Creating Space
Ponzoni, E.

2016

document version
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Reframing cooperation: Challenges in overcoming tensions between professional services and volunteer organizations providing parenting support in immigrant communities

Social Service Review (2015) volume 89, issue 1

Abstract

Volunteer organizations can potentially partner with mainstream professional services to provide better parenting support to immigrant parents. This qualitative study of cooperation between professional agencies and volunteer organizations known as migrant volunteer and community organizations (MVCOs) aims to understand the extent to which professionals and volunteers can transform frame divergence from an obstacle into an advantage. Using frame analysis, this article explores the difficulties these groups encountered when they attempted to work together in two immigrant neighborhoods in Amsterdam. The divergence of the frames each group employed to define cooperation and its aims fueled mistrust and prevented attempts to work more closely together. The possibility of positively employing frame divergence to develop innovative solutions through frame reflection and reframing was hampered by the frame divergence itself, which was rooted in a long-standing controversy concerning roles, power relations, and patterns of inequality between the people involved.
Introduction

Connecting formal and informal care in vital interactions (Hendriks and Tops 2005) is an important social policy challenge in many countries. Though it was already an agenda concern in the early 1980s (Froland 1980; Hoch and Hemmens 1987), this connection has again become relevant as public support in many welfare states undergoes an intense transformation based on the ideals of self-sufficiency and personal responsibility (Rose 2000; Lacey and Ilcan 2006). Mirroring developments in other countries, the Dutch government has increasingly emphasized the importance of capitalizing on informal, voluntary resources of care and social support. The 2007 Social Support Act (Wet Maatschappelijke Ondertseuning), which was designed to promote citizens’ self-sustaining capacities and mutual-support initiatives and to increase the social cohesiveness of Dutch society, delineated government ambitions regarding the role of informal support in different areas of social policy. However, in practice, the shaping of alliances between professional services and informal, voluntary sources of care still poses dilemmas and unanswered questions in various areas of public support.

This article explores challenges in linking professional and volunteer support in the Netherlands, focusing specifically on how professional providers of parenting support and volunteer organizations known as migrant volunteer and community organizations (MVCOs) integrate their perspectives, values, and practical knowledge as they strive to provide parenting support—which is a focus of increasing importance in many countries (Daly 2012; Molinuevo 2013)—to immigrant families in Amsterdam. The interplay between the two types of organizations demands a renegotiation of their values and views, which inform the aims and direction of their cooperation. As this article demonstrates, MVCOs’ views center on notions of safe spaces and collective forms of empowerment, while professional organizations are concerned with increasing immigrant access to and use of professional parenting support services. These differing perspectives on cooperation strongly shape the dynamics of their interaction.

This study starts from the assumptions that parenting support in a multiethnic city such as Amsterdam can be seen as a complex social issue, whose solution requires cooperation between heterogeneous social forces, and that cooperative efforts can produce new resources, which emerge as a result of each group’s unique perception of the issue. In line with these assumptions, I use frame analysis and the concept of reframing to investigate the potential benefits of and obstacles arising from cooperation between MVCOs and professional organizations.

Background and Context

Parenting Support Services for Immigrant Families in Amsterdam

Like governments of other Western countries, the Dutch government has increasingly invested in services that are intended to educate and empower parents to support their children’s well-being and development. These preventive services are provided by municipal Youth and Family Centers (YFCs), which were set up in the early 2000s with the aim of detecting problems at an early stage. At these state-funded centers, qualified practitioners offer parenting courses and light counseling for minor problems and, when needed, refer families to specialized services.
The city of Amsterdam is also home to many informal forms of support, such as informal networks of family support, school initiatives, and grassroots organizations that help parents or children when problems arise. Amsterdam is a city with high ethnic diversity and many ethnically concentrated neighborhoods. Grassroots organizations, such as MVCOs, have formed within these ethnic communities to tackle social problems and funnel the volunteer efforts of socially engaged residents. These organizations, some of which focus on providing parenting support, offer many forms of support to people in the area, often reaching large groups of immigrant citizens who are hesitant to use formal services. MVCOs are often financially sustained by the local government, but in general are not specifically designated for parenting support activities. Rather, they receive support for various other activities that promote the integration and well-being of immigrant citizens, such as language courses, homework support for children, and social activities. The parenting support provided by MVCOs can be considered informal support, because, unlike the support provided by the YFCs, it does not consist of formalized programs or courses and it is not provided by trained counselors who are recognized by the state. Nevertheless, MVCO volunteers have an important pedagogic function in their community. Not only do they stimulate discussion of problems regarding parenting and growing up among community members, but also, because of their position in the community, they are often the only ones who are aware of problematic situations in a specific family and who can therefore offer concrete help.

The composition of the workforce in the two types of organizations differs greatly. Respondents from the YFC and other service agencies are qualified paid professionals, the majority of whom (at least in this study) are middle-class native Dutch women, although some YFCs situated in areas with high concentrations of specific ethnic groups are making an effort to employ professionals with relevant ethnic backgrounds. In contrast, MVCO volunteers are mainly concerned members of an ethnic community who decided to set up a volunteer organization, or to volunteer within an existing organization, to help solve the problems faced by people in their community or neighborhood. They often come from low-income families themselves and consider it their mission to help other community members tackle problems with which they often have personal experience.

Parental Engagement with Professional and Volunteer Support Services

Parental engagement in the YFCs’ professional counseling programs does not always go smoothly (Axford et al. 2012), especially for families with weaker socioeconomic positions or for those from immigrant groups that have a more marginalized and fragile position in society (Pels, Deković, and Model 2006; Van den Broek, Kleijnjen, and Keuzenkamp 2010). MVCOs may gain the trust of these families more easily than professional organizations can, since volunteers are often known and valued in specific immigrant communities. The ample attention international scholars pay to the relation between care services and immigrants shows that this is not an isolated Dutch phenomenon. Studies have shown that use of formal programs and services is often low among lower-income immigrants (Aroian, Wu, and Tran 2005; Hernández-Plaza, Alonso-Morillejo, and Pozo-Muñoz 2006; Kahanec, Kim, and Zimmermann 2013); instead, their main sources of help and support are their own informal social networks (Aroian 1992; Leslie 1992; Martínez, García, and Maya 1999; Hernández-Plaza, Pozo, and Alonso-Morillejo 2004).

Volunteer organizations arising from within immigrant communities appear to be more effective at reaching low-income, marginalized immigrant groups that are not easily reached by Dutch
institutions and professional services (De Gruijter, Tan, and Pels 2009; Bellaart and Pehlivan 2011). Marginalized immigrants are hesitant to use formal services, often because they lack trust or familiarity with the institutions or because the formal services do not directly meet their needs. However, the separation between these families and formal services should not be understood a priori as a trait of the families. The relationship between social workers or counselors and people from ethnic minorities is complicated by tacit assumptions and images that problematize cultural otherness for all participants, which may impair the counseling relationship (Van der Haar 2007; Lee and Bhuyan 2013).

