

## Article

# Selected Determinants of Stakeholder Influence on Project Management in Non-Profit Organizations

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**Abstract:** The article concerns the impact of stakeholders on project management in non-profit organizations. This issue was presented from the perspective of the organization's project management maturity. It seems that this issue has not yet been adequately researched by scientists. Contribution was made to the theory of project management by highlighting the need to adjust the level of project management maturity and stakeholder management maturity, and by recommending areas for further research. It has been noted that stakeholder management and risk assessment are just as important as the issues of financing projects and planning their purpose, scope and selection of project teams. The conclusions were based on the analysis of the results of empirical research. The empirical material came from a study based on a sample of 93 non-profit organizations operating in Poland.

**Keywords:** project management maturity (PMM); non-profit organizations; stakeholder management



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## 1. Introduction

In recent years, in the area of project management, it was observed that the success of a project is influenced not only by people who are members of project teams, steering committees or representatives of the sponsor or client of the project, but also by stakeholders [1–4] (pp. 173–184). A project, regardless of its character, is always carried out in a specific environment. It is shaped by the stakeholders of a given project who influence it and its management team in various ways. Moreover, informed and committed stakeholders are essential for the successful implementation of a project-related change. It can therefore be concluded that competent stakeholder engagement is one of the key success factors in project management [5].

This is particularly evident in non-profit organizations' projects, which, apart from typical project features, are distinguished by high dependence on the environment, cooperation with entities in the environment and partnership [6,7]. Thanks to the projects, non-profit organizations have a better chance to achieve their social goals stemming from the needs of stakeholders [8–10].

Currently, projects in non-profit organizations help to solve many complex socio-economic and environmental problems. Their implementation, often directed at sustainable development, requires proactive involvement of stakeholders. Eskerod and Huemann (2013) combine sustainable development, projects and the role of stakeholders and conclude that there is a need to "involve stakeholders and their interests in more project management activities than before" [11] (p. 45). The trend of a sustainability approach to management based on the assumptions of the triple bottom line, corporate social responsibility, sustainable business models and other concepts has been growing for many years. There is evidence that the concept of sustainability has become a paradigm [12].

In this situation, the inclusion of the issues of sustainable development and social responsibility in project management is slowly becoming a standard. Social responsibility in the implementation of the project comes down to greater responsibility for the impact of the project and its results on society and the environment, taking responsibility for possible negative effects and a stronger focus on identifying the needs of the project's stakeholders and providing a unique product that is created with ethical and moral principles. Therefore, it means a holistic approach to project implementation, which, in addition to the classic parameters of the iron triangle (time, cost, scope), also takes into account the so-called 5P: environmental factors (Planet), social factors (People), economic factors (Profit), factors related to processes (Process), factors related to results (Product). The implementation of projects by non-profit organizations corresponds to the postulated sustainability principles in project management, such as: social, environmental and economic interest, short-term and long-term orientation, local, regional and global orientation, values and ethics, transparency and accountability, risk reduction, consuming income and not capital and stakeholder participation [13] (p. 32). In connection with the above, it can be concluded that project activity becomes a way and an opportunity to shape a better, sustainable world [14], and such goals are guided by many projects that are implemented by non-profit organizations.

In this way, the scope of project management is shifting from traditional time, budget and quality management towards the management of social, environmental and economic impacts [15] (p. 80).

We assume that stakeholder involvement in project implementation by non-profit organizations is related to project maturity. This topic is not very well researched. Literature study on the subject indicates that there are many different studies on attempts to develop new, or adaptation of already recognized concepts, methods and management tools that take into account the specificity of non-profit organizations. However, there is a lack of research results on the efficiency of non-profit organizations' project management and, consequently, stakeholder engagement. Publications available [6,16–22] mainly concern the life cycle of an organization, strategic management, risk management, communication methods, professionalization of management and success factors of non-profit organizations. The literature on the subject is dominated by publications and research relating to the project maturity of corporations [23–30]. Moreover, in Poland the subject of project maturity of an organization has been studied, but the research results we have identified indicate that they also apply to profit-oriented organizations [28,30]. Therefore, it is recommended to conduct research projects aimed at expanding knowledge in the indicated scope and clarifying the above-mentioned issues. In our opinion, what is cognitively interesting are the issues aimed at confirming the relationship between stakeholder engagement and the sustainability of project results in relation to projects implemented by non-profit organizations. Stakeholders involved in non-profit organizations play a key role in effective and sustainable management. They can also affect the longevity of the results achieved. Non-profit organizations face the need to create interconnected programs while delivering coordinated services, and the need for post-project reviews, assessing the sustainability of their effects and collecting data to facilitate future activities [31–34]. The orientation of the implemented projects towards ensuring lasting effects in the environment which such projects are implemented for seems particularly important here. The studies conducted so far do not fully explain the abovementioned relationships.

As part of our article, we would like to consider one of the key success factors in project management for non-profit organizations, i.e., stakeholder engagement [5]. The available studies on project activities indicate the need for active stakeholder participation in the development and implementation of projects. Their participation is inextricably linked with sustainable development [35]. The active participation of stakeholders in project management has been recognized as one of the main principles of good project management in recent times [36–41]. Cooperation, as well as influencing project stakeholders, largely depends on the support of the organization implementing such projects. In practice, this

often means the necessity to engage significant resources or an efficient and coherent communication system. This translates into the need to develop an efficient system to support the stakeholder engagement process.

Therefore, the aim of our article is to contribute to the considerations on the relationship between stakeholder management maturity and non-profit organizations' project maturity.

