

Deservingness as practice: Deservingness practices in mobilizing, coordinating, and evaluating crisis support

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The importance of deservingness criteria like the CARIN typology (Oorshot 2000) for deciding on the question of who deserves help which underlies the regulation of distribution of welfare is well established. However, the process of negotiating and interpreting these criteria has received little attention, theoretical as well as empirical. In this paper, we conceptualize the process of negotiating the contents of deservingness criteria as *deservingness practice*.

With the advent of social media (SoMe) and subsequent increase in informal civil society volunteering distributing vast amounts of welfare provisions through voluntary efforts (Toubøl 2017; Carlsen et al. 2021, 2023) the relevance of deservingness practices gains prominence. A crucial difference between informal volunteering and formal welfare providers like NGOs or the state concerns how the individual actor decides on the deservingness of the needy. For formal welfare providers, the criteria of deservingness are codified in procedures and principles, e.g. laws. Thus, the actor only applies the criteria but does not define them. In contrast, in informal settings no formal procedures or principles are involved and in every single case of requests for help, the volunteers must negotiate the criteria of deservingness when deciding whether to help. Thus, in informal volunteering, the process of negotiating and interpreting criteria of deservingness, that is, the deservingness practices, takes center stage.

In this paper, we introduce and develop the concept of deservingness practices and specify how it operates in different phases of crisis volunteering, from the initial *mobilization*, to the internal *coordination* of support, and finally in the phase of *evaluation* of one's own and other's efforts in supporting those in need. The deservingness practices operate at different levels of society and have consequences for different outcomes. In the different phases, different levels will play more prominent roles for determining the most salient outcomes of deservingness practices. In the *mobilization* phase, deservingness practices at the macro-level of *public debate* will play a major role in determining *which segments are mobilized to volunteer* to help the group of needy. In the phase of *coordination*, deservingness practices at the meso-level of *volunteer groups* concerning negotiating norms for who to help, and at the micro-level of *the helping situation* where requests for help from needy are made, will determine the outcome of the *distribution of help*, that is, who gets help and who does not. Finally in the phase of *evaluation*, deservingness practices at the levels of *public debate* and *group setting* will determine how the mobilized volunteers interpret their *relationships to other actors* which may take different forms from collaborative to contentious.

To illustrate the framework, we draw on empirical examples from informal Danish SoMe support groups during three crisis mobilizations: the 2015 Syrian refugee solidarity mobilization, the COVID-19 mobilization, and the 2022 Ukrainian refugee solidarity mobilization.