Secrecy in Maidan Volunteer Organizations: E+ Initiative Case Study

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Abstract: In this paper, I refer to Maidan (Euromaidan) protests that took place in Ukraine in 2013–2014. I analyse the role of secrecy in Evacuation+ Initiative (E+), one of Maidan volunteer organization that evacuated sick and wounded Maidan residents to safe locations – makeshift hospitals. The empirical part of the paper uses in-depth semistructured oral history interviews with Maidan participants. The analysis identifies the peculiarities of horizontal network volunteering formations of Maidane using the E+ Initiative case study. Different manifestations of secrecy in E+ the same as some visibility markers are also thoroughly covered by the analysis. I suggest that, in the context of the resistance against autocracy, secrecy in E+ is subordinated to the aims of safety and survival. That is why we may frame a separate dimension of secrecy, the "safety dimension," in addition to informational and social dimensions considered by Costas and Gray while studying the different types of organizations (2014).

Keywords: Maidan 2013–2014, secrecy, hidden organizations, volunteer organizations, self-organized organizations, Evacuation+ Initiative.

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Introduction

Maidan 2013–2014 (the Euromaidan, the so-called Revolution of Dignity) is one of the most significant events in contemporary Ukrainian history. It started as a protest against the Ukrainian government's foreign policy and, in a few weeks, turned into a larger-scale resistance movement against state violence and arbitrariness. The protest resulted in significant political changes for Ukraine, such as the signing of the Association Agreement with the European Union, and the introduction of a visa-free regime with EU countries. Moreover, Maidan contributed significantly to the development of civil society in Ukraine (Kvit, 2014). Last, Maidan is an important social phenomenon, often characterized as a unique period of consolidation, mutual help, and social solidarity (Kowal & Wapiński, 2014).

Volunteer initiatives during and after Maidan events shed special light on this unique cooperation between Maidan participants and the citizenry. Various volunteer initiatives developed as grassroots activities before turning into large and diversified organizations with clear structures, work regimes, and divisions of labor. These organizations achieved unexpected results thanks to volunteer support, including financial contributions

(Prokhorova, 2017a; Prokhorova, 2017b). After the Maidan events, some of these groups officially registered as public organizations and continued their activities. Moreover, these organizations were the first to respond to subsequent crises in Ukraine: the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian war in 2014, the Covid-19 pandemic, and the full-scale war started by the Russian armed forces on 24 February 2022 (Zarembo, 2017).

Researchers have already analyzed Maidan volunteer initiatives from various angles (Gomza, Koval, 2015; Ishchenko, 2016; Kvit, 2014; Kulyk, 2014; Onuch, Martsenyuk, 2014; Onuch, Sasse, 2016; Prokhorova, 2017a; Prokhorova, 2017b; Shevtsova, 2017; Stepanenko, 2015; Worschech, 2017, ets.). However, one important topic has yet to arise – the secrecy and visibility of Maidan organizations in the context of the uprising. An examination of Maidan volunteering organizations through the theoretical framework of visibility/secrecy theories promises to shed light on two important questions in organization studies. First, researchers much less describe hidden organizations than large transparent corporations and organizations with elements of secrecy. Second, the information we have about secret organizations, especially in developing regions, usually focuses on such illegal formations as terrorist organizations, organized crime, backstreet businesses, and other enterprises in the informal economy (Scott, 2013, pp. 25, 11–16). The Maidan, by contrast, spawned organizations that were meant to help people and that were developed by civil society actors facing political repression. A case-study analysis of Evacuation+ Initiative suggests new avenues for Maidan research and for organizational studies generally.

The article's main goal is to consider what role secrecy played in Evacuation+ Initiative and what influence secrecy had on the development of a Maidan volunteering organization.

Literature Review

Maidan volunteering organizations

According to volunteering researcher John Wilson, volunteering is help that is more than spontaneous and helps people beyond relatives and friends (Wilson, 2000, p. 216). The Maidan period inspired many acts of volunteerism along with the formation of several volunteering organizations. Maidan participants who were not ready to fight actively in the military were helping those who were (Onuch & Sasse, 2016, p. 3; Prokhorova, 2017b). Before the Maidan, the development of volunteer activities in Ukraine was influenced by external factors, for example, financing by international funds. But the Maidan volunteer movement was substantially homegrown (Matiichuk, 2016, p. 102).

