basis. Both organizations may have different goals, due to their respective backgrounds. Following Eisenhardt (1989a) and Rivera Santos *et al.* (2017) it can be expected that classical agency problems as well as multi-level problems occur, because the collaboration between NomAid and the intermediary is dedicated to improving the condition of an ethnic minority which includes poverty alleviation. In the relationship with the intermediary, NomAid can be seen as the principal and the intermediary is hired to oversee and manage the production of the delicatessen product. The intermediary may concentrate on own interests as a for-profit organization, which may be different from NomAid's interests as a non-profit organization. Therefore, asymmetric information and moral hazard can occur. In addition, potential issues related to communication, power and stakeholder management may arise. While the first two aspects are mainly related to the interaction between NomAid and the intermediary, the latter also concerns the minority families involved in cultivating and processing the delicatessen product. Besides the role as principal in the relationship with the intermediary, NomAid is obligated to also serve as an agent. Following Rivera Santos *et al.* (2017) the ethnic minority as the external beneficiary as well as donors act as principals to the collaborating parties from which they expect results. NomAid as a non-profit organization advocating for the interests of the ethnic minority is therefore commissioned by society to act as their agent (Figure 2). It can be expected that NomAid faces conflicts of interest as the organization acts as principal and as an agent simultaneously.



**Figure 2.** Multi-level agency problem applied to the case scenario.

### 3. Material and methods

The study builds on a qualitative case study approach, because this approach allows generating an in-depth understanding of complex issues, events, and phenomena in a real-life context (Kapolowitz, 2000; Kennedy and Luzar 1999; Muger and Bitsch, 2005). Case studies are used in various disciplines within the social sciences and were more frequently applied in agribusiness research since the 1990s (e.g. Maspaitella *et al.*, 2018; Muger and Bitsch 2005; Selitto *et al.*, 2018; Sterns *et al.*, 1998). Both Eisenhardt (1989b) and Stake (1995), contributed to defining and characterizing the qualitative case study approach. The present case study can be defined as an intrinsic case study, because it aims to present the dynamics in a single setting (Dyer and Wilkins, 1991; Eisenhardt, 1989b) and focuses on the meaning, context, and processes (Siggelkow, 2007) of a cross-sectoral collaboration. Further, the case shows how these processes are perceived from different perspectives (Crowe, 2011; Eisenhard and Graebner, 2007). According to Stake (1995) an intrinsic case study is the study of a case wherein the subject itself is the primary interest. The uniqueness of this case is the agency problems potentially present in this particular form of collaboration, because agency-problems are largely unexplored in cross-sectoral collaborations.

Accordingly, members of both organizations, as well as external actors and stakeholders in their environment were included in the study to contribute to a full and detailed picture of the situation, as they share their perceptions and experiences. The involvement of an ethnic minority within the cross-sector collaboration makes the case particularly sensitive. Members of the ethnic minority under investigation are often affected by poverty, exclusion, and discrimination. Hence, in-depth interviews were carried out, because they allow researchers to obtain answers to questions of a sensitive nature.

Interviews took place in May and July 2017. Overall, 20 people directly involved in or closely related to the collaboration were interviewed. Five current minority workers and two members of a family formerly involved in cultivation and processing of the product, but excluded after the beginning of the collaboration with the intermediary were interviewed. Among the five current minority workers, four are regular workers, and one is working as a supervisor for the intermediary. Further, the sample included the owner-manager of the intermediary, a social worker in charge of the minority families and a pastor familiar with the project and the communities involved. The pastor and the social worker exposed a neutral position towards the project, as they were neither part of NomAid nor hired by the intermediary. Further interviewees were a NomAid's translator, five current members of NomAid, two former members of NomAid, a representative of the national government in charge of the integration of the minority group in the country of production and an external actor currently developing an improved marketing concept for the product.

