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The Organisational Resilience (OR) of Rural Non-Profits (RNPOs) under Conditions of the COVID-19 Pandemic Global Uncertainty

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Abstract: The study investigated the organisational resilience (OR) levels of rural non-profit organisations (RNPOs) in the areas of activity or non-activity to adapt under the global uncertainty conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic. To this end, in April/May 2020, the managers of 35 RNPOs located in Poland were queried. The Spearman's rank correlation coefficient (ρ_s), the coefficient of determination (R^2) and a transformation coefficient (d) were primarily used to verify the hypotheses and interpret the relationships studied. The study revealed four OR descriptive levels—progressive (PR), sustainable (SR), regressive (RR), and downward (DR). The findings also show that the undertaken activities are related to the OR descriptive levels. RNPOs realised one of two adaptations: passive adaptation aimed at returning to the pre-pandemic original state with no changes may lead to a bounce backwards and an uncertain survival, whilst active adaptation leads to a transformation process between OR levels to move forward and thrive in adapting to post-pandemic changes. This study confirmed that building OR requires understanding the ways of transformations among OR levels to undertake activities in strategic areas, i.e., activity scope (AS), cooperation (CO), and finance (FI), to adapt and transform RNPOs' in an environment of post-pandemic uncertainty.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic; uncertainty; organisational resilience (OR); non-profit organisations (NPOs); rural non-profit organisations (RNPOs)



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1. Introduction

The condition of global uncertainty of modern economies and societies is a consequence of the increasing interconnections and multiple turbulences between countries and organisations. It has become even more relevant in 'black swan' cases as the world faces unexpected stressors [1]. Organisations try to prevent uncertainty by increasing their organisational resilience (OR), which has gained academic and political interest, particularly after the unexpected financial crisis of the early 20th century when the economic globalism of the world was revealed even more. Likewise, the unexpected outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has caused a dramatic increase in uncertainty in the globalised world. International situations such as those recently caused by the financial crisis or health crisis appear in the collapse of some fragile organisations, while for others, survival is very challenging even with their robustness. Thus, after the COVID-19 outbreak, OR is becoming a significant challenge for every organisation worldwide. In this context of ever-increasing global uncertainty, coping with OR requires increased knowledge on adapting to global uncertainty and building OR.

Since the world responded with global lockdowns and closing economies followed by economic and social disruptions, the recent COVID-19 pandemic caused unprecedented global disorder and disturbance. It also caused widespread adverse effects on rural areas, particularly rural organisations and communities worldwide [2,3]. It impacted food systems and supplies, farmers' incomes and livelihoods, and the welfare of rural dwellers. Moreover, a substantial increase in food insecurity appeared while at the same time also causing unprecedented food waste and broken food supply chains and networks due to closed borders. This was followed by rural workers' poverty, which deepened already significant differences in rural households' income and welfare [4].

All the indicated challenges were a direct consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic. Rural non-profit organisations (RNPOs) responded to these challenges by undertaking intensified actions in both existing and new areas of activity, including helping access funds, addressing food insecurity, and inequities in access or prioritising rural emergency medical responses [5]. It is also indicated that as a result of their intense activity, non-profits need a post-COVID-19 response stimulus that will improve the capacity and efficiency of rural non-profit service providers [6]. The COVID-19 pandemic caused many financial disturbances for RNPOs, as the funding streams to support activities became more stressed, while some non-profits became essential to provide for those in need. In particular, smaller or community-based organisations are facing difficult situations [7].

Therefore, one may assume that the newest and unexpected situation particularly challenges various RNPOs. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a deep crisis within RNPOs that support and rescue rural beneficiaries hit by the pandemic disaster. This time, in addition to assisting their beneficiaries, RNPOs simultaneously had to undertake activities to adapt their OR, which was harshly challenged under the global uncertainty conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This paper aims at studying how RNPOs built OR under the conditions of global uncertainty in the COVID-19 pandemic, how they understand OR, and which activities they undertake to ensure adaptation and transformation. In the scientific literature, resilience has been broadly defined as the ability to bounce back from adversity, severe threat, or trauma or as a process with the potential to adapt across a lifespan that works to combat negativity and promote a state of prosperity and well-being [8]. It is about the adaptation to disruption, recognised as the dynamic process of actively recovering from adversity and shocks that are often complex and accumulating various social, economic, environmental, and institutional impacts. The process is affected by specific system characteristics, such as resource availability and organisational structures. It could be defined as a latent property of a potentially activated system, and can be observed only when the system is hit by stress or shocks that trigger possible activities of stressed organisations to maintain the desired functions, i.e., providing products or services at desirable levels, by adapting, building, and transforming OR [9].

Academics tend to define OR as the condition of continuing to function and grow even after a development disruption. The growth of academic concepts has been observed. However, empirical explorations are still limited [10]. Even less research applies to non-profit organisations (NPOs) [11] and, in particular, to RNPOs. The OR of the third sector is usually framed as a leadership issue for non-profit professionals or the acquisition of resources, mainly building financial capacity [12]. In particular, NPOs' inter-sectoral cooperation with public and private sectors is critical to immediate adaptations under uncertain conditions [13]. In the face of COVID-19, RNPOs' survival, long-term recovery, and further service depends on their ability to develop OR, undertake activities, and adapt quickly, particularly in the most remote and deprived rural areas [4,14,15]. Rural non-profits must quickly learn how to build their OR.

In this study, OR is considered fundamental to sustaining a rural non-profit organisation (RNPO) under conditions of global uncertainty. RNPOs' OR is defined as their ability to react to and protect from setbacks, adapt and keep servicing beneficiaries, and transform and thrive (bounce forward) or at least return to the original state (bounce backwards)

in the face of adversity and under conditions of global uncertainty. Therefore, the main research problem to be investigated in this study is to understand RNPOs' OR by identifying the different OR levels and the activities undertaken to build it and to establish the relationships between them. Thus, the study attempts to answer two research questions:

1. How do OR levels associate with the building of RNPOs' OR?
2. How do activities undertaken by RNPOs associate with OR levels under conditions of global uncertainty?

This study mainly investigates the relationships between descriptive levels of OR and the activities undertaken to build OR under the global uncertainty conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, it aims at verifying the relationships between the four levels of OR (progressive—PR; sustainable—SR; regressive—RR; downward—DR) without considering the activities undertaken by RNPOs, and also between the OR descriptive levels in the areas of activity undertaken. The findings allow for learning about the activities undertaken by RNPOs under the real pandemic threat and the need to adapt proactively to its effects and find ways of building RNPOs' OR. The paper evaluates how RNPOs have adapted to the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak and how it has affected their OR transformations. It uses the pandemic as a real case to better understand the third sector organisations' adaptation to global uncertainty.

We propose a scientific diagnosis based on an empirical survey carried out in the first months—April/May 2020—of the worldwide pandemic. To this end, we surveyed 35 managers of RNPOs located in Poland's rural areas and addressed their services to rural beneficiaries. The study undertakes a quantitative and qualitative assessment of OR in times of crisis and seeks universal features of the phenomena under investigation. It employs Spearman's rank correlation coefficient (ρ_S) with tied ranks, the coefficient of determination (R^2), and a transformation coefficient (d) to verify the hypotheses and to interpret the relationships studied.

Our study contributes to the fast-growing literature on the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis and the ongoing discussion on implications on various local communities. It fills an existing research gap in theoretical and mainly empirical research on the organisational resilience of NPOs, particularly RNPOs. In a broader view, our research provides new insights into the organisational resilience (OR) of third-sector organisations in general and, in particular, those operating in rural areas and for rural beneficiaries. It seeks to understand non-profits' organisational resilience (NPOR) as a complex and active adaptation shaped mainly by the activities undertaken towards building and transforming OR. The study also contributes to contextual research regarding various characteristics, such as practical activities, developmental experiences, spatial, local, temporal, and global contexts.