According to a study conducted in 2015 by the Democratic Initiatives Foundation named after I. Kucheriv, and the sociological service of the Razumkov Center, the amount of time people devoted to volunteering increased significantly in the years leading up to the protest. In 2012, about 10% of volunteers spent a few hours per month volunteering, and 6% spent a few hours per week. In 2015, the year following the Maidan, those figures were 35% and 23%, respectively, and about 5% volunteered daily ("Post-maidan Charity", 2015). That year, the

Kyiv International Institute of Sociology found that the volunteering sector had the highest level of public trust among all key social institutions. In 2015, 57.6% of Ukrainians trusted volunteers, and 13.5% did not, for a trust-distrust balance of 44.1% (‘Trust in social institutions and groups’, 2015). In 2016, the trust-distrust balance slipped to 33.9%, and the church returned to its traditional rank among Ukrainian institutions with the highest level of trust. However, more than half of Ukrainians (53.5%) still trusted volunteers (‘Trust in social institutions and groups’, 2016). From this we may infer that the crisis activated the potential of the volunteer movement. As a result, new volunteer initiatives formed, corresponding to the demands of the time. Moreover, since the time of the Maidan, the "help" phenomenon has become an essential component of Ukrainian public discourse.

Various authors have noted common characteristics among typical Maidan volunteering organizations. V. Stepanenko characterizes the Maidan not as a unified, hierarchical protest organized by the political elite but as a social, open, variegated, voluntary, self-organized entity (2015, pp. 38, 40). M. Ryabchuk and A. N. Luzhnycky emphasize the grassroots nature of Maidan initiatives in the self-empowerment of civil society, using Vaclav Havel's famous expression "the power of the powerless" (Riabchuk, Lushnycky, 2015, p. 49). Olga Onuch analyzes the role of communication technologies in the mobilization processes of Maidaners and notes that these technologies made “grassroots self-organization by ‘ordinary’ citizens” possible (2015, p. 170). Emily S. Channell-Justice focuses on left activists’ discourse in her research. She also refers to the “grassroots self-organization” of Maidan to describe change achieved on the strength of activists’ skills without the help of the state (2016, pp. 115, 138).

In an earlier article, I conceptualize the formation of the typical Maidan grassroots volunteering initiative as “self-organization”—a fast and spontaneous process that took place in response to new and urgent needs arising at different stages of the conflict. The main features of these organizations were horizontal structure; functional specialization of organizations and their participants; active communication through the Internet, mainly through social networks; and common characteristics of the organizers, who were largely young, educated representatives of the middle class who achieved success in their professional field and brought with them their networks of connections and contacts (Prokhorova, 2017a).

Secrecy and Secret Organization

Jana Costas and Christopher Grey (2016), following Georg Simmel, call secrecy a “universal sociological form” (p. 6). The authors write that both the information kept secret and the methods for keeping it secret vary. Nevertheless, keeping secrets is typical for humans and, consequently, for organizations (pp. 5–6).

Researchers define secrecy as the “perpetuation of keeping certain information from becoming public” (Birchall, 2021, p. 8) or as the act of intentional concealment (Costas & Grey, 2016, pp. 5, 7) or as something hidden and unknown (Scott, 2013, p. 65). However, the most comprehensive definition of secrecy is made by Costas and Grey. They explain the term as “the ongoing formal and informal social processes of intentional concealment of information from actors by actors in organizations” (2014, p. 1426). It is important to emphasize that secrecy is understood here as process, namely, “the processes through which secrets are kept” (Costas & Grey, 2016, p. 7). Moreover, we can see both formal and informal manifestations of secrecy in this definition. Formal secrecy is the official concealment of information in specific established ways. It covers laws and rules about who should keep secrets, what secrets they should keep, and in what circumstances. Such rules can be spelled out in formal agreements or contracts. By contrast, informal secrecy is the unofficial concealment of information by uncodified methods. In these cases, secrets are shared through informal socialization not governed by formal rules (Costas & Grey, 2014, pp. 1431–1432).

