

NEEDS 2021

5th edition of the Northern European Conference
on Emergency and Disaster Studies

Östersund / online 21–23 September

Abstracts from the panel

**Building resilience through organisational learning
and innovation: COVID-19, windows of opportunity,
and the future of cooperation in crisis management**



EUROPEISKA
UNIONEN
Europeiska
regionala
utvecklingsfonden



PART OF  MID SWEDEN UNIVERSITY

Descriptive Study of the Agility and Resilience of the Canadian Humanitarian Aid Sector in the Time of COVID-19

Corresponding Author:

Stéphanie Maltais
University of Ottawa Canada
smalt006@uottawa.ca

Author(s):

COVID-19 has inevitably had repercussions on the Canadian humanitarian sector, whether at the national level or in its activities internationally. On the national territory, a few examples demonstrate the renewal of humanitarian action, such as the fact that Doctors Without Borders attempted, for the first time, to meet needs on Canadian soil (MSF, 2020); the fact that the Canadian Red Cross has launched a new “humanitarian force reserve” initiative in addition to its usual volunteers (Alalouf-Hall & al, 2020); or that Médecins du Monde (MDM) has transformed its mobile clinics into telemedicine to meet the needs of marginalized populations in Montreal (MDM Canada, 2020), among others. On the international spectrum, Canadian Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have tried to continue their efforts and not abandon their local partners.

Like all organizations in any industry, the COVID-19 pandemic has come to test organizational resilience. Certain challenges (quarantine, stopping commercial flights, uncertainty, etc.) have disrupted the usual activities of NGOs in Canada and elsewhere in the world. They have led to an increased localization of aid by relying more on local personnel to provide humanitarian assistance (Brown, 2021).

NGOs working in the humanitarian field are known to be resilient. In recent years, the humanitarian sector itself has shifted somewhat from the traditional Dunantist humanitarian paradigm (based on humanitarian ethics) to a discourse based on resilience as well as on the localization of aid; and this is due in particular to technological innovations of recent years such as digital payment or the use of drones, which has considerably changed the humanitarian landscape (Hilhorst, 2018). So there was, even before the emergence of COVID-19, an existing tendency to empower local actors to take charge of crisis response.

This descriptive study aims to answer the following question: to what extent have Canadian humanitarian actors demonstrated organizational agility and resilience since the onset of the health crisis in their activities at the national and international levels? To answer this question and document the strategic and operational changes of Canadian NGOs at the international and national level, managers of Canadian NGOs and other actors in the field were interviewed. The data collection was supplemented by a literature review of papers written since the beginning of the pandemic.

Explaining Covid-19 crisis response strategies from a Resource Based View

Corresponding Author:

Jeroen Wolbers
Leiden University Netherlands
j.j.wolbers@fgga.leidenuniv.nl

Author(s):

Sanneke Kuipers¹

¹Leiden University, S.L.Kuipers@Fgga.Leidenuniv.NI, NLD

The Covid-19 pandemic requires immediate, simultaneous responses from countries with varying governing institutions, cultures, and geographies. Yet, we also see a wide variety of intervention strategies to mitigate its consequences within the same institutional or geographic context, e.g. between states in a federation such as Germany or the USA, between European member states, or between similar neighbors in one region. One of the most surprising phenomena in COVID-19 is the wide divergence of problem assessments, response strategies and their implementation in different jurisdictions. This divergence begs for an explanation, given the highly similar threat authorities were facing.

Though crisis scholars already knew for long that sensemaking differs between organizations and leaders in crisis situations, the idea persists in that problem perception, available expertise to reduce uncertainty and previous experience define the appropriate or likely crisis response strategy. Yet in the Covid-19 crisis, we witnessed another possible explanation that influenced crisis response strategy: resource availability.

The Resource Based View holds promise as an explanatory theory to explain the variety we observe in the responses to the current pandemic. Scholars claim that firms use a specific mix of unique internal resources as assets in competition with other firms. Not external opportunity and threats define differences in corporate success, but resources from within define the strategy of the organization. It may explain why some national authorities enforced the use of facemasks, and others did not. Or why their crisis response completely relied on testing and tracing, or isolation of incoming travelers. Why they started their vaccination campaigns vaccinating elderly, or chronically ill, or instead started with medical care takers. Many of these variations are puzzling when seen from the perspective of the external considerations, that were so similar in many cases, or even contrary to the selected response.

In this paper, we compare the crisis response strategies of Belgium, Czech Republic, Greece, the Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden: all EU member states facing the same pandemic threat, with access to similar epidemiological expertise, under conditions of similar uncertainty, populations between 10 and 20 million people and the similar incidence of Covid-19 within their borders. This study first looks which resources could explain variation in performance. We proceed by looking at the different strategies of the countries in terms of restrictions, and then we look into issues of availability of resources as explanatory mechanisms for the chosen strategies per case.

Crisis Management, Humanitarian Aid and Disaster Management in Dealing with the Migrant and Refugee Crisis 2015/16

Corresponding Author:

Daniel F. Lorenz

Disaster Research Unit (DRU), Freie Universität Berlin Germany

daniel.lorenz@fu-berlin.de

Author(s):

Cordula Dittmer¹

¹Disaster Research Unit (DRU), Freie Universität Berlin, Cordula.Dittmer@Fu-Berlin.De, DEU

In September 2015, German Chancellor Angela Merkel called the situation for refugees on the Balkan route a humanitarian emergency and referred to a humanitarian imperative in order to justify certain humanitarian responses.