The primary motivation for this investigation was to provide help to cope and recover from the worldwide threat and better understand NPOR amid a universal stressor. In this way, it also endeavours to better understand how RNPOs adapt to exceptional circumstances and recover from a crisis. It derives descriptive OR levels and OR-transforming processes and has practical significance for implementing appropriate activity and regulations emerging in adaptation to possible global economic, social, environmental, or climate uncertainties [16,17].

The paper is structured as follows. After the Introduction, Section 2 discusses the theoretical background of the research. It reviews the notion of RNPO, OR, and OR-building areas of activity. Next, the Materials and Methods section introduces the research's conceptual framework, studied hypotheses, data and sample and measurement details. This section mainly presents the rationale of the usefulness of ρ_S , R^2 , and d for the studied data, assumed relationships, and transformations. The studied relationships and transformations among the investigated RNPO OR descriptive levels in the main areas of undertaken activities are scrutinised in the Results section. The final discussion considers the studied RNPO OR relationships and the findings from fundamental and the most recent literature.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Rural Non-Profit Organisation (RNPO)

RNPOs appear in rural areas and for rural beneficiaries. The location and the beneficiaries substantially determine their roles and distinguish them from non-rural NPOs [18]. The third sector's issue re-emerged in rural communities, especially in countries that, in the 1990s, underwent political and institutional transformations [19]. During the communist era, the activity of non-profit organisations was minimal. Moreover, they were subject to strict state control and pursued state goals [20]. After 1989, in Poland and other countries of Eastern Europe, there was a significant increase in the establishment of new non-governmental organisations. This rapid increase in the number of organisations was observed mainly in the first years of the political transformation. The development of social initiatives was caused by a spontaneous outburst and the willingness of citizens to create space for social activities, and the changing role of the public sector [21]. The policy of 'budget cuts' meant that the NPOs formed at that time were primarily responsible for reducing the gap in the scope of the social policy implemented, which could not meet the needs of citizens. The demand for such activities was particularly evident in rural areas [22].

The political and economic transformation period indicated that non-profit organisations were a sphere that supplemented the welfare state. Moreover, the non-governmental sector mobilised the society to organise and finance service activities, which had thus far been handled by the state [22], and consequently contributed to the development of values such as entrepreneurship, social initiative, and social trust. The system transformation also resulted in changes in the needs and preferences of society, greater freedom of action and the possibility of shaping one's environment, the fulfilment of the needs of freedom, and the freedom to choose the object and forms of consumption [22]. It also significantly influenced the need for self-organisation among rural communities.

Grassroots civil society initiatives began to take over the roles previously played by the state, local governors, or commercial organisations, such as in schooling, health care, or tourism in rural areas. These initiatives were mainly concerned with the poorest regions of the world, primarily deficient rural areas and those with low-income rural dwellers. They may have arisen in an international context in which rich states and societies were willing to channel resources to these deprived areas [23].

Nowadays, RNPOs are no longer perceived as marginal actors but have rather become critical players who can substantially impact rural development [24]. They make an essential contribution to social and economic development, particularly in low-income communities and uncivilised locations, mainly through groundwork with traditionally disadvantaged groups in disadvantageous regions [25].

The rural context determines the specificity of rural non-profits (Table 1). The specificity of the rural location affects their functions and organisational structures, which use mainly democratic, participatory rules [26]. Their services aim to solve specific local problems, social and economic problems, and infrastructural or institutional issues to support disadvantaged beneficiaries. RNPOs usually operate on a small scale for small communities with whom they have close and direct relations. They are poor in specific resources but are committed, rooted, and experienced, typically village-level and community-based organisations. However, they must be relatively more empowered than their clients to gain credibility with marginalised societies to alter their ways of thinking on many long-standing traditional issues [27]. RNPO activists usually have a strong affiliation with the local community and understand the most pressing issues. RNPOs are traditionally set up and localised in rural areas to reach their customers directly, particularly the remote ones. Hence, naturally, they face obstacles specific to rural areas such as lack of civilisation and infrastructure.

Table 1. Main differences between rural and non-rural non-profits.

Attribute	Rural Non-Profit	Non-Rural Non-Profit
Location	Remoteness (suburban or remote rural areas)	Proximity (city centre, city fringe)
Beneficiaries	Dispersed (low population density, individuals)	Concentrated (high population density, mass)
Resources	Deficiencies (infrastructural, financial, human)	Sufficiency (infrastructural, financial, human)
Organisation	Association (participatory, democratic, familiar)	Foundation (founders, commercial, professional)

Source: authors' elaboration based on literature review (see [18,26–32]).

A rural location also means limited access to resources. RNPOs lack essential resources, such as volunteering time, membership fees, or donations. Another issue is human resources. Usually, rural populations lack sufficient administrative or professional skills to staff formal organisations. Subsequently, the lack of professional competence may result in RNPOs' exclusion from funding. Donors, especially international impact-driven, pay attention to matters such as planning, reporting, and accountability. Therefore, rural organisations also face limited access to grant-giving private foundations [26]. The large geographical area and sparse populations in rural areas also make it challenging to reach potential customers or cooperate with other organisations or governments. They also lead to rural communities relying on themselves and not being open to external cooperation. It is connected mainly with how the community behaves and influences its attitudes toward cooperation. Higher remoteness of a population means that people must rely on each other more than would be needed in cities that offer their dwellers various services, such as nurseries, kindergartens, galleries, or restaurants. RNPOs must identify these specific local problems and then mobilise local resources and efforts to solve them and serve the beneficiaries who live in remote areas.

Nevertheless, a rural location can be an asset as well. First of all, RNPOs face a high demand for their services [28]. The rural environment makes it easier to get to know and establish personal relations with clients, other NPOs/RNPOs, or government service organisations or local governors themselves. There is significant mistrust in many low-income rural communities about the role of government and, at the same time, greater trust in RNPOs, who better know their needs and represent their interests by working as brokers between the community and the government [29]. RNPOs' initiators usually have experience with local institutions, e.g., having worked in the local government, cultural centres, schools, or religious communities. They are generally well-known and respected leaders of a local community [30].

Intangible resources such as human players, relationships, networks, community unity, integrity, and commitment are significant success factors for RNPOs. The second one is the participatory approach, particularly involving the community in all stages of the implementation, from planning until long-term ownership [31]. The main features of RNPOs are participatory management, partnership-based, and multisectoral approaches and sensitive targeting. They contribute to the prevention of loss of experienced and skilled staff that need extra support, taking into account the impact on the entire resource base. The organisation staff are committed to gaining access to services and the more significant commitment of local donors, such as local governors looking for ways to stay in power [32].

In the conditions of global uncertainty, RNPOs as field organisations are increasingly important in facilitating coping, adaptation, and recovery, which trigger development and social changes in remote rural areas. RNPOs need to build their resilience under particularly challenging conditions of remoteness, which can sometimes prove to be an asset. However, the strength inherent in intangible resources such as human resources, commitment, engagement, relationships, and networks can be essential to their power. RNPOs have particularly undergone hardships under the global uncertainty during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is even more challenging for them since they experience the hardships of operating in highly disadvantageous and uncivilised areas and traditional communities on a daily basis. Therefore, for RNPOs, OR is critical in sustaining their activities in the highly harsh conditions they usually face, particularly in the outbreak of

the dramatic uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic and the need for rescuing not only their beneficiaries but also their OR.