The considerations are presented against the background of the construct of non-profit organization maturity. In the article, we try to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the level of project maturity in the area of managing stakeholder engagement in non-profit organizations in Poland?
2. What factors influence the level of project maturity in the area of managing stakeholder engagement in non-profit organizations in Poland?

The considerations are related to non-profit organizations operating in Poland. In the light of Kerzner's [42] model, we present the main hypothesis:

**Hypothesis.** *The higher level of project maturity of a non-profit organization translates into a conscious and structured approach to stakeholder engagement.*

Therefore, we have proposed three auxiliary hypotheses which, in our opinion, should allow us to define the level of stakeholder management maturity:

**Hypothesis 1 (H1).** *In non-profit organizations, the number of completed projects affects stakeholder management.*

**Hypothesis 2 (H2).** *The scope of the project, project experience and scale of operations of non-profit organizations have an impact on stakeholder management in non-profit organizations.*

**Hypothesis 3 (H3).** *The use of a specific project management methodology and its standardization at the organization level has a positive impact on the involvement of stakeholders of non-profit organizations.*

The article has a specific layout. At the beginning, we justify undertaking research and present research hypotheses. Then we explain the importance of stakeholders in non-profit organizations. Next, we present the essence of non-profit organizations project maturity in connection to the topic of stakeholder management. We describe the adopted research method and the results obtained. Finally, we include the discussion and conclusion sections. We also point out practical implications and contribution in the development of knowledge about project management. The article ends with an indication of the limitations of our research procedure and a description of future research.

## 2. The Concept of Project Stakeholders in Non-Profit Organizations

Non-profit organizations are important development actors, operating in the ecosystems of multi-sector and cross-sectoral stakeholders to reach out to the most vulnerable social groups. Considering and respecting the potential interests of stakeholders is crucial to sustainable development. Relationships with stakeholders based on mutual understanding and trust are crucial for projects carried out by non-profit organizations. These organizations currently exert a significant influence both on the social and natural environment. Cooperation, which is one of the basic values of these entities, is the basis for achieving success in social activity. Non-profit organizations are becoming more and more aware of building permanent relationships with potential stakeholders and their importance for a sustainable approach to implemented project ventures. The basis of this process should be a dialogue aimed at learning about mutual expectations and opportunities in this area [43]. Stakeholder participation therefore requires "a process of dialogue and ultimately building a consensus of all stakeholders as partners who jointly define problems, design possible

solutions, cooperate in their implementation, and monitor and evaluate the results” [44] (p. 3).

The concept of stakeholders was introduced in the 1960s by the Stanford Research Institute and popularized in the 1980s by Edward Freeman [45] (pp. 303–314). At the same time, it began to appear in project management in the 1990s [46,47], and it gained widespread acceptance only in this century [48] (pp. 16–32), [49] (pp. 243–271), [50].

Project stakeholders are individuals and organizations actively involved in the implementation of a given project or whose interests are positively or unfavorably influenced by the implementation or completion of the *said project* [51]. This means that the project management team should take specific actions towards stakeholders to increase the chances of the project’s success. Non-profit organizations that implement projects are expected to be more flexible in their actions or activities in search of financial resources, which translates into the need to build positive relationships, trust and an atmosphere of cooperation with project stakeholders. In the literature on the subject, the stakeholders of projects implemented by non-profit organizations first of all include the government, supervisory institutions, private sponsors, clients, the media and the society [6,7,52]. In addition, I. Harris, M. Mainelli and M. O’Callaghan (2002) also include staff, beneficiaries, volunteers and members of non-profit organizations. Project stakeholders have a significant impact on the success of the project, which is why their knowledge, attitude and impact are of such importance. Their active participation in implemented and planned projects is emphasized, as well as their support of the decision-making process. However, in order for this involvement to meet the expectations of both the stakeholders themselves and non-profit organizations as project promoters, the process of their identification is important. It consists in a thorough identification and analysis of the needs and expectations of all stakeholder groups related to a specific project. From the point of view of a non-profit organization, it is a complex process. Both the interrelationships and dependencies between the identified groups of stakeholders, as well as their mutual interactions within individual groups, are important in it. A comprehensive approach to this phenomenon is important, as well as its diagnosis and indication of the factors that have the greatest impact on meeting these expectations. The available results of research carried out among Polish non-profit organizations [53,54] indicate that the recipients of activities/services have the strongest influence on non-profit organizations. This group includes members of a given organization (e.g., in self-help organizations) and people and institutions using the services of the surveyed organizations. Such a strong impact results from the character of the undertaken project activities aimed at a specific group of beneficiaries and the needs they signal. The second group consists of employees and volunteers for whom the goals and methods of achieving them are important and determine the activities of the entire organization. The third power among the stakeholders are the founders and members of the organization. They influence the organization by defining and formulating the goals of the organization.