**Coming Changes to the Dutch System of Youth Care**

The Dutch system of youth care is undergoing a radical transformation that will come into force in 2015. Among other changes, the cost and complexity of the currently highly fragmented system of youth and family support will be drastically reduced. The new policy also calls for a normative recalibration with new guiding principles and values (see Bosscher 2012). While the old system has, over the years, become primarily focused on monitoring risks and detecting and treating problematic developments, the new policy is meant to focus more on improving normal developmental conditions by improving the environment in which children grow up. The transformation also endeavors to realize a shift from the primacy of professional control to a greater emphasis on the perspectives, wishes, and initiatives of parents and those in their immediate environment. The goal is a more balanced distribution of tasks and responsibilities between formal services and parents and a better and more fruitful interplay between formal and informal sources of support in order to provide more effective interventions.

Inspired by the views of contemporary sociopedagogical analyses (Hermanns 2009; De Winter 2012), the new policy aims to normalize educational problems, in opposition to the growing medicalization of child-rearing problems and the increasing number of far-reaching interventions. In addition, it aims to reduce dependence on professional help and to employ strength based interventions: interventions that build on the (sometimes hidden) strength of families themselves. These changes envision the ideal active citizen as concerned not only with his or her own well-being but also with that of his or her fellow citizens. On a collective community level, the ideal of self-empowerment translates into citizens’ ability to work together to prevent problems (for instance, by creating a healthy pedagogic climate in the neighborhood) and to find adequate solutions to problems. This also entails a better interplay between formal and informal care.

With this policy shift in mind, the field of parenting support presents an interesting case for investigating the connection between informal volunteer initiatives and professional services offering support in the same domain. The urgent need to help immigrant families and strengthen the connection between formal and informal support, in light of the current transformation, makes the link between formal provisions and MVCOs all the more necessary. However, despite the fact that both groups consider this connection desirable and important, cooperation has proven difficult to achieve in practice.

15 In Dutch, this concept is rendered with the expression *eigen kracht*, which could be translated as “power of one's own” or “self-empowerment.” *Eigen kracht* is a key word in many policy documents and interventions, and it functions as a slogan of the policy transformation.
Framing Cooperation across Boundaries

The inclusion of MVCOs in the support structure for immigrant families in Amsterdam can be seen as emblematic of the challenge of transforming youth policy. The challenge lies in linking the formal system of evidence-based programs and standards of accountability and performance employed by professional organizations with the informal and improvising (Boutellier 2013) type of social work offered by MVCOs. Parenting support for immigrant parents can be seen as an intractable problem (Schön and Rein 1994) or, as it is often called in governance literature, a “wicked” issue (e.g., Clarke and Stewart 2000; Ferlie et al. 2011): a complex social policy issue with no clear definition or solution, the tackling of which requires the involvement of diverse groups of people or actors. Addressing wicked issues requires the cooperation of actors from the public, private, and nonprofit sectors, each of whom has access to different resources, specific knowledge or expertise, or connections with other actors.

The multiplicity of views and perspectives brought in by different actors can open new possibilities and pave the way for new solutions that could not have been reached by actors working separately (Fung and Wright 2001; Agranoff and McGuire 2003; McLaverty 2003). Thus, different understandings and perceptions of problems are important in cooperative settings (Koppenjan and Klijn 2004; Ansell and Gash 2008; Van Buuren 2009). Crafting an alternate definition of the problem may prove essential to tackling wicked issues, making differences in how participants frame problems valuable in their own right. However, the multiplicity of problem frames can also lead to talking at cross-purposes, or “dialogues of the deaf” (Van Eeten 1999, 2). Wicked issues are so thorny in part because the actors involved in devising a solution define the problem differently. A divergent conception of the issue might have a negative dimension that can hinder cooperation, as well as a positive one that can aid development of a solution. I investigate the extent to which the interplay between formal and informal parenting support may act as an innovative union of perspectives, in light of the prospective changes in the statutory youth care system. This article explores the possibility that the conflicting worldviews of actors from professional and volunteer fields have the potential to reconceptualize the issue of parenting support for immigrant families.

Frames, Frame Analysis, and Generative Metaphors

The concept of frames has gained popularity in various disciplines such as psychology, the sociology of social movements, conflict management, and policy analysis. It is, however, used and defined in different manners by different authors. Art Dewulf and colleagues (2009) distinguish a cognitivistic (cognitive-representational) understanding of frames, derived from the fields of cognitive psychology and artificial intelligence (Minsky 1975), from an interactional-constructivist understanding, with roots in communication theory and sociology (an early example of which can be found in the work of Erving Goffman [1974]). While the cognitivistic framework sees frames as knowledge structures or cognitive representations, such as memory structures, that exist in the human mind and help to process information about reality (Benford and Snow 2000), the interactional-constructivist conception views frames as interactively coconstructed ways to make sense of issues and relationships. This article employs the interactional-constructivist concept. In this view, framing reality is an action achieved through the shared use of language, and frames are seen as social and communicative devices rather than as cognitive representations (Putnam and Holmer 1992; Drake and Donohue 1996; Dewulf, Craps, and Dercon 2004; Heracleous and
Frames inform our understanding of certain issues within particular social settings, communities of practice, or institutions.

In the interactional-constructivist conception, frames are dynamic because they are the fruit of interaction and negotiation between actors (Dewulf et al. 2009). Though, from the interactional-constructivist view, frames are considered changeable and never fixed, I will nevertheless look at specific dominant frames in use in the professional and volunteer fields, treating them as social constructs that may become hegemonic in a specific field. In this sense, frames may be seen as socially produced structures for “selecting, organizing, interpreting, and making sense of a complex reality to provide guidelines for knowing, analyzing, persuading, and acting” (Schön and Rein 1994, 32). They involve the classification of specific groups or categories (see also Yanow 2000) and the construction of causal stories about how a problem arose and how it can be explained (see also Hajer 1995; Van Eeten 1999). Frames are embedded in larger discursive structures that organize meanings and reunite concepts and theoretical perspectives that are used to make sense of a specific issue.

The field of policy studies has developed a broad tradition of studying policy issue conflicts as discursive conflicts in which opponents employ contrasting models, metaphors, and interpretive schemes (Saarikoski 2006). These controversies cannot be resolved by referring to facts because actors who are involved in the controversy consider different sets of facts or knowledge to be relevant. This discursive approach posits that the solution to conflict between cooperating parties lies in the challenge of dealing with these differences (Van Eeten 1999; see also Fischer 2003; Hajer and Wagenaar 2003; Innes and Booher 2003; Fischer and Gottweis 2012). It particularly focuses on frame reflective inquiry, which emphasizes the productive aspects of frame divergence and the possibility of convergence between different frames (Schön and Rein 1994).

Generative metaphors play a central role in Donald Schön and Martin Rein’s approach. Generative metaphors create particular associative images that carry with them a constellation of familiar, normative ideas.16 They also carry the specific norms and natural consequences attached to the images. These metaphors inform the evaluation of the situation, which implies a certain type of solution. In other words, frames connect the interpretation of a situation (what is going on) with calls for action, what Schön and Rein call the normative leap from “is” to “ought” (1994, 26–28; see also Snow 2003). They make a particular normative direction appear obvious and naturally flowing from the facts.

