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A port in a storm: Spontaneous volunteering and grassroots movements in Amsterdam. A resilient approach to the (European) refugee crisis

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Abstract

This article seeks to expand knowledge about spontaneous volunteering in Amsterdam during the European refugee crisis in the winter of 2015–16. As formal institutions, which relied on a top–down command and control approach, were unable to handle the relatively large number of refugees who arrived in a short period of time, grassroots social movements based on bottom–up participation emerged. Grassroots volunteers were not only politically engaged, protesting against the strict refugee reception policy, but they also became involved in the crisis response, showing a great deal of flexibility. Although the social movements struggled with their organizational structures, they were able to adapt their missions and structures to changing circumstances. To achieve a resilience-based response to future refugee influxes, this article advocates for formal response organizations to dismantle their static, top–down approach, and for social movements to find a balance between participation and professionalism. If institutionalized refugee response organizations adapt to the dynamics of local conditions, they could create the conditions for resilient solutions in the crisis context.

KEYWORDS

crisis governance, emergent organizing, refugee crisis, social movements, spontaneous volunteering

1 | INTRODUCTION

The 21st century has been characterized by an increasing movement of people. While some people migrate to other countries in search of a better job or education, a higher salary, and better economic climate, others leave their country as forced migrants—refugees—because of conflict situations (OCHA, 2016). More than seven million Syrians have fled their homes since the start of the civil war in 2011, and the ongoing violence in Afghanistan, Eritrea, and Kosovo has contributed to the growth of displaced people. Most sought shelter in their own countries (internally displaced people) or in neighboring countries, but others sought a safe home in Europe. In 2015, the number of forced migrants coming to Europe increased rapidly (IOM, 2016).

Refugees' reception by the inhabitants of European countries has been mixed. Citizens objecting to the European Union's (EU's) refugee reception policy, and citizens welcoming refugees by organizing spontaneous actions have both made their voices heard (Greenhill, 2016; Niemann & Zaun, 2018). Meanwhile, Europe has failed to respond to both the influx of refugees and the societal unrest in an adequate manner. There has been neither clear legislation nor a coordinated effort from the EU to deal with the situation (Heisbourg, 2015). In their insightful book on refugee policies, Betts and Collier (2017) state that the refugee system worldwide is broken, full of flaws, and too unpredictable to deal with the increasing number of refugees. Given that large numbers of refugees are expected to be looking for shelter in the near future, and given that authorities are unable to create predictable patterns of collective actions and coordinating institutions, the context in Europe can be considered a *slow-burning* crisis, defined as an enduring complex situation characterized by substantial ambiguity (Porfiriev, 2000; 't Hart & Boin, 2001). Europe's refugee reception policy is predominantly based on a *crisis governance* approach (Hadfield & Zwitter, 2015).

Crisis governance literature shows that formal authorities, institutions, and administrations struggling with a situation's complexity tend to rely upon a *command and control* policy to "bring the chaos back under control" (Boersma, Ferguson, Groenewegen, & Wolbers, 2014; Henstra, 2010; Simo & Bies, 2007; Tierney, 2012). Once a situation is labeled as a crisis, it is treated as a chaotic situation that needs to be controlled (Pallister-Wilkins, 2016; Van Buuren, Vink, & Warner, 2016). Unstructured responses (e.g., the civil society's response) are then seen as threatening the social order.

The crisis governance lens also reveals another mechanism: crisis evokes spontaneous, unexpected, and emergent collective actions (Laere, 2013; Roux-Dufort, 2007; Solnit, 2010). Europe's refugee crisis was no exception, as many *spontaneous volunteers* started to organize themselves through civil society initiatives. Not only did these initiatives mobilize protests, but they also became engaged in offering alternative forms of help. In the United Kingdom, for example, initiatives emerged in support of refugees throughout the country, the most prominent one being the Refugees Welcome movement (Koca, 2016, p. 96). The response in the Netherlands showed a similar pattern (Bakker, Cheung, & Phillimore, 2016; Van Heelsum, 2017). Some volunteers "just" offered help, either directly to refugees or through formal, institutional response organizations such as the Red Cross or the Salvation Army. Others became more active, trying to overcome the negativity of the media coverage and policies that were "delineating the deserving refugee from the undeserving migrant while casting both groups as outsiders threatening the well-being of an imagined homogenous Europe" (Holmes & Castaneda, 2016, p. 12).

