



International disaster response: Strengthening the legal-organizational approach

Applicants

Eligible proposals must have two (and only two) applicants from different disciplines within the Network Institute.

Supervisor Name	Department/Group	Faculty
1. Peter Groenewegen	Organization Sciences	FSW
2. Arno Lodder	Internet Governance	Law

Project description

Provide a brief description of the project (max. 300 words)

The vast scale and impact of disaster relief calls for joint efforts among the international community. This applies to disasters emerging from natural events (such as earthquakes) as well as from political conflicts (such as the stream of refugees fleeing war-torn areas).

International disaster response is increasingly organized in the form of civil-military interventions, sanctioned through international law United Nations resolutions. Civil-military responses are often organized in a top-down, 'command and control' manner (Quarantelli & Dynes, 1977). However, at the same time, international disaster response often emerges in the form of bottom-up efforts, self-organized by affected citizens and their local and international networks, for instance through online, crowdsourced initiatives (Wolbers et al., in press). However, the question as to how legal frameworks oriented toward civil-military interventions can accommodate these bottom-up, online initiatives remains unanswered (Biersteker et al., finalizing for submission).

Efforts toward a more coordinated disaster response in the international sphere have received much attention from both a legal and an organizational approach. Legal scholars have for instance addressed the tension between state sovereignty and international responses to disasters (Heath, 2011), and the interplay between national and international regulatory frameworks (Mosquini, 2011). Scholars of organization sciences in turn, have been investigating how different stakeholders in disaster response – both formal and informal – can better align their response efforts (Boersma et al., 2014), taking into consideration new sources of information in the form of online, crowdsourced initiatives, which transcend national boundaries.

The lack of understanding of how legal parameters can better represent changing modes of disaster relief and vice versa lead to uncertainty among those responsible for international response work, inhibiting the effectiveness of response efforts. This proposed project seeks to address this deficit in understanding, toward the development of an interdisciplinary, legal-organization sciences approach toward international disaster response.

Project Organization

Each proposal requests two Academy Assistants from different disciplines. Describe their roles and describe the skills and expertise required from them. (max. 300 words)

We will study how international law related to disasters has evolved over the years, and how established international legal parameters accommodate or inhibit coordination among international relief stakeholders, and in particular crowdsourced relief platforms. Data sources related to the former involve resolutions developed by the United Nations Security Council (SC) and General Assembly (GA), which provides the international legal framework for international disaster response. Data sources related to the latter involve the messages shared through an online crowdsourcing platform. In analyzing these sources, we envisage two phases.

During the first phase, the Law-based Assistant will collect and interpret UN resolutions in the light of the aforementioned question. This calls for qualitative analytical skills and a legal background in international law, preferably with the familiarity of the legal parameters affecting online platforms.

This is complemented by a Social Sciences Academy Assistant who will gather and analyze messages shared on an online crowdsourcing platform during a historical natural disaster involving international relief, using quantitative semantic and qualitative interpretive methods. In so doing, the Assistant will identify where coordination challenges might give rise to legal questions in terms of for instance privacy-sensitive information, or national versus international interests. The Social Sciences Assistant should thus be familiar with semantic analytical methods, and familiarity with legal questions is preferred¹.

These analyses will be comparatively analyzed by the Assistants, yielding insight into how international legal frameworks accommodate or inhibit international disaster coordination between civil-military and crowdsourced responses.

During the second phase, both students will collaboratively conduct follow-up interviews with disaster responders at different levels of international disaster response to verify their findings and generate suggestions for resolving the legal and coordination tensions identified in phase one. This calls for qualitative skills for conducting and analyzing interviews (including identifying appropriate respondents, available through the main applicants' networks).

[299 words]

Collaboration

Describe how your research improves collaboration and cross-pollination between the disciplines involved (max. 300 words)

In order to improve international disaster response, there is a need for better understanding of how changing response paradigms – shifting from a top-down, command and control approach, toward a bottom-up, coordination and continuity approach – can be accommodated by legal and organizational frameworks. For instance, privacy concerns or questions of state sovereignty often inhibit the possibility to share disaster information and enable international response. Moreover, online platforms are yielding increasingly important sources of information, but the veracity of such information is difficult to determine and the possibilities to include them legally in disaster response frameworks is questionable.

