

Article

Responding to the Dutch Asylum Crisis: Implications for Collaborative Work between Civil Society and Governmental Organizations

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Abstract

Between 2015 and 2016, the Netherlands experienced an asylum crisis, one that directly affected organizations working with refugee reception and integration. Besides civil society and governmental organizations (CSOs and GOs), the period also saw individuals coming together to form emergent CSOs (ECSOs). We look at these organizations to determine whether their work brought a shift in Dutch practice and policy with regarding refugee reception. We also examine literature concerning crisis governance, participatory spaces, and refugee reception governance. Finally, we investigate the views and experiences of individuals from selected organizations that played an active role during the crisis. This explorative research is based upon a qualitative and interpretative study involving panel discussions, document analysis, and interviews, conducted between 2017 and 2018 by the Refugee Academy at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. We show circumstantial and interorganizational elements that enhanced and hampered interactions between ECSOs, CSOs, and GOs. We argue that shared activities during the crisis may have created possibilities for durable forms of collaboration and for the inclusion of civil society groups in a debate mostly dominated by GOs.

Keywords

asylum crisis; civil society organizations; collaboration; crisis governance; governmental organizations; participation; refugee reception

Issue

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1. Introduction

Between 2015 and 2016, the relatively steep increase in the arrival of asylum seekers in Europe affected the ecology of organizations working with refugee reception. Organizations that, until then, were seemingly detached from each other because of their differing aims and missions came together and worked towards an efficient reception of refugees. Simultaneously, citizens objecting to EU reception policies and citizens welcoming refugees spontaneously organized themselves to assist new arrivals (Boersma, Kraiukhina, Larruina, Lehota, &

Nury, 2018; Youkhana & Sutter, 2017). During this period, European authorities failed to respond to the higher number of individuals requesting asylum and the societal discontent this caused. This situation was characterized by a lack of clear legislation or coordination of efforts among EU members (Boersma et al., 2018; Braun, 2017; Feischmidt, Pries, & Cantat, 2019; Youkhana & Sutter, 2017). As Betts and Collier (2017) argue, the refugee reception system was “broken”, full of weaknesses and incongruences and unable to manage increasing numbers of refugees. What was called a “refugee crisis” was in fact an asylum system crisis due to the inability to deal

with refugees' displacement and subsequent arrival in Europe. Crisis governance literature shows that once a situation is categorized as a crisis, it is treated as a situation that needs to be controlled (Van Buuren, Vink, & Warner, 2016). The Netherlands received 44,970 asylum applications in 2015 (up from 24,495 in 2014 and around 13,000 in 2012 and 2013), most of which concerned refugees from Syria, Eritrea and Iraq (Eurostat, 2019). This sudden inflow meant that emergency shelters and asylum request processing facilities were urgently required (Boersma et al., 2018). The swift establishment of temporary asylum seeker centres was soon followed by public outcry in some areas. These circumstances gave added importance to the contributions of civil society organizations (CSOs) already working in refugee reception, especially since collaboration between them and governmental organizations (GOs) was crucial for effective crisis management (Boersma et al., 2018).

Crisis and disaster studies have acknowledged that citizen volunteers play a major role during crises (Drabek & McEntire, 2003; Dynes, 1994; Helsloot & Ruitenberg, 2004; Schmidt, Wolbers, Ferguson, & Boersma, 2017). The importance of citizen involvement can be seen when citizens converge to assist in damage assessment or provide general support to GOs (Kendra & Wachtendorf, 2003; Schmidt et al., 2017). The Disaster Research Center differentiates four types of organizations: established, expanding, extending, and emergent (Dynes, 1994; Schmidt et al., 2017). Established organizations are traditional response organizations carry out their regular tasks (e.g., the army). Expanding organizations have small permanent staffs who can mobilize large numbers of volunteers when needed (e.g., the Red Cross). Extending organizations are those that perform tasks outside their intended roles (e.g., church groups). Emergent organizations have an unsteady group of volunteers performing non-regular tasks or regular tasks in an improvised manner. During the asylum crisis, emergent civil society organizations (ECSOs) involved groups of individuals who came together for a specific purpose because the established CSOs were too formalized to provide support for their particular concerns. These groups often gave rise to new foundations or grass root organisations with small financial aid from funds or local governments. Note that in this article, "CSO" has two meanings: when we discuss GOs and CSOs together, it is an umbrella term with two subcategories—established CSOs and emergent ECSOs; however, when we discuss CSOs alone, it refers to established CSOs only. The interaction between CSOs (the umbrella term) and GOs is key to successful crisis management and governance (Boersma et al., 2018; COA, 2017; Drabek & McEntire, 2003; Jong & Ataç, 2017).

