

Summary

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Spontaneous Volunteering

a new form of civic engagement?

Submitted by:	Georg Mildenberger
Organisation:	University of Heidelberg, Economics and Social Sciences, Germany
Author(s):	Georg Mildenberger
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Summary:

Spontaneous Volunteering a new form of civic engagement?

Modern societies are complex structures where systems and organizations are specialized to fulfill a wide array of functions. Big infrastructures with attached organizations offer services of all kinds to citizens, including safety and protection against natural forces and other harmful influences. They develop support structures for all types of situations occurring from disturbances and failures of all kinds. Professional help is provided by catastrophe relieve forces with expertise and material. The professional core teams are supported by militia like organizations of trained volunteers.

But they are not alone. In the last year more and more often spontaneous volunteers in big numbers enter the disaster areas. Partly they are integrated as additional resources into the intervention forces. But quite often they do not accept their assigned duties and start to act on their own, with sometimes problematic results.

With the refugee crisis this phenomenon reached a new stage. Now not only small areas were confronted with spontaneous volunteering, but all over the country new informal groups emerged and started to act, sometimes even earlier than the officially designed responders. And those new semi formalized groups ceased to give over when the officially designed responders arrived but demanded to stay. This can be observed up to now, and not only in Germany but all over Europe new organizations emerge. It seems we see a new wave of civil society organizations being founded.

The phenomenon of spontaneous volunteering in the refugee crisis allows us to study self-regulation in real time and on a rather big scale. We have the opportunity to analyze how self-organization works under different conditions, what limits of self-regulation occur and how formal organizations can be seen as a way to overcome such limits.

The paper will introduce the phenomenon of spontaneous volunteering especially in the context of the European refugee crises. It builds especially on first results of our own research under other recent studies in Germany. It will especially examine how actors from different sectors of society interact and ask whether new forms of organizations, networks and governance structures on the local level emerge.

It builds partly on recent survey of civic engagement in refugee aid and partly on qualitative studies/case studies in the area Heidelberg, Wiesloch, Sinsheim.

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