There are two different approaches to understanding secrecy. According to the informational perspective, secrecy deals with keeping information safe, while the sociological perspective considers secrecy as a social phenomenon and space for social interaction (Costas & Grey, 2014, p. 1424). Researchers describe such social phenomena as control (Costas & Grey, 2014, pp. 1428–1429) and identity development (Costas & Grey, 2014, p. 1428; Scott, 2013, pp. 54–57) as manifestations of secrecy in social perspective.

As stated above, secrecy is a universal phenomenon. Still, organizations differ from each other according to the degree of their secrecy. For example, Craig Scott examines different organizations according to their characteristics in three dimensions: organizational visibility, member identification, and relevant audience (2013, p. 84). Using this concept, the organizations we are calling “secret,” “hidden,” or “dark” (in this article, the terms are used synonymously) are relatively invisible. Their members are relatively more likely to be anonymous and unrecognized, and their audience is more likely to be local than public (Scott, 2013, pp. 117–119).

Researchers consider different features common to secret organizations. For example, Cynthia Stohl and Michael Stohl detail three features common to various hidden organizations: an agreement among members to keep confidential their involvement in the organization; an agreement among members to keep confidential the organization's internal activities and management structure; and the eventual leaking of secrets. However, organizations may nonetheless remain hidden for an extended period (Stohl & Stohl, 2017, p. 3). At the same time, Oana B. Albu dwells on the implementation of the following mechanisms in the activities of secret organizations: managing encryption (coding of different data connected to organizations in a way that they may be decoded only by an authorized person), managing concealment (obscuring information about an organization and revealing it only to specific audiences), and managing obfuscation (bolstering organizational secrecy by sending confusing signals (Albu, 2022).

Hidden organizations often face specific problems related to secrecy. Craig Scott mentions three such problems: the communication problem (the need to develop mechanisms for secret communication among members), the identification problem (the need to develop secret mechanisms to identify members), and the advertising problem (the need to promote the organization’s products without attracting unwanted attention).

Methodology

The empirical part of this paper is based on a database of in-depth, semistructured oral-history interviews, each lasting between one and three hours. Oral-history methodology is widely used in the study of social and political movements to reconstruct a particular historical period from the position of active participants through their interpretations of events and processes (Bosi, Reiter, 2014, p. 118).

These interviews were conducted within two oral history projects. The Maidan: Testimonies (Audio recordings and transcripts of the conducted interviews are available to researchers at the Center for Studies of History and Culture of East European Jewry of the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy. Part of transcripts were also published in the book Maidan*: Testimonies, 2013–2014*, ed. by Leonid Finberg and Uliana Holovach, Kyiv: Duh i Litera, 2016. The electronic version of the book is available here: https://ia800909.us.archive.org/0/items/Maydansvidchennia/Maydansvidchennia.pdf). project aimed to collect testimonies of the participants of the Revolution of Dignity. The project includes 303 interviews. Many of these were conducted in the first six months after the protest. Snowball sampling with elements of maximum variation sampling was applied (Kovalov, Shteinberg, 1999, p. 43). The researchers' attention was not focused on opposition politicians or public figures but rather on "ordinary" participants and resistance activists: self-defenders, doctors, cooks, volunteers, priests, businessmen, etc.

The remaining 94 interviews were conducted in 2016–2017 in Maidan: Testimonies. Help to the Injured. International Solidarity project.(Audio recordings and transcripts of the interviews are available to researchers at the Center for Studies of History and Culture of East European Jewry of the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy. Transcripts were also published in the book *Maidan: Testimonies. The Help to the Injured. International Solidarity*, ed. by Leonid Finberg, Iryna Berland, and Olena Andreeva, Kyiv: Duh i Litera, 2018. The electronic version of the book is available here: https://ia803005.us.archive.org/8/items/Maydandopomoga.indd/Maydandopomoga.indd.pdf). The project was designed to reveal the aid chain to those who suffered at the Maidan. These include different categories of respondents: doctors from mobile teams; doctors from the field and from underground hospitals; leaders and members of different volunteering organizations that were engaged in helping the injured in various situations, from the supply of medicines to emergency transportation; representatives of the international community who helped Maidan participants; and so on. Here a combined snowball sampling with the elements of purposeful selection of information-rich cases was applied, as is common in studies of hard-to-reach, hidden, or vulnerable communities (Ellard-Gray, Jeffrey, Choubak, Crann, 2015, p. 3).

