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**Transforming Dialogue into Activism:
The Evolution of a Feminist Organisation in Prague**

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Bachelor's thesis

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Declaration

I hereby declare that I have prepared the submitted Bachelor's thesis myself and only used the cited sources and literature. Additionally, I declare that I have not been awarded any other degree or diploma for this thesis or its substantial part.

Prague, 28th June 2024

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Abstract

This thesis examines the evolution of an emerging feminist organisation in Prague committed to education, advocacy, community building and activism . To date, the scholarly literature on contemporary feminist movements discusses feminist issues, values, practices, and outcomes predominantly in the international scope of feminism. There is a lack of qualitative research that examines contemporary feminist organisations in the Czech Republic. This is why the thesis presents a Prague based case study that focuses on the views and concerns of diverse activists, members, and organisers of key practices and activities. Through combining ethnographic observation, netnography, and semi-structured interviews with a review of relevant literature on non-governmental organisations, and contemporary feminist movements, the analysis traces the multifaceted development of this organisation, identifying factors that contribute to its success or potential failure. The thesis also focuses on the differences of the perceptions and experiences of members and leaders. Lastly, I examine the organisation's values and practices and the way they align with broader feminist discourses and contribute to creating a feminist and queer community in Prague.

Key words:

activism, feminism, contemporary feminist values, non-profit organisation, ethnography

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INTRODUCTION

I would like to begin with a vignette from the beginning of my fieldwork that depicts my first experience with the non-governmental organisation that I call “Fusion” (pseudonym), a self-defined Prague-based intersectional feminist and queer non-profit organisation with a focus on education, advocacy, and community building which is at the centre of this thesis. The choice of this organisation for my participant observation and the basis of this thesis was influenced by my education, during which I grew significant interest in activism, queer theory, and non-governmental organisations.

On Tuesday, 3rd October 2023 I attended my first [Fusion] event - an education event held at the community centre in the old town. My friends introduced me to the organisation, saying that it might be a nice area for fieldwork for my Bachelor's thesis. Such educational events were organised regularly every two weeks. I entered through a massive wooden door into a hall, at the end of which was a stone staircase waiting for me. This was curious since the organisation claimed to be inclusive but evidently excluded some disabled people from attending because of the stairs. When I entered the room the size of a small classroom I was warmly welcomed, offered a seat and tea. The room had a library, where books were sorted into sections according to categories such as lesbian, gay, trans, intersex, bisexual, etc. Next to the library there were a bunch of chairs and a white canvas onto which the presentation was projected. Soon after I took a seat, the program started with an introduction – we were all supposed to introduce ourselves with a name, pronouns, a hobby, and what we were doing in Prague – if we were studying or working. This week's topic was “Homocolonialism,” which was itself quite interesting, since it explored how Western LGBTQ+ movements and ideologies can sometimes impose their perspectives and norms on non-Western cultures. The presenter, who was the founder of the organisation, introduced Fusion by explaining its mission to promote intersectional feminist and queer rights through education, advocacy, and community-building initiatives. They also detailed upcoming events, inviting participants to educational sessions on diverse topics, community events such as board games sessions, upcoming protests and open mic events. They also encouraged the participants to get involved in the running of the organisation

through various volunteer roles. They also mentioned taking interns for various positions, such as – [Fusion] political intern, media intern, and volunteers for all of the branches of the NGO – political, PR, events, education, and “all hands” – for all sorts of tasks. After the presentation, I talked to Grace, a media coordinator, about volunteering or interning, and we exchanged numbers, saying that they would text me. A couple of days later, Grace texted me and forwarded my number to Alex, the CEO of the organisation, saying I should contact them about my internship and ethnography in the organisation. (fieldnote, 3rd October 2023)

In this fieldnote, one of the most defining events of Fusion is depicted, as it demonstrates the essence of Fusion’s identity and operations. It exhibits the organisation’s inclusive community-building efforts, its focus on education and representation, and its proactive engagement in creating opportunities for involvement. Each element of this event, from the welcoming atmosphere and structured introductions to the insightful discussion on “Homocolonialism” and the detailed presentation of Fusion’s mission and activities, reflects Fusion’s broader goals and values.

Some of the events Fusion hosts include education sessions, workshops, fundraisers, open mic events, and various political events. Fusion also publishes a feminist magazine and a podcast. The team of the organisation consists of women, non-binary, and queer people who aim to make a change through education and community building, raising awareness about feminist, queer, and political issues such as same-sex marriage, trans rights, women’s rights, environmental protection, and anti-war protests. Started as a small university movement at the beginning of 2022, in October 2023 Fusion got officially registered as an NGO. Although Fusion is a Czech NGO, it was founded by foreign students studying in Prague and all events and communication are held in English. As of June 2024, the organisation has over 200 members on their Discord channel and more than 2 500 followers on Instagram, which are their primary communication media. The organisation also uses TikTok, WhatsApp, and Facebook. Fusion runs their own website, which is however not frequently updated, hence lacking information about current events and therefore not very efficient in terms of expanding to a broader audience.

Examining the evolution and organisation of Fusion presents a unique and compelling area of research for several reasons. First, Fusion is a growing organisation in Prague dedicated to intersectional feminist and queer advocacy. Its research can provide a fresh perspective on how such organisations emerge and develop, specifically in the Czech Republic. Understanding its journey from a small university movement to an officially registered NGO offers valuable insights into the challenges and successes faced by new feminist initiatives 20 years after the country entered the European Union. Second, the organisation's focus on education, community building, and advocacy within an English-speaking audience adds another layer of complexity as it seeks to navigate cultural diversity. Observing Fusion's activities, such as educational sessions, workshops, and political events in practice, also allows for uncovering some of the ways in which grassroots organisations attempt to foster inclusive spaces and promote feminist and queer values. Importantly, as the absence of a lift at the meeting signalled, this study can also reveal potential inconsistencies and areas for improvement within the organisation, for example, by comparing the participants' experiences and perceptions with the organisers' intentions. And third, analysing how Fusion's values and practices align with broader feminist discourse contributes to a deeper understanding of contemporary feminist movements and their impact on local communities, particularly in a region with limited qualitative research on feminist organisations.

This thesis is structured into three main chapters, each addressing different aspects of the study. Chapter 1 reviews existing literature on non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and non-profit organisations (NPOs), focusing on their structures, operations, funding, and the transition from grassroots movements to formal NGOs. It also explores feminism and feminist organisations, detailing their historical evolution and role in gender equality and social justice, with a particular focus on the Czech Republic. Chapter 2 outlines the research methodology, detailing the use of participant observation, netnography, and semi-structured interviews to study Fusion. Chapter 3 presents a detailed analysis of Fusion's evolution, organisational structure, and impact. It examines Fusion's journey from a grassroots movement to a registered NGO, the alignment and tensions between participant perceptions and organiser intentions, and how Fusion's values align with broader feminist discourses. The chapter

highlights Fusion's contributions to creating an inclusive feminist and queer community in Prague and its impact on local and global feminist movements.

CHAPTER 1: NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATION AND FEMINISM IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC: A LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1. The evolution and impact of non-governmental organisations

Malena (1995) delineates non-governmental organisations (hereafter NGOs) as “organisations that pursue activities to relieve suffering, promote the interests of the poor, protect the environment, provide basic social services, or undertake community development” (p. 13). On the other hand, O’Hagan and Purdy (1993) define non-profit organisations (hereafter NPOs) as institutions “whose profits, or more precisely net earnings, are not legally distributable to controlling individuals” (p. 155). NGOs and NPOs are differentiated in their underlying structures and operational focuses. While NGOs exist in a diversity of organisational models, including both non-profit and for-profit entities, NPOs are explicitly defined as entities refraining from profit distribution to individuals or shareholders. NGOs operate across various scales, addressing multifaceted issues such as human rights and environmental conservation, and can derive funding from a range of sources, including government grants and commercial activities. In contrast, NPOs typically concentrate on local or regional needs, relying heavily on donations and grants for financial support. Both entities face strict regulatory frameworks, but NPOs, with their clear characteristics of non-profitability, are subject to specific government oversight and regulations regarding their exemption from paying taxes, such as reports on their financial situation. The organisation studied in this thesis falls under both the category of NGOs and NPOs, therefore these terms will be used interchangeably throughout this dissertation. In this section, I provide an overview of the evolution and impact of NGOs, with a focus on their structures, operational focuses, and funding sources. The section 1.1.1. discusses the transformation of grassroots movements into formally registered NGOs. It explores the common patterns observed during this transition, such as changes in organisational structures, the introduction of hierarchical frameworks, and the shift from volunteer-based operations to professionalised entities. Section 1.1.2. delves into the role of NGOs as agents of socio-political change. It highlights how NGOs influence policymaking, advocate for marginalised communities, and contribute to social justice.

1.1.1. From grassroots to formal NGOs: patterns in the NGO development

Since one of the themes explored in this thesis is the multifaceted evolution of Fusion into a formal and registered NGO in the Czech Republic, it is vital to look into the relevant literature on the transformation of grassroots organisations into formal organisations, the patterns observed, and the challenges noted by various authors.

Grassroots movements are defined as citizen-initiated efforts that arise at the local level, driven by the passions, concerns, and efforts of community members (Smith et al., 2014). By formal NGOs, I delineate the organisations that have transformed from grassroots movements into officially registered NGOs. O'Hagan and Purdy (1993) state for the early 1990s Ireland that as grassroots movements evolve into officially registered organisations, they tend to experience changes in their organisational structures and funding. Grassroots tend to rely mostly on volunteers, informal organisational structures, and funding derived from their community. The expansion of grassroots often goes hand in hand with their evolution into officially registered organisations; during this shift, most organisations take on more formal and hierarchical organisational structures, which include singular decision makers and/or a board of directors. This adjustment can increase operational efficiency but may also introduce new challenges related to maintaining the organisation's original mission and values (O'Hagan & Purdy, 1993). Furthermore, the evolution of grassroots movements into formal NGOs often involves a move from community-based funding towards a mix of commercial, government, and community-based or private funding (O'Hagan & Purdy, 1993; Vaceková, 2016). For example, in O'Hagan and Purdy (1993), the Wexford Festival Opera, a music festival in Ireland, which first started as a grassroots movement and later developed into a formal NGO, acquires most of its income from box-office receipts, sponsorships, state grants, as well as private donations. A diversity of income sources is vital for organisational sustainability, however, to appeal to donors, NGOs must adopt complex funding-gathering strategies, maintain financial stability and appear as financially stable despite unpredictable future incomes (O'Hagan & Purdy, 1993). Vaceková (2016) in her habilitation thesis on the non-profit sector, its evolution, roles and challenges in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, elaborates on this by recommending NGOs to adopt strategies from the business sector, such as strategic planning, marketing, and performance measurement. However, adopting such

strategies may result in a shift from the original mission of the NGO towards a focus on the financial prosperity of the NGO. Similar to O'Hagan and Purdy (1993), Vaceková (2016) explains that the transformation from grassroots into formal NGOs involves adopting more formal and hierarchical organisational structures, which can lead to both better operational effectiveness and new challenges. Furthermore, she emphasises the important role of professionalisation of NGOs, meaning hiring paid staff with specialised skills and expertise, which can contribute well to the organisation's goals and missions. Professionalisation helps NGOs operate more effectively, secure funding, and manage resources more efficiently. On the other hand, it can also lead to tensions between paid staff and volunteers, as well as a potential shift of the organisation's values and mission from its grassroots origins (Vaceková, 2016). According to O'Hagan and Purdy (1993), non-profit organisations often arise in response to market failures, particularly in areas where for-profit models cannot effectively provide public goods or services due to Weisbrod's theory proposes that non-profits accommodate to excess demand for public goods inadequately supplied by the government (O'Hagan and Purdy, 1993). This theme is further examined in section 1.1.2. of this thesis. Hansmann (1980) expands on this by arguing that non-profits are better suited to areas where profit motives would conflict with consumer welfare, such as the arts and social services. As non-profits formalise, they face several interconnected challenges, including maintaining their mission, managing increased administrative demands, and securing sustainable funding. Moreover, organisations often become overly dependent on state funding, which can complicate financial planning and influence the organisation's mission, values and strategic direction. Additionally, the shift to a more formal structure may lead to internal conflicts and a potential distancing from the original grassroots vision, values, and mission (O'Hagan & Purdy, 1993).