Frame Reflection and Reframing

In addition to providing a description of the structural aspects of frames, Schön and Rein’s frame analysis (1994) aims at finding consensus through a process of reframing, in which actors modify their frames so that they converge. When actors devise a solution to a complex problem to which

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16 As an example, Schön and Rein offer the generative metaphor of a disease, which is used in the framing of urban housing (1994, 25–26). Advocates of restructuring talk about the deterioration of slum areas as a disease needing a cure. This disease metaphor carries normative values and associations that we all are familiar with in the health-care context. That the urban housing situation is seen as a disease serves as an evaluation of the situation and leads to a solution described in terms of healing. A different solution would be advocated by actors who frame the issue by employing the metaphor of a natural community that becomes disrupted by urban renewal.
other actors, employing different frames, must contribute, they work under conditions of uncertainty and complexity that concern both the problem they aim to address and their interaction with other actors. This is a creative process, which Schön and Rein see as a process of designing (1994) that requires practitioners to reflect on their frames in action (Schön 1983), that is, to reformulate problems in light of their evolving understanding of the changing situation, taking into account the unexpected factors and the unintended consequences of their choices as they emerge during the process. However, the process of reframing also demands that actors seek agreement on the nature of the problem and the content of a solution and meet the communicative and interpersonal requirements necessary for sustaining a design coalition. Actors can reflect on the ways in which their frames block the collaborative process by focusing on back talk: messages from other actors that surprise them by violating their assumptions and indicating that others perceive and would handle the issue differently. Actors may therefore have to invent new elements of the design object (the desired resolution) that synthesize aspects of the different frames. This is both a process of communication across frames and of frame reflection, through which actors’ frames are made explicit then adjusted.

The idea of reframing combines Max Scheler’s (1960) principle of reality resisting interpretation (i.e., the idea that the world can offer resistance to our interpretations by presenting us with phenomena that do not fit into our frames) with the idea of cross-frame discourse, namely, the attempt to communicate across frames by trying to view and interpret phenomena through someone else’s frame. Schön and Rein’s theory of cross-frame discourse is inspired by Jürgen Habermas’s (1981) theory of communicative action and discourse ethics, as is the case with other deliberative approaches to policy conflicts (Fung and Wright 2001; Hajer and Wagenaar 2003; Innes and Booher 2003).

The Habermasian legacy of Schön and Rein’s model is especially evident in its necessary conditions for critical frame reflection, which Peter Scholten (2011) succinctly summarizes: The communicative setting must be characterized by openness. Actors must be prepared and able to step into other actors’ shoes and to try to understand the way in which those actors make sense of the situation. This requires empathy. In this way, they become aware not only of other actors’ frames but also of their own. Moreover, actors must be strongly motivated to undertake action, which will lead to a pragmatic willingness to adapt one’s frame if necessary. A last condition, one that encompasses the others, is trust. Without mutual trust, the willingness to meet the other conditions is unlikely (Scholten 2011). The conditions defining an ideal communicative situation echo Habermas’s requirements of discourse ethics and his attempt to overcome relativism by basing social life in a universal set of rules that allow people to reach understandings across differences.

Habermas’s project, which envisions the possibility of communicative settings governed by norms of freedom, openness, and equality, has been criticized for depicting an ideal world and postulating power-free interactions instead of providing tools to combat existing inequality (Flyvbjerg 1998; Hillier 2003). Authors such as Samantha Ashenden and David Owen (1999) and James Tully (1999) point out that Habermas’s project, which is based on rational foundations of consensual agreement, contrasts with Michel Foucault’s work, which reflects on actual power relations and their historical origins. Although Schön and Rein’s project is more empirically oriented, their conditions for
reaching understanding across frames could be subjected to the same critical question as Habermas’s: How and when are such conditions actually achievable?

**Frame Divergence as a Potential Resource within the Pedagogic Field**

Frame divergence and frame reflection can help us understand the widespread difficulty of setting up cooperative relationships between MVCOs and YFCs or other professional parenting support organizations. A preliminary investigation conducted in 2009 provides an initial picture of the relations between these parties and the extent of their existing cooperation. This preliminary study reveals two separate social worlds, both concerned about immigrant families in need of support. The urgent desire to provide better and more integrated forms of support was widespread in both MVCOs and professional organizations, and both groups professed the need to invest in cooperative efforts, yet actual cooperation rates were very low and long-standing tensions appeared to exist. Based on these preliminary insights, this article investigates both professional and volunteer perspectives on potential cooperation by considering how frame divergence between employees of professional organizations and volunteers at MVCOs may lead to dialogues of the deaf (or talking at cross-purposes) or may result in eventual consensus through reframing (when actors modify their frames so that they converge) and frame reflection (when actors make their frames explicit and then adjust them). Even though frame diversity risks unproductive dialogues of the deaf, it may potentially provide new and better resources for tackling complex problems. Can frame divergence between MVCOs and professional services be a potential resource that could increase the value of cooperation between the fields?

The value of communication across frames and frame reflection is not merely that they allow actors to overcome problems that block cooperation. These methods are valuable because different actors bring in a divergent, potentially fruitful understanding of the issue at hand when they employ frames that differ in relevant ways from those of other actors. This article hypothesizes that cooperation between actors can pave the way for new solutions to the issue of parenting support for immigrant parents, which could not be reached by actors separately. I pose the following research questions: What frames do respondents use to make sense of the issue of cooperation? Do professional organizations and volunteer groups have different dominant frames? What role do these frames seem to play in shaping the way in which actors interact with each other? The answers to these questions will be used to consider the extent to which differences in frames potentially enrich our understanding of the issue of parenting support for immigrant parents in particular, and more generally, whether Schön and Rein’s strategies (frame reflection and reframing) constitute a viable method for overcoming the negative consequences of frame divergence, thereby turning frame divergence into a resource.

**Research Methods**

Data were collected between 2010 and 2012 through semistructured interviews, focus groups, and repeated informal contacts with 17 respondents who were core members of MVCOs (volunteers)

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17 See Distelbrink (2009). The preliminary study was conducted through short interviews or informal conversations with different kinds of actors involved in the issue of cooperation between MVCOs and professional services: practitioners, service agency managers, volunteers, local policymakers, and public administrators.
and 14 respondents from professional institutes for parenting support and youth care (professionals). These respondents represented a total of 20 different organizations, of which 12 were MVCOs and 8 were professional organizations. There were no respondents representing more than one of these organizations. The volunteer organizations operated in two neighborhoods with a high percentage of low-income immigrant residents: Amsterdam Zuidoost and Amsterdam Nieuw-West. Since one assumption of the broader research project is that volunteer organizations could help bridge the distance between professional service providers and immigrant communities, I selected MVCOs that reached a substantial number of immigrant families from groups considered hard to reach by public services. This means that the organizations were known, trusted, and regularly visited by parents from marginalized immigrant groups. Moreover, the organizations all had a grassroots character; had all been set up by active citizens (not initiated by outside parties such as companies or funds); and had all directed their activities toward a particular neighborhood or district. The core activities, missions, and ethnic backgrounds of the organizations varied, as did the ethnic backgrounds of the people they helped, but all had parenting as one of their main areas of focus. Finally, in the past few years, all of the MVCOs studied had dealt with the issue of cooperation with professional organizations in some way.

Professionals interviewed included practitioners and managers from various types of service agencies and municipal centers, some of which provided light forms of parenting courses and consulting and others of which offered (in the case of two organizations) more intensive forms of support and help. The majority were practitioners who worked in YFCs and YFC managers employed by the municipality. To understand the policy context of the interview data, the researcher also held informal talks with local district policymakers and examined policy documents.

