The resilience potential of different refugee reception approaches taken during the ‘refugee crisis’ in Amsterdam

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Abstract
The so-called refugee crisis in 2015/2016 created opportunities for faith-based organizations, community initiatives, volunteers and refugees to get actively involved in refugee reception in Amsterdam. This study investigated the resilience potential of three refugee reception approaches that were taken during that transformative period: those of a semi-governmental organization (COA), a faith-based organization (The Salvation Army) and a community initiative (Hoost). Based on qualitative data, the article shows that the nexus of regulations and flexibility in crisis responses impacts the ability to employ multiple local resources and thus predetermines the capacity to adopt resilient solutions to refugee reception during crises. The authors plead for daring governmental efforts that acknowledge, connect and facilitate the innovative power of local communities, faith-based organizations, volunteers and refugees in the refugee reception process without further withdrawals of state responsibility for refugee reception. However, it is crucial that such innovative efforts integrate and learn from existing knowledge to prevent mistakes from being repeated.

Keywords
Crisis response, faith-based organizations, grassroots, refugee reception, resilience

Introduction
In 2015, over 1.2 million people applied for asylum in Europe, and a record number of first-time applicants (43,093) was registered in the Netherlands (VluchtelingenWerk
While national and EU governments reported a lack of financial, human and physical resources to respond to the sudden influx of migrants in an appropriate and timely manner, numerous volunteers devoted extensive private resources to refugee reception (Goroya et al., 2015; Smets et al., 2017). In the Netherlands, the number of people registering as volunteers with response organizations grew to 47,000 in 2015, which equalled the number of people applying (for the first or a repeated time) for asylum. Response organizations even had to introduce waiting lists for volunteers (Van der Velden, 2015). In addition to joining traditional volunteer organizations, many citizens initiated offline and online grassroots initiatives for asylum seekers (Boersma et al., 2018; Rast and Ghorashi, 2018; Smets et al., 2017).

By inciting civilians to participate in refugee reception, the refugee crisis challenged the Netherlands’ institutionalized and restrictive refugee reception approach (Rast and Ghorashi, 2018). Since 1988, growing anti-immigrant sentiments in the Netherlands have resulted in stricter and more assimilationist migrant policies (Vasta, 2007). In 1990, the semi-governmental organization COA (Central Organization for the Reception of Asylum Seekers) was put in charge of Dutch asylum seeker centres, which resulted in further institutionalization of refugee reception. Despite increasing critique of the COA’s restrictive approach (e.g. ACVZ [Adviescommissie voor Vreemdelingenzaken], 2013; Ghorashi, 2005), it remained consistent for more than a decade. The government coalition agreement of 2010 referred to Dutch asylum and immigration policy as ‘restrictive and just’ (Regeerakkoord VVD-CDA, 2010).

Due to a decade-long decline in new asylum seekers prior to the refugee crisis, the number of asylum seeker centres was reduced (COA, 2012). Thus, when the influx suddenly increased in 2015, the COA could not accommodate all newcomers in its regular centres. It was therefore forced to set up temporary ‘emergency shelters’ and ‘crisis emergency shelters’ (COA, n.d.). Unlike in regular asylum seeker centres and emergency shelters, where the COA was in charge, the central government required security regions, provinces, municipalities and cities to take responsibility over crisis emergency shelters (Boersma et al., 2018; COA, n.d.). In Amsterdam, four such centres were set up: Havenstraat, Flierbosdreef, Schipluidenlaan and Marnixstraat. Daily life in these shelters was coordinated by welfare or faith-based organizations (FBOs), such as the Red Cross and The Salvation Army.

Finally, in Amsterdam East, a third – unique – type of refugee reception facility emerged. Unhappy with how the Dutch government and the COA were responding to the influx of asylum seekers, the bottom-up community initiative Gastvrij Oost (Hospitable East) decided to take matters into its own hands. It established an alternative refugee housing project called Hoost for 31 Syrians from February through August 2016. The initiative aimed to create an alternative and welcoming way of receiving refugees.

This qualitative study investigated the resilience potential of three different refugee reception approaches that were taken at two different locations during the transformative time of 2015/2016: those of a semi-governmental organization (COA) and a faith-based organization (The Salvation Army; TSA) at Havenstraat and that of a community initiative (Gastvrij Oost) at Hoost. Our aim was to create knowledge that could inform a rethinking of refugee reception in the Netherlands and beyond. To embed our data
theoretically, we consulted ongoing discussions on resilience, crisis management, faith-based organizations, community initiatives and refugee reception in the Netherlands.

**Theoretical framework**

**Different refugee reception approaches**

Earlier studies have associated COA-controlled refugee reception facilities before 2015 with what Goffman (1961) calls a ‘total institution’ (Geuijen, 1998; Larruina and Ghorashi, 2016; Smets et al., 2017). The key characteristic of a total institution is the prevalence of a bureaucratic control in an impersonal and rational manner (Goffman, 1961). Social interaction between the institution and the external world and vice versa is limited and there is a clear separation between the residents and the staff, which does not allow for much flexibility and mobility between those groups. Finally, inhabitants of total institutions often suffer serious intellectual and emotional repercussions, mostly due to boredom (Goffman, 1961). Dutch asylum seeker centres’ comparison to Goffman’s total institution (Geuijen, 1998; Larruina and Ghorashi, 2016; Smets et al., 2017) is based on their controlled institution and access, separation of the residents and the staff, the remote locations of the centres and the lack of meaningful activities offered in them leading to boredom.