According to Jagiełło-Rusiłowski (2022), successful NGOs are characterised by innovative leadership, transparency, and strategic engagement with policymakers. Collaborative efforts among NGOs, particularly those sharing common visions for change, increase their impact and promote the adoption of beneficial policies for societal well-being (Jagiełło-Rusiłowski, 2022). Furthermore, the relations in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) between NGOs and the government in social welfare provision, including public assistance programs, healthcare services, education, community development and others, are

characterised by several strengths and weaknesses. As Cox (2020) notes, in the mid-2000s a strong foundation by NPOs for delivering social welfare services has been established in post-socialist Central Europe. Moreover, the Visegrád countries, including the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia, have implemented supportive legal and institutional frameworks to assist NPOs in their operations, though with certain constraints. These frameworks have provided opportunities for funding and resource allocation, as well as promoted an encouraging environment for NPOs in fulfilling their goals in social welfare provision. Cox (2020) claims that this has led to a gradual positive shift towards a more meaningful partnership between government and NGOs, offering valuable insights from both parties. Conversely, among these strengths, significant weaknesses persist within the nonprofit organisation-government dynamic in CEE, such as the restricted autonomy of NPOs, limiting their ability to independently follow objectives and adapt to changing societal needs. Additionally, NPOs are limited by the financial constraints imposed by governments that view NPOs as providers of cost-effective welfare services, which undermines NPOs' efficiency and long-term sustainability within the social welfare provision landscape. Moreover, the inconsistent governmental attitudes towards the role of NPOs in social welfare provision create uncertainty, restrict strategic planning and sustainable growth of organisations. The growing competition from private sector entities and church organisations challenges the relevance and resilience of NPOs within the social welfare landscape (Cox, 2020).

1.1.2. NGOs as changemakers of socio-political landscapes

Various scholars claim that NGOs have emerged as vital players in the landscape of development, often filling the void left by perceived shortcomings of the state (Wegner, 1993; Williams, 1990; Zaidi, 1999). According to S. Akbar Zaidi (1999), the shift towards reliance on NGOs originates from a prevailing state failure in traditional development efforts, encouraging societies to turn towards alternative actors for solutions. The reliance on NGOs reflects a broader trend of NGOs being viewed not solely as service providers but as agents of change capable of democratising societies and acting as “counterweight[s] to state power” (Zaidi, 1999, p. 262). One of the key arguments supporting the centrality of NGOs in development is their perceived cost-effectiveness, targeted interventions, and community-oriented service delivery (Charlton & May, 1995). Unlike state institutions

burdened by bureaucracy and inefficiency, NGOs are often praised for their agility and responsiveness to local needs. However, NGOs are moderated by their funding, which usually only leads to short-term, project-specific solutions, and may restrain their ability to address root causes and sustain long-term impact. Charlton and May (1995) state that NGOs are often criticised for being vulnerable to becoming means for donor agendas, which diminishes their autonomy and participation in various often not donor-attractive projects. Despite their notable successful attempts, many NGOs are unable to address their systemic or organisational issues and make changes in their administration, which raises doubts about their efficiency as the main actors in providing solutions to developmental challenges (Charlton & May, 1995).

One of the examples of successful NGOs as a changemaker of the state is depicted by Jagiełło-Rusiłowski (2022), who provides theory and examples on the effective role of NGOs in policy change and sustainable development by using comprehensive organisational strategies and strategic partnerships. Jagiełło-Rusiłowski (2022) provides the example of Cántaro Azul, an NGO in Mexico, and its partner NGO from the USA, Ashoka Fellow, that together influenced both local and national government policies, such as water and sanitation regulations in Mexico. Cántaro Azul, with its focus on addressing water-related challenges in rural Mexican communities, stands out for its integration of water purification technologies with community education initiatives and its partnerships with public institutions. The organisation implements various initiatives to promote access to potable water, hygiene education, and environmental awareness, working in collaboration with local institutions and public policy actors to drive positive change in water and sanitation practices. Through this example Jagiełło-Rusiłowski (2022) depicts how NGOs can go beyond mere service provision and initiate systemic change.

However, Suleiman (2013) in her study on NGOs as markers of societal development, writes that although there is a trend of civil society being represented by non-governmental organisations, NGOs are not likely to possess the capacity to advance development or cultivate democracy on their own. Supporters of Suleiman's view advocate for a renewed emphasis on the role of the state (Teegen et al., 2004, Zaidi, 1999) in spite of the prevailing perceptions of inefficiency and corruption. They state that the state institutions, unlike NGOs, are inherently accountable to citizens and possess the institutional capacity to address underdevelopment

comprehensively. While acknowledging the transformative potential of NGOs, the prevailing argument is that they are ultimately creations of donor funding and cannot substitute for state failure.

Despite the lack of academic literature on the contemporary examples of NGOs as changemakers in the context of the Czech Republic, there are examples of various advocacy organisations appealing to the Czech government for legislation change. One of the most recent examples is the advocacy NGO “Trans*parent,” which focuses on activism not only through protests and marches but also through community building, education, and broadening public awareness on issues regarding trans, non-binary, and intersex people (Trans*parent, 2023). “Trans*parent” is a partner organisation of a key Czech queer NGO “Prague Pride,” which helps them expand their outreach (Trans*parent, 2023). One of their main objectives was to reform the condition of sterilisation of trans people in order to change their legal sex, apart from aforementioned education, publicity, and community building, “Trans*parent” (2023) also created a petition for the abolishment of the dangerous practice of sterilisation of trans people. In early June of 2024, the organisation’s demands were heard by the constitutional court of the Czech Republic and the condition of sterilisation of trans people in order to be able to change their legal sex got overruled (Machaj, 2024). Although, as Machaj (2024) states “[t]he abolition of the condition of castration and surgical procedures is only [going to be] valid from 1 July 2025,” the organisation “Trans*parent” (2023) can be viewed through the lens of a successful agent of policy change.

Another example from the contemporary Czech activist landscape is “Jsme fér” (n.d.-a) and their collaboration with various organisations, one of which is also “Prague Pride,” on the advocacy for “marriage for all couples” (Jsme fér, n.d.-a) meaning the change in the Czech legislation to allow the marriage of same-sex couples. Another one of their objectives is the advocacy for adoption of children by same-sex couples. Their advocacy strategy is similar to the one of “Trans*parent” (2023) mentioned above, with collaborations in protests, marches, and creating petitions. In late February 2024, the law proposal for same-sex marriage was discussed in the Czech parliament, and “Jsme fér” write on their website:

In the 3rd reading, the Chamber of Deputies (Poslanecká sněmovna in Czech) rejected the amendment to the Marriage Act for all couples. They approved an amendment that does not allow same-sex couples to marry, but only to enter into a ‘partnership’ with most of the rights of spouses. (Jsme fér, n.d.-b)

Although, this might have been seen as progress by some, “Jsme fér” and their partner NGOs viewed this disappointingly, viewing it as a stagnation. Despite “Jsme fér’s” negative remarks on the outcome of the situation, the steps taken could be seen as a positive result of their policy changemaking power.

To summarise, while NGOs undoubtedly influence development and social change, they are not universal remedies for systemic challenges. Their effectiveness depends on their ability to adopt proper funding strategies, uphold the principles of transparency and accountability, and form strategic partnerships with state institutions and other stakeholders. Ultimately, a collaborative approach that utilises the strengths of both NGOs and the state offers the most promising way towards sustainable development and societal well-being.

1.2. Feminism and feminist organisations in the context of the Czech Republic

This section is crucial for understanding the broader context within which NGOs that define themselves as feminist operate. The study of feminism and feminist organisations within the Czech Republic offers an area for exploring the relationships between historical context, social movements, and contemporary feminist values. This chapter delineates the landscape of feminist activism and organisation in the Czech Republic, tracing its evolution from the post-socialist era to its current state. In section 1.2.1., I explore the foundational values and principles that support feminist thought and action. Section 1.2.2. discusses the roots and development of feminist NGOs in the Czech Republic, providing an in-depth review of how these organisations have formed, adapted, and structured themselves within the local socio-political environment. Lastly, in section 1.2.3., the focus shifts to the present-day feminist movements and their activities in the Czech Republic. Through these sections, this chapter aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the feminist landscape in the Czech Republic, offering insights into the historical evolution, contemporary movements, and the values that continue to shape feminist activism and organisation.

1.2.1. Feminism and contemporary feminist values

The Cambridge Dictionary (*Feminism*, 2024) defines feminism broadly as “the belief that women should be allowed the same rights, power, and opportunities as men and be treated in the same way, or the set of activities intended to achieve this state.” Mohajan (2022) claims that “at present, there are as many definitions of feminism as there are feminists depending on their own beliefs, history, and culture, but gender equality is common to all” (p. 2) Since its first wave in the late 19th century (Malinowska, 2022), feminism has evolved into a diverse and multifaceted movement, encompassing various perspectives and approaches to addressing gender-based discrimination and promoting the rights and empowerment of women. According to Mohajan (2022), feminism “consists of a number of social, cultural and political movements, theories and moral philosophies concerned with gender inequalities and equal rights for women” (p. 5).

Although feminism is a multifaceted movement, not developed linearly in all parts of the world, Malinowska (2020) offers a typology of four waves of feminism, from its origin until the contemporary situation. The First Wave of Feminism primarily focused on advocating for women’s suffrage and securing basic rights such as education, property ownership, and social agency, this was done through public gatherings, heartfelt speeches, and written advocacy, with a significant emphasis on the press as a communication medium to spread the message of equality (Malinowska, 2020). The Second Wave of Feminism was questioning traditional gender roles, women's roles in the workforce, and societal attitudes towards sexuality. Influenced by poststructuralism, deconstruction, and psychoanalysis, this wave of feminism was challenging prevailing narratives and advocating for a reevaluation of women's roles in society (Malinowska, 2020). The Third Wave of Feminism focused on intersectionality, diversity, and inclusivity, addressing issues of race, class, sexuality, and gender identity. Utilising digital media and online platforms, activists during this wave engaged in advocacy and organising efforts, leveraging technology to amplify their voices and mobilise communities for social change (Malinowska, 2020). Lastly, the Fourth Wave of Feminism emphasises technology, media representation, and achieving gender equality. Key aspects of this wave include advocating for media democracy, utilising the internet and other

mediums for activism, challenging gender stereotypes, and promoting inclusivity in society. (Malinowska, 2020)

As for contemporary feminist values, there is a gap in the literature on the topic. Moreover, defining universal feminist values that apply to all feminists would be essentialist and exclusionary. Still, there are several prevailing values found in literature such as efforts for equality, the IWDA (2023) states that “feminism is about all genders having equal rights and opportunities,” this is further emphasised by Malinowska (2020) and Mohajan (2022). According to IWDA (2023), feminism is about valuing the varied experiences, identities, knowledge, and strengths of women, empowering all women to recognise their rights, and creating equal opportunities in life for diverse women as men already have. Another dominant contemporary feminist value is intersectionality, which is defined by IWDA (2023) as an approach “acknowledging the interplay between gender and other forms of discrimination, like race, age, class, socioeconomic status, physical or mental ability, gender or sexual identity, religion, or ethnicity.” Other principles include advocacy for social justice, challenging the patriarchy, and many others.