Interviews and focus groups were designed to investigate the views of both parties concerning their perspectives on potential cooperation. Interviewees were asked if and why cooperation was needed, what form this cooperation should take, and what roles the different parties should play in it. Respondents often told stories about failed cooperation attempts and talked about their work, their aims, and their wishes for the future.

The respondents’ accounts, from interviews and focus groups, were transcribed and then analyzed using frame analysis, which involved performing multiple readings to identify master narratives or main themes. These narratives were then analyzed for generative metaphors and the guidelines for action the metaphors suggested (Schön and Rein 1994) and for the presence of causal stories (Hajer 1995; Van Eeten 1999). Finally, similar narratives (narratives that pointed in the same direction with respect to the selection of specific facts as relevant, specific causal analyses, and specific suggested solutions) were combined and described as one frame. Although there were, of course, differences in the way respondents described the issue of cooperation, clear patterns emerged that distinguished the approaches of different types of actors. The quotes that best expressed the common frames are used to illustrate those frames in the Findings section.

To understand how actors from the different fields interacted with each other and how frame divergence seems to affect those interactions, the researcher spent time within MVCOs and observed interactions between volunteers and professionals during official meetings and casual encounters; such interactions usually, but not always, involved interviewed respondents. Since actual instances of realized cooperation were hard to find, the researcher observed situations in
which the possibility of cooperation was discussed or in which the theme of cooperation was debated among local policymakers and representatives of the professional, YFC organizations and the MVCOs. In total 11 meetings were observed. The researcher participated in these encounters and spent time within the organizations, sometimes as an external observer and sometimes as a participant observer. In the latter case, the researcher offered to help organizations (mostly MVCOs) to organize and set up projects or seek funding. Researchers analyzed field notes from these observations and materials from the interviews in order to map recurrent tensions between the different types of organizations.

One actual cooperative project between two Moroccan MVCOs and one YFC was closely followed through an exciting project of interactive research called YFC on the Spot, inspired by participatory action research, which was conducted as a subset of the overall research project. These three organizations had recently started partnering on YFC-led parenting courses for parents with a Moroccan background affiliated with the MVCOs. In this interactive research, volunteer and professional respondents, together with the researcher, analyzed the dominant frames through which the respondents understood cooperation and the issues that demanded cooperation. The interchange between the researcher’s analysis of the larger project and the research teams’ analysis of YCF on the Spot informed data interpretation and frame analysis in both projects (see chapter 4). The process of making the frames within the cooperative project explicit yielded important insights that aided our understanding, particularly of volunteers’ views, which at first seemed difficult to interpret. Next to this participatory project, other smaller participatory sub-projects were conducted within the research. One concerned the cooperation between a Ghanaian MVCO and two professional parenting support services, which were cooperating to offer better aid to Ghanaian families (see chapter 5). Another concerned an attempt of cooperation between a school and some Moroccan MVCO’s, which however did not last.

Findings

It is remarkable that, when asked about the need for integrating efforts in order to provide parenting support, both volunteer and professional respondents stressed that more should be done to support immigrant families who are not easily reached by professional sources of parenting support, but each accused the other of not being truly interested in cooperation. In the following section, I discuss the perspectives that emerged during the course of the interviews. Despite individual variance, analysis of the similarities and differences in the way respondents articulated the issue shows two distinct, recurring frames centered on two dominant metaphors, which separate the narratives of the professional and volunteer actors: the frame of access and the frame of shared spaces.

Accessibility of Services across Group Differences: The Frame of Access

The first frame that can be clearly detected in the narratives of respondents is what I call the “frame of access.” This frame was dominant in the narratives of many professional workers. It also sometimes appeared in the narratives of volunteers, who used this frame more for strategic purposes than to make sense of their own work. Thus, in describing the frame of access, I will concentrate on the narratives of professional workers.
The frame of access emphasizes the importance of making professional services accessible to all citizens, regardless of their cultural or socioeconomic background. Many families who could benefit do not take advantage of the extensive professional parenting and child development expertise and support available in the Netherlands:

*It is not only a matter of parents with an immigrant background; some native parents are also difficult to reach. Parents think that when you have a child, you also have to be able to raise it. If you ask for help, it means you have failed. This happens more often with lower-educated people. Higher-educated people are better able to free themselves from this idea. ... What is more specific to immigrants is that they can use the excuse, “these are not our people,” to justify the fact that they don’t want to come to the YFC.*

(Marie, YFC manager)

The YFCs aim to be accessible to all parents who have questions about raising children. However, many immigrant parents with low socioeconomic status prefer to keep their difficulties to themselves; they are often reluctant to knock on the doors of YFCs or other professional institution when problems or doubts arise and call on formal services only once problems have escalated. Both professionals and volunteers indicated that resolving problems at this late stage often entails more professional involvement in family life than would have been needed if the parents had sought assistance at an earlier stage or had been provided with tools to prevent problems, such as effective strategies for communicating or bringing structure and coherence to their parenting. When parents finally seek help or are referred to help by their children’s schools, they sometimes take an uncooperative and defensive stance toward the professionals trying to help them due to mistrust of the system.

*Generative Metaphor in the Frame of Access: The Gap*

The central metaphor professionals used to describe the frame of access was a gap or barrier that separates professionals who have answers and solutions, or at least the right tools and expertise to work toward solutions, from immigrant parents and their children who need these tools and expertise. The image of a barrier or threshold is widespread in policy discourse about minorities, especially in the social services domain. An example of this is the Dutch government research and development program Diversity in Youth Policy, which asks how ethnic minorities’ access to youth and family services can be increased. Professionals also used images such as a barrier, a gap, or a threshold to describe how immigrant parents experiencing problems have trouble connecting with the professional workers who could help them.

*Surely it is easier to say, “My baby is crying all the time, what should I do?” than turning up with a story like, “I cannot manage to get my adolescent daughter to listen to me.” However, these are really questions we can help with if people find their way to us and overcome the barriers that make it difficult to talk about these problems.* (Aman, YFC-based professional parenting counselor)

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18 To preserve anonymity, the names of respondents were replaced with pseudonyms, and identifying information was replaced with initials or generic descriptions.
When asked how the distance or gap can be explained, respondents (both professionals and volunteers) highlighted different aspects of immigrant families or communities that they did not feel were compatible with the system of support in the Netherlands. Indeed, respondents using the frame of access universally characterized the gap by referencing shortcomings on the side of the families. For example, some explained that parents simply do not know about the existence of services or are not familiar with this kind of support and thus cannot understand what advantage they could gain from it. Some professional respondents defined the barrier as a general distance between professional workers and common people and felt that, for immigrant families, this distance might be somewhat larger if professional aid, particularly parenting support, in their country of origin was less common. Language barriers and parents’ unfamiliarity with and utter distrust of professional parenting services and the perception that parenting support might be a gateway into the youth care system at large were also raised as problems. As Marie’s comment suggests, some respondents felt that a reluctance to get noticed by the system, which is also common among nonimmigrants, was the real reason behind claims of cultural difference.

Most respondents, however, described the barrier as a direct expression of cultural distance and of the cultural isolation of immigrant groups in Dutch society. Ethnocultural aspects of the gap, such as taboos on talking about parenting problems and pressure from the ethnic community to keep problems inside the community, separate families in need from the help that is available. Overcoming barriers in order to access professional parenting assistance, then, becomes a part of the process of integration into Dutch society. In this view, professional counseling can be a means to transcending the limiting effects of traditional cultural habits or beliefs.