Officially, the asylum procedure in the Netherlands takes up to six months. However, many asylum seekers must wait for years before receiving their residence permits, which would provide them with a right to private housing (Ghorashi, 2005). Research has shown that wasting their first years of asylum in a dependent situation of inactivity and seclusion from society negatively impacts asylum seekers’ long-term opportunities for inclusion (Engbersen et al., 2015; Ghorashi, 2005). However, when the influx of asylum seekers increased in 2015, the COA did not advance its reception approach. The six-month asylum procedure was even temporarily extended (Boersma et al., 2018).

At the Havenstraat shelter in Amsterdam, the municipality asked TSA to temporarily run the facility. In many countries, welfare organizations and FBOs have official disaster responsibilities (Tierney, 2012). Similarly, in the Netherlands, TSA had previously set up homeless shelters, providing beds, food and support. They therefore had the capacity to run such shelters. The crisis emergency shelters they established in Amsterdam in 2015/2016, however, were the first longer-term refugee reception facilities they had charge of (also see Boersma et al., 2018).

Although its work is not always faith-motivated, an FBO ‘derives inspiration from and guidance for its activities from the teachings and principles of faith or from a particular interpretation or school of thought within a faith’ (Clark and Jennings, in Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2011: 439). This has implications for FBO approaches to offering support; however, the role of FBOs in refugee reception is often neglected by scholars (Snyder, 2011). Existing studies point out that the FBO approach is promising for generating self-sacrifice and altruism, bridging together people with diverse backgrounds, collaborating with the FBO’s broad, geographically-spread networks and mobilizing a wide range of material and human resources. However, an FBO’s potential can be impeded by the exploitation of volunteers, paternalistic approaches to help, desires to convert
non-believers, scarce financial resources and a lack of professional services (Snyder, 2011). As neoliberal policies have spread, governance partnerships have increasingly granted FBOs access to the policy-making sphere, which could potentially ‘allow for new forms of care, justice and hope’ (Cloke, 2010: 223). However, such collaborations are often vulnerable to co-option that could undermine FBOs’ ethos, and character (Cloke, 2010).

Another approach to refugee reception investigated in this study was a community-based reception facility started by a local grassroots initiative. Bauman (2000) claims that, during the individualization process of modernization towards late (or liquid) modernity, solid structures and power melted. Today’s individual is left alone, and the capacity to take collective action is gone. A gap therefore exists between individuals’ rights of self-assertion (individual de jure) and their ability to take control over their lives (individual de facto). To close this gap, various authors argue, a new form of societal connectedness is needed, one where engaged individuals form new bonds and alliances and reinvent the political (e.g. Bauman, 2000; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Ghorashi, 2014).

As welfare capacities in the Netherlands have decreased, numerous local, informal grassroots initiatives have emerged in recent years to address new societal issues (Brandsen et al., 2015). Such community initiatives can be categorized as ‘light communities’, which are characterized by networked, informal, pleasant and fleeting connections that can be established and terminated more easily than traditional collectives (Hurenkamp and Duyvendak, 2008). Community initiatives as light communities thereby fit very well into today’s ‘liquid modernity’ (Bauman, 2000). They can be seen as the above-described new kinds of bonds and alliances that enable citizens to shape their environments and thereby deepen democracy (Ghorashi, 2014).

Because of their decreasing welfare capacities, Dutch governments advocate for increased citizen and community participation (RMO [Raad voor Maatschappelijke Ontwikkeling], 2013). By collaborating with community initiatives, governments can integrate knowledge gained from local practical experience, also called metis (Scott, 1998), when addressing social problems (Smets and Azarhoosh, 2013). Dutch governments, however, seem reluctant to adopt a facilitating and enabling role (RMO, 2013). Their way of working is often informed by techne, a universal knowledge based on hard-and-fast rules, principles and propositions that are logically derived from initial assumptions (Scott, 1998). Authorities thus often look for SMART (specific, measurable, assignable, realistic and time-related) and blueprint solutions. Power imbalances, co-option and techne-dominated forms of collaboration often inhibit the consideration and integration of local resources – metis – available (Smets and Azarhoosh, 2013).

**Resilience of different crisis responses**

Here, we refer to social resilience as ‘the capacity of groups of people bound together in an organization, class, racial group, community, or nation to sustain and advance their well-being in the face of challenges to it’ (Hall and Lamont, 2013: 2). This kind of resilience is crucial for a society’s vitality: for it to ‘provide [its] members with the resources to live healthy, secure, and fulfilling lives’ (Hall and Lamont, 2013: 2). However, in
recent years, the word ‘resilience’ has been a buzzword in many different discourses. In today’s unpredictable society, it appears that, ideally, everything should be resilient (Boin et al., 2010). This is especially true considering the Netherlands’ development from a welfare state into a participation society in which citizens and communities are expected to participate and contribute to society (RMO, 2013).