J. Domański (2012) indicates that such a small difference in influence between employees and volunteers and founders distinguishes non-profit organizations from business entities and indicates greater democracy in decision making. The presented results indicate a significant dependence of activities undertaken by non-profit organizations on the government administration. This applies to both the awarding of grants and the impact through lawmaking. Society has a lesser influence on undertaken projects, which is probably due to a narrow audience and a lack of action affecting society as a whole. The reason for this situation is seen in a small number of large organizations and the initial stage of NGO’s development in Poland. The strength of the media’s influence was also rated low. It seems that this is primarily related to media interest in nationwide campaigns and underestimating smaller, local project initiatives. The influence of service providers was rated the lowest, which may indicate both poor cooperation with this group, as well as the lack of negative dependence of non-profit organizations on external entities [53,54]. For non-profit organizations and implemented projects, it is also important to skillfully build relationships

with individual groups of stakeholders. This process should be analyzed comprehensively and organized in such a way as to best suit the needs, possibilities and expectations of the stakeholders. What distinguishes non-profit organizations from business entities is that the problems of stakeholders are usually important, and the success of the project is not always seen in terms of achieving all the assumed indicators, goals or results assumed by the project sponsors. That is why it is so important for these entities to acquire skills and knowledge in the area of stakeholder identification, tracking changes or forecasting possible scenarios of their behavior. This may contribute to a better achievement of the set goals, and thus to an increase in the effectiveness and durability of the undertaken project undertakings [53,54].

Due to the type and number of stakeholders of non-profit organizations that should be taken into account in the implementation of project ventures, it is becoming increasingly important to understand their importance for the effective and efficient implementation of projects. This makes it necessary to adopt principles, methods and appropriate instruments of cooperation as part of the project stakeholder management process [55]. In order to effectively engage stakeholders in the project endeavors of the discussed organizations and through that, secure their success it is important to indicate the staged nature of the process [40,56]:

- Stage 1 (stakeholder identification) consists of identifying all stakeholders who can potentially create the project environment. Most often, tables with a list of stakeholders or stakeholder maps are created, which graphically present the project environment, broken down into appropriate categories.
- Stage 2 (analysis and evaluation) covers the definition of key stakeholder characteristics, such as strengths and weaknesses, expectations towards the project, possibilities of articulating and enforcing one's interests. Stakeholders are prioritized on this basis. It is advisable to review the analyzes of completed projects so as not to repeat the same mistakes.
- Stage 3 (preparation of engagement plans) is the preparation of an action plan for each stakeholder identified as significant during the analysis and evaluation phase. This plan aims to fully involve them in the project, which will increase the chance of the success of the project. In general, several stakeholder engagement strategies are included. The most important of these are: blocking, informing, inclusion in the project, consulting, ignoring and monitoring.
- Stage 4 (organizing the engagement process) consists primarily of assessing the team's potential and determining the feasibility of the plan. On this basis, a decision can be made to increase the specific competences of team members and prepare resources for task implementation in relation to stakeholders.
- Stage 5 (stakeholder engagement) covers all commercially viable activities that are necessary to elicit and maintain specific stakeholder attitudes and behaviors towards the project. The main tool for stakeholder engagement is the communication plan. During the project implementation, project experience should be gathered on an ongoing basis.
- Stage 6 (evaluation and continual improvement) takes place after the end of the project. Then, one should gather project experience and evaluate the stakeholder engagement process. The conclusions of the evaluation should be used to improve the process as a whole and its individual elements. The accuracy of the stakeholder analysis, the effectiveness of the strategies used in relation to individual groups and the level of contractors' competences should be particularly carefully assessed.

### 3. Project Management Maturity of Non-Profit Organizations and Stakeholder Management

The ability to implement projects is an important asset of non-profit organizations, but they must have knowledge of project management efficiency. Project management issues in the discussed organizations concern changing conditions that occur both inside



the project and in the organization's environment [57–60]. In order to be able to assess the ability of a non-profit organization to manage projects (including stakeholder engagement), it is worth paying attention to the concept of project maturity. It allows one to determine the degree of preparation of the organization to implement projects, taking into account its strengths and weaknesses. Project management maturity assessment concerns the entire project management system that operates in the organization.

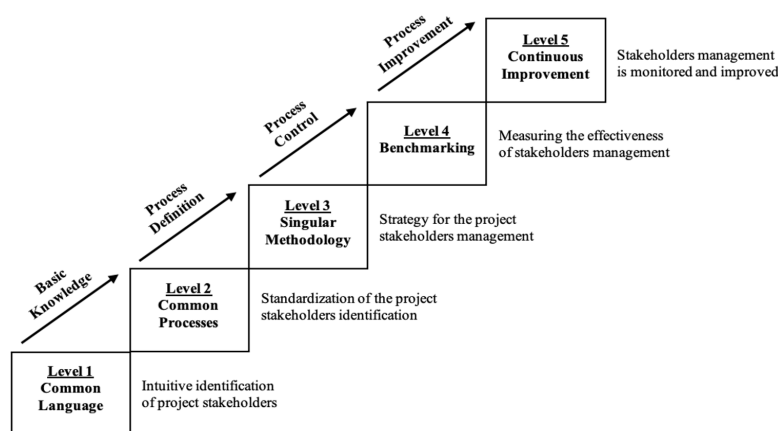
The organization's maturity is currently in the mainstream of discussions in the area of project management [61–74].

The analysis of the definitions proves that the concept of "project management maturity" can be defined both narrowly and broadly [74]. The first approach is focused on single project management, defining maturity as an organization's ability to successfully complete projects. The second one concerns two dimensions of project management, i.e., effective project selection and effective management. In this approach, the concept of project management maturity is defined as the degree of the organization's ability to use professional techniques and tools for the effective selection of a project portfolio aimed at supporting the organization's strategy and effective project management, which means the implementation of projects in accordance with the adopted parameters (time, budget, scope, quality) and oriented towards sustainable development.

As part of the research, it was assumed that project management maturity is the ability of a given organization to use project management techniques, tools and methodologies effectively and professionally. An organization that is mature in terms of projects completes them successfully and has the ability to collect best practices.

Many models are used to measure the project maturity of an organization, including OPM3 (PMI), maturity model (PwC), CMMI (Carnegie Mellon), PMMM (PM Solutions) [75].