These diverse civil society responses to the crisis are seen as important alternatives to the failing institutional approach (Betts & Collier, 2017), but not much is known about the governance and organizational structures behind these initiatives or how those changed over time. This article seeks to expand knowledge about the European crisis and the societal response by studying the role of volunteering. We use a social movement perspective complementary to the crisis management literature to understand volunteers' actions, allowing us to focus on their change agenda. We present a qualitative case study of people in Amsterdam who volunteered to help refugees, particularly those fleeing Syria's civil war, and look at how they made sense of their initiatives vis-á-vis the formal, institutional response. We end by proposing an alternative crisis governance approach.

2 | VOLUNTEERING, COLLECTIVE ACTIONS, AND CRISIS SITUATIONS

Broadly defined, "volunteering means any activity in which time is given freely to benefit another person, group, or organization" (Wilson, 2000, p. 215). Traditional volunteers are mobilized by formal organizations (Hustinx et al., 2010; Selander, 2015). Usually, volunteering is defined in the context of work—unpaid work with an element of attractive leisure (Stebbins, 2013). Unpaid volunteer work leads to benefits for the volunteer (e.g., self-esteem) or others, whereas the leisure element refers to the joyful element of volunteering.

People usually get involved in volunteering activities to satisfy social and psychological needs, including self-esteem, security, reciprocity, social connection, and the understanding of others (Manatschal & Freitag, 2010). Helping others increases individuals' well-being, and this fact encourages people to continue volunteering as part of their identity (Matsuba, Hart, & Atkins, 2007; Meier & Stutzer, 2004). Spontaneous volunteering seems to be even more motivated by feelings of social solidarity, personal empowerment, and satisfaction with intrinsic and extrinsic rewards, as recent research shows (Kulik, Arnon, & Dolev, 2016). Spontaneous volunteers mobilize themselves temporarily; they are "those who seek to contribute on impulse—people who offer assistance following a disaster and who are not previously affiliated with recognized volunteer agencies and may or may not have relevant training, skills or experience" (Cottrell, 2010, p. 3).

In addition, meso- and macro-level forces and contexts have a significant impact on an individual's decision to become a volunteer (Yeung, 2004). Volunteers do not act in isolation, but operate in social networks (Forbes & Zampelli, 2014; Musick & Wilson, 1997). Motivation for action arises from collectivistic concerns, which suggests that people become activists because they are embedded in relationships that push them towards action (Rai & Fiske, 2011; Van Zomeren, 2014).

Recently, there has been a growing interest in understanding how volunteers are mobilized and how they organize themselves during crises (Kulik et al., 2016; Mitani, 2014; Whittaker, McLennan, & Handmer, 2015). Although the literature on volunteering distinguishes between volunteers affiliated with the official response and spontaneous volunteers (i.e., those acting on impulse), in the context of the refugee crisis, a more relevant distinction may be the one between institutional (governmental) and third sector (nonprofit and volunteer) responses.

2.1 | Collective actions during the refugee crisis

During the slow-burning European refugee crisis, volunteers' decision-making processes were influenced by the debates on refugee policies (McGuaran & Hudig, 2014). Such debates are shaped by social actors' voices and interests, and secured by policies and norms related to refugees (Delanty, 2008; Fresia, 2014; Larruina & Ghorashi, 2016). On the one hand, refugees, contrary to migrants, are seen as "helpless victims"—people who are suffering (Betts & Loescher, 2014). They may also be presented as being in great danger and in need of protection (Every & Augoustinos, 2008). On the other hand, beliefs that government help may lead to refugees becoming dependent on state support, becoming lazy and unwilling to work, may deter volunteers.