The concept of resilience is therefore – and for good reason – often criticized for concealing structural power mechanisms and neoliberal austerity (Evans and Reid, 2015; Ghorashi, 2016; Peeters, 2016). Individuals are expected to do more with less, while no attention is paid to the contextual conditions, on all societal levels, in which they are expected to demonstrate resilience (Ghorashi, 2016). The prospects of migrants, for example, cannot be understood as disconnected from their rights and recognition in the host society (Ghorashi, 2016; Hall and Lamont, 2013). Resilience capacity thus depends on economic as well as cultural and social resources on all societal levels: ‘from the family, neighbourhood, and local community to the region, nation-state, and transnational regimes’ (Hall and Lamont, 2013: 14).

Moreover, resilience is often associated with something positive – bouncing back after a crisis – while the question of whether it is actually normatively desirable to return to the status quo is neglected (Peeters, 2016). It thus needs to be acknowledged that resilience around human activity requires social change through adaptability (the ability to learn, to combine experience and knowledge or to adjust and develop an existing system) or in some cases even transformability (the capacity to create a fundamentally new system if the existing system cannot be sustained) (Folke et al., 2010). Social resilience thus needs to be understood as an active and creative process of change ‘in which people assemble a variety of tools, including collective resources and new images of themselves’ (Hall and Lamont, 2013: 14).

Conditions that are conducive to a society’s, community’s or organization’s resilient responses during crises are, among others, equality, inclusion, diversity, flexibility, collaboration, loose connections, indirect dependencies, abilities to learn, opportunities to experiment and power distributions between various stakeholders (e.g. Comfort et al., 2010; Drabek and McEntire, 2003; see also Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Ager, 2013). Research on civilian reactions to crisis situations suggests that civilians tend to be quite resilient (Boin and Van Eeten, 2013). Crisis situations seem to be particularly fertile breeding grounds for spontaneous responses by citizens, communities and civil society organizations (Boersma et al., 2018; Drabek and McEntire, 2003; Smets et al. 2017). Furthermore, the methods of FBOs and grassroots initiatives seem conducive to mobilizing and integrating various resources to increase those organizations’ resilience (see Drabek and McEntire, 2003). FBOs can mobilize and integrate various material and human resources through their networks and volunteer engagement (Smets and ten Kate 2008; Snyder, 2011), which is a crucial asset to quick and effective crisis responses. However, the overabundance of spontaneous volunteers may also overwhelm response organizations (Drabek and McEntire, 2003), especially considering that they have to invest in volunteer training to ensure the continuation and quality of their services (Snyder, 2011).

Grassroots initiatives function outside institutionalized systems and therefore have extensive flexibility and space for experimentation (Boersma et al., 2018; Smets and Azarhoosh, 2013). Their networked embeddedness in local communities allows them to
combine the local knowledge and resources \((\textit{metis})\) of various stakeholders and to employ those in the development of creative responses to adversities (Boersma et al., 2018; Drabek and McEntire, 2003; Smets et al., 2017). However, ambiguous and fleeting memberships and task divisions also subject initiatives to continuously changing circumstances, which might threaten their legitimacy and continuation (Boersma et al., 2018). Nonetheless, even if their time is limited, temporary initiatives ‘may leave legacies, elements of institutional orders and bits and pieces of paths not taken, producing diffuse but important effects, and creating possibilities for subsequent movements, institution-building and transformation’ (Schneiberg and Lounsbury, 2017: 284). FBOs’ and grassroots initiatives’ methods thus seem rather conducive to their ability to respond in a resilient manner.

In contrast, authorities often adopt a crisis governance approach that aims to bring order to a chaotic and complex situation by adopting a command and control model (Drabek and McEntire, 2003). This model is characterized by centralized power, hierarchical and top-down decision-making, and strict and rigid policies and procedures (Boersma et al., 2018; Drabek and McEntire, 2003). In this approach, unstructured emergent responses are considered a threat rather than an opportunity, which prevents the mobilization and integration of available resources and thus limits resilience potential (Boersma et al., 2018; Drabek and McEntire, 2003).

**Methodology**

This article is based on qualitative research conducted from February through July 2016. The research team consisted of two junior researchers (one, a Syrian refugee) and two senior researchers (one with a refugee background). The study took place in two different refugee shelters, \(\text{Havenstraat}\) and \(\text{Hoost}\). \(\text{Havenstraat}\), a former prison in Amsterdam South, was under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Security and Justice from September 2015 through June 2016. TSA managed the shelter from September through April, and in May, the COA took over management until the shelter closed in June. Study respondents connected to this reception facility could therefore report on the approaches of both TSA and the COA. \(\text{Hoost}\) in Amsterdam East allowed us to study \(\text{Gastvrij Oost}\)’s community-based response, which was unique in the Netherlands.