Interviews were conducted according to the methodological principle of reducing the level of symbolic violence toward respondents (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 20). We recommended that interviewers allow respondents to tell their stories and build the conversation themselves. The fewer questions asked, we reasoned, the less the interviewer would determine what the respondent talked about. For more information about the methodological peculiarities of these research projects, see Prokhorova (2017c).

The interviews connected to the E+ Initiative were selected from the whole database for this paper by keyword search. The search keywords were variations of the organization's name and the names of its initiators. Finally, all the information about the secrecy of the E+ Initiative was extracted from the transcripts and analyzed. The whole database consists of 379 interviews, however, only 10 of them were selected for the purpose of this article/ These were the interviews with the E+ Initiative members, doctors, who cooperate with them, and their colleagues from the underground hospitals.

Results

In order to answer the central question of this article—what was the role of secrecy in Evacuation+ Initiative—we should understand what kind of organization it was and how secrecy and visibility manifested within it.

E+ Initiative developed spontaneously in response to the escalation of Maidan events. After January 19, 2014, when protesters and the military confronted one another, the abduction, followed by disappearance or imprisonment, of wounded Maidan participants became commonplace. In one example, on January 21, police abducted Yuri Verbytskyi from the hospital and tortured him to death (Chebeliuk, 2022). In order to prevent such cases, a group of activists created Evacuation+ with the goal of transporting sick and wounded Maidan residents to safe locations outside the Maidan for shelter and medical care.

At first, such safe places were the apartments of those willing to host Maidan residents. However, according to one of the activists, this idea was quickly rejected, as organizing the community to provide medical care to the injured was easier. It was better to look for premises where many of the wounded could be brought at once (*140*[1]). At that point, an activist with contacts among various religious groups proposed sheltering the wounded in churches and monasteries (*371*). Having contacts with colleagues, public activists, and representatives of specific communities is characteristic of Maidan volunteer organization founders (Prokhorova, 2017a).

Five activists and Maidan members formed a group that developed E+. Since E+, like other grassroots Maidan initiatives, was a horizontal organization, the leading activists' roles had mainly to do with coordination rather than leadership. Four of those people became coordinators of subdivisions of the organization.

The E+ structure was clear: the organization was divided into subdivisions according to functional specialization, which was also typical for other Maidan organizations (Prokhorova, 2017a):

> *We were helped by the fact that we had specialization from the very beginning . . . Divisions were formed so that they began to perform their specific work very quickly (140).*

The members of the first such unit were drivers. Their task was to stay directly on the Maidan and either look for potential “clients” of the organization or remain on call, ready to provide help for those who needed it. There were 5–7 drivers (*140*). Volunteers whose role was accompanying the victims stayed together with the drivers. The latter were admitted to the organization according to two criteria: they had to know their way around, and their license plates couldn't be in the police database, which the police had collected in the first two months of the Maidan events. E+ needed drivers who would attract as little attention as possible (*371*).

The second division included call center workers coordinating between Maidan doctors seeking transportation for the injured, drivers, and contacts in underground hospitals. Respondents noted that the call center started with a few people with only ten mobile phones at their disposal. Later, the number grew to 15–18 volunteers (*140*). At first, the call center was located in an activist's office. Later, activists leveraged their contacts to find premises in several offices with convenient locations and 24-hour access (*371*).

A separate category of E+ volunteers were doctors, nurses, and paramedics. Doctors visited patients and prescribed treatment, while nurses and paramedics filled the prescriptions. When the number of wounded and the severity of their injuries increased, more doctors were needed for longer periods. If necessary, patients were brought to hospitals for additional examination.