Against this background, spontaneous volunteering in Amsterdam and in other cities throughout Europe became interwoven with protests that not only offered creative solutions to practical problems, but also expressed frustrations with the top–down crisis approach (Koca, 2016). In such circumstances, collective actions form the basis on which the individuals associated with them intervene in the emergent social relations and common beliefs (Hasenfeld & Gidron, 2005; Wilson, 2012). However, social movement theory emphasizes that "collective action is necessary to create social change and to influence institutions…" (King, 2008, p. 27). For social movement scholars, (suddenly imposed) grievance alone is not enough to start collective action. Mobilization is also required, which can be achieved by building personal networks (i.e., social capital) based on common interests, identities, or ideologies (Klandermans, 2008; Snow, Soule, & Kriesi, 2008). Social movement members converge due to a common cause that needs articulation over time. For example, altruistic social movements that "have been motivated by an aversion to injustice" have assisted subordinate groups who "lacked the legal standing, political capacity, or economic resources they needed to

act effectively on their own behalf" (Schaeffer, 2014, pp. 10–11). This form of collective action is not related by capital and labor issues per se, but is rooted in collectivities with a communal base that may have a government policy (e.g., neoliberal urbanism, repressive refugee policies) as their target of action.

2.2 | Organizational forms and dynamics

An important difference between traditional social movements (such as working-class and labor movements) and social movements that emerge during crisis situations lies in how they happen and how they are organized. For example, during the refugee crisis, spontaneous actions "merged" with the urban social movements that were arising out of the economic, social, cultural, and political transformations of capitalist societies (Novy & Colomb, 2013). In addition, many volunteers who started or joined bottom–up initiatives had refugee backgrounds. For refugees, joining civil society actions demonstrates that they are not simply victims of political turmoil, but agents of change in embracing diversity, and actors in reshaping social relations and power formations (Weng & Lee, 2016). Lastly, the modes of mobilization were not based on traditional forms; instead, they utilized communication and information technologies, including social media platforms such as Facebook (Koca, 2016), since open participation is important for these movements (Della Porta & Mattoni, 2014).

Next, emergent groups—as collectives of individuals who use non-routine resources and activities—create organizations with unclear and fluid boundaries. Participating individuals have ambiguous and fleeting memberships and task divisions, which are unstable and continuously changing because the conditions in which they operate are characterized by continuous change (Drabek & McEntire, 2003). Unlike the centralized, hierarchical, and formal structures of traditional social movements, emerging movements have decentralized, segmented, diffused, and informal structures consisting of voluntary members (Majchrzak, Jarvenpaa, & Hollingshead, 2007).

The assumption is that the characteristics of the emerging crisis organization, including fleeting membership, dispersed leadership, unclear boundaries, and flexible task definitions (Majchrzak et al., 2007), allow spontaneous volunteers to work in a flexible fashion. The way in which volunteers deal with organizational tensions, oppositions, and contradictions during crises results in *hybrid* forms, i.e., partial, temporary organizations (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2011). Hybrid organizational forms, however, cannot escape the normal problems of young organizations, and some formalization (institutionalization) is seen as a solution for issues of accountability, legitimacy, and sustainability (Sine, Mitsuhashi, & Kirsch, 2006). They ultimately aim at building partially organized orders, which are a blend of emergent and established orders (Den Hond, de Bakker, & Smith, 2015). Partial organizations contain elements of traditional organizations such as membership, rules, and hierarchy, but they are supplemented with insights from an ideal "anarchist" organization (Diani, 2013).

3 | METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

This article is based on an in-depth case study (Yin, 2011) on the organization of spontaneous volunteering at the peak of the refugee crisis in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, in the winter of 2015–16. We studied volunteers' motives and their collective actions inside formal organizations and outside them (i.e., in partial organizations), and how they mobilized themselves.

Because of its explorative nature, the project was based on qualitative and interpretative research (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2015). Visiting relevant sites and refugee centers to map volunteers' social environments was a vital part of the study's execution (Hannerz, 2003, p. 206; Marcus, 1995, p. 102). We conducted interviews at two formal organizations: the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (abbreviated as COA in Dutch), an independent administrative body that falls under the political responsibility of the Ministry of Security and Justice; and Vluchtelingen Werk Nederland (VWN, the Dutch Council for Refugees), an organization that offers practical support to refugees during the asylum process and with their integration into the Dutch society. We also interviewed people

working at "formal" volunteering organizations including Vrijwilligers Centrale Amsterdam (VCA), Present Amsterdam, and the Salvation Army. Lastly, we spoke to volunteers in emergent grassroots organizations (all not-for-profit): De Meevaart, Wereldhuis, AMS Helpt, Dutch Parcels for Refugees, Gastvrij Oost, Needs Now, Refugees Welcome Amsterdam, and Takecarebnb.

