

Summary

Divisions and the ties that bind

A review of the role of civil society in relation to the arrival of refugees

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Original title:
Verdeeldheid en verbinding
978 90 377 0882 0

Summary, conclusions and discussion

Civil society has been described as the ‘domain in which voluntary associations are dominant’ (Dekker 2002: 15). It is a diverse community which is expected to keep a critical eye on government (see e.g. Cohen & Arato 1994; Edwards et al. 2001; Edwards 2009). Over the last ten years, question-marks have been placed alongside both its diversity and its critical role vis-à-vis government. As discussed below, this is linked to leading discourses such as the ‘participation society’ and the ‘do-democracy’.¹ It is those question-marks which provide the background to this study. While the participation society is not precisely equivalent to civil society, there are considerable overlaps between the two.

The first aspect referred to above – diversity – gave rise to a discussion about whether the participation society was mainly something for the elites (e.g. Van den Berg & De Goede 2012; Hurenkamp et al. 2006; Van Houwelingen et al. 2014; Mensink et al. 2013). That would be completely at odds with the notion of diversity, and would have the potential to reinforce social cleavages in society. If we define civil society as the ‘domain in which voluntary associations are dominant’ (Dekker 2002: 15), we may conclude that these associations do not extend across social cleavages, with the elites only ‘voluntarily’ seeking ‘connections’ within their own circles, not outside them.

Research has shown that there is a social cleavage based on education level, which translates into a social cleavage based on opinions and world views (Bovens et al. 2014). There are groups (relatively often with a higher education level) ‘that have a reasonably positive attitude to open borders, other cultures and admitting immigrants’, and groups which have ‘a more local, particularist interpretation [...] of fairness and state citizenship’ (relatively often lower-educated people) (Bovens 2014: 19). There is as yet no question of ‘separate worlds’, but rather of ‘separate world views’.

Social cleavages are not always a bad thing (Tiemeijer 2017), but can actually be a sign of a diverse, pluralistic society, provided the different groups are able to live alongside each other more or less peacefully. However, social cleavages can also threaten the stability of society and lead to inadequate representation of certain groups (see e.g. Foley & Edwards 1998; Tiemeijer 2017). This would be the case, for example, if only the elite groups were able to participate in the public debate. Civil-society organisations can help bridge these kinds of ‘problematic’ social cleavages by offering a podium that brings together conflicting groups and gives subordinated groups an opportunity to have their voices heard (Edwards et al. 2001; Minkoff 2001).

As regards the question-marks placed alongside the ‘critical eye’ of civil-society organisations, the second aspect with which we began above, some have argued that recent forms of civic initiative and volunteering have in many cases been in line with government policy (Verhoeven 2013; Verhoeven & Ham 2010). This begs the question of how critically the organisations which make up civil society view government policy. In practice, government and civil society often establish ‘hybrid’ organisational forms (Dekker 2009) and work alongside each other in administrative networks or partnerships (Brandsen & Pape 2015;

Hall et al. 2009; Nair & Campbell 2008; Sheaff et al. 2014; Sidhu & Taylor 2009; Williamson et al. 2004). Civil-society organisations regularly implement government policy by delivering services to their target groups (WRR 2002). Service delivery – possibly subsidised by the government – and advocacy can readily reinforce each other (Mensink et al. 2016). However, exerting pressure on the government can be difficult if that same government is also subsidising the delivery of services (see e.g. Eikenberry & Kluver 2004; Habraken et al. 2013; Hutchinson & Cairns 2010; Onyx et al. 2008; Onyx et al. 2010; Weiler & Wijnkoop 2011).

In this report we selected the reception of refugees as a theme because it involves a great deal of activity that affirms government policy as well as much activity which is critical of that policy. Placing the central focus on this dichotomy sheds light on the social cleavages highlighted earlier. There are other themes besides the reception of refugees for which this would also be a logical way of viewing developments in civil society.

The refugee sector was chosen as the central theme in this report because it offered a good case for obtaining an insight into how diversity and social cleavages are dealt with, as well as the way in which disagreements between civil society and government are handled.