In each shelter, 10 semi-structured interviews were conducted with asylum seekers/refugees on the topics of relationships with volunteers and fellow residents; self-development opportunities; effective integration/home-making/belonging; resilience of refugees and the community; rights, freedoms and responsibilities (at the centres); and future plans. The interviewees were recruited using what Saunders et al. (2015) call purposive, opportunistic and snowball sampling. First, residents known for their outspokenness were interviewed and subsequently asked to facilitate contact with other residents. Our presence on the shelter premises also made it possible for us to contact residents directly when opportunities arose. All interviews at \(\text{Hoost}\) and most interviews at \(\text{Havenstraat}\) were conducted in English; others were conducted in Arabic.

Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with two COA employees, two TSA employees and two \(\text{Hoost}\) initiators, all of whom were chosen through purposive sampling (Saunders et al., 2015). Topics for these interviews were the organization of the shelter; rules within the shelter; refugees’ roles within the shelter; relationships
between residents; resilience of refugees and the surrounding community; relationships between employees/initiators and residents; decision-making within the organization and the shelter; structure and policies of the organization; and collaboration between the community and governmental/semi-governmental organizations. All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim. Furthermore, at Hoost, it was possible to enter the shelter freely, participate in daily activities and attend meetings while taking field notes as a ‘participant as observer’ (Saunders et al., 2015).

The interviews from each shelter were analysed separately by first taking a holistic approach (Lieblich et al., 1998), looking for important patterns and interpreting these for each interview individually. Subsequently, we identified patterns within each shelter and, finally, discussed and compared results from the two shelters by distinguishing patterns that were the most salient at each place. We tried to adopt an approach of ‘dialogical listening’ (Lieblich et al., 1998) by moving back and forth between the data to find patterns of similarity and difference between the shelters. Doing so enabled us to compare and discern salient and even contradictory patterns that led to new insights and a renewed analysis of the data. The researchers’ different backgrounds and positionings brought an extra element of reflexivity to this research, which added a further dimension to the dialogical listening. The results from Hoost were validated by the initiators and several volunteers using member checking (Saunders et al., 2015) during a presentation and discussion with the core team of Gastvrij Oost. Member checking of results was not possible for Havenstraat, because the shelter had closed.

**Empirical results**

**Havenstraat under TSA management**

The crisis emergency shelter at Havenstraat housed 250–300 men from different ethnic backgrounds, including Iraqis, Syrians and Eritreans. The building had three floors of rooms, each room about six square metres in size and accommodating one or two people. There were also facilities for playing games such as football, basketball and handball. The centre was first run by TSA; later, it was taken over by the COA. The central government’s main concern was the creation of a safe and secure refugee centre. Therefore, 12–15 security guards were initially stationed at the centre. Somewhat paradoxically in terms of feeling secure, some refugee respondents considered the presence of so many security guards rather discomforting. They appreciated TSA’s decision to reduce the number of security guards to six. Besides the security guards, there were also two teams of TSA staff, three employees and three volunteers, working the morning and evening shifts, respectively.

According to the interviewed refugees, TSA dealt with residents in a humane and respectful way and applied rules in a flexible manner. One employee said that ‘making mistakes is better than doing nothing’. Volunteers were in charge of redistributing clothes, cleaning, doing the laundry and supporting refugees dealing with medical issues or immigration formalities. Refugees were responsible for cleaning their own rooms, and they were allowed to invite friends to visit them at the shelter. Although caterers provided food on a regular basis, refugees were allowed to help with the cooking. TSA introduced this option on the first day. One TSA employee reported:
I discussed with one Dutch volunteer the possibility to cook, then she directly asked the project manager of The Salvation Army who did not mind it, and then The Salvation Army asked one of the refugees – a chef in Syria – to help with cooking the daily meal.

TSA was also flexible regarding material donations to the shelter. The municipality of Amsterdam, for example, donated 70 bicycles, and TSA devised a way to share them between the 250 residents. Moreover, from the beginning, social media played an important role in the management of donations. A group of volunteers contacted the refugees through social media (Facebook). The online community became stronger every day and created opportunities for refugees and the local community to meet. Volunteers provided various kinds of goods, such as laptops, mobile phones, battery chargers, travel tickets and musical instruments. Moreover, offline and online connections created different communities that organized activities for and/or with refugees, such as sports, restaurant visits, dinner invitations, museum visits, boat trips, zoo visits, joining football clubs or taking Dutch lessons.

By being flexible, TSA managed to combine the resources of various stakeholders and was therefore able to offer refugees, not only basic help, but a reception facility that made them feel appreciated and comfortable. A refugee respondent said that TSA ‘makes us feel like we are with our families’. This kind of approach, which acknowledges the strengths of both the local community and the refugees as well as the value of connections between locals and newcomers, can mean a lot for refugees’ future inclusion. This can be illustrated with the story of the Syrian chef who cooked under TSA management. By cooking at the shelter, this chef gradually became known in the local community and received several opportunities to cook at events elsewhere. He was given an opportunity to use and develop his professional skills while still living at a crisis emergency shelter and before his asylum procedure had even started. After Havenstraat closed, he regularly catered for events held at a local community centre. By the end of his first year in the Netherlands, he had a paid job in a restaurant in Amsterdam East. This example shows that, by letting refugees participate in daily activities and enabling them to contact the local community from the beginning, they might be able to take their first important steps towards becoming members of the host society.