We used a topic list during semi-structured interviews to gain specific information about each organization's backstage, its structure, and context (Weiss, 1995). A second topic list was used with any spontaneous volunteers interviewed on the spot. Spontaneous volunteers were asked about their experience in volunteering projects, what motivated them to join emergent groups, and the movements' organizational dynamics. We were interested in hearing the stories through which they made sense of their own actions and those of the formal institutions, and in the coupling between their perceptions and concrete actions, i.e., the process of enacted sensemaking in crisis situations (Weick, 1988).

Data organization and analysis included transcribing interviews, observation notes, and secondary documents. The data was first coded and then analyzed using the inductive grounded theory approach (Corbin & Strauss, 1990); we captured "concepts relevant to the human organizational experience in terms that are adequate at the level of meaning of the people living that experience and adequate at the level of scientific theorizing about that experience" (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013, p. 16).

In what follows, in section 4 we first provide details about the Dutch asylum policy and how the system struggled to handle the reception of a relatively large number of refugees during a short period of time. Next, section 5.1 describes how spontaneous volunteers organized themselves through social movements. Quotes from interviews are used to illustrate volunteers' sensemaking processes. We show how these organizations took shape and what kinds of dilemmas they were confronted with. Lastly, we present how both the social movements and the formal institutions developed adaptive strategies that resulted in hybrid forms of organizing.

4 | SETTING THE SCENE: THE DUTCH REFUGEE SYSTEM AT TIMES OF CRISIS

Funded by the Dutch Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, the COA handles the reception of asylum seekers, while the Minister for Immigration and Asylum Policy is politically accountable (Bruquetas-Callejo, Garcia-Mascarenas, Penninx, & Scholten, 2011). The COA actively interacts with other government bodies, including the Immigration and Naturalization Service (IND) and the Aliens Police. It houses asylum seekers at formal locations until the IND grants asylum, and the court makes a decision regarding their refugee status. In these reception centers (abbreviated as AZCs in Dutch), asylum seekers are provided with accommodation and some pocket money as well as guidance related to their asylum process (Geuijen, 2000).

The COA provides accommodation from the moment asylum seekers apply for asylum until the point when either they must leave the country or they are granted a residence permit. To apply for asylum in the Netherlands, asylum seekers must report to an IND application center. Once all the application procedures have taken place, they are given accommodation in an AZC. During a regular asylum process, asylum seekers are moved between shelters in their first months in the Netherlands. If the IND—after a legal procedure—establishes that an asylum seeker indeed needs protection, he or she will be given an asylum residence permit. Applicants usually receive a decision on their residence permit within six months. They then can look for a home outside the shelter, develop a more stable social network, and get to know others, including their Dutch neighbors, volunteers, and language teachers (Van Heelsum, 2017).

However, things changed with the increased influx of refugees looking for shelter in the Netherlands in 2015–16 (see Figure 1). Beginning in September 2015, a lack of capacity in formal COA institutions (the result of an earlier political decision to decrease the COA's budget) meant the COA had to organize the intake of refugees on an ad hoc basis, in various temporary locations all over the country (Smets, Younes, Dohmen, Boersma, & Brouwer, 2017). The six-month

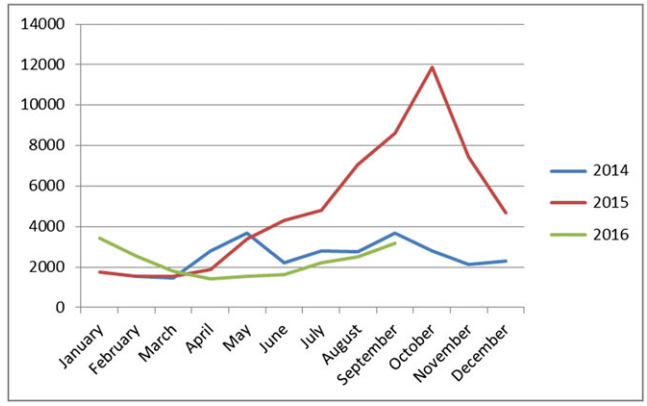

FIGURE 1 Number of refugees looking for asylum in the Netherlands
Source. IND Asylum Trends. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

waiting period had to be extended, the time for preparing and starting the asylum procedure had to be prolonged, and refugees had to be accommodated in temporary reception centers.