Although, as regards diversity, public opinion is deeply divided (Den Ridder et al. 2016), it is not the case that people are simply ‘for’ or ‘against’ refugees; there is a large middle group between these two extremes. People appear to wrestle greatly with their opinions, for example on the question of whether the Netherlands has a moral duty to accept refugees (see also Geuijen 2004). Although people’s thinking may be more nuanced than we sometimes suppose, there is still a strong perception that there are just two groups. People also sometimes organise on the basis of divergent opinions: some to support refugees, others to resist the setting up of reception facilities in their locality.

As regards keeping a critical eye on government policy, or disagreement with that policy, we find examples across the whole ‘opinion spectrum’ of initiatives or groups volunteering in ways that are at odds with government policy. Examples include both campaigns to help failed asylum-seekers find work, resisting to the setting up of asylum-seekers’ reception centres announced by the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA) and the local authority. This makes the refugee sector a good case for exploring both the diversity and the critical eye of civil-society organisations.

This publication also made a key contribution to mapping the refugee sector, the first time this had been done in this form. This translated into a first descriptive research question; the second question is concerned with the themes of diversity and the ‘critical eye’. With the exception of question 1a, which is discussed in a separate chapter, all the questions were raised in the discussion of each of the three cases, each of which has its own dedicated chapter:

- 1 How is civil society structured around the theme of refugees?
 - a How has civil society developed around the theme of refugees?
 - b Why do people become active?
 - c How do groups in civil society organise themselves?
 - d What have civil-society organisations achieved through their efforts?

- 2 How does civil society deal with:
 - a Diversity of views between civil-society organisations?
 - b Fulfilling the role of keeping a critical eye on government?

We investigated these questions on the basis of three case studies from the refugee sector. This means that the findings are not representative for civil society – or the refugee sector – as a whole. This approach did however deliver relevant insights into the experiences of those concerned in relation to three themes. We first studied attempts to influence asylum and integration policy over the last 20 years. Second, we looked at initiatives to support refugees in Utrecht, and at their interaction with established organisations and the government. Third, we investigated experiences with resistance to the announced establishment of an asylum-seekers' reception centre in the Overvecht district of Utrecht. Our findings are based mainly on interviews with stakeholders, on earlier research and on relevant documents. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed using the analysis software atlas.ti.

S.1 How is civil society structured around the theme of refugees?

S.1.1 How has civil society developed around the theme of refugees?

We began this report with a historical outline of developments in civil society in relation to the theme 'refugees'. This provided an answer to question 1a. Civil society has long been active on behalf of refugees, in fact long before the government began offering protection to this group. The Dutch have a tradition of providing support through private initiatives and through churches, often at local level, to people fleeing across national borders, an example being Belgians fleeing to the Netherlands during the First World War. The arrival of new groups of refugees often prompted new initiatives to offer them help and support. After the Second World War, Dutch civil society developed in parallel with the international refugee system and the relevant national bodies. In the 1960s and 70s, initiatives increasingly took a political stance.

From the 1950s onwards, the government tried to bring together the many private initiatives in support of refugees. Following a number of temporary forerunners, the Dutch Council for Refugees (VluchtelingenWerk Nederland) was established in 1979. However, it was not until more than ten years later that the relevant government ministry and the board of the Council were able to agree on the role this organisation should play. Over this period, the size of the organisation fluctuated widely. In the 1990s, the Council was given a

formal role in assisting and supporting refugees. The Council also retained its role in influencing policy.

In the decades after the Second World War, all kinds of self-organised groups appeared, forged by refugees themselves; these were brought together in 1985 under the umbrella of Refugee Organisations in the Netherlands (Vluchtelingen Organisaties Nederland – von), which became the voice of refugees vis-à-vis government policy. It lost its central government funding at the start of this century, following which it continued with limited resources to work for the integration of refugees and to address sociocultural problems in refugee communities.

In recent years, failed asylum-seekers have also begun to organise, with perhaps the best-known example being the Amsterdam group We Are Here (Wij Zijn Hier in Dutch). This collective, which is housed in a constantly changing series of squats, has attracted a great deal of media and political attention since 2012. A number of small local and national organisations have existed since the 1980s, such as the International Network of Local Initiatives with Asylum-seekers (INLIA) and the National Support Centre for Undocumented Migrants (Landelijke Ongedocumenteerden Steunpunt [Stichting LOS]), which supports failed asylum-seekers. In most cases these are not organisations that were established by refugees themselves.