As previously stated, feminism is a multifaceted movement, described by Mohajan (2022) as “a diverse, rival and often opposing collection of social theories, political movements, and moral philosophies.” Jaggar (1983) and Mohajan (2022) pronounce a typology of feminist perspectives consisting of liberal, Marxist, socialist, radical, cultural, black, postmodern, and ecofeminism. Liberal feminism focuses on achieving gender equality through legal and political reforms. It advocates for equal access to civil rights, education, and employment, challenging societal ideas of women’s inferiority and aiming for equal opportunities across genders (Mohajan, 2022; Giddens & Birdsall, 2001). Marxist and socialist feminisms both explore women’s oppression through the lens of class struggle and economic exploitation. They argue that gender inequality is connected to capitalist systems and patriarchal structures, and advocate for a radical transformation of these systems to achieve gender equality and economic justice (Armstrong, 2020; Brenner & Holmstrom, 2012; Engels, 2004; Mohajan, 2022). Radical feminism views patriarchy and sexism as fundamental forces behind women’s oppression. By advocating for social and political changes, radical feminism aims to dismantle patriarchal structures and challenge societal norms that fuel

gender inequalities (Jensen, 2021; Mohajan, 2022; Vukoičić, 2017). Cultural feminism celebrates traditionally feminine qualities and aims to promote feminine qualities and values such as empathy and care within society (Mohajan, 2022; Wolff, 2007). Black feminism emerged to address the specific forms of oppression faced by women of colour. Through intersectional analysis, black feminism highlights the consequences of racism, sexism, and other discrimination (Crenshaw, 1989; Mohajan, 2022; Nash, 2019). Postmodern feminism criticises the conventional notions of gender, sexuality, and identity. It emphasises the fluidity and social construction of gender, rejecting binary categorizations and advocating for a nuanced understanding of gender identities (Mohajan, 2022; Parpart, 1993). Ecofeminism connects the subordinate position of women in society to the exploitation of nature, arguing that patriarchal ideologies encourage both forms of oppression. It advocates for sustainable practices and non-discriminatory structures that empower women and protect the environment (King, 1995; Miles, 2018; Mohajan, 2022).

1.2.2. The emergence of feminist NGOs and feminism in the Czech Republic

The Velvet Revolution in 1989 indicated a significant shift in the Czech Republic, transitioning from a communist regime to a democratic society. According to Bušková and Pleines (2006), signs of burgeoning civil society were evident even before this pivotal event, particularly through the environmentalist movement. Fagan (2005) also highlights this, noting that environmental activists played a crucial role in the eventual downfall of the communist elite. However, as Fagan (2005) claims, it was after the Velvet Revolution that the landscape truly transformed, NGOs started forming, and civic engagement and activism were encouraged in the Czech Republic, which was a result of the newfound political freedom and economic opportunities. The environmental NGOs transformed into more structured and professional organisations, which was motivated by Western influences, including training and support (Fagan, 2005). Bušková and Pleines (2006) note that the main success of the environmentalist movement was “the adoption of the law on the environment and environmental information in 1990” (p. 45).

During the State Socialist Regime, Czech women's civic organising was significantly influenced by governmental policies and semi-state entities dedicated to advancing gender equality. As Koldinskà (2007) writes, “the ‘women’s issue’ became one of the instruments of

Communist propaganda” (p. 240). Hašková (2005) describes the Czech feminist movements since the Second World War as a complex phenomenon shaped by the political, social, and economic conditions of Czech history. During the socialist era, women actively participated in a variety of civic and political endeavours, forming alliances with political parties. After the Velvet Revolution in 1989, foreign feminists and donors played a crucial role in providing support to emerging women’s groups in the region. During the State Socialist Regime, women’s civic organising focused on issues such as women’s participation in the labour market, preventing human trafficking, improving healthcare, advocating for minority women’s rights, environmental issues, and assisting the victims of domestic violence (Hašková, 2005). Furthermore, Heitlinger (1996) claims that for the 1990s, before the country entered the EU:

Western feminism lacks resonance with Czech women (and men), because most Czechs mistrust utopian and emancipatory ideologies, associate concepts such as “women’s emancipation“ and “women’s movements” with the policies of the discredited communist regime, are disinclined to engage in collective action, regard themselves as strong women rather than as victims, assign highly positive meaning to motherhood and the family, and perceive feminism to be anti-male. (p. 77)

Heitlinger (1996) states for the 1990s there was a negative correlation between Czech people and Western feminist ideologies, potentially originating from the legacy of gender equality efforts sponsored by the state during the communist era. A more recent study by Fellegi (2019) states that although, since joining the EU, the Czech Republic has implemented numerous gender equality and anti-discriminatory laws, the progress towards fundamental equality has been less than moderate. The understanding of gender roles in the Czech Republic is according to Fellegi (2019), still highly essentialist and traditional, with the differences between men and women often perceived as natural and predetermined biologically. As delineated by Fellegi (2019), with the traditional conception unchanged since at least the 1990s, men are still seen as “breadwinners” (p. 57) and women as “mothers and caretakers” (p. 57) according to surveys within the Czech society. The double burden of work and household responsibilities often leaves women with less time and energy for their careers and political life, although maintaining jobs and economic independence is becoming an increasing priority (Fellegi, 2019). Similarly to Heitlinger (1996), Fellegi (2019) claims that

this double burden originates from the socialist era, when women were expected to work while also managing household duties. Despite women being the majority of university graduates, they are underrepresented in leadership and political positions, and the gender pay gap in the Czech Republic is one of the highest in Europe at 22% (Fellegi, 2019). However, Fellegi (2019) also notes that the attitudes have been slowly improving over the past 20 years, particularly among younger generations, and young fathers who express a desire to take a more active role in childcare and household responsibilities, indicating a gradual change towards a more equal share of duties. On the other hand, as Fellegi (2019) adds, populist and conservative politicians promote a narrative of preserving traditional gender roles, have led to the construction of a “new enemy” (p. 60) in the form of feminism and “gender ideology” (p. 60), which are portrayed as foreign imports threatening Czech values.

Regarding Czech feminist NGOs, to this day, the most prominent non-governmental organisation considered to be feminist in the Czech Republic is “Český svaz žen” or Czech Women’s Union (hereafter CSZ) (*Historie - CSZ.cz*, 2020). This organisation was established during the socialist regime as the Czechoslovak Women’s Union. After the Velvet Revolution, it underwent several changes, such as modifying its mission to adapt to the new democratic context and focusing more on advocacy for women’s rights and gender equality in the context of a market economy (Bartoň, 2012). As of now, the CSZ has been an active advocate for women’s rights in the Czech Republic for over 50 years. Similarly to the environmental organisations, CSZ also transformed from a state-founded and supported organisation to a more independent NGO (Bartoň, 2012). Hašková (2005) notes that transitioning into the EU Accession Period, Czech women activists encountered several challenges and opportunities as the nation prepared for membership in the European Union. This period witnessed a formalisation and professionalisation of women’s civic groups, marked by a shift towards project-oriented and reform-driven approaches (Hašková, 2005).

According to Fagan (2005), by the end of the millennium, environmental NGOs adopted a more nuanced approach, engaging in policy networks, providing feedback on legislation, and collaborating with the government on environmental issues (Fagan, 2005). This shift signified a turn from radical activism towards a more pragmatic, policy-oriented stance. It mirrored broader changes in the political arena and the evolving expectations placed

on NGOs in the post-communist era (Fagan, 2005). Furthermore, according to Laboutková (2009), NGOs played and continue playing a crucial role in advocating for human rights, environmental conservation, social welfare, and democratic reforms. They became instrumental in bridging gaps left by the state in service delivery and policy advocacy, addressing pressing societal needs with innovative approaches. Over the years, the NGO sector in the Czech Republic has matured and diversified, adapting to changing socio-economic dynamics and emerging global challenges. (Laboutková, 2009).

Lorenz-Meyer (2013) adds to this discussion by examining feminist NGOs in the Czech Republic after 1989. She notes that the early 1990s were characterised by an increase in foreign funding, which allowed feminist organisations to organise various activities ranging from “exhibitions and workshops to publishing and roundtables in the areas of women’s health, violence, lesbianism, ecofeminism, and Roma women” (p. 411). However, after the accession of the Czech Republic to the EU, the funding landscape changed and NGOs had to adapt to the bureaucratic system and project-based funding. Lorenz-Meyer (2013) describes this as “the project era” (p. 412), where NGOs had to apply for funding by writing project proposals, which was initially negatively viewed by the activists who felt like they were doing this at the expense of “real work“ (p. 412). These challenges resulted in a significant decrease in the volume of feminist organisations in the Czech Republic, and those organisations that survived the funding challenges had to adopt more structured and strategic approaches to their work (Lorenz-Meyer, 2013). Furthermore, Lorenz-Meyer (2013) claims that there are ongoing issues with inclusivity visible within the feminist NGOs in the Czech Republic. While these feminist organisations often write about migrant women’s experiences, they tend to employ mostly higher-educated, white, Czech, younger women, while migrant women are often not participating in the running of the organisations. This highlights the broader challenge of creating an inclusive feminist movement that could address the diverse needs and experiences of all women in the Czech Republic (Lorenz-Meyer, 2013).

Cox (2020) provides insights into the present state of NGOs in the Czech Republic, particularly in the social service sector, which is marked by a heavy reliance on funding from local or regional governments. Cox (2020) notes that there has been a visible decrease in the availability of funds for these organisations, especially in comparison to previous years, which

presents significant challenges for NGOs operating within the Czech Republic. These financial constraints resulting from declining funds may negatively affect their ability to maintain service quality, expand their programs, and reach a broader demographic audience. However, according to Cox (2020), even despite their financial struggles, NGOs in the Czech Republic continue to play a crucial role in addressing societal needs and innovating service delivery methods. Nonetheless, the decline in government funding forms a barrier to NGOs' sustainability and effectiveness, highlighting the importance of alternative sources of funding, efficient use of resources, and advocacy for greater support of the NGO sector (Cox, 2020).

According to Bušková and Pleines (2006), Czech NGOs continue to be active and influential in promoting the country's socio-economic development, democratic values, and environmental sustainability, by collaborating with government agencies, businesses, and international partners. Furthermore, the government of the Czech Republic states that "In democratic circumstances, most of these groupings serve to strengthen the participation of citizens in public life and to address public issues. A few of them serve to secure and develop the interests of their own members" (State policy, n.d., p. 7).

1.2.3. Contemporary feminist movements in the Czech Republic

In order to put the feminist non-governmental organisation studied in this thesis into the perspective of the broader feminist landscape in the Czech Republic, it is important first to provide an overview of the key contemporary feminist movements and organisations operating within the country. As mentioned in the section 1.2.2., Czech feminist movements faced considerable challenges in the post-communist era (Fagan, 2005), as well as during the EU accession period (Lorenz-Meyer, 2013), as it had to confront both the legacy of state-sponsored gender equality under socialism and the new populist and conservative politicians promoting the preservation of traditional gender roles (Fellegi, 2019). Feminism is often viewed as a utopian concept and rejected by many Czechs (Fellegi, 2019, Heitlinger, 1996). Guenther (2011) examined for the 2010s, how feminist NGOs in postsocialist Eastern and Central Europe, such as those in the Czech Republic, formed the core of feminist civil society. These NGOs, emerging after the collapse of state socialism, rely heavily on state and international funding, leading to concerns about professionalisation and bureaucratisation, potentially deconcentrating their feminist agendas (Guenther, 2011; Lorenz-Meyer, 2013).