2.2. Organisational Resilience (OR)

The growing global uncertainty of economic development leads to a constant need to build resilience in all kinds of entities worldwide—for-profit and non-profit organisations. In the literature, the concept of resilience has been defined in many ways, including personal, organisational, sectoral, and societal perspectives [33]. It has been described in various fields, including psychology, sociology, ecology, organisation theory, management, disaster management, engineering, public administration, and political science [34,35]. Thus, there are many definitions of resilience, even in the same research area [35]. However, most authors agree that it is a multidimensional and complex phenomenon [11,34,36,37].

OR is considered to be the internal adaptation of a system to external, unexpected changes and disruptions—see, e.g., [11,38]. Resilience enables effective adaptation to such challenges without an extended regressive behaviour period [39]. Furthermore, it supports the transformation of these challenges into opportunities for learning and innovation [8] and is therefore considered an essential strategic advantage [40]. From the organisational research perspective, resilience is conceptualised as, e.g., a capacity and process [41] or feature, outcome, and a measure of the disturbance that an organisation can tolerate [35]. However, it is sometimes understood differently by other authors.

Most commonly [35], OR is defined as an ability or capacity, a feature, or a particular coping mechanism through which an organisation adapts to unexpected environmental conditions such as disasters and economic challenges or internal changes (see, e.g., [39,42]). For instance, Zhang and Liu (2012) [41] indicated the central features of OR as (1) the ability of an organisation to absorb or buffer disturbances and still maintain its core functioning, (2) the ability of an organisation to self-organise, and (3) the capacity for learning and adaptation in the context of change. In turn, Erol et al., (2009) [43] pointed out enterprise flexibility, adaptability, agility, and efficiency as attributes of enterprise resilience. Moreover, McManus (2008) [44] includes adaptive capacity, situation awareness, and management of keystone vulnerabilities. In turn, Hollnagel et al., (2008) [45], as referred to in Kolay (2016) [37], identified a set of abilities that define resilience quality, which include (1) the ability to respond to various disturbances and regular and irregular threats, (2) the ability to monitor what is going on flexibly, (3) the ability to anticipate disruptions, and (4) the ability to learn from experience.

From the process point of view, resilience is concentrated on system dynamics. An organisation's activity or behaviour is seen as an element of a dynamic process of interactions within an organisation and between the organisation and its environment, which implies adapting to internal and external requirements [11]. Resilience is considered a process to recover from a disruption [46].

When describing OR as an outcome, it is defined as a result of activities. According to this perspective, an organisation is resilient when achieving some performance level [47]. Its goals and opportunities in the context of disruptive events can lead to achieving its objectives and realising opportunities in the face of predicted or unpredicted disruptive events [48].

The last of the distinguished perspectives defines OR as a measure of the tolerated disturbance that an organisation can absorb and survive [35,41,49,50] or the rate of recovery from perturbation [41]. This viewpoint indicates that resilience could explain how organisations balance stability and transformation [37,51]. This perspective suggests that resilience is a cycle of ongoing adaptation and transformation [52].

A variety of authors outlined the complexity of the resilience concept concerning its degree, maturity level, or advancement in organisations—see, e.g., [34,47,53]. On the basic level, most authors agree that an organisation is resilient if it bounces back to a prior point of stability [47], which refers to maintaining the present state. However, some indicate that resilience can also apply to bouncing forward, which means searching for and achieving

new stability, growth, and development [10]. This distinction led to identifying other maturity levels, as proposed by Valastro (2011) [53]. The author defined four main aims of organisational resilience and defined them as resilience maturity levels (lower-level maturity means low resilience, and a higher level represents a more resilient organisation). The recognised levels are decline, survive, bounce back, and bounce forward. Valero et al., (2015) [10] suggested another four-level maturity model for organisational resilience (MMOR), using other concepts and putting resilience as one of the distinguished levels. In this approach, organisations evolve and improve their abilities, moving from fragile to robust to resilient and antifragile.

Due to its complexity, organisational resilience relates to other concepts. For instance, Bruneau et al., (2003) [54] defined resiliency as robustness, rapidity, resourcefulness, and redundancy. Resilience is also considered one of many possible organisational adaptations to environmental change. For example, Gaillard (2007) [50] describes it as one of two potential organisational adaptations, while the second is vulnerability, defined as accepting crises.

Resilience is defined by most authors as the ability to react and protect the organisation from decline and recover from the disruption—i.e., its survival. However, for others, disruption can be seen as the beginning of a bounce forward. The transformation resulting from the emergence of an external disturbance and the organisation's adaptation to the new situation are related to taking advantage of new opportunities. It can lead to transformation and thriving and, thus, a new, higher resilience. The other option is to bounce back and return to the original state (Figure 1). Therefore, this study assumes that organisational resilience can be sustainable or enhanced, thus progressive; or declining, thus regressive.

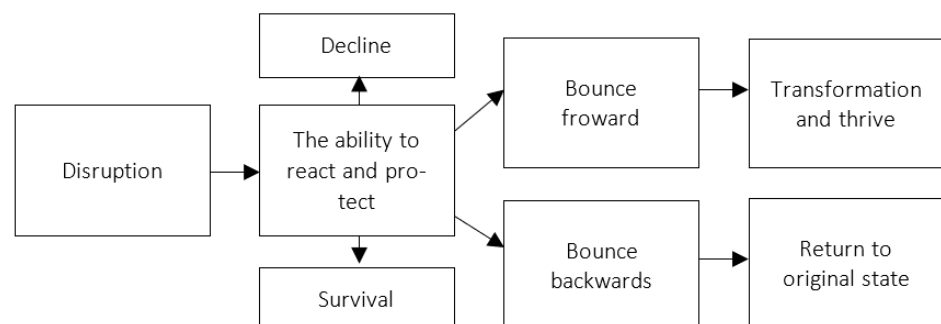


Figure 1. Transformations of organisational resilience (OR). Source: authors' elaboration based on literature review (see [10,34,39,47,53]).

2.3. Organisational Resilience (OR)-Building Areas of Activity

Studies show that NPOs have proven resilient in many countries, especially in countries with traditionally strong ties between the state and the non-profit sector [55,56], particularly RNPOs that build their organisational resilience daily under harsh conditions of remoteness and low civilisation. However, environmental conditions have changed significantly over the last two decades due to, e.g., global economic crises or public reforms (see, e.g., [55,56]) and, most recently, the COVID-19 pandemic health crisis. According to Pape et al., (2020) [55], there are three types of responses presented by non-profit organisations that have been primarily studied in the context of public reforms. They are adaptation, strategic adjustment, and exit. Adaptation includes different organisational strategies that help to conform to the market logic. Strategic adjustment comprises various activities to adjust to the changing policy environment while keeping a non-profit entity's specificity, including cooperation or innovation. The third possible way chosen by other organisations is to close up permanently or to reorient.

Resilience in non-profits is defined through different organisational operation areas, but most research has focused on the role of revenue streams in financial vulnerability or survival prospects [57,58]. In this context, most research shows that using public funding

results in higher resilience [55,59]. Non-profits' resilience develops from their adaptability to changing policy environments [55]. Some examples include professionalisation and commercialisation processes, adopting business-like methods, or building hybrid organisations [55,60]. Resilience as a process in non-profit organisations is used to maintain their integrity and viability. As a result, being resilient allows them to provide services without changing their essential functions, increase their capacity by being innovative, and strengthen the symbiotic relationships they cultivate [11].