5.1.2 Why do people become active?

We interpreted the question of why people become active (question 1b) from the basis of the motivations of both individuals and collectives, but with the emphasis on the latter. We found three triggers for collective action: new or proposed legislation or measures by the government; unmet needs of refugees; and motivations that have nothing to do with refugees.

New or proposed legislation or measures often give rise to advocacy and activism. We explored this in chapter 3 on the basis of interviews with organisations which seek to influence national policy. There is often dissatisfaction about current or proposed policy, with examples such as the Benefit Entitlement (Residence Status) Act (Koppelingswet), the new Aliens Act (Vreemdelingenwet) and plans to expel failed asylum-seekers or to end the funding for supporting asylum status-holders. Chapter 5 described how the announcement of a new reception facility in the Utrecht district of Overvecht was the trigger for resistance. Civil-society organisations also often see refugees' needs which they believe are not being met, despite a raft of services and activities by established organisations. This regularly gives rise to new initiatives, as we saw in Utrecht. In chapter 4 we saw that groups of citizens and organisations react to gaps in the availability of services, for example for failed asylum-seekers. In many cases, harrowing situations are a direct trigger for organising a campaign. The desire for community-building and empowerment were given as arguments for refugees setting about organising themselves.

Sometimes, motivations that have nothing to do with refugees play a role, for example dissatisfaction with the lack of attention for problems in a neighbourhood (crime, unemployment, level of amenities, etc.). In the Overvecht district of Utrecht, this was a key factor

in the resistance to the opening of a refugee reception centre in the district. For many people, the simple need to ‘do something’ for refugees, and thus to help assuage humanitarian needs, was also a reason for taking action.

5.1.3 How do groups in civil society organise themselves?

The question of how groups in civil society organise themselves (question 1c) can be approached in several ways:

- Do they opt for ad hoc or more structural organisation models?
- Do they organise themselves across a broad front or with a specific focus?
- What form do the different kinds of organisation take in practice?
- Do refugees play a role in running the groups?

The development of civil society in its present form (described in chapter 2) was a period of constant fluctuation between ad hoc and structural organisation, with a steady stream of private initiatives, both by Dutch citizens and by refugees themselves. This period saw regular waves of centralisation and institutionalisation, such as the absorption of numerous initiatives in the Council for Refugees (VluchtelingenWerk), as well as of self-organised groupings under the umbrella of Refugee Organisations in the Netherlands (von). The National Support Centre for Undocumented Migrants (Stichting LOS) was not created by merging local organisations, but does bring together and support many local initiatives. The creation of national organisations such as the anti-islamisation group Pegida Netherlands and AZC-Alert, which campaigns against the spread of asylum-seekers’ reception centres, can be regarded as an attempt to harness local discontent concerning the acceptance of refugees.

Civil society can be organised across a broad front as well as with a narrow focus on specific groups or issues. Sometimes the focus is on a very specific target group, as with the initiatives to help Hungarian refugees in the 1950s as described in the historical section of this report. In other cases, the approach is more generic; for example, the Dutch Council for Refugees mainly supports asylum-seekers and status-holders, while organisations such as LOS and INLIA chiefly work with failed asylum-seekers (and other undocumented migrants). Sometimes, rather than organising to focus on a specific group, people can come together around a particular issue, for example where people meet at a demonstration against the expulsion of failed asylum-seekers or have a shared discontent about the proposed opening of an asylum-seekers’ reception centre in the locality, as happened in Overvecht.

The latter can sometimes lead to surprising coalitions, as for example when Dutch citizens of Moroccan origin stood shoulder-to-shoulder with supporters of the right-wing populist Party for Freedom (PVV) during the demonstrations in Utrecht.

The precise organisational form of these groupings varies widely. In the two case studies in Utrecht, we encountered all kinds of arrangements: cupcake campaigns, Facebook groups, debating platforms, daycare centres, large non-governmental organisations (NGOs), churches, and so on. There was a place for all of them. In chapter 3, on influencing policy, we heard about lobbies, demonstrations, petitions, discussion platforms, media cam-

paigns, and any number of other manifestations. Organisations combine different action types and strategies. Broadly speaking, the scientific literature assumes that social movements tend to be a response to political opportunities (Eisinger 1973), or an attempt to marshal people and resources in order to reinforce their argument (McCarthy & Zald 1977), or to frame an issue in such a way that it brings about a change in public opinion (Laubenthal 2007). In practice, civil society combines all these strategies, either within a single organisation, such as the Dutch Council for Refugees, or through combinations of different organisations each with its own strategies.