Across the EU, however, governmental responses to the influx of refugees led to formal, top-down "command and control" types of crisis management, with reduced understandings of how to integrate the knowledge and expertise of civil society actors into a coherent plan of action (Boersma et al., 2018). The Dutch response was

no exception. In addition, the increase in refugee numbers accelerated a process that had been activated a few years earlier. Before the crisis, the adverse effects of the institutionalized reception of asylum seekers in the Netherlands were addressed in diverse academic and policy papers (ACVZ, 2013; Larruina & Ghorashi, 2016; Ten Holder, 2012; WRR, 2015). Many of these critical works were acknowledged by official authorities, and there was a consequent shift in public and policy discussions and in the actual reception and integration of refugees. The main critique was that under the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA), newcomers lacked early integration opportunities, and the long waiting times and uncertainty caused further stress to their already complex situations (ACVZ, 2013). Debates began addressing the early inclusion and societal participation of asylum seekers and refugees, and brought together CSOs and GOs as active contributors (ACVZ, 2013; Ten Holder, 2012; WRR, 2015). We argue that the increased flow of refugees during 2015 and 2016 had a direct impact on this growing public discourse precisely because it increased the profile of these organizations and introduced a multitude of new actors into the field, mostly in the form of ECSOs.

Feischmidt et al. (2019, pp. 1–6) elaborate on the crisis in Europe by outlining four characteristics that encapsulate the main features of this period and delineating the current state of refugee reception. First, refugee arrivals entered the European public discourse. Refugees were in Europe, and they gave new insight into transnational problems and challenges that until then had apparently remained outside the continent. Second, civil society emerged as a central actor in practically all European countries (Pries, 2018). While it is well known that organizations were active prior to the crisis, they extended and adapted their missions during this period. At the same time, other groups appeared and organized themselves spontaneously (Youkhana & Sutter, 2017). Third, the interplay between micro- and macro-level activities increased, and it included network of organizations. These networks integrated personal involvement with new moral and political mobilizations and conducted activities that ranged from local and small-scale assistance to media appearances. Lastly, the asylum crisis was a learning opportunity for all the involved actors. Individuals who became active in assisting often entered a process of politicization after learning about the broader context of the crisis, but state authorities and organisations also learned from their mutual positioning and interactions (Pries, 2018). Civil society perceived state responses to refugee arrivals as the outcome of failing refugee reception systems, while states recognized the value of civil society's contributions (Boersma et al., 2018).

The asylum crisis caused polarized reactions in European and Dutch society alike. Some were based on public anxieties, while others stemmed from something more promising in the dynamism of these new players and initiatives. Alongside the more traditional and es-

established actors in the field—municipalities, governmental agencies, established CSOs—many others acted: businesses, neighbourhood residents, social entrepreneurs, and bottom-up socio-cultural initiatives (Jong & Ataç, 2017). Many of these initiatives were active in creating opportunities for refugees and Dutch people to meet. For example, there were alternative Dutch language teaching programmes, mentoring schemes, and employment projects (Rast & Ghorashi, 2018).

Roger Zetter (cited in Sigona, 2018 p. 456) argues that in this era of globalization and forced migration, two parallel processes are taking place: the proliferation of bureaucratic categories that seek to encapsulate forced displacement and the increasing precarity of the rights and entitlements of displaced people. These processes restrain refugees' movements towards the Global North, and to a certain extent, they also define and frame the assistance that newly arrived refugees receive from both civil society and governmental organizations (Sigona, 2018). As seen during the asylum crisis, the work of safeguarding refugees relies on civic involvement and organizational networks (Feischmidt et al., 2019; Pries, 2018). It is therefore particularly important to understand how the rise of ECSOs and their interplay with established CSOs altered the ecology of refugee reception during the crisis. As Pries (2018) points out, there is a need to better understand the patterns, but also the desirability, of both horizontal and vertical cooperation between different local groups, established NGOs, and state authorities (that is, between ECSOs, CSOs, and GOs).

By examining the experiences and perceptions of individuals actively involved with these three types of organizations during the crisis, this study contributes to the literature on crisis governance, collaborative governance, and CSO participation (both established and emergent). We use a crisis governance lens to call for greater attention to the emergent, bottom-up, and indeed, connective actions ECSOs have with established CSOs and GOs. A crisis governance lens enables us to give meaning to and to understand the roles of informal networks, spontaneous volunteers, and emergent organizations—in other words, the ways that people organize themselves in times of crisis when formal authorities fall short. After a theoretical discussion of crisis and collaborative governance and participatory spaces, we provide a brief outline of our methodological approach. Based on our qualitative and interpretative study conducted in 2017–2018, we address the following questions: what were the experiences of ECSOs, CSOs, and GOs during the 2015–2016 asylum crisis? Did their cooperation help bring about a more fundamental shift in Dutch refugee reception?