The needs of hundreds of thousands of refugees who had already arrived in Germany could only be met by deploying all available civil protection units (CPU) from domestic aid organizations like the German Red Cross (GRC) or the Federal Agency for Technical Relief (THW). However, politically responsible actors, such as Mayors, District Administrators or State Ministers of the Interior, did not have recourse to the corresponding legal and formal disaster declaration as codified in disaster law. At the same time the Federal Ministry of the Interior used outside of German public discourse internal crisis management instruments to set up a unique form of (strategic) crisis management.

Relying on already existing formal structures and proven procedures new instruments were implemented in all the three domains of crisis management – on the federal level, in the humanitarian sector and disaster management. In the analysis of these three different domains of crisis management it came out that actors of different domains used different forms of meaning making and had only very limited knowledge of diverging interpretations and responses. Thus, the overall whole response appears to be highly fragmented with different crisis management procedures in different domains (Woelbers et. al. 2018). In the paper we discuss these three different, but simultaneously used crisis management domains and analyse their roles in responding to the migrant and refugee crisis and the challenges of the fragmented response.

The paper is based on 33 interviews with experts from CPUs involved in refugee aid (GRC, THW, Workers' Samaritan Federation), Federal Office for Civil Protection and Disaster Relief, fire brigades, Federal Ministry of the Interior, social and welfare organizations, humanitarian actors and the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees. The data was collected both during the high period of refugee arrivals in 2015/16, and as part of a research project in 2019 which looks from scientific as well as from practitioners point of view into learning processes after the migrant and refugee crisis.

References

Woelbers, J., et al.

2018 "Introducing a Fragmentation Perspective on Coordination in Crisis Management", *Organization Studies*, 39(11): 1521–1546.

What is trust in a pandemic? Exploring the role of trust in technology, data, and good governance as part of pandemic response.

Corresponding Author:

Katrina Petersen

Trilateral Research United Kingdom

katrina.petersen@trilateralresearch.com

Author(s):

Susannah Copson¹

¹Trilateral Research, Susannah.Copson@Trilateralresearch.Com, GBR

Trust binds together everything we do: relationships, actions, and expectations of others. In the extraordinary circumstances of a pandemic, being able to establish and sustain public trust is imperative in managing risk perception, maintaining public confidence, encouraging compliance with government measures, and grappling with the pathogen spread. Trust, however, is enacted and does different work when between individuals, communities, with public authorities, or a given technology. Building on research conducted within the EC funded H2020 project STAMINA, our presentation aims to unpick what trust means in a pandemic, how it is constantly subject to negotiation and change, and how this impacts risk communication in a pandemic response.

We submit that trust is all important if technology is to be adopted safely and effectively. We note that much of what pandemic planners and public(s) are asking of tools, data, and related protocols and policy is tied closely to building and sustaining trust. For example, while a surveillance tool might be useful for public health purposes, it could damage the fragile trust relationship between the public and authorities if it is felt that people's privacy has been invaded. The ability to collect future data or ensure future public interactions are at stake within that trust.

We explore a set of indices of trust, noting the importance of varying social relationships to each of these and how these help or hinder policy responses or technology design. For example, particularised, generalised and institutional trust have distinct functionalities and features. Although intrinsically linked, each form of trust differentially impacts how publics or individuals engage with the response. Conversely, structural distrust has been blamed on vaccine hesitancy or unwillingness to download a contact tracing app, when reasons are often much more complex. Focusing too much on distrust as the predominant cause makes other elements or concerns (accessibility, privacy, disadvantage, inequalities) invisible.

We argue that when new technologies or policies are adopted for pandemics, those making the decisions need to consider trust as a key societal impact and benefit. We suggest that more research tools – from social media analytics to citizen deliberations – need to be developed around the dynamic, negotiated, situations, and contextual nature of trust and distrust in pandemics. Building trust and social impact together with technology and policy design catalyses the effect of health messages, and much work remains to be done to support this in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Organizational competences for innovation and resilience: Insights from a research project on crisis management during Covid19 in five European countries

Corresponding Author:

Florian Roth
Fraunhofer ISI Germany
florian.roth@isi.fraunhofer.de

Author(s):

Thomas Jackwerth-Rice¹, Florian Neisser², Johannes Sautter³ and Benjamin Kaluza⁴

¹Fraunhofer ISI, Thomas.Jackwerth-Rice@Isi.Fraunhofer.De, DEU

²Fraunhofer INT, Florian.Neisser@Int.Fraunhofer.De, DEU

³Fraunhofer IAO, Johannes.Sautter@Iao.Fraunhofer.De, DEU

⁴Fraunhofer INT, Benjamin.Kaluza@Int.Fraunhofer.De, DEU

Public organizations involved in combatting crises face the dual challenge of activating their original crisis management competencies while creating new competencies without creating new inflexibilities (Stark, 2014). Those competencies that could strengthen the organization's resilience could then be radically new, because they are triggered by the crisis-specific requirements: urgency, novelty, long-lasting, transboundary. In this respect, however, the formal (bureaucratic) structures of public organizations usually tend to be relatively stable, because they are less exposed to external demands from customers or markets as compared to companies (Boin, 2019; Rochet et al., 2018; Eckhard et al. 2020).

We present first results from the ongoing research project KResCo, which follows the question of which organizational competencies have proved particularly helpful in coping with the Corona crisis. Our analysis looks at the formal and informal structures in national and subnational crisis management organizations in five European countries: Austria, Germany, Italy, Sweden, and Switzerland. Particularly, we examine innovation and learning processes in the context of Covid19 pandemic related to three core capabilities related to successful crisis management: anticipation, coping, and adaptation.