The organization also had an administrative division:

> *There were about five people who worked in the office. This included administrative work and some accounting . . . There were IT specialists and so on (140).*

It is worth noting that there were no strangers among the E+ Initiative participants. Only friends or acquaintances—people who could be trusted—joined the volunteers:

> *Acquaintances to trust each other. Alternatively, if someone brings someone, he vouches for him . . . They summoned as many as possible from such people who can be trusted (371);*
>
> *We certainly needed a recommendation; when someone new was coming, we always asked who brought them; and we strictly adhere to this, because we needed trust (285).*

The medical coordinator stated that the “recruiting” of doctors to the team also took place only thanks to her social networks:

> *I called all my friends . . . All of them got together, it was interesting to see because it was my [student] group, among them were two of my children’s godmothers . . . I called, and everyone came (285).*

The E+ Initiative cooperated with several underground hospitals. The leading hospitals were located on the grounds of three churches: the St. Catherine's Church (German Evangelical), the monastery of the Friars Minor Capuchins (Roman Catholic Church), the monastery of St. Basil the Great (Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church).

Similarly to other Maidan volunteering organizations, E+ has both features of a grassroots self-organized initiative, such as spontaneous development, horizontality, social network, and flexibility; and characteristics of bureaucratic organizations: clear structure, precise positions, coordinators of departments. However, unlike other corresponding initiatives, E+ had a unique and essential feature—secrecy.

Secrecy in E+

The activities of E+ were carefully hidden from the authorities and from society both outside and within the Maidan. Those who knew about the organization’s existence were Maidan doctors and church and monastery workers involved in the operation of underground hospitals. At the same time, even they did not know details of the organization's functioning:

> *But it was really very secretive. No one knew about it . . . there was no information about it anywhere. A few people knew this. It was very secret (315).*

Details were also hidden from the patients. For example, the monastery of the Friars Minor Capuchins is far from the center of Kyiv, and patients brought to this monastery (as a rule, not Kyiv citizens) did not even know where they were. Furthermore, when the patients were ready to leave, they were taken from the monastery to the Maidan by car (*315*) just as they were brought. So, even if they wanted to, they would not have been able to reveal the hospital's location.

With St. Catherine's Church, such secrecy could not be achieved due to its location in the thick of things on Lutheranska Street, which runs perpendicular to Bankova Street, where the Presidential Administration is located. Moreover, active Maidan participants knew the church as a place where they could warm up and drink tea. Furthermore, since the police and the military always guarded the Presidential Administration, and they were located directly next to the Church, they were also coming there to warm up and drink tea:

> *Our hospital was on the second floor, and these guys came to the first floor and were given tea there, but they did not touch ours (285).*

However, the hospital’s existence in Saint Catherine's Church was kept secret.

Monks and ministers tried not to spread information about underground hospitals, either among colleagues not involved in helping the wounded or among the congregation. Still, the information risked getting out: someone might guess or hear rumors (*391, 379*).

Perhaps surprisingly, E+ representatives did not see the whole picture; members of the organization did not know the details of others’ work:

> *To prevent information leaks, we separated as much as possible (382).*

The organization's volunteers knew as much as was necessary to perform their duties; they did not know and did not want to know more. There was always the possibility of arrest and interrogation, in which case it is always better to know less:

> *I knew there were five or six more hospitals in the territory of Kyiv, but I did not even know where. They told me: 'If Berkut [a police unit] catches you, you do not know anything' (325);*
> *I did not know many of those involved in the Initiative [E]+ . . . We were so secretive that we were not told who was bringing the sick to us (325);*
> *I did not remember the names. Because at the moment, if something suddenly happened, this is a good protective mechanism so that these people are not found (391).*

Furthermore, many members of the organization could not identify the others. Some knew each other, for example the five founders, or the call center workers who worked in the same room. But volunteers who did not cross paths or only communicated by phone did not know each other:

> *When it was all over, we decided to get together and look each other in the eye. It was fascinating when I looked at the dispatcher girls, and they looked at me. They imagined me in one way, and I imagined them in another. [During this time] we were almost relatives, but we never saw each other (369).*

In sum, E+ organization members deliberately kept their activities invisible to outsiders. The organization mostly managed to keep its locations (both the office and the underground hospitals) secret, not to publicize the identities of the organization's leaders and members, and not to spread information about the organization's activities. We can observe a few manifestations of E+ secrecy.