How should I say this. … It is important that parents become able to put the parenting practices of their own culture into perspective, that people become conscious of how it works here. The risk is that professionals remain mired in the culture of the immigrants and fail to move beyond it. However, it is also important that immigrant parents understand how we parent in the Netherlands. Indeed, my own experience is that, in courses with immigrant parents, it is really hard for them at the beginning, but eventually it becomes such an eye-opener! (Nienke, YFC manager)

It is our expectation that these organizations [MVCOs] fulfill a bridge function. I think this wouldn’t be needed if people didn’t have the idea that there is some threshold to overcome. This threshold is just in their head, we are in fact very accessible. So the first thing we need is volunteers who see this, and are just willing to make the effort to refer parents to us. Of course I see she [the MVCO chair] wants to give parenting advice herself. But … let me put it like this: It would be nice if she realized that she should leave this to someone who really knows what he is talking about. (Suzanne, YFC head)

With the gap comes the need for a bridge. The gap metaphor has a diagnostic-prescriptive character that leads to the notion that bridges must be created to connect these two separate realities. Thus, professional respondents tended to consider cooperation with MVCOs a way of building bridges that allow immigrants access to the parenting support services they offer.
Strengthening Informal Support Networks: The Frame of Shared Spaces

Although the frame of access is also used by volunteers, especially when they are explicitly engaged in negotiating their position in the formal network of service providers, volunteers more commonly employ a different frame, which I call the “frame of shared spaces.” Volunteers use this frame when making sense of their work, when describing the issue of parenting support for immigrant families, and when arguing in favor of cooperation with professional services.

In the frame of access, the primary focus is on the work of volunteers in the neighborhood. This frame draws attention to the belief that both parenting problems and their solutions can arise from the social dynamics between neighborhood inhabitants or community members. Troubles are rooted in relationships between people, and people can find strength in each other for improvement. The role of the volunteers who have set up the MVCOs is central in this story. Respondents employing the frame of access spoke of how these volunteers sense and understand immigrant parents’ difficulties because they belong to the same group and have possibly had the same experiences as parents or children. Their connections with people enhance their ability to initiate a process of change in the community, in which community members become more active in tackling various types of problems, such as problems in the sphere of parenting. This change takes place in small steps that may be difficult for authorities or donors to see but are nonetheless decisive for improving the situation.

Catalyzing Change within a Community

Ahmed, the founder of an association reaching mostly Moroccan inhabitants in the Nieuw-West area, provides an eloquent example of the frame of shared spaces. When asked about his organization’s role in providing parenting support and its possible cooperation with the YFC, Ahmed engaged in a historical narrative about the neighborhood to explain the aims of his organization. His story traces back to a time when his neighborhood began attracting media attention because of problems with its youth. This attention shook up the residents and triggered a discussion of the situation, facilitated by organizations such as his.

Until that period of disruption, children were in some respect left to themselves. Parents weren’t involved in what happened at school or on the streets. The strong negative media hype offered an occasion for discussion in the neighborhood, making it possible for people to talk about the situation and, in the end, to recognize that there were some problems. Before that, the Moroccan community had been highly defensive and did not go in search of solutions. But somehow, when you are following the news and following the political discussions, and you live among these people, being one of them, you become a kind of thermometer for the neighborhood. You start to feel when some happening, some media hype, can be used to wake people up and stimulate discussion. And so we did. What happened was that parents came and started giving advice about how to handle their children. The children were much more quiet and obedient at home than when outside. So a situation arose in which parents wanted to share the strategies they used at home to help at school, to keep order in the class. We also invited them to help during our activities with children. And from there we took it one step further: parents started talking to children on the streets and calling them out on their behavior. So a new kind of interaction came about. Instead of, “The school complains about you,”
or “The government complains about you,” parents heard, “We are looking for solutions together with you.” From this feeling of “we are on the same side” came an opening to see and recognize the problems concerning one’s own children. At that point you can help parents understand that they can do much more themselves to help their children before youth care or the police become involved, before major problems arise. Then parenting support services like the YFC can offer real help, but from a different starting point. Parents are in the lead, looking for solutions. (Ahmed, MVCO chair)

Ahmed tells a story of changing community dynamics due to negative media hype concerning Moroccan youth and relates its influence on his neighborhood in particular, explaining how it set in motion a process that led to a different interaction between parents, children, schools, and government institutions. According to Ahmed, as a result of this new interaction, parents eventually let go of their defensive stance and denial to actively engage in improving the situation and thinking about what they could do differently as parents. Ahmed further explained in the interview that, only after this point was reached could one offer parents advice or suggest the possibility of consulting professional parenting support. Many volunteers employed this frame by focusing attention on the process of formulating a demand, which they conceived as empowering parents to take control of their own situations, possibilities, and needs from their own points of view and positions.

It is interesting to note the importance Ahmed places on the moment when parents perceived that others recognized the importance of their role. Respondents seemed to believe that addressing parents from the beginning as capable people with parenting expertise who can contribute to a solution to a shared problem is essential for initiating dialogue with parents and encouraging them to share their experiences and learn from others. These others may be volunteers, community members, or any other pedagogic advisors, including professional workers, provided that they do not present themselves as uncontested experts and are prepared to share a common space of dialogue and learning.

Indeed, volunteers mostly thought that parents started reflecting on parenting and parenting difficulties as the result of a collective process that happens when parents interact in a space they perceive as their own. Leyla, chair of another MVCO, explained:

> If you want mothers to talk about child rearing, their experiences and difficulties, you have to be silent. You have to just offer tea and coffee, get mothers chatting around a table, and listen. Don’t say anything, just listen. Only when they have become closer with each other, when certain issues have come up, then can you ask questions and ask whether or not they would like to know more or to talk with some expert about the issue they just brought up themselves. … At that point, you can invite a professional to talk with them, to come and sit with them at that very table, to take part in a conversation they already started. That is exactly what we do.

Volunteers saw that one of the root causes of parents’ uncooperative stances is that parents believe that others (service providers, the government, the media) attribute problems to them that they do not recognize in themselves. Volunteers seemed to feel that parents must make the first motion for change. They viewed catalyzing this process as one of the fundamental roles of volunteers.
Unlike Ahmed, who characterized a peak in negative media attention about Moroccan youth as the central disruptive event that opened the possibility of change, most other volunteers stated that the negative image of youth (and parents) from specific immigrant groups in Dutch media and society is one of the main reasons for the distance between parents and pedagogic support institutions. Anti-immigrant feelings in the Netherlands are often expressed through criticism of immigrant youth and parenting. Therefore, according to volunteers, parents from many immigrant groups feel misjudged and insecure. The fact that Dutch society appears to point its finger at immigrants’ parenting ability makes it hard for these parents to accept help or advice from professionals that represent the official Dutch system.