Despite these challenges, feminist NGOs effectively organise around key issues, such as violence against women and employment, although they often focus more on service provision than broader advocacy (Guenther, 2011).

One of the most prominent contemporary feminist NGOs in the Czech Republic is the Czech Women's Lobby (Česká ženská lobby in Czech), an umbrella organisation founded in 2001 that brings together over 30 women's rights groups and advocates for issues such as gender pay gap, women's political representation, and combating domestic violence (Česká ženská lobby, 2024). The Czech Women's Lobby has played a pivotal role in amplifying the voices of diverse feminist organisations and advocating for progressive policy changes to address systemic gender inequalities within Czech society. Another key feminist organisation is "Konsent" founded in 2016, a non-profit focused on combating sexual violence and educating the public on the issues of consent, bodily autonomy, and gender-based discrimination (Konsent, 2021). Furthermore, the non-profit "NESEHNUTÍ" was founded in Brno in 1997, by splitting from the DUHA movement (Nezávislé Sociálně Ekologické Hnutí // NESEHNUTÍ, 2024). "NESEHNUTÍ" focuses on human rights, environmental protection, and social justice, and has also integrated strong feminist perspectives and initiatives into its work, such as advocating for equal pay and promoting women's leadership (Nezávislé Sociálně Ekologické Hnutí // NESEHNUTÍ, 2024). Among several others, these organisations have collectively contributed to strengthening the contemporary feminist movement in the Czech Republic, challenging the post-socialist notions of Western feminism. As delineated by Fellegi (2019), the rise of anti-feminist and "traditional" movements has made the work of these feminist organisations even more significant, however challenging (Fellegi, 2019).

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

2.1. Research questions

This Bachelor's thesis studies the foundation and development of a feminist and queer NGO in Prague. Taking the example of an English-speaking organisation, the aim is to examine the activities and perspectives of both the founders and organisers of the movement as well as the participants. The research poses the following research questions:

1. How has the feminist organisation evolved and organised itself over time, and what are the critical factors contributing to its success or potential failure?
2. How do the views and experiences of participants in the organisation's activities compare with the stated intentions and perspectives of the organisers, and what tensions and opportunities arise from these differences?
3. How do the organisation's values and practices align with the contemporary feminist discourse and values, and what are its contributions to the creation of a feminist and queer community in Prague?

The subsequent sections discuss the methods of data collection, data analysis, and my own positionality.

2.2. Methods of data collection

In order to examine above stated research questions, I combine the methods of participant observation, netnography, and semi-structured interviews, which I describe in turn.

Participant observation and access to the field site

Participant observation refers to a method that “involves getting close to people and making them feel comfortable enough with your presence so that you can observe and record information about their lives” (Bernard, 2017, p. 342). I utilised this method of collecting data by participating in the NGO's events and experiencing the running of the organisation first-hand as an intern.

In terms of finding and accessing a suitable organisation, I began my search by asking acquaintances involved in activism for a suitable organisation. Among the organisations I identified, “Fusion,” which stood out as the only emerging organisation in Prague, focused

entirely on an English-speaking audience. This led me to attend a Fusion presentation night, an event that will be further discussed in Chapter 3. After the event, I spoke with one of the organisers about volunteering or interning and was subsequently connected with the founder, who oversees volunteers and interns. I secured an internship in the administrative department of Fusion, which lasted from October 2023 to March 2024 and involved various tasks such as drafting research proposals, conducting surveys, organising calendars, and assisting at events.

Participant observation included attending a variety of events hosted by the organisation. These encompassed education nights, where different topics related to queer theory or feminism were presented every time, and open mic events, which provided a platform for community members to express themselves. I also participated in several protests organised by Fusion, advocating for various social and political issues, such as the International Women's Rights March, and a protest against the Czech government after they rejected the amendment to allow marriage for all couples. Additionally, I attended teambuilding activities designed to strengthen the bonds among members, as well as fundraisers aimed at supporting the organisation's initiatives. My involvement extended to several internal meetings, where I observed interactions and decision-making processes among the management, volunteers, and interns. These experiences provided me with a comprehensive understanding of Fusion's operations and community engagement, as well as valuable insights into the general development and organisation of non-governmental organisations.

Fieldnotes were taken after every single event attended. These notes documented observations, reflections, and interactions that occurred during various Fusion events, such as education nights, open mic events, protests, team-building activities, and internal meetings. These detailed accounts were crucial for capturing the real-time dynamics and the atmosphere of the events, providing a rich qualitative data source for analysis. As later described in the section 2.4., the name of the organisation, as well as the names and personal information of the participants in the research were anonymized, and they were informed and provided verbal consent to participate in this research.

Netnography

Another vital part of my research was netnography, which Kozinets (2015) defines as “a specific approach to conducting ethnography on the internet. It is a qualitative, interpretive research methodology that adapts traditional ethnographic techniques to the study of social media” (p. 1). Netnography adapts traditional ethnographic research techniques to study the interactions, behaviours, and experiences of individuals and communities on the internet. This method is particularly useful for exploring the dynamics within online communities, social media platforms, and other digital environments where individuals form communities and engage in shared activities and discourses (Kozinets, 2015).

In the context of this research, netnography was employed to investigate the digital presence and community interactions of Fusion, this was done by taking screenshots of posts and conversations, which were later copy-pasted into the fieldnotes. The online conversations I was participating in were also described in the fieldnotes in order to document the personal self-reflection. The online platforms analysed included Fusion’s Instagram page, WhatsApp groups, and their Discord channel. These platforms serve as crucial online venues for community building, information spreading, and the mobilisation of members for various events and activities. The organisation’s Instagram page is used to share updates, promote events, highlight key issues, and engage with followers through posts, stories, and comments. By analysing the content and engagement metrics on Instagram, insights were gained into how Fusion communicates its values, attracts new members, and sustains interaction with its audience. WhatsApp groups are used by Fusion for more immediate and intimate communication among volunteers, interns, and officers. These groups facilitate quick dissemination of information, coordination of activities, and real-time discussions. The analysis of conversations in these groups provided an understanding of the regular interactions, decision-making processes, and sense of community among members. Lastly, the Discord channel was analysed, which serves as a central medium for Fusion’s community engagement. The platform’s channels allow for organised discussions on various topics, event planning, and social interactions. By studying the interactions on Discord, the research captured the diversity of discussions, the inclusivity of different voices, and the collaborative efforts in organising events and initiatives.

Semi-structured interviews

To complement my participant observation and address areas that could not be observed and discuss some findings from the ethnography, I conducted a set of five semi-structured interviews with key members and participants of Fusion. By reviewing my fieldnotes including my detailed observations and reflections recorded during various events and activities, I was able to identify recurring themes, critical issues, and areas of interest that required deeper exploration in the form of interviews. The questions for the interviews were then based on the recurring themes from my fieldnotes analysis. This process ensured that the interview questions were both relevant and tailored to uncover nuanced perspectives and experiences. The interview topic guide explored these main themes: origins, definition and structure of the organisation, community involvement and perceptions, feminism and feminist values. The interview questions varied among different participants, focusing on uncovering the emic perspectives of the interviewees. All interviews were recorded, fully transcribed and coded to analyse the main themes. Furthermore, the names and personal information of the interviewees were anonymized in order to respect the privacy of all participants involved in the research. The interviews provided a rich, qualitative layer to the research, offering personal narratives and detailed accounts that uncovered the emic perspectives, challenges, and successes of Fusion from multiple viewpoints. The following table provides an overview of the purposive sample, including people of different functions associated with the organisation.

Table 1

Interview participants

Name: Alex Interview place: online Interview date: 9 th May 2024	Gender: non-binary Pronouns: they/them Age: 24 Education: Bachelor's degree - organiser and founder of Fusion
Name: Valeria Interview place: café Interview date: 26 th May 2024	Gender: female Pronouns: she/her Age: 20 Education: Bachelor student - Participant in various Fusion events, including the open mic events,

	education sessions, fundraisers, marches, and protests
Name: Daniel Interview place: café Interview date: 28 th May 2024	Gender: male Pronouns: he/him Age: 20 Education: High school diploma <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Former intern at Fusion for 6 months - Participant in various Fusion events such as open mic sessions, education sessions, protests and marches - Volunteered at fundraisers, and other events
Name: Camila Interview place: online Interview date: 5 th June 2024	Gender: female Pronouns: she/her Age: 27 Education: Master's student <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - One of the first members of Fusion - Participant in various Fusion events such as education sessions, open mic sessions, and marches - Volunteered as help at a fundraiser, and other events
Name: Sandro Interview place: interviewee's home Interview date: 5 th June 2024	Gender: non-binary Pronouns: they/them Age: 22 Education: Bachelor's student <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Attended various Fusion events such as education sessions, open mic events, new members meetings, fundraiser - Volunteered at the organisation to help with the fundraiser

2.3. Data analysis

The data analysis for this study utilised an inductive approach. This method helped generalise and interpret research data through specific observations and pattern recognition. By closely examining the fieldnotes data, I identified patterns that provided insights into the activities and dynamics of Fusion, the NGO under study. Data triangulation – participant

observation, netnography, and interviews – enabled a comprehensive understanding of the organisation’s impact and dynamics within the feminist and queer community in Prague.

Analysis of fieldnotes and interview transcripts

Fieldnotes and interviews were thematically analysed to identify recurring themes and patterns, as described in Madden (2017). At first, I systematically coded the data, which involved categorising the data into meaningful segments that simplified the recognition of common themes and significant variations. This process allowed for the organisation of data in a way that highlighted key issues, recurring motifs, and notable differences in perceptions and experiences among participants and organisers. After this, I once again analysed the data to identify new codes and potential themes, while connecting fragments of similar themes together and linking the data to theory. The key codes from this analysis involved “evolution,” “community building,” “organisational structure,” “inclusivity,” “intersectionality,” “education,” “advocacy,” “funding,” and “diversity.”

2.4. Ethical considerations and researcher positionality

Ethical considerations are important in qualitative research. Anonymity clauses and consent protocols were rigorously followed to ensure that all participants were fully informed about the nature of the research and their rights. Given that ethnographic research often involves sensitive information, maintaining the confidentiality and anonymity of participants was a top priority. Before starting my internship at the NGO, I obtained consent to conduct my ethnographic research and use the findings for my Bachelor’s thesis, which the organisers readily approved. During my fieldwork, I consistently informed participants about the research’s purpose during our conversations, assuring them that their personal information would remain confidential and that all details and names would be anonymized. Furthermore, the organisation’s name, as well as other specific details that could potentially disrupt the anonymity of the organisation, and the names and personal information of the participants, were altered throughout the thesis to ensure complete confidentiality and protect the privacy of all involved.