The first concern **technology**. Many articles detail the role of modern technologies in visibility and invisibility processes in contemporary discourse (Albu, 2022; Shaikh & Vaast, 2016; Birchall, 2021; etc). At the same time, Maidan is often called a revolution in social networks. After all, the protests started with a post on Facebook, and throughout all the events, the coordination of most organizations took place on social networks. People coordinated actions, published information about the needs of the Maidan, collected money and reported on expenses, warned about dangers, etc. The E+ Initiative also had a closed Facebook group, but the respondents hardly mention it. However, every respondent says that coordination took place by telephone, and scenarios of possible events were also developed based on telephone communication.

> *We bought telephones, separate ones that we used for communications (311);*
> *We had an emergency phone; if they would start to [arrest] me, I just would dial this number, press the [button], throw the phone somewhere so that it could be heard what is going on (369).*

Maidan doctors communicated with the wounded using analog media: printed announcements on A4 paper, badges, and business cards (*140, 311, 315*), which helped E+ ensure greater secrecy.

E+ volunteers assumed that their phones could be tapped.

> *You know that they listen to everything . . . I am aware of it: I know what to say on the phone and what not to say, I know how to talk about some things (391).*

For this reason, E+ Initiative members contrived special **language and codes** for use in telephone communication. For example, it was agreed not to use words related to the Maidan, such as *Maidan*, *maidaner*, or *meeting* (140). Phone conversations did not discuss underground *hospitals*, *monasteries*, *victims*, or *the wounded*. A code developed: St. Catherine's Church was called *Katerina*, and the Friars Minor Capuchins monastery became *cappuccino*. It was decided to call the victims *guests* or *pizzas*. In the beginning, such ciphers led to misunderstandings and comical situations. A doctor who worked in late January in a field hospital on Hrushevskyi Street (where active fighting was going on at that time) recalls:

> *There was a case: (name) calls and says: 'Good evening, I have two pizzas here for you.' And at this moment, I am sewing up the patient, everything explodes* [sounds of protesters and the military confrontation], *and I do not understand anything. He tries to explain something to me, I start yelling at him that I did not order any pizza! (285)*

The code words eventually wound up firmly embedded in the volunteers' language. A nun who worked as a nurse at the Friars Minor Capuchin monastery consistently called the wounded "guests," even in the interview more than a year later (391).

According to respondents, Maidaners treated in underground hospitals might use pseudonyms when communicating with doctors, nurses, and monks, who did not attempt to discover their real names. A nurse and nun from the Friars Minor Capuchin monastery described her dialogue with patients as follows:

> *We did not ask for surnames then, people were afraid . . . There was no point in asking, because if people did say surnames, they were fictitious (285);*
>
> *How should I call you? I am not asking for your name, just what I should call you (391).*

Another manifestation of secrecy within E+ was the effort by volunteers to **avoid repeated routines**. For example, the team exchanged phones with one another to avoid calling the same contacts from the same numbers and thus prevent regular contacts from being tracked. The numbers of critical contacts were not saved and had to be memorized:

> *I can call it [the connection] a cerebral connection. You had to remember the endings of all numbers that called and who called from them (391).*

Similarly, drivers changed cars and routes to avoid drawing the attention of law enforcement:

> *I know that at three or four points they changed cars, drove different roads around Kyiv so that even the person sitting in the car did not quite remember (391).*

E+ Initiative members planned how to protect themselves and patients if the organization became exposed. To develop plans, the activists communicated with an employee of the Security Service of Ukraine (a former employee of the State Security Committee of the USSR) and with a foreign "security specialist in military and humanitarian conflicts." In response to these conversations, activists developed different behavior models under different conditions. For example, several respondents describe the following **cover-up scenario** should the police start questioning drivers or volunteers:

One of our ideas was that we are like foreigners, speaking English, in more expensive clothes. We have nothing to do with it, and we are going to a hotel. We tried to have currency in our wallets to print documents so that if someone were to catch us, so to speak, we could immediately 'switch to foreigner mode'. We went wearing shirts quite often (311);

For example, I walked around the Maidan in a suit. Yes, just in case. If I am stopped, I go to the hotel to see an Austrian, as I am consulting him (140).