The interviewees were contacted by e-mail, directly in the local community, and at the production site of the intermediary. The second author had the opportunity to accompany NomAid members to the production region, where she also conducted participant observation. She was introduced to the production facilities and relevant actors in the project, as well as other stakeholders. All interviews were arranged independently of NomAid and followed a purposeful sampling strategy. Therefore, for interviewee selection, the interviewees' roles within or related to the project, as well as their potential knowledge on the collaboration between the organizations and its effects were considered (Table 1). Following Curtis *et al.* (2000), in qualitative case studies, sampling is not based on theories of statistical probability, but rather purposeful. The sample should deliver rich information on the issue under investigation, and generate believable explanations (McCrae and Pussell, 2016; Robinson, 2014).

Interviews lasted between 30 and 180 minutes. The second author, a trained interviewer conducted all interviews face-to-face, in German or English, depending on the interviewees' preferences. In seven interviews, a translator was present, because the current and former minority workers did speak neither English nor German. Interview guides were used to outline the main topics of the interviews. Topics were addressed through open-ended questions and asked according to the interview flow. Interviews were audio-recorded and field notes were taken. All interviews were transcribed verbatim, using a simple transcript, adjusting dialect to standard language, and indicating inaudible speech, when interview partners spoke their native tongue with no translator present. These practices are common in qualitative research (Davidson, 2009; Griffin and Frongillo, 2002).

In addition to these materials, information from webpages, podcasts and newspapers on NomAid and the specific project were analyzed using qualitative content analysis. During the analysis process, raw text was systematically broken down and common themes were extracted. This was achieved through constant comparison and contrasting of the material. Ultimately, interaction patterns and effects of the collaboration were identified. The analysis followed Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006) using a hybrid approach, combining inductive and deductive analysis. The analysis started with the inductive approach, where themes arose from the text material. The inductive approach consisted of two main steps: open coding and the establishment of categories. During open coding, labels were assigned to text fragments. These labels reflected the key thought behind each text fragment. During the coding process, field notes, transcripts, and other text documents were carefully read several times. Throughout the analysis process, codes were conceptualized and relabeled. The coding process linked all relevant interview excerpts with codes and their corresponding definitions (Table 2). In the second step of the inductive approach, categories were established by grouping codes according to their meanings and associations. Each category was named using content-characteristic words and defined. Category definitions were created by combining related codes and their definitions.

Building on the contents identified in the inductive analysis, a deductive coding scheme following Eisenhardt's (1989a) overview of agency theory was used to deepen the findings on interactions between both organizations and to reflect on their effects. The analysis process was carried out using the software package Atlas.ti (ATLAS.ti Scientific Software Development GmbH, Berlin, Germany), which allows for systematic analysis of qualitative data. Atlas.ti includes tools for annotating, visualizing, and coding the data. According to Paulus *et al.* (2017) these features help to systematize and track the research process.

Various authors discuss that case studies focusing on a single setting might lack scientific rigor (e.g. Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007; Yin, 2009), citing validity problems (e.g. Gibbert, 2006; Gibbert *et al.*, 2008). To assure the validity of this case study, the present study followed the parallel criteria for qualitative research, which mirror positivistic criteria (Lincoln, 1995), accordingly prolonged engagement, persistent observation, peer debriefing, and member checks were employed (see also Bitsch, 2005). With respect to prolonged engagement, the interviewer spent two weeks in the country where the delicatessen product is cultivated and processed. The interviewer prepared intensively for the research period, and familiarized herself with the country, culture, organization, and ethnic minority under investigation. Prior to the visit at the production side (less affluent European country), the interviewer met with NomAid members for one week in their home country