According to Lander (2001), while conducting fieldwork, it is essential to position oneself in relation to the research in three distinct ways: fixed, subjective, and textual. The

fixed position refers to how unchangeable factors such as age, gender, class, nationality, and race affect data interpretation (Lander, 2001, p. 297). Reflecting on positionality was an important aspect of the analysis of this Bachelor's thesis. As a researcher, acknowledging my position as a white Slovak man in a feminist NGO was critical. This reflection proved valuable in understanding the potential biases and influences that my identity could have on the research process and interactions with participants. My positionality as a man in a feminist NGO was particularly significant, as it made me more visible in the organisation, since there were not that many men. Furthermore, my gender, although understandably, excluded me from certain events, which were for labeled for women only, such as the seminar on the topic of sexual assault. Furthermore, my positionality as a researcher might have affected the findings of this thesis, since the participants of the research might have interacted with me differently compared to how they would interact with a non-researcher or a researcher of a different gender or background. There were several occasions in which the participants humorously pointed out my position as a researcher by inquiring where my notebook and pen were to write notes about them. These interactions could have influenced their responses and the overall data collected, therefore potentially impacting the conclusions drawn from this study.

CHAPTER 3: ANALYSIS

3.1. Fusions' changing aims, organisation and defining events

To illustrate how Fusion was established, developed, and eventually registered as an NGO, I begin this section with a fieldnote describing the founder's perspective on the organisation's evolution.

On a Saturday afternoon in November 2023, about a month after I entered the organisation, I attended a Fusion teambuilding where Alex, one of the leaders, talked about the emergence story of the organisation: "It was originally my idea to start [Fusion], but I knew that there were other people who would be interested in helping and doing it with me. I was in my second year of my bachelor's degree at [a private university]. I was very frustrated with the kind of education I was receiving. I thought it was Eurocentric, heteronormative, and very outdated. I remember a particular lesson in political philosophy where we were studying the usual figures like Rousseau and Burke, those old Enlightenment philosophers. I asked if we could at least include Mary Wollstonecraft, as she provides a great counterargument to Rousseau in the 'Rights of Women.' However, I was told that we couldn't study Wollstonecraft in the political philosophy class because she was a feminist and hence not considered a real philosopher. This was just one of many examples where I felt that my education was not meeting my needs. There was no critical education, and it felt very outdated.

Then during a trip, I reflected on these issues and realised that if we don't get the education we want from public institutions, then we must educate ourselves. So, I made some flyers and put them out in Prague, and I sent them to some friends, inviting them to come by my apartment. We planned to have a glass of wine and discuss the issues of critical education we had encountered in our institutions, not only from [specific university] but also from [other universities] and among Erasmus students. We met for the first time in March 2022, and discussed intersectional feminism, racial equality, and queer theory. We all agreed that these topics were lacking in our schools, along with post-colonial theory. For the first half-year, it was very informal. We would meet once a month, drink some wine, chat, and talk about education. We took turns presenting topics to educate each other, so it was kind of a community collective

learning process. None of us were professionals; most of us were students, some were even in high school, and some were in the early stages of their careers. It was very informal.

However, after half a year, our group grew too large for my apartment. We decided to go for it for real and get registered as an NGO to open a bank account, and secure funding. We moved our meetings to the [specific venue] in Prague. From there, we started meeting every other week for educational sessions. As we grew, we expanded into community building and advocacy. Realising the importance of these issues, we wanted to do more. Besides education sessions, we organised community-building events like cosy movie nights, picnics, educational documentary screenings, queer fashion shows, and even a magazine we write together. In terms of political advocacy, [in 2024] we are going to be the main organiser of [specific march] in Prague and [in 2023] we were co-organisers. We also participate in [pride parades] and [specific] demonstrations.” (fieldnote, November 2023)

In this excerpt, the founder of the organisation outlines Fusion’s development from the initial idea into a small grassroots movement and finally into getting registered as an NGO in October 2023. Initially, their bi-weekly educational sessions, covering topics such as intersectional feminism, racial equality, queer theory, and post-colonial theory, served as a platform for collective learning. Over time, they expanded into organising various community-building events, including cosy movie nights, picnics, educational documentary screenings, and queer fashion shows. Fusion also publishes a collaborative magazine, providing a space for members to express and share ideas. In terms of political advocacy, Fusion actively participates in and organises protests and marches, such as being the main organisers of a women’s rights march in Prague and participating in pride parades. They host monthly open mic events, which attract large audiences and foster creative expression within the queer and feminist community. Additionally, Fusion holds workshops and fundraisers to support their initiatives, such as seminars on sexual violence against women and fundraisers for refugees from the SWANA (Southwest Asia and North Africa) region.

3.1.1. Formalising an idea into an NGO

The establishment of Fusion reflects the broader trends of professionalisation and formalisation seen in the Czech feminist movement post-1989, as discussed in the literature (Cox, 2020; Fagan, 2005; Lorenz-Meyer, 2013). This process involves creating a structured organisational framework, defining clear objectives and goals, and securing sustainable funding sources to support long-term activities. I will discuss each of these aspects below.

First, Fusion began as an informal group of individuals dissatisfied with the Eurocentric and heteronormative nature of their education, similar to the grassroots movements described by O'Hagan and Purdy (1993). The structured organisational framework was changed from an informal group of 10-15 people who met in the founder's apartment to discuss critical education issues, to a vertical structure with designated coordinators and department heads. This shift happened in the year 2023, before the registration of Fusion as an official NGO in October 2023. In an interview, Alex told me:

We've been through a few different structures, so it's always an interesting topic. When we started out, we were only 10-15 people, so it was very easy. It was a group session and there everyone agrees, you know there's not much to do there. (Alex, interview, 9th May 2024)

However, later as the movement started to grow, and as Alex describes the organisation "moved to the [community] centre" from the founder's apartment:

[Gertha] came in as a co-founder. She had great ideas, and she built a vertical structure of me and her as coordinators, and then with five or six people below, who were responsible for certain departments, events, PR, finance, and logistics, then we had volunteers, and just the people who showed up. (Alex, interview, 9th May 2024)

During my participant observation and work in Fusion as an intern, the organisational structure was as described above. As I was interning in the administrative department and helping out with tasks from other departments, I had to report to Alex, who supervised not only the administrative department but all of the departments of Fusion. This often made communication within the organisation delayed and rushed, as tasks were regularly done at the last minute. For example, writing project proposals was done by me and other interns in the

administrative department, who were not given enough time or information, and did not have practice or guidance in doing so. This undoubtedly resulted in a lower quality of work.

The group's informal, volunteer-based structure and community-based funding during this stage, reflect early-stage grassroots organisations before transitioning to a formal NGO to secure funding and increase operational efficiency, as discussed by Vaceková (2016). Fusion's early stages focused on collective learning and community building, where members educated each other on topics like intersectional feminism, racial equality, and queer theory. This mirrors the grassroots movement's reliance on community efforts and volunteerism (Smith et al., 2014). The informal nature of these meetings is indicative of grassroots organisations before they formalise their operations.

At the beginning of 2024, after the registration of the organisation as an official NGO in the Czech Republic, Fusion decided to once again review its organisational structure to make it "more horizontal." Now, Alex is still the founder, holding the title of the "Project Coordinator" of the organisation, the significant change includes establishing a "monthly management meeting" of 15 people in management positions instead of a singular head of the organisation. Alex stated that "we meet up once a month, sit around the table, and everyone takes turns to talk, give an update." Furthermore, Alex stated that in these meetings, there is also always "a facilitator of the group and someone who takes notes".

Although I personally did not attend any of the managerial meetings, as my position as an intern did not allow me to do so and because this structure was implemented towards the end of my internship and participant observation, I attended other internal meetings such as team-building or new members' meetings, which followed a similar structure, although they were less frequent. These events, although informal, usually started with an introduction of the new members, followed by individual recounts of tasks, and updates on future events, goals, and tasks. Similarly to the management meetings, in the internal Fusion meetings, there was always someone present to take notes of the important issues discussed.

Secondly, Alex stated that the objectives and goals of Fusion were formulated and subsequently revised:

[Fusion's goals are] something we are actually redefining at the moment. The main goal originally was critical education [about intersectional feminism, racial equality, queer theory, and post-colonial theory] leading to introspective action. So, we had three values put down, which [were] introspection, inclusion, and action. (Alex, interview, 9th May 2024)

As noted during my fieldwork and in the interviews with the participants, the presence of ambiguity in objectives and goals, as well as values is indicative of Fusion's events. For example, one of the participants, Sandro, described the goals as "a bit hazy," another participant, Camila, as "hard to define." Sandro further observed that while Fusion self-identified itself as an "education NGO," their activities appeared to be aiming more at community building. As noted by Vacková (2016), maintaining a balance between operational efficiency and staying true to the organisation's mission is a continuing challenge for formalised NGOs. These tensions between the points of view of the organisers, interns, and participants, will be further examined in section 3.2.

Thirdly, securing sustainable funding sources had to be revised from funding by the organisers and community to a combination of applying for grants from the government and corporations, membership fees in addition to community funding. During my internship, the "funding problem" had been often a centre of debates and working on obtaining grants and sponsors was of high importance. This correlates with the literature by Lorenz-Meyer (2013) who researched feminist NGOs in the Czech Republic after 1989. One of the respondents of Lorenz-Meyer's (2013) study stated that the professionalisation of the NGO sector leaves them with no time for the "real work" (p. 412) since they have to constantly apply for and manage the grants. Founded in October 2023, Alex confirmed that since Fusion did not have a bank account until the beginning of 2024, which meant that they could not apply for funding. Alex expressed another concern, namely that obtaining funding was very time-consuming and difficult to arrange since "nobody wants to do it." The situation has improved when Fusion introduced an option of a paid membership, which can be purchased for the duration of 6 or 12 months. Alex elaborated that "basically, you sign up as a member, for a 12-month small fee and that helps us pay rent. And in return, you get to go to some special events, and you get a 10% discount on all [Fusion events]." This membership is charged on a voluntary basis, and the participants who decide not to buy the membership can still attend most events, such as the

education sessions, workshops, and open mic events. Alex stated that in the first month since the establishment of the membership system, around 30 people signed up for it, with most of them buying the 12 month option. Contrary to this, none of the participants that I interviewed bought the membership. Sandro stated that they think the membership is a “very understandable” move of the organisation: “I understand that for some people it might be inaccessible, but every organisation has to get money somewhere, and it’s either you fund it yourself, with the membership fee, or you go to corporations.” On the other hand, Valeria described the membership fee as “limiting” saying that she cannot afford it nor does she have the time to “get advantage of it.” However, Valeria also stated that she would be thinking about buying the membership when she has the money and the time, “I tried to put myself in their shoes and they need to have revenue.”

Despite the lack of sufficient funding, Fusion organises several long-term activities. Once a month they host open mic events, and every 2 weeks they host education sessions on a different topic presented by a different member of the organisation, usually related to post-colonial theory, feminism, and queer theory. Less frequently, they (co-)organise protests, marches, workshops, and fundraisers. As depicted in the fieldnote except above, the education sessions are the first events that defined Fusion’s essence at first, at informal gatherings focused on “critical education,” starting out as a tool of resisting the “Eurocentric, heteronormative, and very outdated” formal education offered at Alex’s university. As the Fusion “education sessions” became defining events, the topics discussed included intersectional feminism, racial equality, queer theory, and post-colonial theory. During my participant observation, I attended three education sessions, where usually around 20 people participated. Two out of four participants that I interviewed stated that their first event was a Fusion “education session,” where each week one volunteer can take part in presenting a topic of their choice. The nature of the education sessions is further discussed in section 3.2. Alex’s ambitious long-term objectives include the establishment of an online library of resources and the invitation of prominent academics and activists to contribute to their initiatives and events, such as the “education sessions.”