OR is a complex phenomenon caused by many factors, varying across business models or sectors. It also varies for NPOs in different areas. According to Coutu (2002) [61], resilient people and organisations possess three characteristics—a staunch acceptance of reality; a deep belief, often buttressed by firmly held values, that life is meaningful; and an uncanny ability to improvise and undertake activities. There are different indicators of non-profit organisational resilience noted in research, such as transformational leadership style [10], operating reserves [62], succession planning [63], or volunteering [64]. Witmer and Mellinger (2016) [11] showed that numerous qualities could help organisations successfully adapt to funding changes and other disruptive challenges. They included commitment to the mission, improvisation, community reciprocity, servant and transformational leadership, hope and optimism, and fiscal transparency. Some organisations define organisational resilience as leadership development, capacity, and financial sustainability [12].

The Resilience Guide of S. D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation (2020) [65] describes seven OR areas in NPOs/RNPOs. The first factor, purpose driven, is about commitment to purpose, creating a shared understanding of shared vision, mission, and values. Secondly, clear-eyed activity means a realistic view of the challenges ahead and whether and how the organisation in question can address them. The next factor, agility, says that the organisation and its leaders should focus on future-oriented, inclusive planning and adaptive management practices. The fourth one is about being open to internal and external stakeholders by intentional communication with them. Empowerment is the next factor, connected with an inclusive organisational culture that embraces shared leadership. Resilient non-profits are also committed to the self-renewal of individual team members. The last factor is connectedness, being supported by personal relationships, institutional links, and community networks.

As many authors highlight, NPOs/RNPOs appear to undertake many activities to build their resilience, such as professionalisation, diversification of financial sources, increasing economic revenues, human resource management, intrinsic motivation, and inter-organisational and inter-sectoral cooperation [66–71]. It seems that third-sector organisations' resilience-building areas can be categorised as specific and non-specific, whereby passive (non-specific/non-active) areas operate as automatic barriers protecting the organisation against external fluctuations, which are included in their structures or functions, and do not require specific activities. In such a case, there is no need for change. On the other side, NPOs/RNPOs can actively undertake activities in specific areas to increase their ability to react to and protect from disruptions and adapt. Therefore, they usually undertake crisis management or other activities in finance, forms and scopes, human resources, cooperation, and work organisation or planning (Figure 2).

This study assumes one non-specific—i.e., passive/inactive—area as no change (NC) and eight specific—i.e., active—areas within which RNPOs have undertaken activities under the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting global uncertainty. They are crisis management (CM), finance (FI), activity forms (AF), activity scopes (AS), cooperation (CO), human resources (HR), work organisation (WO), and planning (PL).

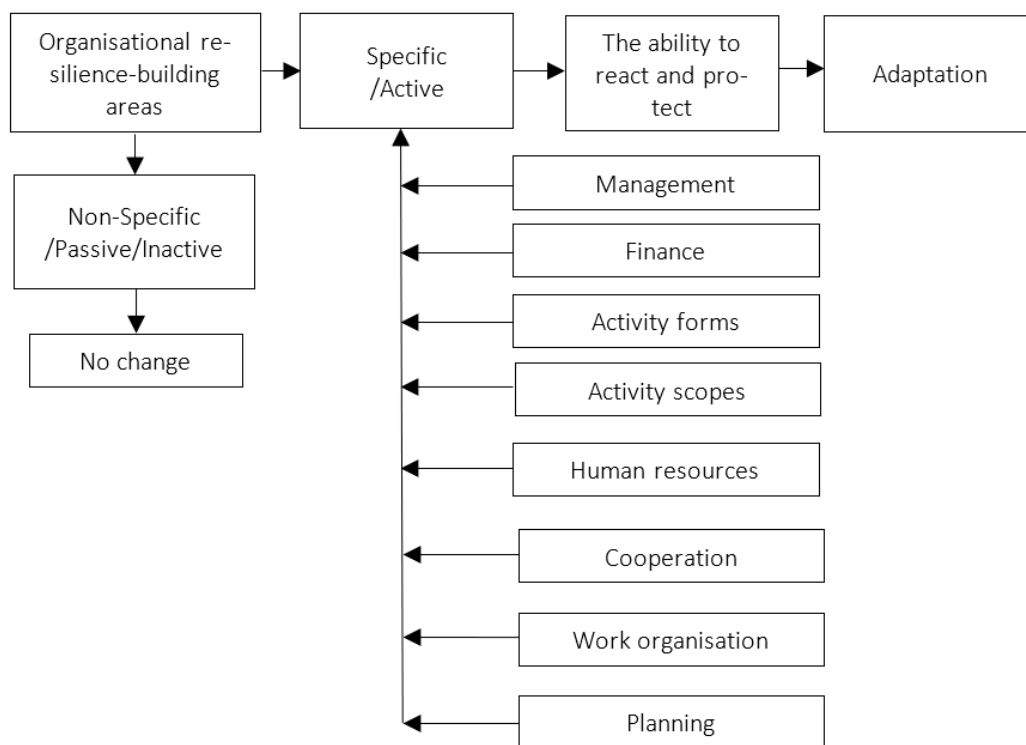


Figure 2. NPOs/RNPOs' organisational resilience-building areas of activity. Source: authors' elaboration based on literature review (see [57–60,66–71]).

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Conceptual Framework

RNPOs are located within rural areas and directed towards supporting rural beneficiaries. They face specific challenges and difficulties of spatial and civil remoteness, affecting their OR. RNPOs' OR is primarily built under a low population density, infrastructural deficiencies, and low population incomes. OR is particularly important under global uncertainty, during which aid expectations of RNPOs dramatically increase, as has been the case in the COVID-19 pandemic.

This study defines OR as the ability to adapt appropriately by undertaking activities towards the effects of a problem. The emergence of uncertainty causes OR to be tested. The study refers to OR as a phenomenon that can occur with varying degrees of intensity and can stabilise, change, or exacerbate the state of an entity subject to adverse external factors. It is assumed that OR is a gradable phenomenon with the possibility of determining its degree (see, e.g., [53], and therefore, its levels are transformative (also see Figure 1). Furthermore, it is assumed that OR is also related to the entity's adaptation to disruption and the activities undertaken to prevent its weakening or collapse. Moreover, each organisation has at its disposal different capabilities in terms of activities undertaken. However, organisations can take various actions in other areas depending on needs and possibilities. For example, organisations can respond proactively by undertaking activities to adapt and build OR by positively exploiting changes in the environment. Alternatively, organisations can remain passive and adapt reactively to changes in the background, trying to survive the crisis.

These assumptions are particularly vital when analysing global uncertainties in the course of their duration when it is still challenging to predict their final results, as is the case during the COVID-19 pandemic. This conceptualisation allows testing OR levels of RNPOs associated with the activities undertaken. It assumes that less resilient organisations (downward and regressive) take significantly more activities to counteract the adverse effects than more resilient organisations (sustainable and progressive).

3.2. Hypothesis

This study explores the activities undertaken by RNPOs under the uncertain condition of the global COVID-19 pandemic. The general hypothesis of this study is that understanding OR is associated with the areas of activity undertaken to adapt and build OR. In particular, two research hypotheses are being tested, as follows.

Hypothesis 1 (H1). *There are relationships between OR levels that define the understanding of OR.*

Hypothesis 2 (H2). *There are relationships between OR levels within the areas of undertaken activities.*

Firstly, six correlations between OR levels were examined. Secondly, six correlations within nine areas of activity were tested. Fifty-four specific statistical hypotheses for each descriptive level of OR relationship ($\binom{4}{2} = 6$) in the areas of undertaken activities or non-activity (9) were tested. Therefore, 54 relationships between them were examined.