**Table 1.** Purposeful sampling approach.

<b>Group of interviewees</b>	<b>Role in the project or relationship with the project</b>	<b>Information sought from the interviewees</b>
Current members of NomAid (n=5)	Board of Directors of the organization; volunteers in the organization	Board members are expected to have comprehensive knowledge of the collaboration and its effects on NomAid and minority families. As they were involved in the formation of the collaboration and its current execution. Volunteers are expected to have partial knowledge on the collaboration and its effects on NomAid and minority families, because they suggested the collaboration, fearing liability.
Former members of NomAid (n=2)	Board of Directors of the organization; volunteers in the organization	Expected to have partial knowledge on the collaboration and its effects on NomAid and minority families, because they left the association during the formation of the collaboration. Expected to provide potential detrimental knowledge on the collaboration.
Marketing concept developer (n=1)	Marketing of the product in NomAid's home country	Expected to be knowledgeable about the product, its production, distribution, and marketing.
Current minority workers (n=5)	Cultivating produce; processing produce	Expected to have partial knowledge on the collaboration and its effects on the minority families. Expected to have comprehensive knowledge on current processing.
Former minority cultivators and processors (n=2)	Cultivating produce; processing produce	Expected to have partial knowledge on collaboration and its effects on the minority families. Expected to have comprehensive knowledge on cultivation and processing, before they were excluded.
Intermediary's owner-manager (n=1)	Managing processing and the minority workers involved	Expected to have comprehensive knowledge on the collaboration and its effects on NomAid and minority families, because the interviewee was involved in the formation of the collaboration and its current execution.
Local government representative (n=1)	In charge of the integration of minority group in the country where they live	Expected to be knowledgeable about living and working conditions of minority families, because the interviewee is in charge of integration.
Social worker (n=1)	In charge of the minority families; also translator for NomAid	Expected to have comprehensive knowledge on the collaboration and its effects on NomAid and minority families, because the interviewee is in close contact with the minority families in the region. The interviewee also was involved in the formation of the collaboration and its current execution. The interviewee also works as a translator for NomAid.
Pastor (n=1)	Familiar with the project, in close contact with minority communities in the region	Expected to be knowledgeable about living and working conditions of minority families in the region; also expected to be knowledgeable about actors in the project.
NomAid's translator (n=1)	Familiar with the project, in close contact with the minority community and with NomAid	Expected to be have comprehensive knowledge about the project and perceptions among the ethnic minority.



**Table 2.** Exemplary codes for the category ‘challenges in the project’ with excerpts from interviews and the other data material.

Code	Excerpt
Tension in the cross-sector collaboration	‘When he inspected the [delicatessen product], we realized they were bad. Oh, this is bad, oh, this is bad too, oh, the others are bad as well, right. And they were not.
Quality standards, pricing, and operations caused dissent between (NomAid and the intermediary)	So, he brought them back. Of course, I gave them new ones for these bad ones. And then we checked which were really bad. We realized that from the 14,000, 150 or 200 units had gone bad’ (Manager of the intermediary, female).  ‘When I spoke to [Name of a former NomAid member, Board of Directors], I told him that if they want to make it as they did it until now, it has got nothing with me, so I will be very glad if I won’t work with it. It is not a problem because I do not live from this produce. Of course, you cannot live from something which earns you, I don’t know, 1,000 Euro a year, just assumed’ (Manager of the intermediary, female).  ‘She did many things we did not like. For instance the rent for the storage. She wanted to have 2,000 Euro for the storage, even though it belongs to her father. We had to make sure that enough money is left for us’ (NomAid, former member of the Board of Directors, male).
Excluding minority workers Due to the organizational changes in the project, several minority families had to give up production for the project	‘And because of these 50 Euro or 100 Euro more, which they would have gotten from us, they had to leave the project. All of them stood up and left [refers to payment of minority workers by the intermediary]’ (Former NomAid volunteer, male).  ‘I have recently heard from her that she would like to collaborate with a farmer, as she is not as interested in working with the individual families [minority families cultivating produce for the delicatessen recipe]’ (NomAid, former member of the Board of Directors, male).
Risk of litigation Since the product was not cultivated professionally and not processed industrially, members of NomAid feared to be held liable.	‘Because this is food, you have really strict laws that you need to follow in your production’ (Manager of the intermediary, female).  ‘I said we need to pay attention because it is a matter of food safety. In addition, what we were doing was not legal [...]. It is not possible. This will result in a huge argument, and our entire project will break down’ (NomAid volunteer, female).