The open mic events are another significant event that defines Fusion. These events are, like the education sessions, meant to be open to everyone regardless of gender, age,

nationality, or previous interaction with the organisation. However, unlike the free education sessions, the open mic events are only accessible for a small fee. During these open mic events, individuals or groups of people perform poetry, comedy, songs, and dances; some of these are rehearsed, others are more spontaneous or original. Although these events only happen once a month, they are very popular among members as well as the Prague feminist community, drawing 60-80 people. This is because, according to the participants, they provide a platform for creative expression and community building, allowing participants to share their work in a supportive and safe environment. All the respondents in the interviews stated that they are not aware of any other feminist organisation in Prague that organises open mic events. Sandro elaborated on this, saying that they know of other similar events, such as “queer karaoke” or events organised by specific student associations, but the open mics that Fusion organises are quite distinct in the Prague landscape. Valeria stated that she finds the Fusion education events “unique” since they offer a “safe space for the performance of music, poetry, comedy, and others.” Comparing this with the sources available, the Fusion’s open mic sessions are unique since they are happening regularly once a month, and allowing people of diverse backgrounds to perform in a safe space. These aspects might contribute to the events’ popularity.

These perceptions of Fusion’s participants and organisers about the establishing and developmental processes are critical to understanding the internal dynamics that drive the organisation. Similarly, in her review of post-socialist feminist NGOs from more than a decade ago, Guenther (2011) has emphasised the importance of aligning organisational practices with feminist values, such as inclusivity, intersectionality, and community building.

3.2. “Community, advocacy and education”: Alignment of goals, values and intentions

This section will compare the stated values and intentions of the organisation described above with the participants’ perceived values and degrees of participation in Fusion’s events. As discussed in Chapter 2, of the five semi-structured interviews, three were with participants who had experience with volunteering, and one was a former intern. In this section, I will focus on the perceptions and experiences of the participants and the intern. While Fusion’s goals and objectives are being redefined, their main focus is still on education, advocacy, and

building a community of like-minded people interested in feminism and queer issues. I will examine Fusion's values of "introspection, inclusion, and action," as defined by Alex, in turn.

3.2.1. Community

First, with respect to community-building, the participants expressed a generally positive perception of the organisation's ability to foster a sense of community and belonging through ice-breakers and implementing interactive games where participants get to know each other, noting that Fusion's events and initiatives facilitated meaningful connections and a supportive environment. For example, Sandro stated:

I would say that there is a sense of community in a lot of [Fusion's] events. Yeah, I think it's fairly easy to get into it. I mean, obviously, it takes a little bit of effort, but it seems like a really welcoming environment for people who share the opinions that most of the members and organisers have. But obviously, if you have completely opposite opinions, you maybe wouldn't want to join or it would be really strange. (Sandro, interview, 5th June 2024)

Sandro implied that although, it is fairly easy to engage with the community, those with completely opposing opinions might find it challenging or strange to join. These opposing opinions likely pertain to views that conflict with Fusion's core values, such as opposition to intersectional feminism, racial equality, queer theory, post-colonial theory, or broader conservative and traditionalist views. Individuals holding such differing perspectives might feel alienated in an environment that prioritises progressive, inclusive, and social justice-oriented values, making it difficult for them to connect with the community or feel comfortable at Fusion's events and initiatives.

Camila, being one of the first members of Fusion and participating in education sessions, open mic sessions, and marches, as well as volunteering at Fusion's fundraiser, added that "when I go to their events, even if I go alone, I don't feel alone because I became friends with the people there." Contrary to this, Valeria highlighted the distinction between degrees of community within the organisation:

I feel like it's kind of an interesting community created in [Fusion] because there's this external community that everyone is invited to, but I would say that there is another

smaller community of people who participate more. There are the people more involved with [Fusion], and since I've been to some inside events, I feel like there's this line, which is very shadowed, but you can still see it, between the communities of the people who are more involved and the people who are less involved. (Valeria, interview, 26th May 2024)

Valeria's observation highlights a distinctive social dynamic within Fusion, suggesting that the organisation operates on multiple levels of community engagement. The "external community" refers to the broader group of participants who are welcomed to join Fusion's public events and initiatives. This inclusivity aligns with Fusion's mission to foster a sense of belonging and community through interactive activities and shared goals. However, Valeria notes the existence of a "smaller community" composed of individuals who are more actively involved in the inner workings of Fusion. This inner circle includes core members, organisers, and frequent participants who contribute significantly to the planning and execution of Fusion's activities. The "shadowed line" mentioned by Valeria, represents the subtle yet noticeable division between these two groups. This line is not a strict barrier but rather a distinction based on the level of involvement and commitment. During my participant observation, I noticed that those within the smaller, more involved community have deeper connections with each other and a stronger influence on the direction of Fusion. The "smaller community" consists of long-term participants and organisers in Fusion, which likely helps to create stronger interpersonal relationships, many of them being classmates, close friends, or partners. While Fusion aims to create a welcoming environment for all, the presence of an inner circle could lead to feelings of exclusion among less involved members.

Daniel, a former intern at Fusion, similarly expressed that the sense of community was playing a significant role in his decision to become an intern and more active within the organisation:

Something that really stood out for me was the friendliness among almost everyone in [Fusion]. It made me realise, wow, even if they are cooperating, they're also somewhat friends and stick around to each other. So you notice that and think that maybe I want to stay here for longer, and want to keep being 'a friend' to also help this organisation grow bigger. (Daniel, interview, 28th May 2024)

During my fieldwork, I have often noticed a blurred line between the participants, who regularly attend Fusion's events and volunteer, and the organisers, with many participants becoming more involved over time and even sometimes bringing a friend or a partner to help out with, for example, checking tickets, putting up decorations, or cleaning up at fundraisers or other events. This shows the strength of the community-building efforts at Fusion, particularly from the perspective of those who are more actively involved in the organisation.

3.2.2. Advocacy

Second, in terms of the advocacy focus of the organisation, Fusion's efforts have been perceived more critically in various ways by the participants. Following the Cambridge dictionary, advocacy (2024) refers to "public support for an idea, plan, or way of doing something," which broadly resonates with the perceptions of participants, depending on whether they feel aligned with Fusion's advocacy work. The main advocacy events (co-)organised by Fusion are either protests or marches related to women's rights, queer rights, specific international political issues, or fundraisers for the victims of different oppressive political regimes. According to Zaidi (1999), NGOs are often seen as vital players in the development landscape, capable of filling gaps left by state institutions and acting as agents of change. Fusion's advocacy reflects this broader trend, as the organisation works to promote progressive values and engage in political advocacy around issues like feminism and queer rights. This aligns with the idea that NGOs can democratise societies and serve as counterweights to state power by addressing specific community needs and pushing for policy changes (Charlton & May, 1995; Zaidi, 1999). While the participants expressed alignment with the general advocacy issues that Fusion tackles, their perspectives differed in the degree to which they felt Fusion's approach to advocacy was effective or aligned with their own values and preferences. Camila and Valeria stated that they especially enjoyed a particular women's rights protest:

I love marches, I love protests, and mainly this one because in my country it's huge. So I loved that I could have spent it with [Fusion] and with some of my Latina friends too. I felt super safe and strong, which is the kind of way you want to feel at protests. It is nice when it is run by people who can protect you and are very political. (Valeria, interview, 26th May 2024)

Although he did not attend the women's rights protest, Daniel agreed with Valeria:

I love what [Fusion] is doing [in their advocacy events,] it's like almost screaming 'we can do anything we want, we can destroy those [metaphorical] barriers' that maybe some queer people are afraid of destroying themselves. So in a way, they are empowering the community even while protesting. (Daniel, interview, 28th May 2024)

However, other participants who were less involved expressed some reservations about Fusion's advocacy approach. Sandro stated that they perceive contradictions in Fusion's advocacy efforts, particularly regarding its anti-capitalist and feminist stances. Despite promoting these radical values, Sandro felt that the organisation struggled to align these ideals with practical realities, such as the need for funding, which often requires compromise and engagement with corporate entities. Guenther (2011) and Lorenz-Meyer (2013), in their studies on post-socialist feminist NGOs, similarly observed more than a decade earlier that the reliance on funding, professionalisation, and bureaucratization weakened feminist values, by taking up too much time from the activists and restricting their time to do "real work" (Lorenz-Meyer, 2013, p. 412). Sandro reflects upon their last volunteering experience with Fusion at a fundraiser, which made them cut ties with the organisation:

I was volunteering, but the communication was not super clear, and I assumed that if I'm a volunteer at an event, that means that I get a free entrance even though it's a fundraiser. But then, when I was on my shift, which was during the party, one of the organisers came up to me and asked me if I had paid for my ticket. I was really confused, and I felt very uncomfortable. Because that's usually not how it works. I felt very on the spot. But then I think the person understood that I was feeling uncomfortable, and they were like 'if you don't have money, you don't have to pay, but it would be really nice.'

But I still think that was very uncomfortable and that's not something that you should ask your volunteer. You cannot speculate or I'm not supposed to report on how much money I have, that would be uncomfortable. I think something that made me most mad was that after I had a shift for a few hours, the person was like 'you've been here volunteering for like just an hour or two, but you're going to be here for more hours, so you have to pay!' And that made me very mad because I felt like it was very, in a

way, calculated, and very capitalist. I felt like this person was trying to make sense of why I should pay. And I think their intention was just to fundraise as much money as possible. But to me, it felt like they were trying to make a more valid claim on why I should pay more money. (Sandro, interview, 5th June 2024)

Nina, my acquaintance from university, who also volunteered at this event, confirmed that she witnessed this situation happening. She furthermore stated that it made her not want to be associated with Fusion since then. Similarly to Sandro, this was also her last Fusion event. Moreover, from my netnographic observation, there were some tensions I recorded before the fundraiser. In the Whatsapp intern groupchat, just a day before the fundraiser, Daniel was discussing whether we as interns also have to buy the tickets, saying: “They don’t even pay us, so we could at least get a ticket for free.” All interns agreed, stating that since they were volunteering there anyways, they would expect not to pay for it. Furthermore, later there was an email sent to all volunteers at this fundraiser, stating that “It is a bit unfair that you have to pay while also volunteering, but all the money will go to people who urgently need it.” After this, Daniel wrote in the groupchat that he “did not care that much” and moreover, everyone stated that they do not mind paying. This emphasises the underlying dissatisfaction among the volunteers regarding the organisation’s policies, which contributed to a sense of unfairness and frustration. Nina’s account and the netnographic observation reveal a pattern of discontent that could ultimately lead to a decline in the engagement of volunteers. Despite the volunteers’ willingness to support the cause, the expectation to pay for tickets while volunteering highlighted a perceived lack of appreciation for their efforts. This situation not only diminished their motivation but also their overall experience with Fusion, resulting in both Nina and Sandro deciding not to participate in future events.

This experience highlights the differing perspectives participants have regarding Fusion’s advocacy approach, with some appreciating the empowering and community-building aspects, while others perceive contradictions between the organisation’s radical ideals and its practical operational realities. The Cambridge Dictionary (*Protest*, 2024) defines protests as “an occasion when people show that they disagree with something by standing somewhere, shouting, carrying signs, etc.” Although, protests and fundraisers are different types of events, I characterise them together in this thesis intentionally due to the

unique way of fundraising done by Fusion. Most of the fundraisers are preceded by marches associated with loud chanting of slogans; they also include raising money for specific political issues, speeches by activists on these issues, and posters are common features in this environment as well, serving as decorations at the venue after the march. Moreover, both protests and fundraisers are considered to be political in Fusion, and therefore they are both put under the umbrella of advocacy by the participants and organisers, for example, the political department in the former vertical structure of Fusion was the one in charge of both protests and fundraisers.