However, in our opinion, in order to determine the project management maturity of non-profit organizations in connection to the stakeholder engagement area, it is important to indicate a project management maturity model that will be easy to apply, universal (i.e., not oriented to any industry) and useful for non-profit organizations. The model that meets these criteria in our view is the project maturity model (PMMM) proposed by H. Kerzner (2001). It is based on a five-point scale and analysis of nine knowledge areas described in detail in the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBok) [76]. The level of advancement of tools and techniques used in the implementation of project tasks is assessed. The individual levels of project management maturity in the presented model (Figure 1) have been characterized in Table 1 [64]:



**Figure 1.** The relationship between the levels of project management maturity and stakeholder management. Source: figure edited for the purpose of the present paper from the original work by H. Kerzner [65].

**Table 1.** Managing project stakeholders from the point of view of the organization's project management maturity.

Project Management Maturity Level	Stakeholder Management Maturity Level
<p>Level 1</p> <p>Use of common terminology</p> <p>Use of common terminology by members of project teams. At this level, there are organizations that recognize the importance of projects, but are only starting to be aware of the need for a common understanding of principles and concepts related to project management. The management supports the implementation of projects in a chaotic manner. There is no training in the area of project management. Moreover, the benefits of project management are not identified.</p>	<p>Individual project stakeholders are identified, it is not a formal process. Project promoters see the need to identify stakeholders, but do not yet see the benefits of this process. Singular attempts are made to use tools in single projects. These are solutions implemented and combined with the manager.</p>
<p>Level 2</p> <p>Unified processes</p> <p>Common processes in project management. There is an improvement in processes that lead to an increase in the chances of the success of a given project. Importantly, these processes are common to all projects carried out in the organization. At this level, the benefits of implementing projects in the organization are also noticed. This translates into supporting projects at every management level.</p>	<p>There is a stakeholder identification process. There are attempts to standardize this process. The influence of this group on the success of the project is being noticed, but only from the point of view of individual projects. Instructions and procedures are created to a limited extent. IT tools supporting stakeholder management are used to a limited extent.</p>
<p>Level 3</p> <p>Developed methodology of the procedure</p> <p>It uses the synergy effect that results from combining all methodologies into one common methodology. This enables easier control of the entire project management process. The organizational culture is also shaped in the direction of project management and bureaucracy is reduced to the necessary minimum. At this level, comprehensive and periodic training in the area of project management takes place. Moreover, project management is officially supported by the management at every management level.</p>	<p>There are processes aimed at identifying stakeholders. They are analyzed and assessed, prioritization is carried out, and errors that have appeared in already completed projects are analyzed. Stakeholder engagement plans are prepared, along with an indication of a strategy to deal with them. The engagement process is carried out primarily with the stakeholders with the greatest impact on the project. Trainings are conducted and procedures are followed. The benefits of using stakeholder management tools are recognized.</p>
<p>Level 4</p> <p>Benchmarking</p> <p>Application of benchmarking in project management. At this level, benchmarking is used as a tool that supports development decisions. This is an ongoing process. The organization has a permanent staff that carries out continuous improvement processes. Benchmarking refers to the processes carried out, methods and techniques used as well as soft aspects of management, such as organizational culture, personal skills. The organization at this level has a project office or center of excellence as the focal point of project knowledge in the organization.</p>	<p>Processes aimed at measuring the effectiveness of the applied stakeholder management methods and the benefits of this are implemented. The level of maturity also relates to the soft aspects of project management, which means that the communication plans adopted in the project also become a stakeholder management tool. The processes are analyzed on an ongoing basis, improved and adjusted to the specifics of implemented projects.</p>

Table 1. Cont.

Project Management Maturity Level	Stakeholder Management Maturity Level
Level 5 Continuous improvement Continuous improvement. At this level, as a result of benchmarking, organizations make decisions regarding the usefulness of the information obtained in improving their own project management methodology. They constantly follow trends in project management, technological innovations or look for improvements in implemented processes. The knowledge gained during the implementation of projects is transferred to subsequent projects and made available to project teams in the future. In addition, the organization has a mentoring program for project managers, usually implemented by a project office. Strategic planning through project management is an ongoing process. This is the stage in which there is a continuous process of improving project implementation.	All processes related to stakeholder involvement in project ventures are in place. They are standardized and monitored. This is the level at which project management is an ongoing process. This means that the entire stakeholder management process is subject to detailed analysis and evaluation. The conclusions regarding the improvement of this process as a whole in future projects (good practices) become important here. The organization uses an integrated approach to CSR.

Source: own work based on [64].

When an organization reaches level 5 of project management maturity, it should remember to return to level 3 or 4 in order to rebuild the methodology or perform benchmarking again. The last level means that the organization operates in a continuous improvement cycle that is necessary to maintain a sustainable competitive advantage. In practice, this means that reaching the last level of maturity is associated with the so-called consuming the benefits of increasingly effective project implementation. However, over time, competitors begin to attain similar skill levels. It then becomes necessary to undertake further actions aimed at continuous improvement of project management skills. To diagnose the state of stakeholder management in non-profit organizations the shows the processes of this area in relation to individual levels of project maturity (Table 1). It is worth emphasizing that gaining knowledge about project maturity may be the beginning of the improvement of non-profit organizations in the area of stakeholder management.

Summarizing the above considerations, it should be emphasized that in order to assess the ability of a non-profit organization to manage stakeholders, one should turn to the concept of project maturity. This approach will allow for the identification of determinants influencing the involvement of stakeholders in projects implemented by the surveyed organizations.