3.3. The Data and Sample

This study sampled various groups of RNPOs. The sample consisted of 35 RNPOs, located in rural areas which address their services towards rural beneficiaries in Poland. The sample was selected from the non-profit organisations' database held by the National Court Register, where they are required to register. The selection represents the structure of RNPOs well. In April/May 2020, management staff representatives of RNPOs were surveyed through online devices. The respondents provided enumerative answers. One manager represented each surveyed RNPO. We asked to answer only the leaders of the organisation who have complete knowledge about its functioning and plans. The respondents were asked to indicate their position. These were the presidents and members of the board as well as directors (senior management). To fully answer the queries, specific competencies and knowledge about the organisation were required. Therefore, only the top management or the board members were the appropriate respondents in this design.

The questionnaire consisted of 13 close-ended questions, with 4 descriptive questions investigating managers' assessment of their organisation's resilience levels, and 9 identifying areas of undertaken activities (crisis management—CM; finance—FI; activity forms—AF; activity scopes—AS; cooperation—CO; human resources—HR; work organisation—WO; planning—PL; no change—NC). A 10-point end-defined Likert scale was used to rank the responses, as suggested by Cummins and Gullone (2000) [72]. This produces increased sensitivity of the measurement instrument and avoids the limitations and difficulties of using standard 5- or 7-choice scales. Respondents were informed that ten means 'total agreement' with the statement, and one means 'I do not agree at all' with the statement.

The broad evaluation scale assigned to responses allowed for differentiating responses that may have been influenced by emotions, which were particularly strong in the early days of the COVID-19 crisis. It also allowed for a reflection of the multidimensional consequences of the lockdown for the RNPOs. However, more importantly, it led to distinguishing the OR levels since the respondents were not faced with an ultimatum, such as resilient vs. non-resilient. The respondents were allowed to make a broader statement about OR levels.

3.4. Measurement

Spearman's rank correlation coefficient ρ_S was applied to study the relationships between the variables characterising the population under investigation. The rules for applying, calculating, and testing the significance or interpretation of this coefficient are

widely described in the literature [73–91]. The comparisons of ρ_S values were based on the coefficient of determination R^2 (most frequently expressed as a percentage) [79,88,92–94].

In order to determine the degree of easiness/difficulty of the transformations between the OR levels, a transformation coefficient was formulated (1).

$$d = \frac{|a - b|}{2} \quad (1)$$

where a and b are the weighted averages of the RNPO managers' responses regarding two analysed descriptive levels of OR from the four derived, i.e., PR, SR, RR, and DR.

The weights were the individual response's counts, and their values were set on a particular Likert scale. When interpreting the transformation coefficient, it was assumed that the lower its value is, the higher the easiness of transformation between OR levels is. Conversely, the higher the transformation coefficient value is, the greater the difficulty of transformation between levels is.

4. Results

4.1. Relationships Between Levels of Organisational Resilience (OR)

Based on the responses of the RNPO managers, we derived four levels of organisational resilience (OR), with two being positive (optimistic)—progressive or sustainable—while the others are negative (pessimistic)—regressive and downward (Table 2).

Table 2. Descriptive levels of organisational resilience (OR).

Level	Description
I Progressive (PR)	The organisation takes advantage of opportunities arising from changes in the environment as a result of activating new areas of operation, bounces forward, and improves aspects of the organisation's functioning.
II Sustainable (SR)	The organisation takes adaptive measures within internal adaptations, which enables it to survive and return to the state before the environmental change and so to bounce backwards quickly and effectively.
III Regressive (RR)	The organisation reacts and adapts poorly to the disruption. The actions taken are not proactive enough to maintain its position. As a result of changes in the environment, the organisation accepts a worsened state after disruption.
IV Downward (DR)	The organisation remains passive, does not undertake activities to adapt, is not resilient and has little chance of survival.

Notes: PR—progressive resilience; SR—sustainable resilience; RR—regressive resilience; DR—downward resilience. Source: authors' survey.

Since the RNPO managers ranked the OR levels simultaneously, the next step of the analysis was to compute the correlations between their responses. The variables meet the assumptions of ρ_S for tied ranks, and p -values for each pair of variables were computed.

Table 3 shows the correlation matrix between the four OR levels. As can be seen from the p -values, the null hypothesis for three pairs of variables (SR–RR, SR–DR, and RR–DR) can be rejected, and the alternative hypothesis that there is a statistically significant correlation at the 0.05 level and even at the 0.01 level (two-tailed) can be accepted. The p -values calculated for the other three pairs of variables (PR–SR, PR–RR, and PR–DR) do not allow us to accept the null hypothesis as there is no statistically significant correlation. The latter three p -values are, in fact, higher than 0.05. They are as follows: $p = 0.066$ (PR–SR), $p = 0.710$ (PR–RR), and $p = 0.056$ (PR–DR). However, the strength of the correlations of two pairs of variables was moderate, at 0.31 (PR–SR) and -0.33 (PR–DR).

Interestingly, one pair of variables, SR–RR, was statistically significant at the 0.05 level of significance. For two pairs of variables (SR–DR and RR–DR), the p -values were even lower than 0.01.

Although the values of statistically significant ρ_S with tied ranks are most important for the formulation of conclusions, it is, nevertheless, helpful to compare the values of statistically significant correlations, and having no statistically significant ones provides a

complete understanding of the practical importance of the relationships between the four descriptive levels of RNPO resilience.

Table 3. Spearman’s rank correlation coefficients ρ_S and determination coefficients (R^2 in %) matrix between descriptive levels of organisational resilience (OR).

	PR	SR	RR	DR
Progressive (PR)	1	0.31 −9.89%	−0.07 −0.43%	−0.33 −10.65%
Sustainable (SR)		1	−0.43 ** −18.25%	−0.65 * −42.83%
Regressive (RR)			1	0.49 * −24.24%
Downward (DR)				1

Notes: PR—progressive resilience; SR—sustainable resilience; RR—regressive resilience; DR—downward resilience. * Statistically significant correlation at the 0.01 level. ** Statistically significant correlation at the 0.05 level. Source: authors’ survey.

The direction of ρ_S confirms the validity of the analysis of the four descriptive levels of organisational resilience from two different perspectives. This is because PR and SR were found to represent OR from an optimistic perspective, while RR and DR were found to represent organisational resilience from a pessimistic perspective. Therefore, the correlation coefficient has a positive direction between OR types from the same perspective as perceived by the surveyed RNPO managers. Thus, the correlation coefficient directions between PR and SR and RR and DR are positive.

On the other hand, the correlation coefficient has a negative direction between OR types from a different perspective according to the analysed RNPOs. This is confirmed by the negative direction of the correlation between four pairs of variables (RR–PR, RR–SR, DR–PR, and DR–SR). The direction of the correlations confirms two different approaches to understanding RNPOs’ resilience.

The significant statistical correlation coefficient was the highest for the pair SR–DR, with a strong correlation of -0.65 . The ρ_S strength was moderate (0.49) for RR–DR. The third most significant statistical correlation, between SR and RR, was also moderate (-0.42).

R^2 , expressed as a percentage, was calculated because one cannot directly compare the values of the ρ_S with each other to answer the question of how much stronger or weaker one is than the other. Two R^2 values were calculated based on two correlations that are not statistically significant between the two pairs of variables, namely PR–SR and PR–DR, the results of which indicate that only 9.89% of the variation in the PR variable is explained by variation in the SR variable, and 10.65% of the variation in the PR variable is explained by variation in the DR variable. From these two R^2 values, the variable PR explains insignificant changes in SR and DR, and vice versa. The studied RNPOs did not associate the two levels of OR strongly with each other. However, the studied RNPO managers identified PR almost equally with both optimistic SR and pessimistic DR. In times of uncertainty, the line between an optimistic approach and a pessimistic approach to OR becomes blurred. This may suggest the greatest ease of transformation between the optimistic approach to OR (SR) and the pessimistic approach to OR (RR) under the global uncertainty conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic (Table 4).