Activists were also preparing for large-scale sweeps of the Maidan, the disconnection of telephone service, and other possible escalations of events:

Later, they searched for various locations in the center where it would be possible to hide in Kyiv—entrances, houses, and so on (311);

He [the security expert] was setting us up for different scenarios. He told us which lanes we could run away; talked about, for example, how to 'lie low' and not call anyone for two days if such a scenario occurs (140);

We bought green lasers that shined very far away—this is so that if communication is blocked, if it will not be possible to communicate, then you can shine it into the sky, and it will be visible for half of Kyiv. We even thought about the code signs we would create with them (311).

We even had a printed-out contact list of everyone, all our contacts that we had to have with us. And if everything were too bad, then we would have to destroy it (314).

As a result of its secrecy, E+ remained unknown to ordinary Maidan participants who, as a result, were afraid to rely on their help.

We wanted to help them, but they did not know us. It was not clear who, it was not clear from where (314).

Ukrainian society has always been quite traditional and religious. For many years, the Church has been the only institution whose ratio of trust to distrust was always more than 1. Moreover, the level of trust to the Church was higher than to any other institution for many years ('Ukrainian Trust in Social Institutions', 2012; 'Trust in social institutions and groups', 2015; 'Trust in social institutions and groups', 2016; etc). E+, in a certain sense, borrowed institutional legitimacy from the Church, helping it surmount mistrust. Connections to a church helped volunteers establish trusting relations with the wounded.

The mistrust was terrible, and people were afraid just to go beyond the perimeter of the Maidan simply, but when they heard that it was a monastery or a church, they immediately agreed to go (285).

Visibility in E+

While there are a lot of manifestations of secrecy in E+ activities, we can also observe some visibility markers, namely in its **external communication**. Activists of E+ started by printing information about themselves and their contacts and pasting them all over the field hospitals of the Maidan. In addition, through a coordinator and directly, they established communication with "Doctors of the Maidan"—one of the volunteer initiatives created to help the sick and wounded in improvised field hospitals. Soon, Maidan doctors started to call E+ directly when they had potential "clients" for them:

> *We printed such A4 sheets where [our contacts] were indicated . . . and went to all the medical services. We had 6 or 7 points where these sheets hung;*
>
> *We handed out our business cards at medical centers; they called us (140).*

E+ also employed the use of **visual recognition signs**. Identification signs were vital for drivers and volunteers interacting with the wounded because the "field" employees had to instill trust in potential "clients." Thus, the drivers and volunteers had E+ badges that officially represented the organization in the eyes of potential patients, field hospital doctors, and Maidan guards:

> *We already had such a badge, it was written "E+ Initiative," "Evacuation+" (315);*
>
> *We had a special sign. Only with it could our volunteers go, and all the doctors knew us at all medical centers (285).*

It is worth emphasizing that external communication and visual recognition signs were intended for other active participants engaged in organizing Maidan (doctors, guards, fighters), but not for average Maidaners and, obviously, not for anyone outside the Maidan.

Discussion

The balance between visibility and secrecy in an organization providing life-saving support and medical assistance requires elaborating combined strategies of "secret visibility," which includes transferring the information about the functioning of the organization to potential recipients of its services, and, at the same time, keeps in secrecy its networks in the interests of organizational security and personal safety. The questions of elaborating such strategies in different protest settings were studied in Albrecht, M., Blasco, J., Jensen, R. & Mareková, L., 2021; Jusufi, I., 2018; Thomas, M., 2016.

It was not always easy for E+ to stay hidden. As described above, it was hard to overcome distrust from potential E+ clients. Even active Maidaners did not know about the initiative and did not want to leave the territory of the Maidan with its members. It would have been easier to help people had E+ been recognizable to Maidan participants. But such visibility risked attracting the interest of security forces, thus putting volunteers and patients in danger. Apart from a few visible manifestations, secrecy dictated the group's actions.