The central government required Amsterdam to temporarily accept more asylum seekers than it usually does. The municipality had to set up four emergency shelters, and requested assistance from the Salvation Army. Although that organization had experience with setting up emergency shelters and assisting people in need, it was the first time it had organized a long-term shelter, keeping it open 24 hours a day, and constantly providing all the services: "Before we didn't have a shelter for refugees, so it was completely new for us" (Volunteer coordinator at the Salvation Army).

In April 2016, after having regained capacity, the COA took over management of all the shelters in Amsterdam. It was crucial for the COA to regain control over a situation that—in its perspective and in the perspective of the formal authorities—had gotten out of hand. "For the daily operations, it is the COA's responsibility because we are part of the refugee chain and the Salvation Army is not" (COA team leader). The residents of the emergency shelters faced significant changes with the takeover: for instance, stricter rules, fewer services provided, loss of quality and quantity of provided food, and restricted permits for voluntary initiatives to enter the shelters.

The housing of refugees in ad hoc, temporary reception centers resulted in two relevant, rather opposing, reactions from the Dutch public: one that was unreceptive to the refugees, and one that welcomed them. In the winter of 2015–16, many protesters descended on the streets, arguing against formal authorities' top–down imposed plans to open large-scale refugee centers in close proximity to their neighborhoods (Bellaart, Broekhuizen, & Van Dongen, 2016; ISR, 2016). The formal policy to house refugees in large asylum accommodation centers in the Netherlands without much consultation with the host communities caused a lot of societal unrest, and hampered refugees' integration into Dutch society (Bakker et al., 2016). The terrorist attacks that had taken place in European cities also had a great impact on how refugees—particularly those from Muslim backgrounds—were perceived. The fear of others was reinforced by the rhetoric of right-wing politicians, which led to anxieties about the future (Bolshova, 2016).

5 | RESULTS

5.1 | Spontaneous volunteering and social movements during the refugee crisis in Amsterdam

While some people feared the influx of refugees, many spontaneous, emergent citizen initiatives welcomed refugees, and actively started to organize small-scale housing for them. Since those initiatives were not organized in a controlled (and structured manner), but were driven by emergent, informal, personal networks, the formal institutions had a

difficult time integrating them into their crisis response. Although the COA and well-established civil society organizations, such as the Red Cross, the Salvation Army, and the VCA, were used to officially recruit volunteers, their requirements were perceived as hurdles by citizens who wanted to spontaneously volunteer with refugees. For emerging initiatives, Facebook became the easiest and fastest way of recruiting volunteers: "I asked one of the members in our team to put something on Facebook. And there were already a lot of people who had emailed us that they wanted to do something" (Volunteer at Gastvrij Oost). "We also started a Facebook page event so that everybody who donated could see what we did with their donations. Also we hoped that people checking the page would donate and invite others too" (Spontaneous volunteer at AMS Helpt).

Various bottom–up initiatives in Amsterdam activated numerous volunteers outside the formal organizations. They did not need third parties to recruit for their activities, as they could build on the growing protests and support for the rights of refugees, despite the strict government policy. For most spontaneous volunteers, it was important to be involved in "hands on" activities and see an immediate result of their work. Volunteering in an organization that allowed them to do something good *right now* was important to these individuals: they wanted to do something "real".

Although the COA was responsible for housing refugees in temporary centers, no organization was responsible for helping refugees reach an AZC. Refugees Welcome Amsterdam, a citizen initiative that emerged at Amsterdam Central Station, started to fill this gap. One of the initiative's founders elaborated on his motivation:

> "I always wanted to do something for my fellow people, and I love social contacts and helping people. When Zohair messaged me, I thought, Wow! Let's see what we can do. Zohair is a good friend of mine, and we are just two Moroccan guys from Amsterdam East who came up with an idea to do something." (one of the founders of Refugees Welcome Amsterdam)

They started with small gestures such as collecting clothes and groceries to bring to the railway station where refugees had been arriving constantly since early September 2015. People passing by spontaneously started to assist in distributing the goods to refugees. "It is just amazing to be in that situation, to be part of something beautiful…Many people thought, ooh it is far away from us, and we will not be confronted with it. The Dutch population felt afraid because of this situation, and there was ignorance" (one of the founders of Refugees Welcome Amsterdam).