In the recent initiatives we studied Utrecht, we saw many examples of ‘shared administration’, in which refugees and Dutch citizens stood side-by-side at the helm of organisations supporting refugees. We found a similar trend in projects and campaigns aimed at allowing asylum-seekers and failed asylum-seekers to volunteer alongside Dutch natives. In our interviews, respondents suggested abandoning the idea that Dutch citizens volunteer to help ‘those poor refugees’; ‘inclusiveness’ and ‘community’ are the new watchwords. The jointly run initiatives in Utrecht do not aim to take decisions for refugees, but to give them a chance to have their own voices heard. The umbrella organisation von spent two decades speaking on behalf of refugees vis-à-vis the government. The scrapping of its funding has made this much more difficult, but the emergence of new self-organised groups, such as We Are Here for failed asylum-seekers in Amsterdam, indicates that there is still a need for a collective voice. Self-organised groups are of course important for community-building and empowerment; however, the existence of jointly run organisations offers a better chance of two-way integration.

5.1.4 What have civil-society organisations achieved through their efforts?

To explore what civil-society organisations have achieved through their efforts (question 1d), we emphasised the tangible results they have achieved for refugees. Examples include meeting basic needs, strengthening the sense of community and bringing about changes in government policy and measures. We also investigated how those organisations feel about the results they achieve and what they do with them.

Initiatives to meet basic needs often deliver immediate results. A volunteer who distributes food in the Jaarbeurs centre in Utrecht stated that refugees are no longer hungry. And a group launching a daycare centre elsewhere in the city offering activities for failed asylum-seekers immediately saw people building contacts and becoming more active. When asked about their achievements, it was mostly tangible results of this kind that were cited by respondents. Tens of thousands of volunteers have achieved significant results through initiatives such as these.

As well as meeting basic needs, the achievements in terms of community-building have also been impressive. Those involved in the initiatives in Utrecht (chapter 4) mainly saw their added value compared with existing organisations in creating a safe space from where refugees can work on building social networks and stronger communities. It was interesting that, broadly speaking, the initiators felt that the volunteers involved had also benefited: they too benefit by building new contacts, both informal and professional, and

enjoyed feeling part of a community. Active engagement is thus important for many people.

Initiatives to influence policy (chapter 3) were often at least partially successful. Campaigns by organisations such as Amnesty International, the Dutch Council for Refugees, Church in Action (Kerk in Actie), INLIA, von and Stichting LOS have led to changes in the Benefit Entitlement (Residence Status) Act and the Aliens Act, to the pardoning of 27,000 people without papers, to the retention of funding for supporting asylum status-holders, to a more flexible and more humane asylum procedure, to name just a few examples. The protests against housing refugees in the Overvecht district of Utrecht (chapter 5) were successful in the sense that they led to the formulation of the ‘Einstein Plan’, under which the opening of a new asylum-seekers’ reception centre is accompanied by investments in the local area. The campaigns focused attention on real problems in the locality, which the local authority itself admitted had been neglected for too long.

When asked what civil-society groups felt about the results they had achieved, it was interesting that their responses were not dominated by a sense of satisfaction regarding their political influence. Many members of national lobbying organisations that we spoke to feel the political and social climate had hardened, denting their optimism. ‘What is there to celebrate?’, as one of our respondents put it. Similarly, by no means all those involved in the protests against housing refugees in Overvecht have confidence in the Einstein Plan; ‘Seeing will be believing’, appears to be the attitude.

This was linked to another point, namely the fact that campaigning results were not widely publicised. Organisations reported them in their annual reports, but we noticed in many of the interviews that there was a certain embarrassment about expressing pride in what had been achieved. One respondent referred to ‘self-congratulation’, another to ‘just mentioning’ successes. This could be partly strategic: placing too much emphasis on all that has been achieved could send out a signal that there is little left to fight for. Evaluations of government policy are very common, but there are relatively few studies showing what civil society has achieved through its efforts across the piece. That is a very different approach to describing results than self-reported achievements in annual reports. It is of course extremely difficult to demonstrate an impact, but it is certainly possible to give an impression. In this report we focused on the results of both service delivery and efforts to influence policy. It may be that this combination offers a direction for further research.