Meanwhile, the literature on transparency and secrecy suggests that secrecy is "being widely considered illegitimate and unjustifiable" and is even "deemed an evil that needs to be eradicated" (Ringel, 2019, pp. 705, 707). Costas and Gray (2016), by contrast, insist that secrecy should not necessarily be understood as something "ethically wrong" (p. 6). But a preference for transparency is all but universal among researchers, together with the idea that transparency can "improve" organizations (Ringel, 2019, p. 706). However, using the example of Evacuation + Initiative, we can see how an active Maidan agent used secrecy to establish stable and efficient practices and interactions with underground hospitals, which were themselves created with the help of E+ volunteers. The interviews do not reveal an exact number of Maidan residents transported by the organization, though approximately three hundred people are said to have been transported in a single month (*285*).

Particularly if it operates in a difficult socioeconomic context or under conditions of repression, transparency may not always be the best choice for an organization. In those cases, secrecy might be preferable to visibility. In a stable, open society, secrecy might reduce an organization’s effectiveness. But amid resistance to autocracy, secrecy furnishes extra opportunities for efficiency and security, and may pave an organization's only way forward.

Secrecy kept E+ volunteers and patients safe. It protected partners at churches and monasteries who took significant risks permitting and helping coordinate underground hospitals on their property. E+ sought to protect all participants from the authorities and their security forces, and secrecy was their first line of defense.

Costas and Gray (2014) drew attention to the fact that secrecy in an organization can exist not only for the sake of keeping particular information secret (the informational dimension of secrecy), but also for its symbolic value to society, its social dimension (p. 1429). Signs of both dimensions of secrecy can be discerned in the activities of E+. For example, information about the location of underground hospitals was not disseminated because doing so could harm the organization’s functioning (information dimension). The social function of secrecy manifested, for example, in forming the mutual identity of the members of the organization (social dimension). They may not have seen each other during the activities; still, they formed a clear sense of interconnection. At the same time, it seems that neither informational nor social dimensions of secrecy are primary in our case. After all, secrecy on the Maidan is not aimed at preserving the organization's reputation or capital. Nor is it about secrecy as social control, where managers know more than subordinates and insiders know more than outsiders (Costas & Gray, 2014, p. 1436).

Secrecy was necessary for the E+ Initiative and underground hospitals to ensure the safety and survival of wounded and sick Maidan activists. Further research is required to claim that secrecy of this type may be considered a separate “safety dimension.” However, this “safety” is probably the key feature of secret organizations that exist in conditions of autocratic repression. The primary role of secrecy in the development of E+ as an active Maidan volunteering organization was to provide safety.

Such secrecy is inextricable from its social context. As soon as the context changed, there was no longer a need for E+ to stay secret. Immediately after the escape of President Yanukovych, E+, which became known as “Safe Transportation,” together with several other Maidan initiatives, established communication with the foreign governments of Poland, the Czech Republic, Germany, France, and others. As a result, these countries were prepared to take seriously injured Maidan activists abroad for care. By this time, the need for secrecy had passed, and the organization needed to be visible in order to establish trust with foreign governments. In days, the organization went from secrecy to visibility.

Conclusion

Summing up our inquiry, we can state several peculiarities regarding the secrecy/visibility aspects of E+ as a Maidan volunteer organization.

First, to act effectively, there was a need for E+ to find a balance between visibility and secrecy. Meanwhile, secrecy prevails over visibility in the functioning of E+ all it was acting in the conditions of antiauthoritarian resistance.

Second, conducting helping activities in armed confrontation, the operation of E+ is subordinated to preserving the safety and survival of protesting activists. This feature of E+ suggests that neither the informational nor social dimension of secrecy is critical for it, but what we have called the “safety dimension.”

Finally, E+, similarly to many other horizontal network formations, is adaptive and flexible, which provides a tremendous resource for quick and efficient development of secret coding, change of secrecy strategy, and even for a rapid turn from secrecy to visibility when the confrontation is over.

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