(more affluent European country). Regarding persistent observation the interviewer took field notes during each visit and after each qualitative interview conducted. Photos supported the written notes. Peer debriefing allowed the interviewer to reflect on the research process and findings. The interviewer discussed both the research process and the results extensively with the other members of the research team not participating in the field visits. Member checks require interviewees to provide feedback on the results and their interpretation (Koelsch, 2013; Smith and Gannon, 2018). Interviewees respond and validate whether their input is correctly represented or not. As part of the present study, results and their interpretation were presented to NomAid members after the data collection and the analysis. However, it was not possible to conduct member checks with the ethnic minority or the intermediary. In addition, the purposeful sampling procedure described above contributes to ensure the validity and transferability of the present study.

All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

## 4. Results and discussion

Volunteers and members of the Board of Directors of NomAid, as well as the manager of the intermediary agreed that the major aspect that led to the collaboration was the desire for professionalization. The common goal was to guarantee food safety and a stable product for the consumer. In addition, NomAid members highlighted their social commitment, their willingness to support minority communities, and to improve their living conditions as reasons to participate in the collaboration. Volunteers as well as members of the Board of Directors of NomAid emphasized the goals of the organization to campaign against illiteracy, to counteract poor housing and hygienic conditions, and to support people in minority communities in finding employment. In contrast, the intermediary's primary interest to participate in the collaboration was profit-oriented.

*'Last year, there was the first change and the [ethnic minority] were producing, at home. I do not know if you know this type of the production, the years before, so it was not me who spoke to the [ethnic minority]. I told [NomAid], if you wish them to work, it is absolutely no problem for me, but they have to come to the factory, which has the permission to work. Because you cannot work illegally at home, of course, not with the food'* (manager of the intermediary, female).

*'It is terrible over there, I would like to help. I have stayed in that small inn, and there I realized a lot. I want to help, and that is how my story started'* (NomAid volunteer, female).

*'Only five hours from [city in more affluent European country], there are families which need to live in partially inhuman conditions. Since 2007, NomAid helps to improve the living conditions of these people. Capacity building is the aim of our volunteers. We offer these families to earn a part of their means of sustenance by themselves, and we like to improve their confidence. This requires contacts and understanding of their situation. Therefore, we travel frequently into the region where [ethnic minority] people live. We also consider conversations with local authorities as essential'* (NomAid's organizational philosophy on its web profile).

In line with the organizational goal, NomAid members have philanthropic motivations, while the intermediary gives voice to instrumental motivation to engage in the collaboration. Even though both types of motivation are different in nature, they do not necessarily contradict each other. The desire for capacity building for the minority group on behalf of NomAid is implemented through the intermediary offering jobs. Furthermore, the sourcing and processing of the product through the intermediary adheres to legal regulations and European food safety standards, fulfilling the expectations of all parties.

Even though both collaborators benefit and their goals do not contradict each other on the surface level, the implementation of the collaboration causes a conflict of interest. Following the intermediary's point of view, the requirement regarding employment of minority workers was fulfilled and current workers are satisfied with their jobs. In contrast, some members of NomAid comment negatively on the hiring practices of the intermediary. In their opinion, the intermediary seems interested mainly in increasing the profit margin, and even accepts a potential decrease in the welfare of minority families, namely those formerly cultivating the produce, which contradicts the goals of NomAid.

*'[...] We really try producing with the [ethnic minority]. Two people said they want to work and they are working. With the [ethnic minority] percentage of our workers, I am satisfied; this is enough'* (manager of the intermediary, female).

*'Yeah, if you get to know afterwards, that the number of the remaining ones is not increasing [refers to the number of minority workers in the project], you know that they [refers to the intermediary] have never been serious'* (NomAid volunteer NomAid, male).

The differences in perception regarding their work relationship can be attributed to a rather unspecific contract, without detailed specifications or incentives. NomAid and the intermediary implemented a trust-based relationship, similar to the initial project when all interactions were solely trust-based. As outlined in the introduction, NomAid entered the collaboration without legal support and lacked major experience regarding cross-sectoral collaborations.