Figure 1 presents the relationship between the levels of project management maturity and stakeholder management.

#### 4. Research Methodology

The aim of this research was to determine the level of project management maturity of non-profit organizations in Poland. The research process was planned and carried out divided into four main stages, i.e., (1) research preparation, (2) conducting pilot studies, (3) conducting the actual research and (4) analysis of research results and inference. Each stage was a logical continuation of the previous stages.

The research was conducted in 2017 and 2018 on a group of 93 organizations with project experience. The PAPI and CAWI techniques were used to conduct the study. Focusing the research on non-profit organizations was purposeful as these entities are poorly recognized in the area of project management. The research used a modified project maturity assessment questionnaire, which was based on ten areas of project management (including stakeholder management) described in the PMBoK standard, which made



it compatible with the approach of H. Kerzner. The research began with participants answering several additional questions regarding: (1) the position held, (2) the project experience of both the person participating in the study and the organization, (3) the number of implemented projects, along with the sources of their financing, (4) the level of knowledge in the field of project management or (5) the level of support for the project approach. The rest of the questionnaire concerned the organization itself and substantive aspects. The rating consisted of 100 items organized into ten categories (10 items each). The task of the surveyed organization was to respond to the descriptions provided in a standardized table relating to the surveyed areas. A five-point Likert scale was used. The questionnaire adopted a verbal description of the answers (0 = I don't know, 1 = Never, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Usually, 4 = Often, 5 = Always). The adopted form of the research allowed for efficient calculation of the average determining the level of maturity for each of the areas of knowledge. Each of the areas was individually assigned to one of five levels of project maturity. The adopted scale of design maturity levels is consistent with the level descriptions presented in The Kerzner PMMM model. Therefore, when assessing the obtained results, reference was made primarily to this model.

The study covered a total of 93 organizations, including 29 foundations and 64 associations. The survey was dominated by organizations operating in Poland and operating in the area of "education and upbringing" (30.1% of respondents). The main source of financing the activities of the surveyed organizations were local government sources (funds from municipalities, districts or provincial governments), which were indicated by as many as 75.3% of the surveyed organizations. On the other hand, the main type of implemented projects was related to projects aimed at young people (58.1% of responses), children (35.5% of responses) or focused on training activities (41.9% of responses). The surveyed organizations indicated average project experience in 50.5% (47 responses) (average project experience—continuous implementation of single or few projects), extensive (extensive project experience—continuous, simultaneous implementation of many projects) experience was indicated by 36.6% of the respondents (34 responses) and 12.9% (12 responses) indicated that they had extensive (very extensive design experience—design organization, all its activity is the implementation of projects) experience in implementing project projects. There was no organization in the research sample that would not implement projects at all. This is due to the deliberate selection of the sample, because the study of project maturity for a non-profit organization that does not implement projects would miss the purpose of the study.

In order to achieve the goals set out in this article, we focused on the part of the research that concerned the level of project maturity of a non-profit organization in Poland in the area of project stakeholder involvement. It was one of the ten areas of knowledge described in detail in the PMBoK standard, within which people, organizations or groups that may have an impact on the project or be influenced by the project are identified, their expectations are analyzed and an appropriate management strategy is developed. This area consists of processes aimed at identifying stakeholders, planning, managing their involvement and controlling their involvement.

The studied area (project stakeholder management) is one of the main factors influencing the maturity of project management and translates into the sustainability of project undertakings. It is worth emphasizing that the requirements for stakeholders in the surveyed organizations are variable and depend on the level of project maturity of a given entity.

## 5. Results

The obtained results were analyzed statistically with the use of SPSS software. The level of project maturity of the surveyed non-profit organizations was set at 3.15. It is the arithmetic mean of the results obtained in ten areas of PMBoK knowledge. From the point of view of the obtained result, non-profit organizations in Poland have project experience, which can be classified at a level between 3 and 4 which indicates the use of a consistent

project management methodology and attempts to use benchmarking. Therefore, the main hypothesis, which indicated that the examined non-profit organizations are at the third level of project maturity, was confirmed.

On the other hand, from the point of view of the knowledge area related to stakeholder management, the preliminary quantitative analysis shows that in 95% of the cases, the obtained assessment indicates the maturity level in the range from 2 to 2.4. This means that the surveyed non-profit organizations are emerging from level 2 and can be located between the level 2 and 3 of maturity.

In order to verify the adopted research hypotheses, certain approaches were applied. The verification of hypothesis 1 was based on the linear regression model and the determination of Pearson's correlation coefficients.

The choice of this method is dictated by the fact that all variables are quantitative, therefore it is advisable to look for a functional relationship. All calculations were performed for the significance level of 0.05. Table 2 presents the synthetic result of the analysis of the assessment of the impact of three variables on the variable stakeholders using the regression model. The most important parameter in this case is the statistical significance of the variable expressed by the *p*-value. This measure shows whether a relationship between variables can be found in quantitative data. Its value below 0.05 indicates the existence of such a relationship. Values above this threshold indicate that the relationship does not exist. The *p*-values presented in Table 2 clearly show no influence of independent variables on the assessment level of the maturity level expressed by the stakeholders variable. The table also shows the evaluation parameters of the entire model:  $R^2$  indicates a very low level of fitting ( $R^2 = 0.02$ ), which is equivalent to the fact that only 2% of observations are explained by the model, the significance parameter of the entire model is 0.53.