**Generative Metaphor in the Frame of Shared Spaces: The Immigrant Organization as a Workplace**

Listening and observing, coupled with the subtle ability to distill the seeds of change, seem to be the keys to success in the MVCOs, which offer a space for this process to develop and for core volunteers to help nurture it. If the generative metaphor in the frame of access is that of a gap or barrier, the frame of shared spaces is conveyed by the metaphor of the workplace.19

> Our organization is a kind of workplace; we try out different things. ... The activities we do for the parents come from the activities we do with the children, of what we see there. If we observe a problem with the children, we ask a few parents to come along and help. The idea is that, just by interacting with the children in a common space, parents start to help each other. The ones who are more secure help parents who have more difficulty but in an informal, almost casual, way. (Ahmed, MVCO chair)

The workplace is a site of informal encounters, in which serious work is nevertheless accomplished. Informality is a necessary instrument for the volunteers’ work, which requires them to go along with spontaneous occurrences. This frame entails a comprehensive, holistic understanding of what happens inside shared spaces, which are loci for informality and mutual support. Inside these spaces, problems, often arising from the dynamics within these spaces, can come to the surface and possibilities for resolution can be found. The image of the workplace was sometimes used to describe shared spaces inside the volunteer organization, but it was also used to refer to the neighborhood as a whole. In addition to the workplace, another frequently used spatial image is that of the home. Volunteers also often described the premises of the MVCO as a living room where people can have a cup of coffee and feel at home. The central idea of the home metaphor is that informality and the feeling of being on one’s own terrain are important conditions for triggering a process of change for parents and children. Volunteers also repeatedly used the kitchen table as a metaphor.

> The most important things we do are not so much the formal activities we organize, but the informal talks in the kitchen. Other organizations in this building say we do too much chatting and we’re always making noise in the kitchen, but that chatting is the most

19 The term “workplace” (werkplaats in Dutch) signifies a place, shop, or atelier where people work together, for instance in manufacturing. It suggests ideas of industrious activity, perseverant effort, trying out techniques, and pursuing concrete results (activities which are attributed to a collective of people of the neighborhood). This metaphor, used explicitly by two respondents to characterize the work done within their organizations, nicely conveys the way in which many volunteers talked about their organizations.
important thing we do! It is at the kitchen table that it all happens, really. There, all the problems that women experience, but never talk about, pop up in conversation. (Amina, MVCO volunteer)

The idea of space that emerges from volunteers’ stories is comparable to the concept of safe spaces from black feminist emancipation movements (Collins 2000). These spaces help marginalized individuals feel safe enough to help each other construct positive images of themselves that contrast with the negative images produced in societal discourses.

If cooperation between MVCOs and statutory services is an evolving enterprise that allows for linking elements of different frames, the two frames described above, the frame of access and the frame of shared spaces, appear to have valuable and interesting contrasts and resources for mutual learning. However, the frames are also constitutive elements of long-standing tensions between the two fields. In the following section, I introduce some ways that the two divergent frames produced negative consequences in mutual interactions. I will elaborate on the tensions that emerged in the Discussion section.

Contrasting Expectations Regarding Cooperation

The normative leaps suggested by the two frames prescribe different models of cooperation. In the frame of access, the metaphor of the gap indicates the need for a bridge. Fruitful cooperation with MVCOs will thus consist in their acting as bridges or bridge builders who can connect the extensive system of professional support to people who need it the most. The frame of access story naturally flows into a call for volunteers to capitalize on their contacts and relationships with their communities. The other aims and activities of the volunteer organizations are not directly relevant in this frame; their position in the community is of the most value.

The most important thing is not filling the courses; it’s reaching the people who need it most, that they find their way to us before problems get tough. Immigrant organizations reach some of these people more easily. They have the trust and respect of their community, and they often have contact with families struggling with parenting problems or insecurities. (Elizabeth, YFC manager)

MVCOs can help change people’s negative images of professional services so that they begin to see YFCs not just as places to take parenting courses but as places where they are welcome to come with all their questions. In the access frame, this is the most valuable contribution MVCOs can make toward solving parenting problems in their neighborhood.

A very different normative prescription comes from the workplace metaphor of the frame of shared spaces, which generates the expectation that professionals join volunteers within the safe spaces created literally within immigrant organizations. The workplace is an experimental space in which people work together. People standing outside the workplace are observers. Anyone wanting to contribute to a process of change must come inside and join in. This suggests that practitioners from professional agencies should come inside the safe spaces created by MVCOs and start helping to get the work done. Most volunteer respondents considered a connection with professional expertise in parenting support as potentially valuable, but they viewed the idea that volunteers
should act as bridges to connect parents to YFC parenting courses as misconceived. The YFC did not count (at least not yet) as a safe shared space for parents.

_The YFC is not seen by mothers as a place of their own. This is the difference with [name of her organization]. The YFC is a place where you go for compulsory medical controls and where you get criticized because your son is overweight. It is not the place you go to share your experience as a mother with others. ... So I simply cannot just refer them to the YFC; they would feel abandoned._ (Layla, MVCO chair)

Although both professional and volunteer respondents stressed the importance of working toward cooperation, deep-rooted traces of skepticism and distrust appeared in the answers of nearly all respondents. The interviews revealed that sporadic contact and attempts to approach each other for cooperation mostly reinforced those negative feelings. Thus, the frames that structured respondents’ perceptions and definitions of problems also fueled and maintained their distrust for one another because they produced contrasting expectations concerning appropriate behavior.

**Feelings of Distrust and Negative Images**

A number of volunteers explained that they were upset by the approaches of professional parenting counselors, which they experienced as quick and instrumental. At most, practitioners dropped by the MVCO with a parenting course brochure and asked volunteers to encourage parents to attend the courses without showing any interest in what the MVCO itself was already doing. This seemed to make the volunteers feel that the professionals were more concerned with attendance for their courses than with actually doing something for parents who needed their support; otherwise, they would offer their expertise and knowledge to reinforce the work of the volunteers who were able to leverage informal processes to achieve change.

_It would be a relief, seriously, if a professional organization would ever come to me and say, “Look, we are paid to tackle these issues. Let us help. Let us take over part of your work. Tell us how we can help.” But that has not been the case. I got the feeling she just wanted to fill her courses and she needed my help to contact parents. But that is useless. No one wants to go there, and there is a reason for that. ... In the end, the real work will fall back on me again._ (Anna, MVCO chair)

_I know that, in Zuidoost, professionals have problems earning the trust of families they could and should help. But not one service agency has ever approached us with the question, “What’s going wrong here? Why does this family misunderstand us?”... And then I just start thinking, “They do not really want the problems to be solved.” Because if you really do, you use all the cards you have. I don’t care if you have certain performance records to fulfill. That means you are missing your actual aim._ (Azra, MVCO volunteer)

As these quotes illustrate, in the actual dynamics, the frame of shared spaces contributed to the construction of a negative image of the professional organizations that attempt to make contact with MVCOs. Volunteers described professional organizations as selfish, market-oriented, and incapable of seeing the importance of a safe space. As volunteers perceived them through the frame of shared spaces, professionals expected volunteer organizations to help them achieve their own
goals even though the volunteers were already overloaded with the burden of delivering the support that professionals were not able to give to immigrant families.

What we do, we do it for our women, not for the [government] institutes. We think it is necessary to create these spaces for them. But in the end this means that we are the ones facing the problems that emerge. ... And we must do this for nothing, while some professional gets paid to sit in his office. I can do it for free, for some time ... but the feeling of being used by the institutions to reach their own goals is too much. (Alice, MVCO chair)

This instrumental stance, reproduced in the frame of access, seems to foster frustration and the feeling of being used in MVCO volunteers. Conversely, professionals, reasoning through their own frame of access, reported feeling bitterly disappointed by volunteers’ reactions to their attempts to work together. Professionals who contacted MVCOs did so with the aim of reaching actors who were in the position to act as bridges and who had the information necessary for that role. Professionals seemed to interpret volunteers’ reluctance to refer parents to their services as a selfish protection of their own realm of influence.