Nonetheless, the critical perception of NomAid members interviewed towards the intermediary is common in many cross-sectoral collaborations. According to Selsky and Parker (2005), non-profit organizations are skeptical of their collaboration partners' business motivations because they fear reputational damages to their own organization. Yet, the absence of common meta-goals can be seen as the main reason leading to conflicts between collaborators. Following Austin and Seitanidi (2012a) meta-goals can improve organizational effectiveness because the collaboration can lead to synergetic effects. The tensions between NomAid and the intermediary resulted from a conflict over priorities and organizational direction, which could have been avoided or at least reduced by defined meta-goals.

Further barriers in the collaboration are prejudices among the collaborating parties, as well as towards the minority group. NomAid members regret the absence of a more personal working relationship with the minority group and do not agree with some practices of the intermediary. However, the manager of the intermediary also gives voice to doubts regarding the non-profit organization. In addition, even the translator has doubts about the project and its consequences.

*'Before it has been much more personal, more familiar. There was a direct relationship between us and the [ethnic minority]'*  
(NomAid volunteer, female).

*'This year we will work in the factory with real [ethnic minority] people. All the workers this year will be real [ethnic minority]. We are afraid of it, if they will work the same way the second day because this is also a very important question. If you are not used to work. It is not sure that they will come. And if you have got the production there, you have got the [produce], you must do the job. You cannot tell the [produce], please be fresh also for tomorrow or the day after tomorrow'*  
(manager of the intermediary, female).

*'I did not want to make the impression, it was my idea, and I initiated all this. I told them, they have to come by themselves, and that they should tell them, it was their idea and not mine. Well, I live here, I do not need tension and arguments, the wrath of the people, bad contacts, and a bad reputation. [...] I have never been part of the project. I only translated for them. [...] However, this project is not my business'*  
(translator for NomAid, female).

One of the biggest barriers within the project is the language barrier, as only one member in the non-profit organization speaks one of the common languages in the country where the project is located. As the translator distances herself from the project, she potentially intensifies the problem with respect to communication with authorities or the minority group. The communication between the manager of the intermediary and NomAid is less restricted, because they both speak English. However, there are still communication problems. In cross-sectoral collaborations, partners should use the same terminology and share a common understanding of this terminology in order to clarify intentions and concerns (Koschmann *et al.*, 2012; Selsky and Parker, 2005). Inadequate communication negatively affects such collaborations and can lead to failure (Selsky and Parker, 2005).

The project also suffers from a lack of organizational identification. Following Kolk *et al.* (2010), inter-organizational and intra-organizational identification are important in cross-sectoral collaborations, because it leads to trust and organizational commitment, which are absent among several actors in the project. Further, various actors state directly and indirectly their lack of appreciation of the minority group and their culture, which is detrimental to the project aiming to increase the welfare of this group. The lack of appreciation

towards the ethnic minority corresponds with earlier studies of this and similar minority groups in other European countries. Arranz (2018) and Papaoikonomou *et al.* (2009) stated that stereotypes towards the minority's culture are the main reasons for exclusion from the labor market.

In contrast to other actors, the current minority workers at the processing site did not state any concerns or doubts towards the intermediary or NomAid. The members of a family formerly involved in cultivation and processing of the product, but excluded after the beginning of the collaboration stated their disappointment of not being involved anymore.

*'We need to work, it is worth it, we have children at home'* (current minority worker, female).

*'Good job, this woman can come to [city] and work. Nevertheless, than the price is not possible. It is way too far. Forty or fifty kilometer. It is in [city], they have others, and it is impossible for me to come there all by myself'* (former cultivator and processor, female).