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Crisis Governance

Crises are disruptions to peace and order in society; they manifest in diverse forms, from natural disasters and fi-

nancial system failures to dramatic changes in refugee movements and numbers. According to Boin, 't Hart, Stern and Sundelius (2016, p. 5), a crisis occurs when "a social system, a community, an organization, a policy sector, a country...experiences an urgent threat to its basic structures or fundamental values, which harbours many 'unknowns' and appears to require a far-reaching response". Crisis governance, then, concerns how government works to control a perceived crisis (Boin et al., 2016). It includes governments working towards remediating a crisis but also towards enhancing community resilience for future critical situations. Crisis governance appears as a set of intertwined governance challenges in which all the relevant organizations play a role. During crises, ruling authorities often rely on instrumentation of the chaos, command, and control governance model (Drabek & McEntire, 2003; Dynes, 1994; Helsloot & Ruitenbergh, 2004). However, in recent years, that model has been weakened by the emergence of alternative forms of cooperation among different parties, and the emergence of advising institutions, all of which has led to the continuity, coordination, cooperation crisis management model. This model suggests that governmental organizations should aim at solving the issues that generated the crisis rather than avoiding those issues, even if that means working through an initial period of disorder or confusion (Drabek & McEntire, 2003; Dynes, 1994; Helsloot & Ruitenbergh, 2004). Doing so allows governments to respond with greater flexibility and inventiveness so they can adapt to the changing nature of social and organizational dynamics during different stages of a crisis. Effective responses, with synchronized forms of preparation and improvisation, can be assured by creating response structures that are ready to be triggered when needed.

2.2. Collaborative Governance

Refugee reception in the Netherlands is an established and highly institutionalized process (Geuijen, 1998; Larruina & Ghorashi, 2016; Ten Holder, 2012). To clarify whether the asylum crisis brought new opportunities to achieve durable collaboration between different stakeholders in refugee reception, it is useful to examine the concept collaborative governance. Theories of collaborative governance help to further conceptualize the relation between ECSOs, CSOs, and GOs because they provide elements for understanding the complexity of interactions between heterogeneous stakeholders. Collaborative governance allows different organizations to work together and agree on solutions while assisting policymakers and practitioners in targeting problems and delivering action more effectively. According to Thompson (as cited in Thomson & Perry, 2006, p. 23), collaboration is an informal or formal process of negotiation between independent actors. It enables the creation of structures to define and manage their relationships and how they act on the issue that brought them together. In

the specific case of collaborative governance, it is a practice that brings multiple stakeholders together in spaces where public agencies engage in a general agreement-oriented and decision-making process (Ansell & Gash, 2008, pp. 543–544). Stoker (as cited in Ansell & Gash, 2008) refers to collaborative governance as the rules around collective decision-making. Gray (1989, p. 5) argues that collaboration is a process in which actors who have different perspectives on a problem can explore their differences and seek answers that go beyond their own interests and understandings. The asylum crisis created a favourable environment for the formation of temporary, emergent collaborations between ECSOs, CSOs, and GOs. Burke and Morley (2016) note that where there is a new and complex environment, temporary collaborations connecting different organizations to a shared goal often prove to be effective (Burke & Morley, 2016). However, such collaborations usually lack planning and therefore tend to rely on spontaneous actions to coordinate activities (Beck & Plowman, 2014, p. 1235). Emergent collaboration appears in a context where organizations are under pressure to respond to conditions that require contributions from multiple stakeholders (Beck & Plowman, 2014, p. 1235). These collaborative arrangements progress rapidly during critical situations, and the interactions between actors develop organically through the immediate exchange of information and resources.