**Havenstraat under COA management**

On 1 May 2016, the COA took over management of Havenstraat. There was a transition period of about a month (April) when TSA and the COA were both present. A TSA employee stressed that a transition period was needed to avoid a shock for the refugees. During the last two weeks of the transition, TSA started implementing the COA’s more sober way of working, which, as mentioned previously, can be compared to that of a total institution (Geuijen, 1998; Larruina and Ghorashi, 2016; Smets et al., 2017). The COA’s main objective was to provide equal access to healthcare, security, food and a place to sleep. One consequence of the new management was that the communal cooking arrangement ended. Food was only provided through catering services and only to those who
were on time for dinner. Another new rule restricted conversations between refugees and staff members: according to COA regulations, staff and refugees were not allowed to become friends. One refugee reported that they saw COA employees only during meals. Moreover, the COA’s approach focused on security. The ratio of security guards to refugees at the centre increased, and residents had to wear wrist bands to gain access to the premises. Our respondents reported that this also meant that volunteers could no longer enter the premises without permission from the COA, which was hard to get. Residents associated the COA with unnecessary and strict rules that lacked empathy for refugees’ needs:

Before COA came, we already knew from friends in different camps who were living under the COA management that we would have to eat the uneatable food from the black box [the microwave meal box]. And anything we do will be registered under our names in the system. The Salvation Army used to try to talk to us and discuss what we are allowed and what we are not allowed to do, but COA immediately writes a report about it.

Finally, the COA also discontinued community collaborations. According to COA respondents, segregating asylum seekers from the local community is legitimized by security considerations and by the aim of preventing the integration of refugees who might not receive refugee status and therefore might be sent back to their country of origin. Refugee respondents said that almost all activities stopped. Importantly, however, the online community that had been established during TSA management allowed refugees to keep in touch with the networks they had already built. Even though the activities of Facebook volunteers and TSA ended at some point, connections with local people outside the centre were not under COA control and could therefore not be broken. Nonetheless, the COA’s reception approach still affected refugees’ opportunities to participate in and explore their new environment:

If someone invites me somewhere at 6 o’clock, I can’t go because no one can bring me my food. We said, Okay, give the food to someone else. They did not accept that. When I went to school, I even had to skip a course because I have to collect my dinner. … You feel the obligation to be there on time, or you won’t get any food. And I do not have money to buy food.

As mentioned previously, during the refugee crisis, the six-month asylum procedure was temporarily extended. The combination of this delay and the worsening living conditions at Havenstraat led to a hunger strike outside the shelter that resulted in even worse conditions for the residents:

The weather was so bad, and 70 people were sleeping outside the centre. Only 20 people stayed inside. They were either old or afraid that, if they participated, they would be removed. We stayed for about two weeks, sleeping in the cold weather. Nobody from the government talked with us and the IND [Immigration and Naturalization Service] would only come after we ended the hunger strike. During the hunger strike, COA tried to calm us down, but the hunger strike went on, and after a week somebody got sick and fainted. Then I told COA employees to bring an ambulance. They replied that it is very expensive: 400 euros. They assumed that his life was not even worth 400 euros.
Hoost

The community initiative Gastvrij Oost (Hospitable East) set up Hoost – a small-scale refugee centre – in a former office building in Amsterdam East. According to one initiator, the Hoost approach was only possible because of the trust the initiators had established through years of experience working at the grassroots level while collaborating with the local government:

What is interesting: It [Hoost] originated in the eastern part of Amsterdam, and we have around 10–12 years city development bottom-up. So politicians in the eastern part had a lot of trust that we could do this together. And they also were very involved in looking for other ways to host refugees.

In collaboration with local government officials, Hoost initiators arranged for the housing corporation that owned the office building to sublet it to the municipality, who let the initiative make use of the premises. The local government also supported the initiative financially. One initiator described Hoost as a chance for both the initiators and the government to experiment and gain experience with innovative ways of receiving refugees.

Before establishing Hoost, Gastvrij Oost organized networking and dialogue events to connect and employ the knowledge of relevant stakeholders, such as neighbours, welfare organizations, entrepreneurs, academics, social workers, ex-refugees and government officials. To further embed Hoost in the neighbourhood, informational meetings were held in February 2016, where local neighbours could meet some of the future residents, ask questions and discuss their concerns. An initiator expressed that those meetings were crucial, not only for making people feel that their fears were being heard, but also for helping people identify opportunities to get involved, which increased the initiative’s resources:

The dialogue that we did, I think it’s a really good way to talk about the issue and to include people and to talk about the possibilities you see, what you could do, but also about the fears you have. If you give people more possibilities to actually be involved and participate, you take people more serious, refugees as well as local citizens, and I think that can promote a lot.