5.2 Diversity and critical eye

5.2.1 How does civil society deal with diversity among civil-society organisations?

Question 2a focused on the diversity between civil-society organisations and how civil society deals with it. Bearing in mind the debate about social cleavages, the easy way would be to only look at contact between groups with very different views. However, this study showed that there can also be tensions between groups which hold relatively similar views, though it is true to say that there is more consensus than discord between such groups.

Groups with differing views

Based on our study, we conclude that:

- there is a feeling that ‘proponents and opponents’ of refugees live in ‘separate worlds’, and that this feeling does nothing to foster contact;
- groups which organise around different views rarely meet each other;
- dialogue is considered important, but does not always happen;
- a great deal of attention is given to people with extreme views, and little to those with more moderate views.

After discussing these conclusions, we look at a number of other possible questions for future research.

The respondents in Utrecht had the feeling that proponents and opponents lived in ‘completely separate worlds’ and that there was a ‘societal schism’. At the same time, these same people argued that this image is inaccurate and does not foster mutual contact. Earlier we wrote that divisions in society are reflected in opinion research (Den Ridder et al. 2016), but that people are also not simply ‘for’ or ‘against’ refugees. We have already seen that the discontent regarding the announced opening of an asylum-seekers’ reception centre in Overvecht often masked other problems, and refugees were used as a vehicle through which to express that discontent. There was a strong sense of, ‘Why build something like that here?’. There is a difficulty, however: although opinions may diverge less than we might initially think, people do often organise themselves either to support refugees or to resist their acceptance.

Also relevant in this context is that groups which organise around different viewpoints rarely meet each other. Members of the civic initiatives in Utrecht that we interviewed said that the only time they ‘met’ people who were critical of accepting refugees was online. One respondent said: ‘If I didn’t read the newspaper, I would genuinely think that the world consists only of really well-meaning, engaged people’. Organisations such as Amnesty International, the Dutch Council for Refugees and Church in Action have by contrast prepared their local branches for ‘offline’ contacts. At demonstrations and public meetings, they also encounter people who oppose the housing of refugees in their immediate locality. The atmosphere at these events is often very tense, preventing open dialogue.

Third, while many of our respondents stressed that contact and open dialogue are important, in Utrecht they were often unable to find suitable platforms for this. Although Stads podium Utrecht, a civic initiative which aims to foster and facilitate dialogue between residents, offers a very different kind of platform – a boxing ring – than the public information meetings organised by the local authority, it too enjoyed only modest success in engaging those protesting against the asylum-seekers’ centre in Overvecht. Nonetheless, the respondents welcomed such attempts. ‘We have to work together to find a way through it’, stressed one respondent from Pegida. That will not be a straightforward process. The general picture appears to be that there should be a place for everyone in the debate – includ-

ing the ‘troublemakers’ from Pegida, as one respondent put it – though in reality this causes a good deal of discomfiture. People have all kinds of images of groups with which they do or do not wish to be associated; many of those images have to do with what we might call ‘civility’ (Dekker 2009; Kopecky & Mudde 2005). Civility is often associated with certain standards of decency and a degree of moderation. For our respondents, groups lose their legitimacy if they use violence, for example, are unrelentingly negative or espouse extreme ideas; that is ‘not civil’. Whether they are justified or not, images such as this stand in the way of dialogue.

Finally, we conclude that groups with extreme views receive a great deal of attention, while those with more moderate views are relatively ignored. The conclusion that attempts to engage people who oppose the opening of asylum-seekers’ centres are not very successful may sound contradictory if we think back to the images of protests against such centres in places like Geldermalsen. At the end of 2015, many thought that critics were given too much rather than too little voice, at least on television. The violence of some protests often came as a surprise. There is a common belief in the public debate that those who perpetrate violence receive disproportionate attention. The tv current affairs programme *Nieuwsuur*, for example, devoted an entire programme to the riots in Geldermalsen, explaining that the most extreme opponents, who sometimes did not balk at violence, did indeed receive a lot of attention. This fits in with the picture we presented in this report, namely that we are inclined to emphasise the extremes, while those in the middle, with more moderate views, receive little attention. This echoes broader concerns that these moderate groups are in danger of losing trust in the constitutional democracy (Putters & Van Noije 2018). For example, we saw groups who were concerned about the general state of their neighbourhood, for whom the announcement of an asylum-seekers’ centre provided a trigger prompting them to express those concerns. The search is still on for platforms to discuss concerns such as these without the need for an external trigger.