2.3. CSOs and Participatory Spaces

To understand the role of CSOs in the broader context of refugee reception and integration, it is important to note their capacity to participate and the possible obstacles to their participation in an environment mostly dominated by GOs. According to Rast and Ghorashi (2018), refugee reception through the active engagement of newcomers in CSO activities offers a more inclusive approach than that usually used by GOs. However, such initiatives face numerous internal and external challenges that limit inclusive practices. For example, despite the proliferation of new opportunities for citizen engagement in different policy processes (Gaventa, 2006; Rast & Ghorashi, 2018), participation alone does not always result in better inclusion in a specific policy sector, in this case, that of migrants and refugees. The development of CSOs' role in refugee reception appears to be in line with what is usually described as the Dutch participation society (RMO, 2013). However, community engagement is often seen as a replacement for government action and funds (RMO, 2013; Skinner & Fleuret, 2011). In continental Europe, government withdrawal has resulted in an increased emphasis on the responsibility of citizens—and voluntary organizations, as the most direct expression of citizens' commitment—without funding and/or assigning those organizations the formal task of service delivery. In other words, state reductions in welfare and social support tend to be accompanied by policy discourses centred on pluralism, citizen responsibility, and a celebration of the

synergy between the state, the private sector, and voluntary resources (Skinner & Fleuret, 2011).

Neoliberal policy studies have generated much literature evaluating the risks and advantages of a more prominent role for community engagement in social support systems. The merits of community participation projects include smaller-scale operations, more pluralized forms of support, improved responsiveness to local needs, and increased capacity to build, engage, and empower local communities (Mitchell, 2001; Trudeau, 2008). However, these virtues can be compromised when community engagement becomes a tool of welfare support, leading to the risk that CSOs become an arm of the state apparatus (Hanlon, Rosenberg, & Clasby, 2007; Peeters & Drosterij, 2011; Trommel, 2009). Cooperation assets that are shared between CSOs and GOs should thus be organized to preserve CSOs' capacities to act as spaces of resistance, and to ensure "openness to alternative standpoints and active incorporation of different, marginalized voices from the periphery into a sector traditionally dominated by society mainstream groups" (Wolch, 1999, p. 29). This requires a critical reconsideration of participatory spaces and cooperative assets between CSOs, and GOs, one that attends to questions of power (Hardy & Clegg, 2006; Hardy & Leiba-O'Sullivan, 1998) in its analysis of the relations between these groups and stakeholders.

Gaventa (2006) elaborates on three types of participatory spaces for citizen initiatives: closed spaces, invited spaces, and created spaces. Closed spaces are where decisions are taken by policymakers without input from other stakeholders. Invited spaces constitute a shift from closed to open spaces. Here other stakeholders are invited to take part and contribute their views. Created spaces are devised by those with less power or influence over a particular issue. Cornwall (2002, p. 17) refers to created spaces as "spaces that emerge more organically out of sets of common concerns or identifications....These may be 'sites of radical possibility' where those who are excluded find a place and a voice". The interplay between closed, invited, and created spaces presents challenges to the interactions between ECSOs, CSOs, and GOs. To contest closed spaces, ECSOs and CSOs may demand greater transparency and accountability, as well as more democratic structures (Gaventa, 2006). Invited spaces might require that these organizations negotiate and collaborate while seeking a degree of independence. However, they should be able to decide when to enter and leave such spaces, which would preserve their capacity to operate in different spaces and generate change in each.

Both crisis and collaborative governance provide elements to understand the relations between ECSOs, CSOs, and GOs. Collaborative governance allows different organizations to work together on specific problems while assisting policymakers and practitioners. Similarly, the interaction between different participatory spaces puts questions of power at the heart of any engagement be-

tween CSOs and GOs (Hardy & Clegg, 2006; Hardy & Leiba-O'Sullivan, 1998). Thus, it is important to reflect on the experiences of ECSOs, CSOs, and GOs during the asylum crisis in order to see if those engagements brought a change in dynamics between organizations dealing with refugee reception.

Crisis governance employs a multi-actor perspective to study crisis preparation, prevention, response, recovery, and accountability. It also studies the role that citizens and new technologies can play in different crisis phases (Drabek & McEntire, 2003; Dynes, 1994; Helsloot & Ruitenbergh, 2004). Furthermore, participation as joint consultations or practices through which different actors can contribute to crisis remediation is an important angle for studying the dynamics between different organizational actors. Such participation opportunities give space for more pluralized forms of support and the capacity to build, engage, and empower local communities (Mitchell, 2001; Trudeau, 2008).