The most important thing is that key members of immigrant organizations are themselves convinced that the step toward us is not too big to take. And that they convey trust in us. If the immigrant organizations themselves are convinced the step is too big, the step remains too big. (Suzanne, YFC head)

People from immigrant organizations have a better view on who needs support in their community. They are the first to receive signals that something is wrong. The ideal situation is that someone like that accompanies the one needing advice or help to a professional service agency. But I don’t think this happens that often actually. ... I get the feeling that what they actually are after is doing it [the parenting support] themselves. (Lucy, professional parenting counselor)

To professionals employing the frame of access, being in the position to act as bridges and preferring not to fulfill that role means choosing to keep the gap in place. Since the gap itself was often conceived in terms of ethnocultural distance, expressed by the lack of integration of immigrant parents, the disillusionment of professionals who reached out to MVCOs reinforced their perception of MVCOs as bastions that want to exert their own influence on members of their community. As a result, professional respondents often pictured volunteers as mirroring, and thus reinforcing, the distance and distrust that parents have toward formal services. When asked how an immigrant organization would prove itself trustworthy, a professional active in Zuidoost replied:

The proof for me would be that they actually refer parents to the YFC. They say they do. D [an MVCO volunteer] keeps on talking about the fact that she’s doing the preliminary work that is necessary to lead people to help. But I must be honest, I have not seen one parent who has come here and said that he was referred by her. (Elizabeth, YFC manager)

The apparent lack of help can make some professionals question whether cooperation is worthwhile. Indeed, Elizabeth (quoted above) eventually decided to stop investing time in making contact with immigrant organizations.
Immigrant Organizations Aligning with the Frame of Access to Legitimize Their Position

Although the frame of shared spaces, as I have described it, captures the way in which volunteer respondents make sense of their work and justify their expectations toward professionals, volunteers sometimes align with the frame of access when they are explicitly negotiating their position in the system of social support and legitimizing their work in relation to professional services. Many volunteers claimed that institutional recognition of their organizations was insufficient. They argued that the material importance of their social contributions was not adequately matched by institutional support, describing their function as bridge builders who could close the gap between professional services’ offerings and parents’ demands. They claimed that policymakers should value their work and deem it just as important as that of the formally recognized parenting support services. This idea appeared sporadically in interviews with volunteers, but two respondents particularly emphasized it, both in interviews and in observations of their interactions with professionals. These respondents were intensely concerned about the continuity of their organizations, which they would have liked to turn into government-funded service suppliers. They described their organizations as “indispensable links” between existing services and parents who are not able to find their way to these services alone due to different kinds of cultural barriers and insecurities.

It is actually strange that a role as important as ours is left to the spontaneous initiative of volunteer organizations. It is organizations like ours that can lower the barrier for parents who need help. … People from Ghana are not used to sharing problems with others. They fear that their story will become known by others. It is difficult even for me to get them to talk about it. So you really have to win their trust and then take them by the hand to professional services. This is crucial work—prework—that is needed before professional counseling can be accepted. (Alice, MVCO chair)

In aligning with the frame of access, these respondents reproduced the image of parents being limited by their cultural backgrounds, which also appeared in the narratives of professionals. However, from the observations and interviews, it appeared that, even though they reached many parents who they perceived as being marginalized, these volunteer organizations struggled to actually refer parents to professional services due to what they described as a dependence relationship that had developed between parents and volunteers.

I tried to back off at some point and convince him [a Ghanaian father needing help] that P [professional counselor] could help him further. But the point is also that, in our culture, older people do not accept advice from younger people, so that makes it very difficult for him. He thinks, “You could be my daughter and you’re supposed to tell me how to handle problems with my kids?” (Danielle, MVCO volunteer)

Volunteers talked of their function as bridge builders but seemed to fail to channel parents to professional counselors, which appears to have greatly fueled professionals’ distrust. Professionals depicted these volunteers as saying one thing and doing another, or as having a double agenda.
Discussion

I describe two distinct frames that volunteers and professionals used to conceptualize how immigrant parents should be supported. The frame of access professionals used emphasizes the barriers that obstruct professional counseling and coaching of parents in need of support. In contrast, the frame of shared spaces volunteers used emphasizes spaces for empowerment in which community members can be helped to understand their position in society, including their role as parents, and can come to see both existing difficulties and possibilities for change. The dominance of the frame of access in the professional field is not surprising, since this frame places importance on expert knowledge and the general availability of government-financed support. The frame of access values principles of equality and state involvement in the well-being of citizens established in the welfare state, whereas the frame of shared spaces reflects values that have more in common with an emancipatory discourse (a discourse in which emancipation is central).

Frame Divergence as a Resource for Innovative Solutions

A few different aspects should be considered when evaluating the extent to which frame divergence can be seen as a potential resource benefiting cooperative efforts. First, it is important to consider the relevance of the frame of shared spaces in the current policy context, in this case, of the Netherlands’ new policy for social services. The aims of recent developments in youth care and parenting support policies, as well as general developments in Dutch social policy, are in tune with the values of the frame of shared spaces. The new policy encourages citizens to be more actively and consciously involved in their own well-being. This concerns not just individual parents, but the social environment around families and within neighborhoods. The new policy aims to reduce dependence on intensive forms of professional help and state support while at the same time strengthening the pedagogic environment in which children grow up so that major problems are prevented from developing.

It is not difficult to draw parallels between the frame of shared spaces, as described above, and the pedagogical ideas that greatly contributed to the conceptual framework of this new policy. For instance, the shared spaces perspective is in tune with the idea that tackling youth-related problems requires a shift in focus from what happens behind the front door to what happens outside the front door, focusing on the neighborhood and on the social relations within what Micha De Winter calls the educative civil society (De Winter 2012). Similarly, it is in harmony with claims that medical pedagogic or educational psychology perspectives on child-rearing problems should be replaced by sociopedagogic views that normalize parenting difficulties (Hermanns 2009).

If cooperation between MVCOs and professional services is an evolving enterprise that allows for linking elements of different frames, the two frames appear to have valuable contrasts and resources for mutual learning. Thus, it seems likely that processes of reframing in action (in the context of concrete cooperative settings between the two fields), as described by Schön and Rein, could produce fruitful perspectives by connecting the frame of professionals, centered on equal rights to access, with the frame of volunteers, focusing on citizen empowerment. The notions of safe spaces and the workplace metaphor express a bottom-up understanding of activation, embodied in the everyday practice of MVCOs, that could provide one form of practical fulfillment of the citizen activation and mutual support called for by this new policy.
Frame divergence is also an expression of the value of having a diversity of practices and expertise. In line with what Schön and Rein term a hopeful perspective, concrete cooperative projects in which actors reflect on frame differences would offer opportunities for cogeneration of a common frame of action that is adapted throughout the process. While professionals could become familiar with the daily MVCO practices that embody aspects of the new policy vision, volunteers could incorporate professional pedagogic expertise. They may even begin to see professional expertise as a useful tool for their emancipatory objectives if empowerment programs were reframed to help immigrant parents feel welcome and safe at their local YFCs. The new framing of the problem could then be considered a possible resource for innovation, making cooperation between professionals and volunteers all the more valuable.