A spontaneous volunteer at Amsterdam Central Station, who was active in the early days of the crisis, stated:

> "When we arrived at Amsterdam Central Station, we saw that nothing was prepared or arranged, there was nothing. They [the refugees] could go to the police station where they received a ticket to Ter Apel [a large, existing COA refugee center]. […] We heard stories of people traveling 15 to 20 days, tired and hungry, and it was so badly arranged for them, if at all. [One refugee] became emotional as he said that he could not believe how it was possible that a rich and developed country like the Netherlands was unable to act." (a spontaneous volunteer for Refugees Welcome)

Other volunteers joined local grassroots organizations such as Gastvrij Oost Amsterdam, which collaborated with a local housing corporation and with the Meevaart, a local urban social movement, to house a small group of refugees. One of the founders of Gastvrij Oost pointed out that:

> "these are really interesting projects, grassroots projects, sort of *democracy by doing*, and each organization was challenging different things. And I thought it would be very good if we could connect to each other, and then we could learn from each other. So we made a community of practice." (one of the founders of Gastvrij Oost)

Gastvrij Oost was built on the idea of human rights, and it wanted to connect with refugees. It was working with the project Ongekend Bijzonder, an oral history project that has collected and recorded refugees' stories. In 2015, Gastvrij

Oost launched a temporary small-scale residential facility called HOOST at the Mauritskade in Amsterdam East, which allowed a group of Syrian refugees to live in the neighborhood instead of in the COA's asylum seeker center.

A similar initiative was Takecarebnb, founded as a start-up by two friends who had the idea that refugees (once their residence permits were granted) could temporarily live with host families instead of staying anonymously in refugee shelters while waiting for permanent housing. Their idea was inspired by the popular online rental service in the sharing economy, Airbnb (Zervas, Proserpio, & Byers, 2014). One of the founders stated:

> "You are in a good position when you have a relatively good life, good job, and you can give something back, you can offer something. Then the question really just becomes how, which way I can contribute best. So you feel the need to contribute. Not because you feel that it's not done enough, or not because the government is failing, but more because you want to do something." (one of the founders of Takecarebnb)

5.2 | Looking for continuity: Towards a hybrid form of organizing

As the crisis progressed, an increasing number of people became involved in various activities aimed at helping refugees in Amsterdam. Besides a general willingness to help others, one of the main reasons for becoming involved was a frustration with the top–down approach adopted by the formal administrations. Respondents agreed that the COA's attitude towards helping refugees was very bureaucratic, and that the agency did not facilitate the right cooperation and communication channels. The following exemplifies participants' answers on questions concerning the COA:

> "Yes, they are assigned by the government, but in a very political way. So the COA offers refugees housing and food, and that's it. And then in bad housing, like in camps, and in former prison cells, and so on, and I think it's also to scare off new refugees. 'Don't come to the Netherlands, because treatment is not so good,' and that's a very politically influenced organization. And so we were talking about small-scale housing for refugees, and COA talks about this, that they would like this, or they see chances in this, but I don't think they really want it, I don't really think so." (a spontaneous volunteer at Gastvrij Oost)

Citizens mobilized themselves, building alternatives to the static, bureaucratic institutions. Our respondents opposed the negative reactions towards refugees by some Dutch citizens and political groups, and since they did not support their views, they were eager to show the exact opposite of what those groups stood for. They strongly agitated against the formal procedure of asylum seeking, which takes months, and during which time there are no or very few activities organized for refugees. Most new initiatives advocated for a less-controlled way of working:

> "Everybody is different in that perspective—what I noticed in the last few months, that we all have our own different interests. […] Sometimes, well, it doesn't match, or you don't want to bring your whole network in. So that is one thing, it's interesting to discover, and it is interesting in this grassroots movement, I think." (a spontaneous volunteer at Refugees Welcome)