3.2.3. Education

Third, the educational component of Fusion's focus has been a key draw for many participants, who appreciate the organisation's efforts to provide learning opportunities on a range of topics such as feminism, intersectionality, queer rights, and decolonial praxis. The participants I interviewed expressed various experiences. Camila, as a long-time member of Fusion, has found the educational programming to be a valuable aspect of her involvement, noting that she was fond of the idea of connecting a feminist group of people, queer people, and mostly women in this city "because it is very challenging to integrate foreigners, and these education sessions were a huge step for that." Furthermore, Camila said that these sessions helped her to develop a critical mindset about some issues, such as migration, and the reality of diverse backgrounds or international political or social issues. Camila particularly mentioned a session about "Latin America and some type of gender-based violence." Coming from Latin America, Camila expressed her appreciation for the education sessions, stating that she really likes that "it informs people about what is happening around here and also in other countries." (Camila, interview, 5th June 2024)

Sandro, had a more critical perspective on education sessions, which they describe as:

something in between a lecture and a presentation. I feel like it's mainly members making these presentations for members. So, even the education sessions for me would fall into more community building because a lot of the time it's topics, which most of the community members are quite knowledgeable about, obviously not all of them, and obviously I'm generalising. But most of the time I feel like it's nothing particularly new or maybe you're just learning something more nuanced, but for me, it was not

groundbreaking. I think there were very interesting topics, but it was never something that I would learn a lot about, it was more like a fun way to spend time with new people. There are a lot of queer people, a lot of people who speak the same language as me and have similar interests. So I would say that [Fusion] is mainly a community-building organisation for English-speaking people, for queer people or allies, or women, for feminist women to just find community, find people of approximately their age.

Sandro's perspective on the educational aspect of the organisation resonates with my ethnographic observations as well. While the educational component of Fusion's focus has been valuable for many participants, some, like Sandro, feel that the content often caters to a relatively knowledgeable audience rather than providing groundbreaking new information. After each of the education sessions, there is a space for questions and discussion, and the pattern I observed is that the discussion often involves participants sharing their own experiences and perspectives of the topics discussed, such as migration, further reinforcing the community-building aspect of these educational offerings, rather than focusing on the educational value of these sessions. I depict this in the following fieldnote.

On a Tuesday in November 2023, I attended an education session hosted by Fusion. The education sessions are free of charge and open to everyone. This week the presenter was Rami [a person from the SWANA region], presenting the topics of Orientalism, Western feminism, Western LGBTQ+ politics, and its effect in the Middle East. We started not with the presentation but with a warm up children's game, where we were supposed to . 'I used to be a primary school teacher, is it visible?' Alex asked and everyone nodded. Most of the Fusion events start with introducing yourself and then playing a group 'introduction' warm-up game for example, a game where everyone writes a fun fact about themselves on a piece of paper, throws the paper into a box, and then everyone gets to take out a paper and try to guess who is the fun fact about. Then Alex continued with a talk about the upcoming Fusion events and briefly introduced the organisation, starting with 'if you're new here' – this is what you should know about Fusion.

The presentation by Rami went well, it was very academic and professional, with citations of E. Said's 'Orientalism' as well as other authors. This presentation was very well delivered thanks to the fact that Rami comes from the region and community that he was presenting about. He was very professional in doing so as well, acknowledging his own personal bias to the topic, like. Towards the end of the presentation, there was a space for discussion and questions from the audience. Despite the complexity of the presentation topic, there were no questions regarding the topic, but the diverse audience engaged actively with the presenter about their personal experiences since many of the participants were brought up in the Middle East. It seemed to me that the audience was more focused on building personal connections and community than deeply engaging with the academic content. (fieldnote, November)

The audience's preference for making personal connections over commenting on the academic context, showcases that building community and sharing experiences mattered more in these sessions. Since the participants came from diverse backgrounds with common regional ties, they likely valued a supportive environment where they could feel understood and connected.

3.2.4. "Introspection, inclusion, and action"

When I asked Alex what they meant by and how they defined the values of "introspection, inclusion, and action," they responded with:

We want to educate ourselves, get smarter about the world, and then use that knowledge to take affirmative steps in a better direction, especially concerning intersectional feminism, of which queer theory and postcolonial theory are often understood to be parts of. So our goal is to make steps for intersectional feminism through education, whether that's building community, sometimes organising a demonstration, or doing fundraisers for people in need. I would love to see Fusion be the centre of non-formal free education that we have right now. We're building it up and we're trying to make these postcolonial introduction courses to intersectional feminism, crisis theory, postcolonialism, critical theory, and trying to provide people

with free academic sources since we believe that education should be free for all. (Alex, interview, 9th May 2024)

From the interviews I conducted, Valeria discussed with me the racial dynamics within Fusion, noting that she has often been one of the few or only black people at events, which she said:

feels a bit isolating. It makes you feel a little bit smaller, you know, plus people may speak better English than me so that doesn't make me feel great. But at the last event, for example, I met someone from the Dominican Republic and the United States, so I felt way closer to them and also way safer. (Valeria, interview, 26th May 2024)

About the root of this diversity issue, Valeria stated:

I would say because Prague is not ethnically diverse, and it's also with feminist movements. I don't know if you have any experience with it, but for example, my country is super ethnically diverse, but if I attend a feminist event or something like that, there would be fewer people of colour. (Valeria, interview, 26th May 2024)

Valeria's mention of feeling "a bit smaller" and not great due to language barriers points to the complex layers of exclusion she experiences, not only is she feeling racially isolated, but also linguistically disadvantaged. However, Valeria also recounts a positive experience where she met people from the Dominican Republic and the United States at a recent event. This encounter made her feel more connected and safer, suggesting that the presence of more diverse participants can significantly improve the inclusivity and comfort levels at Fusion events. In discussing the root of the diversity issue, Valeria points out that Prague itself is not very ethnically diverse. This demographic characteristic naturally affects the makeup of participants at Fusion events. However, she also draws a broader comparison, noting that even in her home country, which is ethnically diverse, feminist events still tend to have fewer people of colour. This suggests that the underrepresentation of people of colour in feminist movements is a widespread issue, not limited to Prague. Valeria's observation can be linked to broader discussions in the literature on the challenges of inclusivity within feminist movements. Her comments resonate with the findings of Lorenz-Meyer (2013), who discusses

how feminist NGOs in the Czech Republic and elsewhere have faced challenges in creating inclusive environments that fully engage women from diverse backgrounds.

3.3. Alignment of Fusion’s values with feminist discourse

Fusion’s values have already been examined in the previous section 3.2. as focused on “introspection, inclusion, and action.” However, in order to define Fusion within the broader feminist discourse, it is also crucial to consider the definition of feminism from the organisers’ and the participants’ points of view. This was done during the semi-structured interviews when I asked the interviewees to define Fusion, feminism, and whether they view Fusion as a feminist NGO.

The feedback from the interviews provided a strong alignment of Fusion’s values with feminist values. Valeria defined feminism as “a movement seeking gender equality, equal rights for people of different gender.” Daniel highlighted the combative aspects, defining feminism as a “non-restrictive fight about fighting patriarchy and trying to find a balance with gender equality, not making any gender stronger than the other.” Camila stated that for her:

[Feminism] is more than an ideology, it is a political, social and also economic movement that promotes equality, freedom as well and tries to overcome these old ideas that foster disparity in power, control and approach. Also, I think it is revolutionary because it breaks this hegemony and tries to implement these new ideas, especially advocating for women’s rights. It gives voice to non-visible voices. (Camila, interview, 5th June 2024)

The definitions of feminism provided by Valeria, Daniel, and Camila collectively highlight the multifaceted nature of the movement and demonstrate a broad alignment with Fusion’s core values of introspection, inclusion, and action. Valeria emphasises gender equality and equal rights for people of different genders, focusing on inclusivity and the fundamental goal of equality. Daniel underscores the combative aspect, framing feminism as a non-restrictive fight against patriarchy and for gender balance, which resonates with the proactive and action-oriented approach of Fusion. Camila offers a comprehensive view, describing feminism as a political, social, and economic movement that promotes equality, freedom, and challenges old power disparities, aligning with both the introspective and

revolutionary nature of Fusion’s mission. Together, these definitions encapsulate the diverse yet cohesive understanding of feminism within Fusion, reflecting its commitment to addressing systemic inequalities and advocating for inclusive social change.

Sandro’s definition was more complex, portraying feminism as a “lens to perceive life through.” They stated that:

Feminism for me is a lot about understanding how the world works and in which ways it is unequal, particularly for women, for queer people and a lot of other systems of oppression as well. It's a way of understanding a lot of things like films, books, and media and understanding the world in a more nuanced way as opposed to just this mainstream men-made patriarchal understanding of everything and this very reductive understanding of women and generally people who are not men and who are not privileged and generally about the existence of non-men in any space and learning how to reclaim the space for yourself. So I would say it's like a lens that I see life through. Also for me as a student, it's an academic tool as well. That's why I mentioned books and films. It's a lens to perceive life though and understand oppression and fight it. It's a lens that helps me form ties with people and it helps me understand where my solidarity belongs, with whom it belongs and who needs it the most. Where to direct my efforts and who my solidarity belongs with. (Sandro, interview, 5th June 2024)

Sandro is framing feminism as a “lens to perceive life through” rather than just a movement or ideology; through this, they emphasise understanding and awareness over direct confrontation. Sandro perceives feminism as an ongoing process of learning, understanding, and reclaiming spaces rather than a battle to be won.

Additionally, all of the interviewees defined Fusion as a feminist organisation, some stating that they see feminism as a core characteristic of the NGO, and some stating that they see feminism as a foundation of the organisation. However, due to the multiplicity of definitions of feminism, they found it challenging to say with full certainty if all the practices align with the feminist discourse, which can be understood by its emphasis on gender equality, intersectionality, and the deconstruction of traditional gender roles. Sandro said:

I feel like [feminism] is a really easy word to use, and then it can mean so many things to different people that it's really hard to say if [Fusion] is feminist or not, but it also doesn't mean that it's not feminist. I feel like it's struggling to identify itself a little bit, and it's not so much with identification, but rather with its practices. (Sandro, interview, 5th June 2024)

Malinowska (2020) and Mohajan (2022) also describe feminism as encompassing diverse movements, theories, and moral philosophies. On the other hand, others stated that Fusion's emphasis on providing education on issues such as gender, sexuality, equality, intersectionality, etc. is a clear and intentional alignment with the broader feminist ideology.

In the literature review of this thesis, feminism was defined as “the belief that women should be allowed the same rights, power, and opportunities as men and be treated in the same way, or the set of activities intended to achieve this state” by the Cambridge Dictionary (*Feminism*, 2024). Furthermore, there is also a definition by Mohajan (2022) provided, who characterises feminism as “a number of social, cultural, and political movements, theories, and moral philosophies concerned with gender inequalities and equal rights for women.” Mohajan (2022) noted that there are as many definitions of feminism as there are feminists, influenced by their individual beliefs, history, and culture, but the common thread is the pursuit of gender equality. Through the interviews, it is evident that Fusion's values, such as promoting gender equality, fighting patriarchy, and giving voice to marginalised groups, are strongly aligned with the broader feminist discourse.