The current minority workers explained not having many alternative employment possibilities. They are employed for two months in the season to process the produce. The workers appreciated the working conditions, the physically light work and the working facilities, including a small lounge for breaks. The current workers did not express demands or expectations regarding wages, benefits, or any help from NomAid. In contrast, the excluded members of the minority stated that after the organizational change, their income diminished from one euro per unit of (processed) product to approximately one euro per kilogram produce (raw product), and therefore they could not afford to continue to be involved in the project. From total earnings of €15,000 for the families involved in cultivating and processing the delicatessen product in the community-based scheme, direct earnings from the project fell to €2,400 in wages for minority workers at the intermediary (plus €800 of wage subsidy by NomAid). They also stated that the commuting distance from their home to the production site was too far and costly to apply for work at the processing site. These differences in perception may occur as the current minority workers are highly dependent on both, the intermediary as well as NomAid. Given that the interviewer was a stranger to them, it is likely that they were careful to not express disrespect towards their employer and supporters.

As previously shown, communication problems and the lack of meta-goals exist within the project. Moreover, the intermediary's lack of identification with the project goals negatively affects the interaction between the collaborators. The negative attitude towards the ethnic minority intensifies the tensions. Ultimately, the occurrence of distrust among and exclusion of actors in the project indicate the existence of classic agency problems in the collaboration (Table 3).

Trust in a for-profit-non-profit collaborations develops as a result of reliable social interactions. However, trust may be differently valued and put into practice by the collaborating partners (Parker and Selsky, 2004). In the for-profit sector, trust is traditionally built on constrained contractual exchanges, whereas trust in the non-profit sector is rather grounded in solidarity with the mission or on shared values (Selsky and Parker, 2004). From NomAid's perspective the intermediary's manager as the agent in relationship to NomAid is following her own interests, rather than working towards the project goals. From a non-profit perspective this can be seen as a violation of trust and a case of hidden action. NomAid as the principal was unable to observe the agent's actions and is unable to fully evaluate all actions retrospectively. Firstly, most of the minority workers involved in processing earn only minimum wage for a small number of hours. Therefore, the original processors could not afford to commute to the work site. Secondly, the new payment scheme set up by the intermediary excluded the minority cultivators from the project. Under the new payment scheme, the cultivators of the produce earned considerably less, and participation in the project was no longer efficient for the minority families who had done both cultivation and processing under the previous scheme. The intermediary decided to purchase the produce on the local market (Table 3) instead of using the produce that the minority families cultivated in their home gardens. Decisions of the intermediary are not in the best interest of the non-profit organization aiming to increase the welfare of the minority group. In addition, the

**Table 3.** Agency problems within the project.

<b>Element</b>	<b>Explanation</b>	<b>In this study</b>	<b>Examples of interview statements</b>
Human assumption	Self-interest, bounded rationality	Yes	Intermediary expresses self-interest <i>'I want to make the base of our cooperation to make it as a business. Therefore, they order the production, we give a price, of course, we always quarrel by the price and if we agree on the price then we give the production and that's all. For us, the production you must always do as a business. There is no other way'</i>
Organizational assumption	Partial goal conflict among participants, information asymmetry between principal and agent	Yes	Goal conflict with respect to the ethnic minority, Information asymmetry between NomAid and the intermediary <i>'[...] NomAid really supports the [ethnic minority]. I do not see the financial situation of NomAid, but this is also not my business. When they come to take the [product] or when they come to see us, I always see that the car is full of stuff. They give it to them, the [ethnic minority] can be thankful; they know how to be thankful. However, this is the most speculative nation in the world, really. I am not a big fan, but this is also a job, and they are also people, of course'</i> (manager of the intermediary, female).
Hidden action	Occurs after contract formation and relates to the principal's ability to respond to the agent's actions. The principle is unable to observe the agent's actions and is unable to evaluate them retrospectively.	Yes	Intermediary had bought cucumbers from a different source than the ethnic minority without informing NomAid <i>'This category we produce, this is the A-category [...]. This is the cost now, if you go to the market, without an invoice, you pay €1.50'</i>
Hidden information	Occurs within the contractual relationship. In this case, the principal is able to observe the agent's actions but is retrospectively unable to evaluate them appropriately.	No	Not applicable (manager of the intermediary, female).
Hidden characteristics	Occurs before contract formation. The principal chooses an agent who is not as capable, committed, or ethical in his or her actions as expected. It is assumed that the agent deceives the principal, because the agent knows in advance that his or her interests and the principal's interests are incompatible.	Evidence ambiguous	Not applicable

non-profit organization was not informed about such decisions in advance, which constitutes a case of hidden action and moral hazard. It is ambiguous whether a case of hidden characteristics and adverse selection was present when both parties decided to collaborate.