However, when their activities started to grow, the founders of the spontaneous social movements struggled to uphold the informal modes of organizing. Gastvrij Oost, which started with a bottom–up approach to housing refugees, decided to register the initiative as a formal foundation, implementing some elements of hierarchical order including oversight and management meetings. As one founder explained:

> "Well, we have like in Gastvrij Oost, we have now...we have, like the management, it is a big word, but we are 5 people, and we meet each other every Monday...We have a board, like the board of a foundation,

> that consists of three people, but they, we all work together with each other, so there is no hierarchy—no, there is not—and so we have this group of five people." (one of the founders of Gastvrij Oost)

Eventually, the question was whether the organization was really maintaining its flexibility as it tried to cope with the given situation while still satisfying the professionals, the stakeholders, and the community. A Takecarebnb volunteer argued:

> "So that was like in the beginning, we needed to start two things, we needed to start building an organization and we needed to have an idea on what it was going to look like. And we were going to run a pilot, and based on the experience of the pilot, we were going to improve. Some things were conscious, but then it was organic as we went along and learned from the first pilot." (a volunteer for Takecarebnb)

Initiative founders also revealed some problematic sides of their work that had to do with issues of accountability:

> "Many refugees asked for legal advice, and that is something we cannot give because we just don't know. And that is what we had to communicate to our volunteers, not to say things if they were not sure about them. Especially legal advice." (a volunteer for Refugees Welcome Amsterdam)

Over time, as the situation remained unclear, the spontaneous volunteers restricted themselves and their tasks, and, in fact, they became much more focused and formal than one would expect, given their open and flexible structure.

Some initiatives (Refugees Welcome, Dutch Parcels for Refugees, and AMS Helpt) turned out to be temporary and committed only to short-term help, given their limited resources, energy, and time. As a founder of Refugees Welcome Amsterdam explained:

> "As long as the crisis continues, we will stand firm at the central station. We will wait for the refugees, and we will help them, especially the families. When the influx stops, we have discussed visiting refugee camps, but our main focus is the here and now. We do what we can when we are needed to do it. But we have no concrete plan for the future. We do things depending on the situation." (one of the founders of Refugees Welcome Amsterdam)

Others (Gastvrij Oost and Takecarebnb, in particular) developed a conscious mode of professionalization. Division of labor and specialization became important for them over time, and to be able to function in the long term, fundraising activities and a paid labor force were implemented. This is a well-known pattern: Howard and Pratt-Boyden (2013), who studied Occupy London, described how, over time, hierarchies occur within social movements, manifesting in "the emergence of stratification within a movement and submittance of the collective to hierarchy which is entrusted upon specific individuals" (Howard & Pratt-Boyden, 2013, p. 739).

Although the established crisis-response organizations struggled enormously with their own organization, some tried to find alternatives to their formal and static organizational structures, moving to a process of adaptation. There are signs that the need for institutional reform (Betts & Collier, 2017) is recognized by response organizations. For example, the Red Cross, which assisted the COA in setting up the ad hoc temporary refugee camps, managed to include many spontaneous volunteers in its activities. Those who were not willing to join a social movement per se, but still wanted to help, could join the Red Cross's novel initiative called Ready2Help (Schmidt, Wolbers, Ferguson, & Boersma, 2017). During the crisis, spontaneous volunteers who registered online were contacted by the Red Cross via email, SMS, or automated calls. The organization then asked whether they were available to provide specific assistance during the crisis. This new *hybrid* organizational form allowed volunteers to decide whether they could perform a certain task at a given place and time (Hasenfeld & Gidron, 2005).

In May 2016, the COA announced that it was reducing its capacity to accommodate asylum seekers due to lower occupancy and expected refugee inflow (COA, 2016). However, while official initiatives are scaling down, there is concern about possible increases in refugee numbers in the near future. COA Chairman, Gerard Bakker, speaking about both the reductions and the uncertainty, said in an annual report:

> We have grown substantially together, so it's important that we also downscale together. 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, 2016; translation by the authors)