**Table 2.** The significance of parameters in the linear regression model.

Independent Variable	Impact on the Dependent Variable, Stakeholders <i>p</i> -Value	Conclusion
Number of implemented EU projects	0.18	Variables have no effect
Number of all completed projects	0.97	
Period of activity in the field of project implementation (in years)	0.77	
Model fit $R^2 = 0.02$ <i>p</i> -value = 0.53, dependencies do not exist		

Source: own work.

The linear regression model describes the combined effect of the three variables, but it can be shown that the pairwise relationship cannot be found either. This property is measured by Pearson's linear correlation coefficient and the corresponding *p*-value coefficient (Table 3). The values of the correlation coefficient in the range  $-0.2$  to  $+0.2$  indicate no relationship between the variables. This is confirmed by the *p*-values, they are higher than the threshold value of 0.05 adopted in the study.

**Table 3.** Correlation of dependent variables and stakeholder management level assessment.

Independent Variable	Stakeholders	
	Coefficient of Correlation of the Dependence of the Independent Variable and the Stakeholders Variable	Statistical Significance
Number of implemented EU projects	$-0.05$	<i>p</i> -value = 0.54
Number of all completed projects	$-0.14$	<i>p</i> -value = 0.14
Period of activity in the field of project implementation (in years)	$-0.02$	<i>p</i> -value = 0.79

Source: own work.

The  $p$ -value in each case exceeds the significance level of 0.05, which means that the given factor has no impact on the level of stakeholder management. Therefore, it can be assumed that the examined non-profit organizations are not at the level 1 of project maturity, but at higher levels.

In testing the H2 hypothesis, nominal variables were used to describe:

- The geographical scale of the activity;
- Using IT tools to implement projects;
- Assessment of experience in realization projects.

The ability to conduct projects with an advanced level of difficulty, project experience and the scale of operation do not affect the management of stakeholders in non-profit organizations.

Figure 2 shows the distribution of stakeholder management maturity assessment depending on the geographical scale of the activity. It can be noticed that as the scale of action increases, the height of the assessment increases (middle points of the sections, connected by a line). However, whether this relationship is significant is determined by the width of the intervals for a given class (sections on the graph representing the standard deviation in the group). Each segment contains a variable range that covers the remaining segments, so there are no clear differences. This is formally confirmed by the ANOVA model. It does not show any dependence of the level of stakeholder management maturity assessment on the scale of the organization's activity ( $p$ -value = 0.25). Similarly, such a dependence cannot be demonstrated on the evaluation of experience in project management ( $p = 0.30$ ). The same conclusions can be drawn with regard to the use of IT tools and training (Table 4). Therefore, it can be concluded that the H2 hypothesis is true: the level of maturity of stakeholder management does not depend on the scale of operations of the surveyed organizations or on experience in project implementation. From this point of view, the examined non-profit organizations are probably not on level 2 of project maturity.

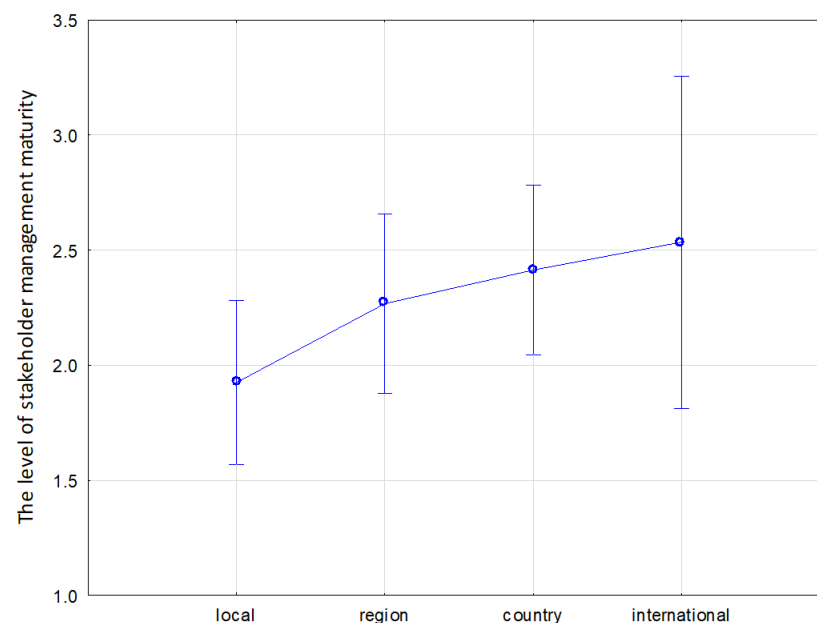


Figure 2. Scale of activity and the level of stakeholder management maturity. Source: own work.

**Table 4.** Influence of selected variables on the level of stakeholder management maturity.

Influence of the Variable	<i>p</i> -Value	Conclusion
The scale of the organization's activities	0.25	None of the analyzed factors has an impact on the level of stakeholder management maturity.
Experience in project implementation (low-high)	0.30	
The use of IT methods in the implementation of projects	0.35	
Training in project implementation for employees	0.15	

Source: own work.

In order to verify the H3 hypothesis, two factors were taken into account:

1. Whether the organization has developed a formal project management methodology;
2. Whether the methodology is used partially or throughout the organization.

Subsequently, *t*-test was used, which allowed us to determine the differences in the mean values of the scores in two independent groups. Both the fact of introducing the methodology and whether it covers the entire organization or only a part of it very clearly influences the level of stakeholder management maturity. It can be seen that in the light of Kerzner's model, organizations that have not yet implemented any methodology are still at the project maturity level 2 (the average rating is 1.9). Additionally, non-profit organizations that have partially implemented a project management methodology are at a slightly lower level (2.2) than those that have a fully crystallized methodology applied throughout the organization. The obtained results and conclusions are presented in Table 5.