What do these conclusions imply for questions that we might investigate in future research? This study builds on existing research on social cleavages (e.g. Bovens et al. 2014; Tiemeijer 2017). Those studies often started from the individual perspective; based on personal characteristics, people were divided into groups based on differences in education level, opinions, etc. In line with earlier research on civil society (e.g. Dahl 1978; Edwards et al. 2001; Foley & Edwards 1996; Putnam 2000; Putnam 2004; Walzer 1991), in this study we investigated these kinds of social cleavages not from the perspective of individuals, but of groups. This study generated a number of questions which could be relevant for future research. They may not be entirely new questions, but they could be relevant for other societal themes in which civil society is involved:

- How are social cleavages reflected in civil society?
- When are social cleavages in civil society problematic?
- Can civil society contribute to overcoming problematic social cleavages?

Groups with relatively similar views

Not entirely unexpectedly, groups and organisations with relatively similar goals more often agree than disagree with each other. If we look at initiatives to influence the national refugee policy, respondents feel that there is greater collaboration than in the past. Those involved in civic initiatives in Utrecht also frequently collaborate and coordinate their activities. They also seek out collaboration with established organisations such as the Dutch Council for Refugees. Despite this, we also encountered examples of divisions in areas where there was a relatively high degree of consensus. We record them here not because they dominate, but because they provide an insight into the way in which civil society organises itself in relation to refugees.

We looked at tensions in collaborative initiatives from two different perspectives. First, we saw that the collaboration between new, ‘spontaneous’ civic initiatives and ‘professional’ volunteer organisations was initially slightly fraught in relation to the new asylum-seekers’ centre in Overvecht. According to a number of respondents, here too it sometimes appeared as if there were ‘separate worlds’, with those involved in new initiatives finding it hard to understand why they were not permitted to organise activities jointly with the Dutch Council for Refugees in the asylum-seekers’ centre, for example. For its part, the Council shared the view of the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA) that a professional distance is needed to guarantee the safety and privacy of large groups of people who have been through a great deal. However, collaboration between ad hoc initiatives and established organisations did undeniably prove to be feasible provided there was a clear framework.

Second, we heard reports of occasional tensions between organisations aiming to influence national refugee policy. Many organisations receive criticism from others with more ‘radical’ views; the Dutch Council for Refugees, for example, is criticised for its limited support for failed asylum-seekers. The organisations levelling this criticism are themselves criticised by groups situated even further from the mainstream for being too moderate in tone. Most of the people we spoke to ultimately valued organisations highly even though they might not agree with them on everything. ‘You need people who are more moderate and more radical to hold each other in balance’, as one of our respondents put it.

5.2.2 How does civil society fulfil its role of keeping a critical eye on government?

We discussed a debate on the question of whether civil society had not become too policy-affirming in the age of the participation society and the do-democracy. We deliberately opted to study action on behalf of refugees, because it seemed from reports in the media as if initiatives on different sides of the political spectrum were not always in line with government policy. Yet we also found many examples of consensus, which we discuss first here. We focus specifically on collaboration at local level. As regards the critical eye, we explore the reasons for criticism and how that criticism is handled. Lastly, we attempt to shed light on the relationship between government and civil society in a more general sense, and draw attention to the need for research on the role of civil society in critically reviewing policy.

We start with the consensus between government and civil society. First, we can regard the collaboration which has developed over the years between the Dutch Council for Refugees and the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA) as an example of a 'hybridisation' or 'partnership' between government and civil society (Brandsen & Pape 2015; Brandsen & Pestoff 2006; Dekker 2004; Habraken et al. 2013). As reported in chapter 2, the Dutch Council for Refugees has a formal role in providing support in the asylum procedure, in the area of work and integration and in relation to family reunification. The Council is also often based locally in buildings managed by the COA. Second, the collaboration between the municipality of Utrecht, the civic initiatives we studied and organisations such as the Dutch Council for Refugees and the COA can be seen as a form of network administration (Hall et al. 2009; Sheaff et al. 2014). The coordinating and facilitating role of the local authority is widely appreciated.