Even though NomAid had chosen an agent focusing mainly on profit and less interested in supporting the minority families than expected, it is not clear whether the agent was aware in advance that her interests and the principal's interests differed that substantially. Moreover from a for-profit perspective the intermediary does not have to bear the blame for the ensuing problems. Following Selsky and Parker (2004), for-profit organizations use contracts with specification as their basis of trust and operation. Given that Nom-Aid did not monitor the actions of the intermediary and did not ask for specific reporting from the intermediary, the results of the collaboration are undesirable for the non-profit organization, but not surprising. NomAid might have focused too strongly on its agent role, advocating the rights of the ethnic minority, and neglected its duties as principal.

The trust problems identified in this case highlight the importance of clarifying the factors shaping a cross-sectoral collaboration, as well as the roles of each party involved in the collaboration, as this may avoid the occurrence of agency problems. In the case of NomAid and the intermediary, problems occurred for both partners. Even though the collaboration allowed setting up an operation to produce and market the delicatessen product, reducing the risk of food safety problems and litigation, various drawbacks affect the collaboration. The absence of meta-goals, inadequate communication, and lack of inter-organizational identification led to undesired actions by the intermediary from NomAid's perspective. Particularly the exclusion of the minority cultivators is a considerable danger to NomAid's reputation, and respectively their role as an agent commissioned by society (Rivera-Santos et al, 2017), because the organization explicitly supports the ethnic minority. Selling a delicatessen product for charitable purposes that does not come from the minority group could be considered as a deception by sellers and consumers. The practice can endanger the reputation and existence of NomAid, and the reputation of the intermediary. Caused by these changes to the original project, NomAid may lose its credibility with stakeholders and donors acting as principals towards them, and because they are supporting other projects and activities of NomAid, consequences may be drastic.

Overall, NomAid has neither been completely successful nor failed fully as principal and as agent, and there is substantial need for improvement regarding both roles. The occurrence of hidden action showed that NomAid as principal needs to improve on monitoring its agent. Exclusion and welfare losses of minority workers showed that NomAid needs to improve as an agent, as they socially represent the ethnic minority and advocate for their wellbeing. NomAid's difficulties can be attributed to the lack of experience in both, business as well as cooperation, unawareness of potential hazards, and the naiveté to base a cross-sectoral collaboration mostly on trust without seeking legal counsel or other support in specifying the contractual agreement with the intermediary.

## 5. Conclusions

The study investigated the organizational interactions of a cross-sectoral collaboration and evaluated the resulting benefits and drawbacks for the non-profit organization, which had initiated the cultivation and processing of a delicatessen product to support an ethnic minority group in one of the least economically affluent European countries. The collaboration was negatively affected by inadequate communication, the absence of meta-goals, and agency problems. The opportunistic behavior of the for-profit collaborator, more precisely the exclusion of the former minority processors from the project through hiring different workers (albeit initially few and later more workers from the same ethnic minority), as well as using produce that was not cultivated by minority families, constitutes a case of hidden action. This type of action is undesirable for the collaboration and conflicts with NomAid's project goals. Consequently, both NomAid as well as the intermediary need to decide whether they want to continue the collaboration. From the perspective of NomAid as the principal, it can either choose to operate with a different partner who shares the goal of supporting the ethnic minority, or continue to work with the current intermediary in an adapted contractual

relationship. The intermediary needs to decide whether she wants to stay in a collaboration with a principal with much distrust and negative perceptions, and if so whether she is willing to accept a more specified contractual relationship and adapt her actions.