**Table 5.** The impact of project management methodology on the level of stakeholder management maturity.

Factor	Average Value Stakeholders Assessments	<i>p</i> -Value	Conclusion
There is no common project management methodology in the organization	1.9	0.002	The introduction of project management methodology in an organization has a major impact on the way stakeholders are managed
The organization has a standardized project management methodology	2.5		
Project management methodology introduced in part of the organization	2.2	0.01	The partially (fragmentarily) applied methodology is ineffective The methodology applicable throughout the organization allows one to significantly increase the level of maturity of stakeholder management
Project management methodology implemented throughout the organization	2.6		

Source: own work.

## 6. Discussion and Conclusions

Our research aimed to show the relationship between project management maturity (PMM) in non-profit organizations operating in Poland and the maturity of stakeholder management. The study covered factors that, in our opinion, may determine the level of stakeholder management maturity from the perspective of the construct of an organization's project maturity.

Statistical analysis of the obtained data confirmed the main hypothesis. Based on the conducted research, it was found that, from the point of view of the obtained result (3.15), the surveyed non-profit organizations have project experience, which indicates the level of design maturity between levels 3 and 4, according to the Kerzner model. However, from the

point of view of the area of knowledge related to stakeholder management, the quantitative analysis shows that in 95% of the cases the obtained score indicates a result in the range of 2 to 2.4. This means that the surveyed non-profit organizations rank rather between levels 2 and 3 of project maturity. They are somewhat halfway between these levels. The features characteristic for level 3 of project maturity, such as visible unified processes for all implemented projects or training courses aimed at implementing one common project management methodology, are not yet clearly visible here. The organizational culture is also not fully oriented towards the design approach.

Subsequently, in order to verify the auxiliary hypotheses, seven variables were identified, of which only one turned out to have a significant impact on the manner of stakeholder management. It is an accepted, organization-wide standardized project management methodology. Therefore, the adopted hypothesis 3, indicating that the use of a specific project management methodology and its standardization at the level of the entire organization has an impact on the management of stakeholders in non-profit organizations, was confirmed.

However, our study did not show a relationship between the number of all completed projects, completed EU projects, the period of operation (in years), the scale of the organization's operation, the level of experience in project implementation, the use of IT tools in project implementation, training for employees in project implementation and the maturity stakeholder management. Thus, the adopted auxiliary hypotheses H1 and H2 were confirmed.

In non-profit organizations, the number of completed projects does not affect stakeholder management. This relationship is also not visible with the ability to conduct projects with an advanced level of difficulty, with project experience and the scale of implemented projects. These are the features of design maturity on level 2 in the Kerzner model. At this level, organizations have already developed the design language and are becoming aware of the importance of project implementation. They implement an increasing number of projects and begin to see the need to standardize project management processes. The surveyed non-profit organizations were located at a higher level of project management maturity; hence, the above factors did not affect the area of stakeholder management.

As a result of the research, we noticed that although the surveyed non-profit organizations also implement EU and social projects, this aspect does not have a significant impact on the level of maturity in the area of stakeholder management. In our opinion, project maturity in this aspect is mainly determined by external factors, which determine the amount of financial support for project implementation. The surveyed non-profit organizations do not feel the need to implement or standardize processes related to the stakeholders of their projects. They are also not affected by stakeholder management pressure from project finance institutions. For potential donors, important areas deciding about commissioning a given project are the classic parameters of project implementation, such as costs, time and their scope. They are still focused very little on social responsibility in project implementation, which assumes a strong focus on harmonizing the benefits of various parties; in the case of non-profit organizations these are project beneficiaries, financiers and often the project contractors themselves. It refers to balancing environmental, social and economic effects.

In our opinion, external conditions, characteristic of Poland, are of great importance here. The NGOs, in order in to fulfil their statutory aims, especially the provision of social services, must co-operate with the public administration. They need this co-operation also to secure public funds to finance their activities. From the point of view of economic theory, non-profit organizations are an intermediate link between the state and the market. Their functioning is a manifestation of the activity of the civil society, which is still being created and shaped in Poland. It is a slow process that requires appropriate systemic conditions and increasing social trust [77] (pp. 208–232). Non-profit organizations operate from the grassroots level, seeking support from beneficiaries and recipients of their services or various stakeholders; they are a way of working out the “common good” that requires



the need for joint action. Funds obtained externally are usually temporary and secured to fulfill a goal. In this situation, the aspects related to their acquisition and settlement play a leading role. This is often accompanied by complicated competition procedures [43].

The system of distribution of public funds (including granted subsidies) requires a project approach from non-profit organizations. On the other hand, non-profit organizations focus very much on financial issues (the project maturity of the surveyed organizations in the area of costs was determined at the highest level of maturity—3.83) and develop elaborate cost management methodologies in this area. This is mainly due to the application of the procedure of competitions and tenders to which non-profit organizations join. The cost factor also plays an important role from the point of view of commercial companies that engage in CSR activities and finance the implementation of projects of non-profit organizations [78,79].

Along with the costs, the non-profit organizations under study put a strong emphasis on planning the scope of projects, the time of their implementation, selection of project teams, integrity and ensuring proper communication. This corresponds to the specificity of funding sources and statutory activities of non-profit organizations that have to look after these aspects more than commercial companies. Otherwise, it is difficult to obtain funds for financing projects.