By combining Organization Sciences knowledge on disaster coordination, information systems research, and knowledge sharing in international settings, with Legal Sciences knowledge on Internet-based information and international law, we can contribute to developing international disaster coordination from a legal-organizational approach.

In addition to the applicants, the research team will be complemented with other scholars in both departments with methodological and topical expertise, thereby establishing a broad basis in both departments for the further development of the research topic.

[173 words]

¹ We have our eyes set on a suitable (and willing) student who is currently completing his MSc in Law, with a BSc in Criminology and a BSc in Public Administration and Organization (B&O), and who will start his MSc in Organization Sciences next year.

Deliverables

Enumerate intended project results: papers, research proposals or otherwise. (max 200 words)

Project outcomes include:

- One paper presenting the organizational significance of a legal-organizational approach to international disaster response, submitted to a Social Sciences journal focusing on disaster coordination, such as *Disasters* or the *Journal of Contingency and Crisis Management*
- One paper outlining the legal significance of online sources of disaster information and their implications for international legal frameworks, submitted to an appropriate legal conference.
- The outlines of an interdisciplinary PhD research proposal to further develop a legal-organizational perspective on disaster coordination.
- One interdisciplinary workshop involving VU-based scholars from Law and Social Sciences faculty interested in the topic of international disaster coordination and internet-based response.

[103 words]

Planning

Provide a breakdown of the project into phases with tentative timing (max 150 words)

- September 2016: Project kick-off, fine-tune project objectives with Assistants
- October – December 2016: literature review (both Assistants)
Phase 1:
- January 2017: data collection UN Resolutions (Law Assistant) and online, crowdsourced information (Social Sciences Assistant)
- February 2017: data analysis phase 1
- March 2017: comparative analysis both data sources and initial recommendations
Phase 2:
- April 2017: follow-up interviews and development of final recommendations
- May 2017: interdisciplinary workshop
- May – June 2017: complete papers
- June 2017: develop outlines of PhD research proposal

[76 words]

Please respect the word count limits: proposals that exceed the stated limits will not be eligible.

References

Biersteker, E., Ferguson, J.E., Groenewegen, P., Beersma, B. Toward a legal perspective on crisis coordination: How information managers cope with the tension between privacy and coherence (finalizing for submission to *Journal of Homeland Security and Emergency Management*)

Boersma, F.K., Ferguson, J.E., Groenewegen, P. & Wolbers, J.J. (2014). Beyond the Myth of Control: Toward network switching in disaster management. In S.R. Hiltz, M.S. Pfaff, L. Plotnick, and P.C. Shih, eds. (Ed.), *Proceedings of the 11th International ISCRAM Conference* (pp. 123-127).

Heath, J. B. (2011). Disasters, relief, and neglect: the duty to accept humanitarian assistance and the work of the International Law Commission. *New York University Journal of International Law and Politics (JILP)*, 43(2), 419.

Mosquini, E. (2011). Are Lawyers Unsung Disaster Heroes: The Importance of Well-Prepared Domestic Legal and Regulatory Frameworks for Effective Disaster Response. *Emory International Law Review.*, 25, 1217-1232.

Quarantelli, E. L., & Dynes, R. R. (1977). Response to social crisis and disaster. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 23-49.

Wolbers, J.J., Boersma, F.K., Ferguson, J.E., Groenewegen, P., Mulder, F. (in press). Two faces of disaster response. Transcending the dichotomy of control and collaboration during the Nepal earthquake relief operation. *International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disasters*.

VU Academy Assistants Proposal 201-2017

*Send completed proposals to: akademiestudent.fsw@vu.nl, before **10 June 2016 at 12.00pm**. An independent committee will evaluate the proposals; subsequent notification of the committee decision will be given on 1 July.*