3. Research Approach and Methods

This article is drawn from a case study involving individuals from ECSOs, CSOs, and GOs taking part in research activities at the Refugee Academy, a part of the Institute for Societal Resilience at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. The study's objectives were to identify crisis response practices that could be applied to the asylum crisis and other crisis situations and to determine if those responses would contribute to a more fundamental shift in Dutch refugee reception. As exploratory research conducted within the academy's Refugee Crisis Governance research stream, the project was based primarily on qualitative and interpretative methods (Denscombe, 2014; Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2015). These included the analysis of data from two meetings with panel discussions, twelve semi-structured follow-up interviews, and document analysis (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Panel discussions allowed us to bring in different actors with extensive knowledge and expertise on the asylum crisis. Semi-structured interviews offered informants a relaxed and personalized approach, which provided flexibility in how discussion topics were introduced. Lastly, document analysis enabled the contextualization and triangulation of our research (Bowen, 2009). We corroborated findings by analysing data collected through different methods. In June 2017, during its first meeting, the Refugee Academy organized a roundtable on the governance of the 2015–2016 asylum crisis. It was moderated by one of this article's authors, an expert in crisis governance and organization sciences. Of the nine other participants, two were from different local governments, three from other universities, two from ECSOs, and two from CSOs. In November 2017, another meeting on crisis governance was organized. It had a panel with individuals from three ECSOs, two CSOs, and two GOs and was moderated by one of the authors. During February–March 2018, follow-up interviews were arranged with

relevant interviewees identified through contacts from the Refugee Academy. We created a list of 45 potential respondents based on their organizations and roles during the crisis. Of these, 15 individuals did not reply, 18 did not see enough connection between their work and the potential interviews, and 12 agreed to be interviewed. However, these 12 were mainly from CSOs and, of those, mostly ECSOs. While GO respondents were open to discussing their experiences during the crisis in the first Refugee Academy meeting (in June 2017), by the second meeting four months later, they proved harder to attract. By January–March 2018, none of our GO contacts, including those who had taken part in previous activities, were willing to be interviewed. Paradoxically, many of these organizations were still eager to contribute to other activities organized by our research group, just not those activities concerned with the asylum crisis and related questions. The interviews were conducted in Dutch and followed an interview guide created to consider the operationalization of the central concepts of this study. The aim was to identify recurring topics and develop an overview of the different perceptions, views, and opinions. To systematize and analyse the data gathered, we used the grounded theory approach, which allows theory to be developed from the data, instead of the opposite. This inductive method (e.g., from the specific to the general) guided rather than determined our analysis (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013). The interviews were transcribed and translated into English by native Dutch speakers. The empirical findings are based on selected quotes from the meeting reports and the interviews that show common patterns, topics, and subjects.

4. Results

4.1. *Setting the Scene: Dutch Refugee Reception during the Crisis*

Whether emergent or established, CSOs assist refugees through advocacy, the provision of extra services, and the help of volunteers (Fleischmann & Steinhilper, 2017). They may include experts who can act to represent the interests of refugees without the regulatory constraints of GOs. CSOs can provide a degree of flexibility and adaptability that GOs cannot. Moreover, these organizations play a key role in refugee reception and integration because they assist refugees after their arrival (Garkisch, Heidingsfelder, & Beckmann, 2017). Not only do CSOs adapt to immediate refugee needs and possibilities, but they play a useful role in connecting refugees to other relevant individuals and organizations. CSOs aim to be a bridge, a link between their experiences and futures in the host society (Fleischmann & Steinhilper, 2017; Larruina & Ghorashi, 2016; Rast & Ghorashi, 2018). During the crisis, ECSOs supported or interacted with CSOs such as the Dutch Council for Refugees or the Red Cross (Boersma et al., 2018). Some ECSOs collected donations and sent aid packages to Greece and other Euro-

pean countries. Other organizations focused on improving refugees' integration in local communities, greeting and assisting refugees when they arrived in town, or facilitating temporary stays for refugees with Dutch host families. Some other ECSOs provided community housing or opportunities for encounter and connection with the neighbourhood, both in physical spaces and through online communities. The key Dutch GOs involved were the COA, the Immigration and Naturalization Service (IND), and the local governments.

CSOs were asked to assist GOs with the reception of refugees during the crisis. Starting in September 2015, the accommodation of asylum seekers took place in new locations because the COA's centres lacked the capacity (Boersma et al., 2018). Though the law stated that applicants should receive a decision on their residency status within six months, the time to complete the process was prolonged during the crisis, and refugees had to be accommodated in temporary reception centres. In Amsterdam, the city government set up four emergency shelters and requested assistance from the Salvation Army. By April 2016, the COA had increased its capacity, and it took over management of all the Amsterdam shelters (Boersma et al., 2018). Finally, in May 2017, the COA announced that its operations would be reduced due to lower occupancy and expectations for reduced refugee inflow in the future (COA, 2017). However, while some initiatives were scaling down, other stakeholders expressed less certainty about future refugee numbers. This was clearly expressed by COA chairman Gerard Bakker, who spoke of both the experience of community groups and the need to remain ready for future developments:

We learned a lot from each other, and therefore we became locally involved in this movement, with cities, volunteers, and locals. We will not just close the door behind us, because we will need each other again if the number of asylum seekers grows again unexpectedly. (COA, 2017; authors' translation)

Additionally, the Advisory Committee on Migration Affairs (ACVZ, 2018) work plan for 2017 focused on what the Dutch Minister of Justice called "Migration Management 2030". Indeed, authorities remained concerned about future migration and sought advice on how to develop a stable long-term migration system that would assist them in planning their work and services accordingly.