Once Hoost was established, the project employed refugee and local community resources to run the shelter. Residents were involved in preparing the building and moving furniture. Community members donated and transported furniture and bicycles. Demand, supply and transport were coordinated via a Facebook group. Hoost residents consisted of 21 men, one woman waiting to be reunited with her family, and two families with a total of five children (in total 31 people). The families had their own bedrooms and living rooms, the woman had her own bedroom and the other residents shared rooms (two or three people per room). Showers, one kitchen, a garden and two common rooms were shared by all residents. Hoost residents lived, cleaned, shopped and cooked together from February through August 2016. Volunteers from the local community offered language courses and organized activities, such as sports activities or guided tours through the neighbourhood. Volunteers also provided information about family reunion and study or job opportunities. Many volunteers also employed their own networks to connect
newcomers with people who could help them work on their future plans. The following statement by a Hoost resident is very illustrative of Hoost’s approach to receiving refugees:

I believe that there are many […] normal Dutch people who want to help but don’t know how. When I look around this building, I remember how it was really empty. And then in two, three weeks it was really full with furniture, with lessons, with activities. Really, it’s something that people, just neighbours and volunteers, did. I really have this confidence in Dutch people. […] If you ask one of the neighbours ‘Can you perhaps do this?’ it will not be difficult for him. And it will mean a lot for people like us here. So, in this kind of project, society takes over a part of the government’s role in solving the refugee crisis.

Hoost residents mentioned that, through language courses and social activities, they could practise the Dutch language, build a social network and get to know the city, neighbours and Dutch culture. Having spent several months without being able to do anything, almost all respondents stated that they were happy to have control over their daily activities again. Many also stated that they had privacy, felt safe, and had the freedom to come and go whenever they wanted. Some respondents said that they felt like they were being treated like human beings again:

I feel like a normal human being, but before, they communicated with us like we were numbers. […] I think the COA sometimes contacted the people like animals, not like people.

At the time of the interviews, most respondents were thus quite positive about the initiative. We must mention, however, that most of them received their residence permit around the same time that they moved into Hoost. The respondents said this played a crucial role in their feeling safe and being able to think about their futures in the Netherlands. Moreover, the initiators had arranged a deal with the municipality: every Hoost resident would receive private housing in Amsterdam after the termination of the project in August, which is a lot earlier than they would otherwise have received private housing. Some residents stated that this was the main reason they decided to participate in the project in the first place. Despite satisfaction with the project, some residents we spoke to after the project finished were less positive about some of their encounters with locals at Hoost and other initiatives:

So people who came to Hoost looked at me. […] I felt worse because […] they treat me differently. Without any reason. […] people came just to see me. It’s a strange feeling. To answer the same questions for almost two years. It’s not good. For anyone.

Some tensions also emerged between Hoost residents regarding issues such as tidying up, cleaning, cooking or eating preferences. For our respondents, the biggest challenge was having only one kitchen for 31 people. Every evening, a different team had to cook food for everyone. This inhibited the residents’ ability to eat when and what they wanted and to decide how much money they wanted to spend on food. Moreover, the kitchen arrangement had a disproportionately negative effect on the women in particular, because they took on the main cooking responsibilities, which put a lot of pressure on them:
It is not that she makes one dish, she makes many things. Other teams, no, not like my wife. It’s really difficult sometimes because some teams make three dishes, others only one. Now everybody here says, ‘Please X, I’m waiting for you to cook’. So she feels more responsible, pressure, she has to make.

The initiators also faced challenges. The project demanded a lot of their time and energy. How long they could have continued this extensive effort is not clear. Moreover, one initiator mentioned that their flexible and unstructured way of working also meant that volunteers did not always receive enough instructions and structure, which caused some volunteers to leave:

We work with a lot of volunteers, and I think, for the next time, it’s better if you have more of a plan, a structure, so people know what they’re going to do in the building. So there have been a few persons that dropped out or didn’t participate anymore.

Conclusions and discussion

The refugee crisis created opportunities for FBOs, community initiatives, local citizens and refugees to get involved in refugee reception in Amsterdam. This research investigated the resilience potential of three refugee reception approaches taken in the transformative time of 2015/2016.

During the refugee crisis, the COA took a crisis governance approach informed by a command and control model (also see Boersma et al., 2018; Smets et al., 2017). Refugees, local volunteers and communities were not allowed to play an active part in the reception process, which impeded the organization’s ability to include available resources in the reception process. When the COA took over Havenstraat, refugees could no longer help in the kitchen, many activities organized by local volunteers had to stop and even well-intentioned rules (equality principle) prevented the flow of resources because they were applied in an inflexible manner. Under COA management, refugees were offered merely basic help and had very limited space for autonomy, to the extent that they chose to hold a hunger strike as leverage for negotiating a different reception approach. The COA’s strict rules and security-based approach thus limited its capacity for adaptation and collaboration, which is important for including resources, particularly in times of crisis (see also Boersma et al., 2018; Drabek and McEntire, 2003; Smets et al., 2017). All stakeholders involved in Havenstraat were thus limited in their access to resources and in their capacity to sustain and advance their well-being (see Hall and Lamont, 2013). Thus, in our research, the COA’s approach was least resilient.