If both parties decide to continue the collaboration, they need to agree on meta-goals and clearly define how the collaboration should proceed. Given that the partners cannot work purely on a trust basis, it is recommendable for NomAid to set up an incentive system to better align the goals of the intermediary with the project goals. Therefore, a contract with stipulations regarding the employment of and sourcing from the ethnic minority would be useful. For example, a sourcing quota could guarantee that all or most of the produce is cultivated by minority families. Additionally, the recruitment and payment of the workers in the factory could be specified in more detail.

To improve communication in the project, actors must strive to overcome at least some of their communication problems. These are due to language barriers and due to stereotypes among the actors. Even though the current translator of NomAid is reliable and a good networker, the translator is skeptical of the project. NomAid should carefully reevaluate the benefits the current translator contributes to the project and respective drawbacks such as potentially biased translation. Unbiased translation is important for the contact with local authorities and other potential local collaborators.

In case tensions between the collaborators cannot be overcome, an alternative to working with an intermediary for processing, which would also empower the ethnic minority and improve their conditions is the implementation of a kitchen incubator through the project. The ethnic minority group could use these facilities to learn how to produce and process locally, independently, safe and adhering to EU regulations. This option for capacity building would follow NomAid's philosophy and, furthermore, be a contribution to rural development in the region. However, this does not only require considerable funds, which seem to be available, but an accompanying commitment to training and advisory services.

When establishing a kitchen incubator as part of the project, NomAid must be aware that agency problems may occur again. If the kitchen incubator was part of a production-processing collaboration involving the ethnic minority as shareholders, a principal-principal conflict can occur. For example, if institutional frameworks do not protect the minority shareholders and NomAid would act as the controlling shareholder, this could set the stage for further conflicts. When establishing a kitchen incubator, institutional frameworks, governance and financial control are essential to allow a satisfying collaboration. Therefore, it can be concluded that similar to other collaborations, in cross-sectoral collaborations the form of agency conflict occurring depends on the context, the institutional framework, and the specific actors collaborating. Accordingly, NomAid needs to seek both legal counsel as well as other advisory services to compensate for its lack of experience with such collaborations. In addition to the will to support the minority, knowhow of potential hazards and how to guard against them is required.

Overall, the case study presented an example of the importance of aligning various hierarchical levels within a collaboration. Following Kolk *et al.* (2010) who theoretically proposed this alignment, the present study can serve as empirical evidence. In this case, actors have apparently only addressed the meso-level of their collaboration, assuming that the strengths of both organizations – business skills of the intermediary, networking and fundraising skills of the non-profit organization – matched each other, without considering meta-goals on the macro level and factors on the micro level, such as trust, communication and inter-organizational identification. As proposed by Kolk *et al.* (2010) this mismatch can lead to tensions within or failure of the collaboration. Further, the present study empirically corroborates the multi-level agency problems presented in the theoretical study of Rivera-Santos *et al.* (2017). Drawing from this, the present case study is of value to other forms of cross-sectoral collaborations and cases involving hybrid organizations for instance social enterprises, as these organizations unite for-profit and non-profit goals. The combination of both theoretical lines (Kolk *et al.* 2010; Rivera Santos *et al.*, 2017) complement each other on the micro level of the organization, and relate to human and organizational assumptions and their consequences. Meta-goals,

communication, trust, and the acknowledgement of multiple roles and respectively obligations help actors to avoid or remedy the effects of classical as well as multi-level agency problems.

For future research on non-profit-for-profit collaborations, which involve NomAid, an action research approach is recommended. Following Schenkels and Jacobs (2018), action research is particularly suitable to foster change. Depending on the path NomAid chooses to pursue, a researcher may accompany a change process in the collaboration between NomAid and the intermediary, or the implementation of a kitchen incubator. Additionally, the present collaboration could be compared to similar cross-sectoral collaborations, where production and marketing takes place in a similar manner, in a multiple case study. Such a multiple case study could focus on structural and strategic challenges in cross-sectoral collaborations, which would allow providing further advice for (potential) collaborators on how to effectively achieve their goals.

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## Conflict of interest

All authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest regarding this publication.

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