4.2. Circumstantial Elements and Crisis Governance

Our findings reveal circumstantial (specific to an organization's context) and interorganizational elements that played a crucial role in the work of ECSOs, CSOs, and GOs during the crisis. It is clear that their experiences require a shift in our attention to what we call meso- and micro-level organizational dynamics.

4.2.1. Location and Anticipation

During the Refugee Academy meetings, participants from ECSOs, CSOs, and GOs discussed their impressions and experiences of the asylum crisis. This was one of the few opportunities they had to talk about the topic with people from other organizations. Their shared impressions related to the predictability of the crisis and its perception as mostly an urban experience:

What was striking was that there was a lot of talking about the crisis, while I was thinking by [sic] myself, if we have a crisis, it is a crisis of organizations and how we fix things and in what way we are prepared and not prepared to [sic] things that, from my view, we could have seen coming. (Respondent 6, interview)

The crisis did not come as a surprise to most respondents. In fact, they noted several conditions that were present before the increase in refugee arrivals, and they had foreseen subsequent developments and implications. This foreknowledge made respondents critical of the actual refugee crisis, but many agreed that although the handling of the crisis was clearly unfortunate, it had, nonetheless, brought positive outcomes. Some said the crisis was a "blessing in disguise" (ISR, 2017a). This was clearly realized by the coming together of independent individuals and local initiatives that otherwise would have never interacted.

4.2.2. Assessment of Needs and Definition of Roles

Respondents representing CSOs that had been present in Dutch society for a few years reflected on the impact of events portrayed in the media and the subsequent surge in calls to inquire about volunteering opportunities. This hindered the already overburdened workload of established organizations. At times, it created new obstacles or contradictory situations:

Certain events portrayed in the media stirred public opinion and helped to increase the numbers of volunteers willing to help established local community organizations and projects, or in the launch of new initiatives. Established NGOs/charity organizations [CSOs] sometimes viewed the sudden increase in new volunteers and initiatives [ECSOs] as interfering with their work. (ISR, 2017b)

During the roundtables, participants spoke of their frustration with the lack of resources not only for receiving refugees but for integrating them into the community as soon as possible. They often elaborated on their roles during the crisis, but they also discussed how they might address this issue:

For all organizations, it is important to know how to give help, but also to provide refugees with the re-

sources for self-help wherever possible. To achieve the latter, it is essential to recognize what abilities people already have and build on them. This reminds workers, in turn, to listen to refugees—their views, experiences, and contributions—as a means of making refugee reception more just and sustainable. (ISR, 2017a)

All respondents noted the importance of achieving a genuine understanding of refugee needs rather than making assumptions that do not include the perspectives of refugees themselves. Many felt that the involvement of new actors—ECSOs—would facilitate better communication with refugees and, therefore, better needs assessments. This might be achieved by bringing together like-minded organizations and individuals to enhance learning and cooperation activities:

Many participants noted that we often tend to organize initiatives *for* refugees rather than *with* them. We need a great deal more reflection on this. It is time to see part of our work as listening to and involving refugees in our discussions, decisions, and projects. All participants agreed [ECSOs, CSOs, and GOs]. (ISR, 2017b)

In the report from the second meeting (ISR, 2017b), there is a clear realization that organizational and individual learning processes should involve not only the host society but refugees themselves, and as soon as they arrive. The concept of co-ownership may prove interesting in this context, insofar as it suggests a shift from providing help by just giving to providing help by asking what is needed. In other words, there is a growing understanding that reception and integration are two-way processes.

4.3. *Interorganizational Elements: Opportunities for Collaborative Governance?*

4.3.1. Working Separately to Achieve Similar Aims

When asked what the organizations had experienced during the crisis in relation to other stakeholders, participants recognized that GOs interacted with and learned from the work and practices of ECSOs, CSOs, or other governmental counterparts:

Governmental organizations learned a great deal by going into the field and working with initiatives and municipalities. This is a process that had started before the refugee crisis, but it was developed further and faster during this period. On the other hand, there was evidence that the good intentions of local governments can sometimes produce unintended (negative) results. For instance, the actions of municipalities often foment competition and/or conflict between initiatives [mostly ECSOs]. (ISR, 2017b)

Though GOs and CSOs had started coming together before the 2015–2016 period, this process accelerated during the asylum crisis. Paradoxically, this sometimes-produced unintended consequences, as the previous example indicates. By funding new projects, local governments sometimes stimulated competition between different initiatives.