However, in this study, frame divergence only adds value on a conceptual, abstract level. In practice, actors employed frames to solidify their positions toward each other. Thus, the frame divergence itself played a pivotal role in structuring and fueling conflict between professionals and volunteers. The two groups’ different ways of conceptualizing the parenting issue could have functioned as a resource, but since the actors were directly involved in the solutions that the different generative metaphors projected, the frames led to opposing expectations of cooperative behavior. Moreover, my findings show that this happened in a context of relations characterized by tension, power struggles, and inequality, which cannot be ignored. This reinforces the claims of critics who are skeptical of Habermas-inspired ideas of cross-frame communication, such as Schön and Rein’s, that postulate the possibility of power-free interactions.

**Conflict and Tension**

At least two profound tensions emerge from the data. First, through the use of the different frames, professional and volunteer actors in this study negotiate boundaries between different fields, including responsibilities, areas of competence, and expertise that belong to these fields. On one side is the formal system of parenting support and youth care in the Netherlands, which is characterized by strong professionalism combined, in recent decades, with rising demands for public accountability and performance. On the other side is the field of MVCO volunteers who, through the frame of shared spaces, construct the informality that characterizes their work as an ideal ground for providing informal and formal parenting support. This frame disrupts the institutionalized primacy of professional support, constructing parenting support as something that actually belongs more in the sphere of community relations.

This perspective is confined to the circle of MVCOs, and their views are hardly heard in the debate on cooperation between informal support and professional services. As mentioned previously, the frame of shared spaces shares striking commonalities with the general ideals of the policy transformation. However, when the subject is specifically immigrant families and the role of the MVCOs, the frame of access defines that role in the eyes of public managers, professionals, and local policymakers who have secure positions and audible voices in the system and its ongoing development.

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20 Schön and Rein (1994) draw on Albert Hirschman’s bias toward hope. Hirschman’s work on disparate areas is permeated by the conviction that, despite the complexity of human institutions and their development, “societal development and institutional reform may be deliberately pursued through the exercise of human reason” (quoted in Schön and Rein 1994, 55). He stresses how difficulties and tensions in disparate social realities can function as stimuli for collective learning.
transformation. In contrast, MVCO chairs have a fragile position with low authority and financial security. The volunteers in this study who explicitly tried to secure a position for themselves in the system ended up aligning with the dominant frame of access. They pictured themselves as bridges and defined their role as an indispensable element of service delivery within the institutional system of support.

However, in aligning with the frame of access, these volunteers also distanced themselves from their emancipatory aims by reproducing disempowering images of the immigrant families involved. Although the concept of access appears to suggest an effort toward more equality in the use of collective provisions, the frame of access, as employed by respondents, pushes all of the responsibility for change onto the shoulders of immigrant families. Respondents using this frame described the metaphorical gap in a way that referred exclusively to limitations of the families, who in the frame of access are constructed as problematic actors. The frame of access is thus centered on the belief that immigrant families lack the necessary ability to cross the threshold, mostly as a result of their sociocultural background.

This issue relates to the second tension emerging from the interplay of the two frames in interactions between the actors studied: the position of immigrants and immigrant organizations in Dutch society and the opposition between immigrants and nonimmigrants. Recent data show that, in the pedagogic realm, immigrant-based volunteer organizations have less cooperation with professional services than do native-based volunteer organizations (Van der Klein, Mak, and Van der Gaag 2011). As Nicole Breninkmeier and Halleh Ghorashi illustrate (2009), MVCOs occupy a somewhat paradoxical position in the Dutch welfare system. While immigrant organizations see themselves as agents of change and are often identified as key actors when it comes to issues related to emancipation, government agencies often treat them as mere executors and translators of government policy (Breninkmeier and Ghorashi 2009).

Policymakers expect MVCOs to reproduce hegemonic discourses that are at odds with the emancipatory changes they work to promote in their communities. These discourses construct immigrants as a problematic category: a group characterized by socioeconomic arrears that should be better incorporated into the professional system rather than being allowed to cultivate difference through collective processes. This is reflected in the assumptions of the dominant integration discourse that, since the 1990s, has linked improving the socioeconomic position of immigrants through integration into Dutch norms and values in a way that distances immigrants from their own cultural values. This has created a blind spot in Dutch policy discourse regarding the potential role of MVCOs in promoting cultural awareness and equality by giving space to perspectives from the margins (see chapter 2). The dominant thinking, which focuses on cultural uniformity, exacerbates the conflict between the fields because it puts the onus on MVCOs to embrace the expectations of professionals as a test of loyalty to Dutch norms and values (Breninkmeier and Ghorashi 2009). The construction of MVCOs as actors whose loyalty must be tested is reproduced and sustained through the frame of access employed by those in the professional field. In this sense, as long as immigrant organizations are assessed by whether they propagate Dutch values or nourish difference by promoting the cultural values of immigrant communities, it is unlikely that the frame of shared spaces will be recognized as embodying the values of the youth policy transformation.
Conclusion

The question of whether frame divergence can be seen as a positive resource can be answered in both the positive and the negative. Indeed, on a purely conceptual and analytical level, the two frames employed by the volunteers and professionals present beneficial differences. The variety of ideas, norms, worldviews, and expert knowledge embedded in them implies a potential for crafting innovative solutions. However, the realization of such solutions through a process of reframing seems unlikely in the context of this study.

The frame divergence regarding parenting support for distanced immigrant families is embedded in a complex discursive field that sustains inequality, reproduces underlying tensions, and prevents recognition of the frame of shared spaces as a source for innovation. Moreover, the frame divergence fuels mutual distrust and conflict, making the necessary conditions for frame reflection and innovative reframing difficult to attain. Indeed, the controversy over parenting support for Amsterdam’s immigrant communities is not simply a conflict of values rooted in different types of intellectual and experiential knowledge but a conflict concerning loyalty, respective competencies and responsibilities, and legitimacy. It is a conflict between parties with highly unequal power relations that does not easily allow for mutual understanding.

In this context, the actual interactions informed by the frame divergence do not simply result in dialogues of the deaf; they affect a dynamic of interaction, rooted in profound tensions and patterns of inequality, which produces and reinforces distrust. In such a setting, processes of reframing are difficult to imagine, as are the conditions of openness, empathy, rationality, and trust that Schön and Rein prescribe as necessary for frame reflection. In this case, neglecting the ways which power struggles and inequality inform relations, as indicated by critics of Habermas such as Bent Flyvbjerg (1998) and Jean Hillier (2003), appears to be a limitation of frame reflection and reframing.

This drawback does not mean that reaching solutions through frame reflection and reframing is impossible, that these two processes cannot function as a strong basis of cooperation in specific cases. However, this study suggests that, in order to be successful, these processes may have to involve reflection on the societal positions of the actors involved, with specific attention to power differences (chapter 4 describes of one attempt to work in this direction). Coming to terms with frame divergence and the mutual distrust it produces will entail tackling reciprocal tensions and relations that transcend the communicative setting itself, as well as taking into account the broader discursive context that informs the image and social role of immigrant organizations.
References