From the literature review, it can be implied that fourth-wave feminism's reliance on technology and media representation as tools for activism and community building is mirrored in Fusion's strategic use of digital platforms like Instagram, Discord, and WhatsApp to mobilize and engage its members. Furthermore, Fusion's educational and advocative approach aligns with fourth-wave practices of “calling out” sexism and promoting public discourse on feminist issues, as noted by Munro (2013). In practice, this is done by Fusion's activism on social media, such as Instagram, where they regularly publish stories and posts to inform their followers on various political, environmental and social issues, such as upcoming protests and why people should join them. Fusion's emphasis on intersectionality, which acknowledges the interconnection of oppression with race, class, and sexuality, etc., also reflects the broader

goals of fourth-wave feminism to address the exclusionary tendencies of past movements and ensure marginalised voices are heard (Malinowska, 2020; Munro, 2013). Fusion is using these social media for advocacy, education, and community building, which is a typical sign of fourth-wave feminism. Defining itself as an intersectional feminist and queer non-profit, Fusion focuses on a broad range of issues, including gender equality, LGBTQ+ rights, and reproductive rights, reflecting the fourth wave's commitment to recognising and addressing diverse and intersecting experiences of oppression. The organisation's focus on community building is evident in its efforts to create an inclusive space for international students and expats in Prague, fostering a supportive and connected community, which is central to the fourth wave's emphasis on grassroots organising and collective action. Fusion also engages in various advocacy efforts, including protests, marches, and fundraisers, to address social and political issues, highlighting their commitment to public advocacy.

As for Fusion's alignment with the feminist ideologies consisting of liberal, Marxist, socialist, radical, cultural, black, postmodern, and ecofeminism, as proposed by Jaggar (1983) and Mohajan (2022), the analysis of the values and practices of Fusion implies that the NGO resonates with the principles of postmodern feminism. According to Mohajan (2022), postmodern feminism challenges essentialist perspectives on gender, and central to its principles is the deconstruction of normative gender constructs, positing that gender is a socially constructed phenomenon shaped by linguistic, cultural, and power dynamics. Fusion aims to deconstruct normative gender roles in practice by organising educational workshops and events that promote awareness and critical discussion of gender as a social construct, highlighting diverse gender identities and experiences. Additionally, they can create safe, inclusive spaces for individuals to express their authentic selves and challenge traditional gender norms through community activities, advocacy, and support networks. Similarly to Mohajan, according to Parpart (1993), postmodern feminist discourse emphasises a critique of essentialism, and underscoring the contextual and contingent nature of knowledge, asserting that truth is constructed through language, discourse, and social practices. Fusion's activities, such as educational sessions on topics like "Homocolonialism" and their focus on various issues such as queer theory, align with postmodern feminism's emphasis on deconstructing normative gender constructs and advocating for a nuanced understanding of gender and identity as well as a non-essentialist approach to the gathering of knowledge.

Additionally, Fusion's significant emphasis on intersectionality is a core principle of intersectional feminism, which although not categorised by Jaggar (1983) and Mohajan (2022) as one of the main feminist ideologies, it has its similarities with the postmodern feminist discourse. Yuval-Davis (2006, p. 195) claims that postmodern feminism approaches feminism in an intersectional manner, meaning that it focuses on the effects of diverse factors contributing to the oppression of women and other minorities, such as race, social class, and sexuality. Fusion's commitment to addressing these intersecting identities is evident in their focus on intersectional feminism, queer theory, and postcolonial theory. However, people like Valeria expressed that they felt excluded or unsafe, highlighting a tension between Fusion's aims at inclusivity and the lived experiences of some participants. Valeria noted feeling racially isolated and linguistically disadvantaged at events, which made her feel "a bit smaller" and uncomfortable. Sandro also experienced discomfort when asked to pay for a ticket while volunteering, which contradicted their expectations and left them feeling uncomfortable and undervalued. Furthermore, acknowledging my own positionality, I also did not feel included all of the time. For example, in one of the team-building sessions, while suggesting ideas on how to make Fusion more inclusive, one woman stated, "We should try to make everyone feel welcome, we cannot forget about people with disabilities, people who don't speak English, older people, well, everyone. I mean everyone except men." Laughter followed this statement from the corners of the room. There were three men in the room, including me. We were not laughing, but I noticed the other men staring into the floor. This incident illustrates the underlying challenges in creating a genuinely inclusive environment where all members, regardless of gender, feel equally valued and respected.

3.3.1. Fusion's role as a feminist community builder in the Czech activist landscape

As previously described, Fusion organises various types of events within Prague, that create a sense of a feminist community, for example, some of the events include education sessions, open mic events, protests, workshops, marches, etc. Fusion's community is made mostly of foreigners, since it is an English-speaking NGO, but during my participant observation, I also noticed a few Czech people participating in Fusion's events.

Fusion's impact can be understood through the lens of how it interacts with other NGOs in the region. The participants' responses highlight that Fusion occupies a distinctive space, particularly as an English-speaking organisation. For instance, Camila mentions: "I know some other NGOs in Prague, like People in Need, some other migration one, but I don't really participate in their events or anything." This suggests that while there are other NGOs, they do not engage feminist or English speaking participants in the same way Fusion does. Similarly, on the topic of knowing or participating in other NGOs Valeria notes, "I don't think so. Definitely, not here [in the Czech Republic]. I do follow some online. There are organisations that I have worked with in my country but not here," indicating a gap that Fusion fills for expats who are looking for community and activism opportunities. Daniel adds, "I don't really know any other NGOs in Prague, maybe [a specific NGO] but I don't think they organise activities in English, so that's it." This emphasises the language barrier that Fusion addresses, making it a critical player in engaging non-Czech speakers in feminist and community activities.

Furthermore, it can also be beneficial to look into participants' views on the future potential of Fusion. According to the semi-structured interviews conducted, combined with the insights gathered during my ethnography of the NGO, it is safe to say that the participants see significant potential for Fusion to grow and increase its influence. Valeria articulates this well:

There is no other such English-speaking organisation, but there are Czech ones. Another fact that could make them grow is that there's no other organisation focusing on the things that [Fusion] is focusing on because they are bringing this kind of foreign perspective on mainstream feminism. (Valeria, interview, 26th May 2024)

She notes the innovative nature of Fusion's activities, such as organising protests, which she believes would not happen without Fusion's involvement. This underscores the organisation's ability to introduce new forms of activism and community engagement that are not typically seen in the local context. Daniel also sees long-term potential for Fusion: "I actually believe [Fusion] will be a huge thing. Of course, I'm talking in the long term, because as of now, it's kind of a niche thing." He suggests that while Fusion is currently a "niche" player, its unique approach and sustained effort could lead to significant growth and impact over time. However, Daniel's optimism is moderated by his experience as an intern and

understanding of the challenges faced by new NGOs, especially in maintaining their core values while scaling up. On the contrary, Sandro presents a more cautious view: “I feel like their intention is not to be grassroots, even though grassroots are hard to define. That’s definitely not their intention for the future, and I think they seem to want to grow as big as possible.” They acknowledge the potential for growth but warn of the risks associated with expansion, such as losing the political and community-focused essence that defines Fusion. Sandro’s concerns about funding and maintaining the organisation’s mission highlight the delicate balance NGOs must strike between growth and staying true to their foundational principles.

Additionally, Fusion’s uniqueness is a recurrent theme in the participants’ feedback. Daniel states, “I’m not sure if [Fusion] is one-of-a-kind because I am not that in touch with NGOs here in the city. But I will say that, as far as I’m aware, it’s truly unique in the things that they are doing.” This sentiment underscores Fusion’s distinct role in the NGO landscape. Its activities, such as visible campaigns and community events, differentiate it from other local organisations. The use of English and a focus on expats and international students further set Fusion apart, addressing a specific need that is not met by other Czech NGOs. Fusion’s emphasis on creating safe, inclusive spaces for diverse communities is particularly noteworthy. As Valeria highlights, the organisation’s efforts in organising protests and community events bring a fresh perspective to local feminist activism, which is often less visible in the Czech context. This ability to introduce and sustain new forms of engagement is a testament to Fusion's innovative approach and its potential to effect meaningful change.

CONCLUSION

This research aimed to explore the multifaceted evolution of Fusion, an intersectional feminist and queer non-profit organisation in Prague, focusing on its development, community impact, and alignment with contemporary feminist discourse. The study employed ethnographic methods, including participant observation, netnography, and semi-structured interviews with Fusion members and participants.

Regarding the first research question, “how has the feminist organisation evolved and organised itself over time, and what are the critical factors contributing to its success or potential failure?” Fusion’s journey from the initial idea into a small grassroots movement and finally into a registered NGO highlights several key factors influencing its development. Initially, Fusion started as an informal university movement focused on providing education and fostering community among international students and expats in Prague. The growth of the organisation was driven by its unique positioning as an English-speaking NGO addressing intersectional feminist and queer issues, which distinguished it from other local organisations. The formalisation process involved significant changes, including the establishment of hierarchical structures, the introduction of membership fees, and efforts to secure sustainable funding through grants and sponsorships. These trends are also reflected in the literature by Cox (2020), Fagan (2005), and Lorenz-Meyer (2013) on the professionalisation and formalisation of feminist movements in the Czech Republic. In Fusion, these structural changes, while necessary for operational efficiency, introduced challenges related to maintaining the organisation’s original mission and values.

The second research question is “how do the views and experiences of participants in the organisation’s activities compare with the stated intentions and perspectives of the organisers, and what tensions and opportunities arise from these differences?” Participants generally perceive Fusion as a welcoming and inclusive community that successfully fosters connections among like-minded individuals. However, there are noted distinctions between the levels of involvement among members, with a “smaller community” of core participants who are more actively engaged in the organisation’s activities. While Fusion’s mission emphasises introspection, inclusion, and action, participants noted inconsistencies in how

these values were implemented. For instance, the introduction of membership fees, though necessary for financial sustainability, raised questions about inclusivity and accessibility for all community members. Additionally, the shift towards more formal hierarchical structures sometimes conflicted with the grassroots, participatory ethos that initially attracted members. These issues highlighted a delicate balance that Fusion must maintain between professionalising its operations and staying true to its foundational principles of inclusivity and community engagement. Such challenges are reflective of broader struggles within feminist NGOs to reconcile growth and formalisation with their core activist values. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the overall perceptions of the organisation were mostly positive, and participants stated that they valued Fusion's efforts in providing a platform for marginalised voices and promoting feminist and queer values.

Lastly, the third research question, "How do the organisation's values and practices align with the contemporary feminist discourse and values, and what are its contributions to the creation of a feminist and queer community in Prague?" Fusion's activities, including education sessions, workshops, protests, and community events, align closely with its stated values of "introspection, inclusion, and action." These activities foster a sense of community among participants and promote awareness and advocacy on feminist and queer issues. The organisation's focus on intersectionality and inclusivity reflects the principles of fourth-wave feminism, emphasising technology, media representation, and grassroots organising. Fusion's use of digital platforms like Instagram and Discord for advocacy and community building mirrors the broader feminist movement's reliance on these tools to mobilise and engage members.

Due to the limited scope of this study, there are some limitations, such as its concentration on a single organisation within a specific cultural and geographical context, which limits the generalisability of the findings to other feminist NGOs in different regions or cultural settings. Additionally, the research was conducted over a relatively short period, potentially overlooking long-term developments and changes within the organisation. Future research could address these limitations by conducting comparative studies of multiple feminist NGOs across different cultural and geographical contexts to identify common patterns and unique challenges. Incorporating quantitative methods, such as surveys, could

complement these qualitative findings and offer a more comprehensive understanding of the broader impact of feminist NGOs. Additionally, exploring the perspectives of more members and those with opposing viewpoints could provide more insights regarding the organisation's inclusivity and community dynamics.

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