The surveyed non-profit organizations focus to a lesser extent on project risk assessment (project maturity was indicated at the level of 2.68). In our opinion, this approach results from the fact that public funding sponsors have a limited approach to this issue. It is often the case that only the value of a project, which exceeds 2 million PLN, requires a risk management procedure. This means that non-profit organizations in Poland have not developed risk assessment methodologies, they do not feel such a need, because the funds they receive for the implementation of projects usually do not exceed the indicated value [79].

Therefore, the issue of stakeholders, which we are interested in the conducted study, does not come to the fore. In many projects of non-profit organizations, part of the area of cooperation with stakeholders is transferred to the area of communication (in the discussed studies, project maturity was indicated at the level of 3.18). From the point of view of the evaluation of the existing projects, this approach was sufficient. Non-profit organizations operating in Poland find it difficult to establish partnerships with stakeholders. The view from the perspective of financial—not social—benefits dominates. This is slowly changing as public institutions are beginning to be “held accountable for” the number of signed agreements for this type of cooperation. Commercial companies, on the other hand, get additional points when applying for subsidies for this type of cooperation. [78,79].

These factors may result in increased interest in non-profit organizations as social partners. These changes are slowly being felt and will probably have an increasing impact on the area of knowledge of stakeholder management. This should also make it easier for non-profit organizations to access larger (in terms of financial value) projects. They can become an important partner in the use of public funds. In addition, it can also contribute to increasing the level of maturity in stakeholder management.

Our study confirmed that stakeholder management in project implementation in non-profit organizations requires improvement. We noticed a discrepancy between the level of project management maturity (PMM) and the degree of stakeholder participation. It results, among others, from the specificity of Polish conditions, in particular the method of financing and accounting for projects of non-profit organizations and the low level of awareness of the importance of stakeholder management. There is also a lack of implementation of formal procedures that could organize the stakeholder management process, which is now largely informal. There is also no record of stakeholders and a register of their impact on the project implementation.

Other researchers have pointed out the importance of stakeholder management (e.g., participatory approaches) [80]. They indicate that the success of a nonprofit's projects depends on how well the organizations deal with key groups which may include customers,

employees, suppliers, local community, donors/financiers and other stakeholders who can influence the achievement of their goals [81]. The research carried out by [82–84] shows that the identification of needs and problems of various stakeholder groups, stakeholder involvement in monitoring the project progress and sharing responsibility for the adopted goals are of great importance in achieving the project's goals. To achieve this, knowledge about stakeholders and their preferences is vital. Systematic analysis of project stakeholder needs facilitates interaction with stakeholders and helps structure processes so that the perspective of many stakeholders is represented and inappropriate influence is reduced. The expected value that this can bring is the implementation of projects in an atmosphere of approval by many parties [85]. This approach also defuses potential conflicts that may occur in the implementation of projects, and a high level of stakeholder empowerment, especially in the early stages of project planning, can bring many benefits [86]. On the other hand, research results [87] indicate that stakeholder participation in public projects has a positive impact on project results both in the early and final stages of the project budgeting process, i.e., at the stages of information exchange and program evaluation.

Moreover, the higher the level of project maturity, the more non-profit organizations should use advanced tools such as stakeholder matrix, responsibility assignment matrix, communication plans, stakeholder monitoring and reporting and managing their engagement. This is in line with studies that have shown that improving project effects is associated with higher maturity of processes [88].

## 7. Practical Implications and Contribution

The success of projects depends on the involvement and prudent management of stakeholders is a statement that is found more often in the literature than in the practice of non-profit organizations. Therefore, in our opinion, the results of the research conducted may enrich the existing knowledge on project management in non-profit organizations. The article complements the knowledge about the importance of developing project maturity in non-profit organizations. It is important from the point of view of learning about the factors limiting the achievement of lasting effects of implemented projects. In the article, we pay attention to the issues of matching the level of project maturity and maturity in the field of stakeholder management. The article has several implications for practice. Firstly, it signals that research and striving to increase project maturity is important, as in business, so in non-profit organizations. As project management develops, the maturity of non-profit organizations can be observed. Secondly, it postulates that such areas of project knowledge as stakeholder management and risk assessment are just as important as the issues of financing and setting the goal, scope, time of implementation, defining tasks and selecting a project team. It also draws attention to the fact that involving stakeholders in the implementation of projects may affect the perspective of social responsibility in the implementation of projects. The idea of stakeholder participation, long present in project management methodologies and standards (e.g., in PMBOK as one of the areas of knowledge), highlights the need to maintain a balance of interests related to projects and to recognize and realize potential benefits also for stakeholders. This is considered the key to sustainable development from an environmental, social and economic perspective. A conscious and structured approach to stakeholder engagement is an important factor in the success of projects. It should be a key part of any project. Project stakeholders have the possibility to positively or negatively influence the project outcome. Involving them in the implemented project allows you to avoid conflict situations and affects the development of lasting effects of the project.

Still, the awareness of this issue is not high, and the solutions applied are fragmented. However, given the important social and economic role of projects implemented by non-profit organizations and the difficulties in managing them, we believe that more attention should be paid to researching stakeholder management maturity as one of the areas of project knowledge.

## 8. Limitations and Future Research

This article is not free from limitations, which at the same time inspire future research. One of them is embedding research solely in the realities of Polish non-profit organizations. Subsequent studies could take into account an international perspective. Moreover, they should be focused on recognizing changes in the scope of stakeholder participation and take into account sustainable project management. Such arrangements are needed to complete and enrich the existing knowledge on the topic in question.

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