TSA’s approach to receiving refugees contributed to a more effective refugee reception operation at Havenstraat. The key to their success was their flexible approach. They accepted donations of any size, employed (certain) skills of (some) refugees in the running of the shelter and collaborated with local volunteers and initiatives. Via social media, these volunteers coordinated the demand and supply of goods and services, realized contacts between locals and newcomers, and organized events and courses. Collaborating in a flexible manner and experimenting and learning from mistakes enabled TSA to employ various resources and thus increased their resilience capacity (also
see Comfort et al., 2010; Drabek and McEntire, 2003; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Ager, 2013). Moreover, TSA remained both flexible and open to suggestions and contributions from refugees and locals. By doing so, it was able to not only provide newcomers with basic help but also make them feel appreciated and comfortable. Its approach also contributed to fruitful encounters between refugees and the local community (also see Snyder, 2011). Overall, when compared with the COA’s approach, TSA’s approach increased all involved stakeholders’ access to resources and their capacity to sustain and advance their well-being (see Hall and Lamont, 2013). Thus, TSA’s approach to refugee reception at Havenstraat proved to be more resilient than the COA’s. However, its approach was not without problems. In our research, it was not so much co-option that constituted a problem (see Cloke, 2010; Snyder, 2011) but the fact that the collaboration between the FBO and (semi-)governmental institutions was terminated once the FBO’s support was not needed anymore. This does not mean that the FBO’s efforts were for nothing. The example of the Syrian chef shows that an approach that acknowledges both the local community’s and refugees’ strengths as well as the value of connections between locals and newcomers can have quite an impact in refugees’ first important steps towards becoming members of the host society – even if the original approach is only of a temporary nature (also see Schneiberg and Lounsbury, 2017).

Hoost was the most innovative approach of the three. It was initiated, implemented and controlled by a few neighbourhood residents in collaboration with local community members, future Hoost residents, governmental officials and various other stakeholders. All stakeholders involved in Hoost showed flexibility, adaptability and collaborative ability, which allowed them to connect and employ their diverse resources (also see Boersma et al., 2018; Comfort et al., 2010; Drabek and McEntire, 2003). The initiative’s success is largely indebted to trust and an innovative collaboration history. Having years of experience in collaborating and experimenting with the local government and other societal stakeholders enabled this initiative to build further on those collaborative structures, which increased their resilience capacity to receive refugees in Amsterdam East. Networking and dialogue events further enabled the consideration of fears and integration of existing knowledge and resources of various stakeholders. By taking this approach, Hoost contributed to the first level of refugee inclusion in (having a house) and within (being connected to) the Dutch community in Amsterdam East. Hoost’s approach is thus an example of social resilience as an active and creative process of change in which a variety of resources are combined to sustain and advance individuals’ and the community’s well-being (see Hall and Lamont, 2013). Nonetheless, Hoost initiators faced various challenges that undermined their resilience. First, the project demanded a lot of energy, time and resources from the people involved, especially the initiators. Second, the initiative’s flexible and unstructured methods did not resonate with all volunteers, which caused some challenges for the initiative (also see Drabek and McEntire, 2003). Finally, relationships within Hoost were not always easy. House rules complicated relationships between residents, and the kitchen arrangement, which was not ideal, had a disproportionally negative effect on the women. Moreover, it is important to stay critical about power issues within relationships between local volunteers and refugees (see for more Rast and Ghorashi, 2018).
In accordance with other research (Boersma et al., 2018; Smets et al., 2017; see also Comfort et al., 2010; Drabek and McEntire, 2003), this study showed that the COA’s crisis management approach, informed by a command and control model, hampered its own, the local community’s and the refugees’ resilience during the refugee crisis. Additionally, we elucidated opportunities of community initiatives’ capacities to ‘deepen democracy’ (Ghorashi, 2014) and ‘reinvent the political’ (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002) around refugee reception by initiating grassroots approaches while collaborating with various stakeholders in innovative ways. Finally, our research elaborated on an example of FBOs’ potential to introduce ‘new forms of care, justice and hope’ (see Cloke, 2010: 223) into refugee reception through flexibility and collaboration. Even though these initiatives were only temporary, and the COA is once again in charge of all reception facilities, refugee reception in Amsterdam has changed for good. As Schneiberg and Lounsbury (2017: 284) claim, even if their time is limited, temporary initiatives ‘may leave legacies, elements of institutional orders and bits and pieces of paths not taken, producing diffuse but important effects, and creating possibilities for subsequent movements, institution-building and transformation’. Accordingly, many initiatives still exist in Amsterdam and many have been adjusted or transformed over time. Hoost initiators, for example, established the community centre Boost for locals and newcomers. Moreover, the local government is still collaborating with various community-based initiatives – among them Boost – that focus on refugee inclusion. Finally, after some time, the COA has also adjusted its approach. In its 2017 annual plan (COA, 2017), the COA referred to resilience as one of its major challenges and introduced a new reception approach that embraces the concept of ‘flexible reception’. This plan also discussed the challenges of connecting with a self-organizing society. Considering insights gained from our research, these appear to be positive changes. However, we note that the COA’s adaptation came too late for asylum seekers at Havenstraat.