The respondents emphasized not only the contact between different types of organizations (GO and CSO), but also the interactions between organizations belonging to the same sector (CSO–CSO or GO–GO). In the following example, we see evidence of strained relations between established and emergent CSOs:

There appeared to be little recognition of the long experience and knowledge built within the NGOs themselves. For that reason, it is crucial to rethink and redesign the relations between established NGOs, like *Vluchtelingenwerk* [Dutch Council for Refugees], and more “fluid” community initiatives [ECSOs] so that the positive potential of the latter is realized and interconnected with the experience of the first. (ISR, 2017b)

Where lines of communication between CSOs and GOs were inadequate, collaborative efforts sometimes suffered or ended in conflict. One respondent described a lack of support from relevant organizations and the bureaucratic rules that obstructed clear communication:

Sometimes there was a clear guideline communicated from the national organizations to the local ones. Then there is someone you know and that you can call. But the bureaucracy was very burdensome; there is someone behind a desk who says, “Rules are rules”. (ECSO Respondent 3, interview)

Our research shows that where horizontal cooperation and collaboration occurred, experienced organizations could assist the less experienced in establishing themselves and launching their programmes.

4.4. *Opportunities for Change through ECSO and CSO Participation*

Although the circumstantial and interorganizational evidence show elements that limited the work of CSOs and GOs, the Refugee Academy meetings and the interviews indicate the beginning of a shift towards enabling CSOs’ inclusion in an organizational ecosystem composed mostly of GOs. This change is seen mainly in the sharing of best practices and the focusing on local rather than central governments.

4.4.1. Opportunities for Change at the Meso-Level: Unexpected Partners and Local Governments

Respondents acknowledged that the asylum crisis presented an opportunity to rethink approaches to refugee

reception. They highlighted the importance of understanding the need for different organizational roles as part of a larger set of stakeholders and processes. This could be applied to the relation between homogenous or heterogeneous organizations (i.e., the interplay among organizations belonging to the same or different sectors) but also to the relationship between organizations and refugees:

First, this opportunity [the asylum crisis] brought onto the organizational stage local and private initiatives [ECSOs] dealing with different issues regarding refugees. Second, municipalities are more involved in refugee reception than before; they are taking responsibility and initiative. These elements are generating the conditions for a larger shift in thinking about the meaning and effects of greater public participation. (ISR, 2017a)

Many of the interviews stressed the relevance of establishing and sustaining a good relationship with local governments, often noting that the relatively small size of the municipalities allowed them to interact and obtain immediate answers to their needs and requests:

Yes, in some municipalities it is a bit easier because they are smaller. That makes it easy to get to them, to reach them. Everything I say isn't about my interaction, but what I see in the field. I have a pretty good relationship with the municipality....They are also open to processes and new things. (CSO Respondent 5, interview)

Regarding the specific actions taken during the crisis, participants mostly agreed that traditional decision channels should be modified, from being top-down to being bottom-up. Both Refugee Academy meeting reports also acknowledged the necessity of collaborative spaces and a better definition of roles, which might clarify responsibilities and help to draw an organizational map showing all the relevant stakeholders and their relation to one another. In this context, most respondents defined their roles by focusing on what could have been done better and in what manner. The interorganizational connections that emerged during the asylum crisis were central, and participants identified three conditions required to facilitate those connections: focusing on positive people, having a can-do attitude, and local governments assuming a coordinating role.

4.4.2. Opportunities for Change at the Micro-Level: Human Capital and Tailored Actions

While acknowledging the conditions required to facilitate governance and share best practices, respondents elaborated on how this could start at the micro-level. They particularly emphasized the importance of personal alliances. One respondent felt that, despite the differ-

ences between organizations, all stakeholders should focus on connections between individuals or groups that work well together and pursue the same goals:

Regardless of the (type) of organization, there are always people you can connect with, who can make a difference. Working together towards an inclusive system boils down to finding those people and keeping in touch with the network one establishes. We should invest in creating structures in which people can find each other and build durable networks. (ISR, 2017b)