There was also regular consensus between local authorities and civil-society organisations in their criticism of national policy, most strikingly on failed asylum-seekers (see also Kos et al. 2015). Local authorities were often confronted with people who had ended up on the streets because it was not practically possible to expel them. Since 2005, LOGO (Landelijk Overleg Gemeentebesturen inzake Opvang- en terugkeerbeleid), a partnership between municipalities offering a platform to discuss homeless asylum-seekers with central government, has occasionally raised questions about the reception and repatriation policy. They work with national organisations such as INLIA, which have supported homeless asylum-seekers since the 1980s. In Utrecht we saw local NGOs such as Villa Vrede and Ubuntuhuis collaborating with the local authority in providing support to failed asylum-seekers. In this sense, our choice of Utrecht might provide a distorted picture, because the degree of collaboration could be lower in other municipalities. The fact that Utrecht regularly and loudly criticised the policy of the national government created a special set of circumstances.

It was not so much the case that local organisations were insufficiently critical of the local authority, but rather that the local authority was more critical than average of national government. We found that the local authority was certainly criticised for the way in which new asylum-seekers' centres were introduced. The relationship between local civil society, the local authority and national government is important for the future of civil society. As the role of local authorities steadily grows due to ongoing policy devolution (see e.g. De Klerk et al. 2010; Pommer & Boelhouver 2016), it is logical that this will influence the functioning of civil society. If the position of local actors is reinforced in policy, it is plausible that the emphasis in civil society will also move in that direction.

There are several reasons why civil-society organisations criticise the government. First, criticism may be related to the group targeted by an organisation: failed asylum-seekers are for example a fairly sensitive political issue. This criticism can also be implicit, for example by offering support that is not quite in line with legislation. Certain forms of support for failed asylum-seekers fall into a grey area in terms of regulations. In the historical overview in this report we showed that there have been many conflicts in recent years between government and civil society on the rights of people without papers. Second, in a more general sense, current and proposed government policy and measures have regularly

given rise to criticism (see §5.1.2). Third, the tensions between service delivery and action by an organisation can lead to reciprocal criticism.

Conflicts are dealt with in various ways. Where the criticism is aimed at government policy and measures, it can sometimes take years of campaigns by networks of civil-society organisations before a solution is reached that is acceptable to all parties (see chapter 2). Sometimes it ends up as a test of legislation and regulations or international human rights treaties, as in the obligation to offer emergency shelter and food to failed asylum-seekers. During the establishment of the Dutch Council for Refugees, it also took a long time and a good deal of protest before a relationship was forged with government that was aligned with the organisation's values. In many cases, a solution can also be found without protest and in mutual consultation, though stakeholders do feel that the government could sometimes opt for a different standpoint. The introduction of new reception facilities being cited as an example of this; in Overvecht, the public participation meetings had more the character of information meetings, a view also shared by council staff.

How can we define the relationship between government and civil society in more a general sense? Reciprocal criticism does not necessarily mean that government and civil society inhabit 'separate worlds'. Only a small number of organisations feel they are completely outside the political system; this applies at most for anarchist groupings such as the No Border Network, whose views were expressed in chapter 4. Most organisations recognise that they belong in the same political arena as the government, where deliberation takes place. This has also been called an 'agonistic relationship' (Verhoeven 2009), which can sometimes give rise to a 'them and us' opposition between government and civil society, but without any sense of hostility. According to one of our respondents, politicians ought to embrace this critical role of civil-society organisations: 'Those politicians have a right to a 'critical counterweight'.'

Finally, we draw attention to the need for research on the critical role of civil-society organisations in relation to policy. We began this report by observing that the debate on the participation society and do-democracy is often concentrated on forms of participation that affirm government policy. This discourse has subtly led to a rather more 'well-behaved' image of civil society (see also Verhoeven & Ham 2010). The sociologist Imrat Verhoeven also recommended devoting attention to 'citizens who do not blithely join in actions to improve their neighbourhood, but who do follow local policy critically and keep the government on its toes' (Verhoeven 2013).

Note

- 1 The Van Dale Dictionary of the Dutch language chose 'participation society' as its word of the year in 2013, defining it as: 'a society in which citizens do not depend (entirely) on the government for their well-being, but are encouraged to take their own responsibility for this'. The term 'do-democracy' refers to the notion that a democracy is created by active citizens 'doing', rather than by debates in Parliament.