When interpreting the coefficient of transformation, it was assumed that the lower its value is, the greater the easiness of transformation between descriptive OR levels would be. Conversely, the higher the value of the d is, the greater the difficulty of transformation between them would be.

In addition, it is noteworthy that the transformation between two levels of resilience of the same optimistic approach, i.e., from PR to SR or vice versa, is gradual (step by step) and smooth, while the transition between two levels of resilience of different approaches, i.e., from PR to DR or vice versa, is a leap and sudden. It should also be highlighted that the variations in both variables (RR–DR) for a pessimistic approach to OR are more strongly

associated with each other than the variations in both variables for an optimistic approach to OR are. The moderate correlation coefficient (0.49) between RR and DR suggests that RNPOs are pessimistic about OR under the conditions of global uncertainty in the COVID-19 pandemic. Interestingly, and most importantly, as much as 42% of the variation in the SR variable is explained by variation in the DR variable. In contrast, half as much variation in the RR variable is explained by variation in the DR variable.

Table 4. The d coefficients of transformations between descriptive OR levels.

	PR	SR	RR	DR
Progressive (PR)	0	1.87	1.51	1.04
Sustainable (SR)		0	0.35	0.83
Regressive (RR)			0	0.47
Downward (DR)				0

Notes: PR—progressive resilience; SR—sustainable resilience; RR—regressive resilience; DR—downward resilience. Source: authors' survey.

The variability of the SR variable related to the optimistic perception of OR is more strongly explained by the variables RR and DR for the pessimistic approach to OR than by the variable PR for the optimistic approach to OR. The total variability of optimistic RNPO resilience is more strongly accounted for and explained by the pessimistic OR approach. This further confirms that the studied RNPOs are looking at the future of their organisations with great concern for their survival and return to the pre-pandemic situation.

Even more interestingly, changes in SR are most strongly explained by changes in DR, followed by the less pessimistic approach to OR, which is represented by RR. Based on the transformation coefficient, it can be concluded that the transformation from SR to DR, or vice versa from DR to SR ($d = 0.83$), can be more difficult than the gradual transformation from SR to RR ($d = 0.35$). Thus, survival and return to the original pre-pandemic state become even more uncertain when the process of OR is not gradual and moderate, but it can be abrupt and robust. Under conditions of global uncertainty, building OR may lack the predictability of the sequence of specific actions. This, in turn, may prompt some RNPOs to introduce crisis management, which presents some predictability of activities during a crisis period, or to not to keep up with the changes taking place and take no action at all.

4.2. Levels of Organisational Resilience (OR) and Areas of Undertaken Activities

Under the conditions of global uncertainty in the COVID-19 pandemic, the surveyed RNPOs undertook activities in various areas to adopt and build OR. On average, two activities were indicated per organisation surveyed. The most significantly indicated (15%) activity was crisis management (CM), which seems quite natural in the face of a crisis, especially in its first phase. However, in second place was inaction (NC), accounting for 14% of all indications. This shows the passive adaptation of some RNPOs under the conditions of global uncertainty in the COVID-19 pandemic. The fewest indications were made for HR (four responses, 6%) and PL (five responses, 7%). Due to the low number of RNPO managers' indications, HR and PL were not included in the correlation analysis. As far as activity forms and scopes are concerned, 13% and 10% of the surveyed organisations adapted these areas, respectively. It is important to note that 86% of the organisations surveyed actively adapted under the COVID-19 pandemic global uncertainty condition (Figure 3). Table 5 demonstrates statistically significant values of ρ_S and R^2 in %. The surveyed RNPO managers identified PR with DR or vice versa. The association of PR with DR requires actions in the areas of FI, AS, and CO.

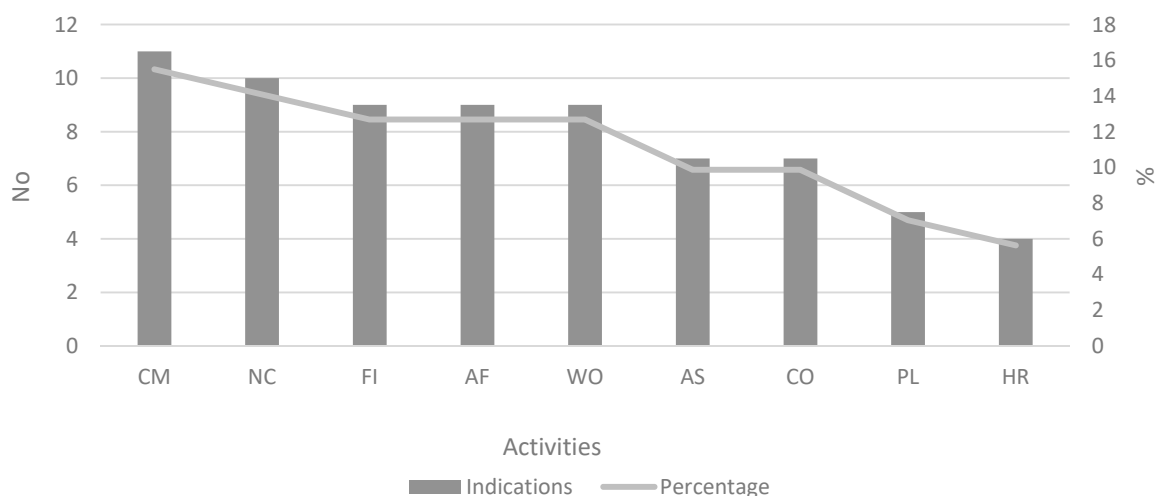


Figure 3. The areas of activity undertaken by RNPOs under the uncertainty conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic. Notes: CM—crisis management; FI—finance; AF—activity forms; AS—activity scopes; CO—cooperation; HR—human resources; WO—work organisation; PL—planning; NC—no change. Source: authors’ survey.

Table 5. Statistically significant Spearman’s rank correlation coefficients (ρ_s) and determination coefficients (R^2 in %) matrix between levels of organisational resilience (OR) in the areas of undertaken activities.

	PR	SR	RR	DR
Progressive (PR)	1			AS: -0.82^{**} (67.40%) CO: -0.79^{**} (63.20%) FI: -0.70^{**} (49.56%)
Sustainable (SR)		1	CM: -0.73^{**} (53.00%)	CM: -0.91^* (83.54%) WO: -0.88^* (77.79%)
Regressive (RR)			1	CM: 0.81^* (66.10%) AF: 0.75^{**} (56.55%)
Downward (DR)				1

Notes: CM—crisis management; FI—finance; AF—activity forms; AS—activity scopes; CO—cooperation; WO—work organisation. * Statistically significant correlation at the 0.01 level. ** Statistically significant correlation at the 0.05 level. Source: authors’ survey.

Similarly, the RNPO managers surveyed who associated SR with RR undertook only CM. On the other hand, if the surveyed RNPOs undertook activities in the areas of AS, CO, and FI, it means that they showed great concern about the relationship of organisational resilience within the extreme levels of PR and DR. This is because associating the two extreme descriptive types of OR requires making changes in the most significant areas of RNPO activity.

Adequate adaptation means transforming from a pessimistic understanding of OR to an optimistic one or a transformation within the same approach to OR, i.e., from SR to PR or from DR to RR. Adequate adaptation leads to strengthening OR. In contrast, inadequate adaptation means transformation from an optimistic understanding of OR to a pessimistic

one, or transformation within the same approach to OR, i.e., from PR to SR or from RR to DR.