Moreover, many respondents recognized the benefit of tailoring their actions to specific situations rather than following a generic procedure. Others underlined the importance of networking to seek solutions to problems or possible points of collaboration. One respondent highlighted the importance of personal contacts not only to facilitate their work but to connect refugees with the larger host society. As another individual observed, "networks" might refer to other organizations or to individual volunteers. Some networks might even include employees from GOs. However, active collaboration with GOs proved more elusive due to their bureaucratic challenges:

If you don't know how to find each other, a lot of time and energy will be lost....If you are all doing the same thing and you don't know it. You need some sort of coordination, and you have to find each other. (ECSO Respondent 11, interview)

Our research shows that to obtain a quick answer or solution to a problem, respondents regularly used their networks to reach the right person in the relevant organization. Despite, or perhaps because of, these informal tactics, such contact often led to greater collaboration and more positive outcomes.

While these reports and interview fragments present patterns observed in a specific setting, they have much to tell us about how ECSOs, CSOs, and GOs interacted during the asylum crisis and what their reflections and considerations reveal about the larger Dutch response. Our evidence suggests that these interactions hold the potential for future collaboration and, more specifically, for more inclusive practices regarding CSOs. The implications for refugee reception and organizational ecology are addressed in the next section.

5. Conclusion

This research examined the differing roles and experiences of ECSOs, CSOs, and GOs during the Dutch asylum crisis. Our data shows that the coming together of these organizations may mark the beginning of a shift that enables the inclusion of ECSOs and CSOs in an organizational ecosystem that before the crisis, was mostly dominated by GOs. This change occurred mainly

because of a focus on local rather than central government initiatives and because stakeholders sought to network, collaborate, and share best practices. The crisis provided an opportunity to reconsider the challenges of refugee reception, where the participation of ECSOs, CSOs, and refugees themselves could be invited and actively encouraged.

From a crisis management perspective, understanding the contributions of ECSOs and CSOs could assist GOs in moving away from the command-and-control approach to crisis and towards better planned and coordinated practices. In a crisis management model that favours coordination, new opportunities for collaboration and resource optimization between ECSOs, CSOs, and GOs would be possible (Boersma et al., 2018; Drabek & McEntire, 2003). This could enable interactions between heterogeneous stakeholders while making the most of their human, social, and logistical resources. Although incorporating new actors can sometimes hamper the work of established actors, a well-supported plan of action/interaction could help mitigate early difficulties, with much to be gained as actors learn to work together. Therefore, it is arguable that after a crisis, or indeed during any non-crisis period, there is an opportunity to put inclusive and collaborative relations (Rast & Ghorashi, 2018) into place in anticipation of future needs. What we can say with certainty is that the asylum crisis brought a new awareness of the importance of collaborative assets.

More specifically, our empirical findings suggest real possibilities for CSOs and local GOs to work together. This could be achieved in part because municipalities are smaller and less bureaucratic than the central government, often making it quicker and easier for ECSOs and CSOs to access decision makers and resources. Indeed, many respondents described micro-level interactions that focused on, and reinforced, contacts and relations in local government as well as other community agencies.

Turning to the broad issue of participation, the asylum crisis created “closed spaces” where only governmental organizations, such as the COA and the municipalities, were involved (Boersma et al., 2018). These became “invited spaces” once CSOs were asked to assist. However, while the promise to leave that “invited space” open for future interactions was clearly expressed in the 2017 COA statement and in the Refugee Academy meeting it seems that the perception of ongoing collaboration was not shared by all.

As our study indicates, there are opportunities for collaboration among ECSOs, CSOs, and GOs during both crisis and non-crisis periods. Such collaborative governance could offer the possibility of shared spaces to exchange best practices on a long-term basis, one that could foster a sustainable form of refugee reception and integration by contributing to policy changes and best practice guidelines. However, these opportunities are weakened by seemingly divergent organizational priorities. This gives

added urgency to the need for civil society and governments to work together during non-crisis periods so they can be ready for any future asylum crisis.

Future research needs to determine to what extent our findings apply to other policy sectors and/or stages of a (asylum) crisis. In addition, because of the differences between ECSOs, CSOs, and GOs, research should allow for the fact that each may present differently depending upon whether it is considered separately or with the others. In other words, considering them together may mask internal or external factors that might otherwise be visible. With that caveat, we argue that by examining micro- and meso-level opportunities between ECSO, CSOs, and GOs, it is possible to identify the conditions for a change in Dutch refugee reception. This change can be contextualized in an organizational ecology that includes the effort and commitment of individuals, most of whom share a desire to assist refugees without bureaucratic constraints. Their work and indeed this research are made more important because they coincide with current and highly polarized public debates about the reception and inclusion of refugees.

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Conflict of interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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