6 | DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

When, in 2016, the EU made a controversial deal with Turkey to block the flow of refugees into Europe, the influx slowed down. Yet, the refugee crisis is far from over. First, the many conflicts in the Middle East and Africa and the problematic economic situations in these regions will remain as the main cause of the displacement of millions of people. Tens of thousands of refugees are stuck in camps situated in the EU border countries of Greece and Italy as a result of the fortification of Europe (SOS Europe, 2014). Second, though the EU–Turkey deal aims to decrease the number of illegal migrants to Greece and to trade that stream for legal migrants, Turkey keeps deporting Syrian refugees, and uses force to deny Syrian refugees entrance to its country (Heijer, Rijpma, & Spijkerboer, 2016; Memisoglu & Ilgit, 2017). Third, the attempt at "relabeling" refugees as migrants (Crawley & Skleparis, 2018), and defining countries of origin as safe (Niemann & Zaun, 2018) has proven to be an unsustainable solution to the crisis. As a result, the international community is still struggling to find answers to the burning problem of the broken refugee system (Betts & Collier, 2017). As long as there is no adequate fix, Europe will continue to face systemic, ongoing uncertainty filled with the unpredictable actions of a divided society.

This study reveals how formal institutions and organizations dealing with refugees in Amsterdam (including those who regularly work with volunteers) adopted a top–down crisis approach to control the situation, but failed to connect their actions with spontaneous forms of volunteering. Although the emergent response reflected people's desire to act, it also reflected their frustration with the formal institutions. Intentionally or not, spontaneous volunteers offered alternatives to the more top–down oriented crisis management strategy of formal organizations and authorities that—for the volunteers—was an inhumane way of dealing with refugees. For spontaneous volunteers, keeping the structures of the social movement open was pivotal. Yet the movement's organization turned out to be challenging as volunteers struggled with the legitimacy and continuation of their initiatives.

Each time a crisis occurs, a new policy window emerges, which interest groups can use to challenge the status quo (Kingdon, 2003). In the end, the question remains, how can formal institutions and spontaneous civil society initiatives combine their activities into collective actions? Movements that became active during the refugee crisis might figure in the production of new trajectories of change. "That is, even when they are defeated or their time has passed, movements may leave legacies, elements of institutional orders and bits and pieces of paths not taken" (Schneiberg & Lounsbury, 2008, p. 651). We noticed that some initiatives during the refugee crisis established new identities and logics and developed creative solutions that enabled them (and others) to cope with organizational struggles and to realize new results. For example, new initiatives such as Ready2Help, developed by the Red Cross to utilize spontaneous volunteers, were attempts by the established (volunteering) organizations to reconsider their static organizational structures.

However, for a formal institution such as the COA, such changes are difficult because it has to meet the formal agreements it has made with the Dutch government. Yet, as its leadership starts to recognize new possibilities, the COA has much to gain in terms of crisis governance. The crisis governance approach that focuses on coordination

and collaboration (Dynes, 1994) has proven to be much more resilient than an approach that maintains the command and control doctrine. In this resilience perspective, rather than seeking to control social structures, response institutions are challenged to tap into local, spontaneous initiatives (Drabek & McEntire, 2003; Tierney, 2012). The resilience perspective emphasizes an adaptive approach that facilitates different transformative mechanisms, and allows new initiatives to emerge (Tierney, 2014). The transformative capacity goes beyond the mere adaptive capacity to adjust to changing external and internal processes, thereby allowing organizations to cross thresholds into new development trajectories (Folke et al., 2010). Transformation of public institutions, however, requires recombining sources of experience and knowledge; it is difficult and political, never neutral (McNulty & Ferlie, 2004). For formal organizations, it means they have to forego the static, top–down approach and consider how to foster more flexible ways of organizing. For spontaneous civil society initiatives, it means they have to find a balance between being a professional organization/consolidating their image as professional organization and maintaining the community participation intrinsically related to their roots.

In conclusion, this research provides insights into how spontaneous volunteers in Amsterdam chose between different volunteer opportunities in the context of the refugee crisis. Despite what is often reported about the benefits of a command and control crisis response structure, the relevance of the less well-organized but flexible grassroots initiatives is undeniable. In the long run, it is crucial to invest in collaboration between formal and nonformal response activities in order to create successful crisis governance, especially given the ambiguity of the dynamics of the refugee crisis and the changes in policies. If institutionalized refugee response organizations adapt to the dynamics of local conditions, they could create the conditions for resilient solutions in the crisis context.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None declared.

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