On the other hand, inadequate adaptation leads to the weakening of organisational resilience. Therefore, what is crucial for a change in the OR approach from DR to PR or vice versa is an adequate adaptation (moving from DR to PR) or inadequate adaptation (moving from PR to DR) in the form of adaptations made in the areas of AS (−0.82), CO (−0.79), and FI (−0.70). They explain, respectively, up to 67.4%, 63.2%, and 49.6% of the variation in the PR variable, explained by variation in the DR variable, and vice versa.

This may bring to mind adaptations in activity areas requiring cooperation or adaptations in cooperation contributing to adaptations in the AS. In turn, adaptations in the scopes of activities or in CO may contribute to adaptations in the FI of the studied RNPOs.

In contrast, the investigated RNPOs' managers perceived the possibility of weakening organisational resilience (OR) when SR and DR are associated. The activities undertaken included CM, as indicated by the very strong association (−0.91). Hence, in the area of CM, the 83.54% variation in the SR variable is explained by variation in the DR variable and vice versa. They also perceived the need to undertake activities in the WO, as it has a strong association.

This may bring to mind the introduction of CM requiring adaptations in the WO. Appropriate adaptation or inappropriate adaptation in these two areas of activities (CM and WO) may contribute to the relation of SR to DR or vice versa.

In addition, the strongest association between the two pessimistic approaches to OR (RR and DR) also requires a very strong association between them and CM (0.81). In the area of CM, 66.10% of the variation in the RR variable is explained by variation in the DR variable and vice versa. The second area strongly associated with countering the decline in OR is AF (0.75). Here, 56.55% of the total variability of RR is accounted for or explained by DR in AF, whereas in the area of CM, 66.10% of the variation in the RR variable is explained by variation in the DR variable and vice versa.

5. Discussion

This study primarily adopted quantitative methods for studying the relationships and transformations between the evaluated levels of OR and areas of undertaken activities. However, the analyses carried out also allowed for a qualitative assessment of the phenomenon studied. The quantitative analyses used basic descriptive statistics and statistical inference to test whether the study population met the assumptions of the non-parametric monotonic correlation testing method. They also enabled the formulation of research and statistical hypotheses. After discussing whether these assumptions are met, the paper focused on hypothesis testing and verification, Spearman's rank correlation coefficient ρ_S for tied ranks, and calculation of the coefficient of determination R^2 to interpret the value ρ_S and the d coefficient to draw conclusions on OR transformations. Hypothesis testing and verification allowed for determining the statistical significance of the direction and strength of ρ_S of tied ranks. The values of the statistically significant correlation coefficients permitted, from the quantitative side, the achievement of the research objective and an answer to the research questions. The main research hypotheses were positively verified.

Nowadays, RNPOs are critical for rural areas and rural communities' development worldwide. Emerging research on RNPOs demonstrates their role and the specific barriers they face considering rural community characteristics [18,24,30,95,96]. This article examines organisational resilience (OR) and the activities undertaken to ensure adaptation under the global uncertainty conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our research questions focused on understanding the OR of third-sector organisations in rural areas and their capability to cope and adapt in times of disruptions affecting organisations. We used the OR concept to analyse the experiences of rural non-profit organisations (RNPOs) in a time of global uncertainty and evaluated the coping and adaptation behaviours, and lastly, we matched the undertaken activities with OR. Our

study documented that OR is not a single state but can be assessed at several levels. In our research, four descriptive levels of OR were derived.

We found that different OR levels are related to building organisational resilience, and that the understanding of OR is related to the activities undertaken by RNPOs to adapt and build OR. Interestingly, the studied RNPOs' managers strongly identified the optimistic sustainable (SR) approach to OR with the most pessimistic (DR) approach. Building sustainable OR is associated with downward resilience (DR). It follows that the rationale for building sustainable resilience in RNPOs is primarily to bounce backwards from DR. To a lesser extent, the rationale for ensuring sustainable RNPOs' resilience is to bounce back from RR.

These findings from the study also reveal a stronger and more abrupt bounce backwards from DR compared to the gradual and smooth bounce backwards from RR to build SR. It stands to reason that RNPOs building SR bounce back more intensely and by a leap from an extreme pessimistic (DR) approach to OR than from a less pessimistic (RR) approach to OR.

Changes in SR are most strongly explained by changes in DR, followed by the less pessimistic approach to OR, which is represented by RR. This also shows that the transformation from SR to DR, or vice versa from DR to SR, can be more difficult than the gradual transformation from SR to RR. Thus, survival and return to the original pre-pandemic state become even more uncertain when the building of OR is not gradual and moderate but rather abrupt and robust. Under conditions of global uncertainty, the process of building OR may lack predictability of the sequence of specific actions. This further confirms that RNPOs are looking at the future of their organisations with great concern for their survival and return to the pre-pandemic state, because survival is becoming uncertain and this return is unrealistic in the new post-pandemic reality.

This uncertainty is further exacerbated by RNPOs' understanding of OR, whose post-pandemic state will differ from the original pre-pandemic state. Consequently, passive adaptation aimed at returning to the original state and reaching a prior stability point may trigger a greater degree of uncertainty than active adaptation leading to transformation, thriving, and reaching a new post-pandemic stability point. Returning to the original state or reaching a previous point of stability is already unrealistic after the COVID-19 pandemic. Under conditions of post-pandemic uncertainty, passive adaptation is supposed to ensure a return to the unrealistic original pre-pandemic state. However, it may lead to the survival and then to the decline of RNPOs. This is because inaction is a bounce backwards from a decline and an attempt to return to a prior point of stability, but in a new post-pandemic reality. Inaction is passiveness and can be directed at seeking its justification in a changing environment. In this sense, action can have a non-specific character, bouncing backwards from a decline to escape the post-pandemic crisis and survive in no change. Such action does not trigger a particular dynamic of interconnected adaptations oriented towards co-creation of the future.

This is because post-pandemic adaptation requires complex, comprehensive, and dynamic actions, reflecting a bouncing forward towards a new point of stability through transformation, even if it is abrupt and a leap. Thus, passive adaptation does not lead to building OR when the post-pandemic reality requires complex, comprehensive, and dynamic actions in order to adapt to the highly interconnected effects of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis.

The post-pandemic world is of a new quality that changes the factors and external environment of RNPOs, but mainly inside their organisations. This seems reasonable since the environment in which non-profits operate is essential to their effectiveness and the results of their employment relations. The influences of the COVID-19 pandemic could shape non-profit HRM and employees' ability to assist people [2,97]. Thus, organisations with an optimistic approach do not perceive or experience threats as intensely as organisations with a pessimistic focus on HR preparation and protection do.

In addition, adequate (or not adequate) adaptation is essential for changing OR. These changes are made chiefly in the activity scope, cooperation and finance areas among organisations strengthening their OR in an abrupt and steep adaptation, primarily in crisis management and work organisation among organisations with lowering OR during a gradual and smooth transition transformation.

Others' research findings show that OR results from their adaptability and ability to flexibly use the strategy that best serves them in a given situation. Pape et al., (2020) [55] introduced adaptation, strategic adjustment, and exit as responses to change. Our study shows that essential adaptation occurs in the areas of activity scopes, cooperation, and finance among organisations that actively build their OR. They correspond with Pepe's approach, even though they focus on a different nature of disruption. Some organisations decline or seriously adapt their AS.