With that being said, we emphasize that our respondents’ accounts must be understood in context. TSA’s approach might have been experienced so positively because respondents compared it to the COA’s approach. Similarly, Hoost residents might have been so pleased because they compared that shelter with previous emergency shelters. Finally, we also advocate for cautious readings of solidarity and resilience regarding refugee reception. Some researchers fear that volunteer engagement might result in even further withdrawals of state responsibility (e.g. Hamann and Karakayali, 2016). Scholars are also concerned about decreasing solidarity and engagement (e.g. Hamann et al., 2016). Additionally, recent research has found that volunteers participating in refugee reception might reproduce rather than transform existing notions of exclusion and paternalism (e.g. Fleischmann and Steinhilper, 2017; Rast and Ghorashi, 2018). Volunteers often have a clear conception of ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ refugees (Fleischmann and Steinhilper, 2017). Furthermore, refugees are often pictured as victims or receivers of humanitarian aid rather than as self-determined individuals (Fleischmann and Steinhilper, 2017). Such subtle mechanisms of exclusion can result in a reproduction of exclusive structures within initiatives (Rast and Ghorashi, 2018). Similarly, Lancione (2014) points out that, in homeless shelters, narratives of ‘love for the poor’ may conceal the conditional, habituating and humiliating nature of assistance within the affective and material atmospheres produced by FBOs. In fact, the power structures within organizations and initiatives were
problematized by activist groups long before the refugee crisis (Fleischmann and Steinhilper, 2017). To prevent mistakes from being repeated and to build resilient and inclusive responses, it is imperative that new, innovative developments are combined with the experiences and knowledge of various stakeholders, especially experienced ones (also see Ponzoni and Ghorashi, 2018).

To conclude, we plead for a daring governmental policy that acknowledges, connects and facilitates the innovative power of local communities, FBOs, volunteers and refugees in the refugee reception process without further withdrawals of state responsibility for refugee reception. It is crucial that such innovative efforts integrate and learn from existing knowledge to prevent mistakes from being repeated. Finally, all stakeholders involved need to reflect on (subtle) exclusionary mechanisms in their attempts at creating inclusive solutions to prevent the reproduction of exclusive structures (also see Ghorashi and Ponzoni, 2014; Rast and Ghorashi, 2018; Smets et al., 2017).

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**Résumé**

La crise dite « des réfugiés » a été en 2015–2016 l’occasion pour des organisations confessionnelles, des initiatives communautaires, des citoyens bénévoles et des réfugiés de s’impliquer activement dans l’accueil des réfugiés à Amsterdam. Dans cette étude, nous avons examiné le potentiel de résilience de trois approches d’accueil des réfugiés qui ont été adoptées pendant cette période de transformation : celle d’une organisation semi-gouvernementale (COA), celle d’une organisation confessionnelle (l’Armée du Salut) et celle d’une initiative communautaire (*Hoost*).

Sur la base de données qualitatives, nous montrons que le lien entre règlements et flexibilité dans les réponses apportées aux crises a des répercussions sur la capacité à recourir à des ressources locales multiples et pré-détermine par conséquent la capacité à adopter des solutions adaptées à l’accueil des réfugiés pendant les crises. Nous plaidons pour des mesures gouvernementales audacieuses qui reconnaissent, relient et facilitent la capacité d’innovation des communautés locales, des organisations confessionnelles, des citoyens bénévoles et des réfugiés dans le processus d’accueil des réfugiés, sans que l’État ne se désengage davantage de sa responsabilité en la matière. Toutefois, il est essentiel que ces efforts d’innovation intègrent les connaissances existantes et en tirent des enseignements afin d’éviter que des erreurs ne se reproduisent.
Mots-clés
Accueil des réfugiés, organisations confessionnelles, population locale, réponse aux crises, résilience

Resumen
La llamada crisis de los refugiados en 2015/2016 dio la oportunidad para que organizaciones religiosas, iniciativas comunitarias, voluntarios y refugiados se involucrarán activamente en la acogida de los refugiados en Ámsterdam. Este estudio investiga el potencial de resiliencia de los tres enfoques de recepción de refugiados que fueron adoptados durante ese período de transformación: el de una organización semi-gubernamental (COA), el de una organización religiosa (El Ejército de Salvación) y el de una iniciativa comunitaria (Hoost). A partir de datos cualitativos, se muestra que el nexo entre regulaciones y flexibilidad en las respuestas a las crisis afecta a la capacidad de emplear múltiples recursos locales y, por tanto, predetermina la capacidad de adoptar soluciones adaptadas a la acogida de refugiados durante las crisis. Se aboga por esfuerzos audaces del gobierno que reconozcan, conecten y faciliten el poder innovador de las comunidades locales, las organizaciones religiosas, los voluntarios y los refugiados en el proceso de acogida de refugiados, sin que el Estado eluda aún más su responsabilidad en la acogida de refugiados. Sin embargo, es crucial que tales esfuerzos innovadores integren el conocimiento existente para evitar que se repitan los errores.

Palabras clave
Acogida de refugiados, organizaciones religiosas, población local, resiliencia, respuesta a la crisis