In contrast, others introduce adaptations in the FI area (which can sometimes be interpreted as an adaptation to new market logic) or CO (strategic adjustment, e.g., trying to find new solutions in the policy environment). While adaptation in this approach is linked to market-oriented activity, strategic adaptation is related to policy changes, and the latter adaptation seems much more common among non-profits. Organisations' early reactions to the COVID-19 pandemic focused on, e.g., advocacy coalition, creating different kinds of solutions, adaptations to continue to provide services, innovative practices, and development of new roles to respond to current challenges [98,99].

The organisations learned from past trajectories, discussed future scenarios, and assessed how the actual shocks were dealt with. Still, an open question remains concerning the ability of the third sector to provide mid-term and long-term rescue and undertake activities for their beneficiaries. After all, they are organisations whose primary task is to help, support, and create positive adaptations. However, this was not the core of our analysis. It should be mentioned that organisational vulnerabilities are linked to internal abilities and the government–non-profit relationship and institutional context of their operation. As they depend on governmental policy, more or less room is left for RNPOs to operate [100].

Non-profits all over the world responded with different capacities to the pandemic's challenges. At first, it seemed that the concerns of the studied RNPOs were similar to those in other parts of the world [101–105]. Most organisations had to reduce their activity scopes or even close. They struggled with revenue decreases and difficulties with cooperation and communication with partners, donors, and clients. Some research found that many non-profits were hit fastest and hardest by the pandemic from the fiscal perspective [106]. However, the pandemic's impact has a different scale and order, as many NPOs/RNPOs face a three-dimensional crisis in resourcing, operation, and demand. It depends very much on local circumstances and national and local policy responses to COVID-19, and research to shed light on these immediate experiences is still emerging [107].

As for actions taken to cope with this demanding situation and to adapt effectively, organisations focused on, e.g., HR and WO issues, such as managing the stress and anxiety of staff and transitioning staff to a remote work environment, or activity scope and forms for clients to be able to access programs and services, e.g., access to adequate activity forms to deliver remote programs and services and adequate supplies to deliver programs (e.g., personal protective equipment) [101,108]. They often intensified activities in finances such as fundraising or financial scenario re-evaluation [101]. They also made a special effort to secure the organisation financially (e.g., cutting expenses, drawing on reserves) and to increase revenue, (e.g., make a unique appeal to donors, apply for public donations or loans) [105].

Most organisations demonstrated a sufficient size and structure to respond to the pandemic. However, the findings reveal potential vulnerabilities in non-profit resilience due to the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly related to financial and human resources and cooperation [108]. However, in our research, we presented the specific activities undertaken related to an organisation's resilience approach, so the next step was to characterise and

explain the specific solutions implemented in organisations, which are not discussed in most research so far. This corresponds with our findings showing which measures are essential for resilience and recovery and verifying them in the rural environment.

Being prepared to transform and carry out a sustainable transition during external disruption is crucial in the COVID-19 pandemic era. Organisations have made efforts to react as appropriately as possible. However, COVID-19 affected the system elements mostly negatively. It appears dependent on the type of organisation, and NPOs/RNPOs have been affected by COVID-19 positively only in the area of organisational systems, while being negatively affected especially in terms of service provision, management and strategy, and procurement and marketing [5].

Furthermore, this study shows that RNPOs understand their OR and the resulting active adaptation to transform and thrive in building OR. The post-pandemic spill-over even more strongly affects interrelated RNPOs' staff and volunteers with their beneficiaries, creating a supportive community of inclusion, collectively better understanding their resilience and actively adapting to new realities.

These effects further blur the boundaries between levels of resilience and between the external and the internal in the activities of RNPOs, so firmly based on human resources. Therefore, it seems that overcoming barriers means bouncing backwards from a decline, which is not sufficient for building OR. It requires co-creating new interrelated internal and external realities through bouncing forward and active adaptation oriented towards AS, FI, and CO, particularly in the relationship of extreme pessimistic downward resilience with extreme optimistic progressive resilience.

The studied RNPOs have striven to rebuild resilience in the aftermath of the pandemic. However, they are no longer the same as before the pandemic, striving instead for new stability in the transformation process, but not to restore pre-pandemic stability, as they actively adapt to the new co-created post-pandemic quality to avoid further crises.

Last but not least, the importance of the findings and contributions presented in this study has to be considered with their limitations in mind. First, a causal relationship was not confirmed as the analysis shows only correlations. Second, because this study's sample was small and represents one country origin, the findings cannot be generalised to all rural organisations. Therefore, replication of this study in different contexts is suggested to test the generality of the results. Third, the comparison to earlier findings is limited since the enormous production and household sectors' lockdown has never happened before on such a large scale and never before had such a multidimensional socio-economic impact taken place. Therefore, this study is more of a review and evaluation of an ongoing situation than a continuation of previous studies.

However, the value of this study lies mainly in the fact that its results bring essential knowledge about the building of RNPOs' OR in the significantly changing and uncertain global environment. In this way, our research fills an identified critical theoretical as well as empirical research gap. Regardless of the limitations mentioned above, the paper provides implications for OR research and contributes to the literature with its assessment of levels' relationships within areas of activity undertaken under conditions of global uncertainty.

6. Conclusions

This study confirmed that building organisational resilience requires understanding its levels, determining the strength and direction of the relationships between them to undertake corrective activities to adapt and transform RNPOs in an environment of post-pandemic uncertainty.

The studied RNPO managers' responses distinguished four levels of organisational resilience (OR), assigned to two approaches to OR: from the most optimistic understanding of OR as progressive resilience (PR) to the most pessimistic understanding of OR as downward resilience (DR). In order to build organisational resilience, RNPOs can realise one of two adaptations. Only active adaptation oriented towards the co-creation of a future post-pandemic reality by undertaking activities in relevant areas of RNPOs' functioning

contributes to building OR. This adaptation may involve a gradual (step-by-step) and smooth transformation under conditions of post-pandemic uncertainty. In turn, this transformation allows an easier focus on fewer areas of activities, as occurs between the descriptive levels of SR, RR, and DR.

However, post-pandemic uncertainty may associate active adaptation with a leap, abruptness, and more difficult transformation when conducted between levels of OR representing different RNPOs' approaches to OR. Regardless of the type of transformation, active adaptation entails bouncing forward towards a new point of stability. RNPOs may perform passive adaptation, which entails bouncing backward in an unrealistic attempt to return to the original state and a prior point of stability in an already new post-pandemic reality. However, realising this adaptation may lead, at most, to uncertain and fragile survival because this original state in the post-pandemic environment will not only no longer return to being this pre-pandemic state, but it is understood as highly pessimistic DR. In a period of post-pandemic uncertainty requiring complex, comprehensive, and dynamic actions, the delineation between an optimistic and a pessimistic understanding of organisational resilience becomes blurred. This implies the need to focus on the most critical specific area of RNPOs, the one most strongly associated with their other activities.

Therefore, the studied RNPOs mainly made an active adaptation, focusing on their most critical specific activity area. Most often, RNPOs conducted activities in crisis management (CM) when the approach to OR was understood highly pessimistically. However, CM is not the sole recovery measure in this most challenging case nor the only antidote to resolve a pandemic crisis' complex interrelated effects.

In general, a consistent pattern was found. The stronger the RNPO managers' associated extreme descriptive OR levels were, the greater the number of areas in which RNPOs undertake activities was. Consequently, the top three core resilience-building areas (AS, CO, and FI) require a relationship between OR extremes. Building OR under the uncertainty of the impact of complex and comprehensive pandemic effects on RNPOs fosters a blurring of the hermetic boundaries between levels of OR, while at the same time identifying them with each other, but with different strengths, and this in turn also requires different specific activity areas of active adaptation.

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