

Panel 11:

Public Sector Reform and Democracy

Sebastian Jilke*
jilke@fsw.eur.nl

Sandra van Thiel†
s.vanthiel@fm.ru.nl

Sjors Overman†
s.overman@fm.ru.nl

Kutsal Yesilkagit**
a.k.yesilkagit@cdh.leidenuniv.nl

* *Erasmus University Rotterdam*

† *Radboud University Nijmegen*

** *Leiden University*

Panel Proposal for NIG Annual Work Conference 2015

1. Outline of the topic

This panel discusses the democratic implications of reforms in public service delivery. Studying reforms of government organizations, and the way the state delivers services to the citizens it serves has a long-standing tradition in public administration research (Savas, 1987; Hood, 1991; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011). We know quite a bit about the extent and institutional trajectories in the way public sectors have been reformed in past decades (Ferlie, Lynn, & Pollitt, 2005; Christensen & Lægreid, 2007). These changes in the way of how the state is set-up are most visible at the frontline of public service delivery. They include the creation of (quasi-)markets, a greater orientation towards the *citizen-consumer* (Clarke et al. 2007), contracting-out of services to the private sector, public-private partnerships in delivery, or the agencification of service providers. One direct implication of these developments is that citizens are, nowadays, confronted with government in new and different shapes.

Citizens change their roles accordingly. A consumer now, citizens behave in a more individualistic, consumption-oriented manner in the realm of increasingly marketised public services. Sending market signals to service providers via individual voice and choice mechanisms (i.e., complaining to, or switching between, service providers) seem to have replaced traditional civic-republican mechanisms of holding service providers to account (for example via politicians). Collective participatory action and political voice gave way to individual consumerism (Dalton 2000).

As a result, interactions between citizens and the state have changed. Yet, public services remain crucial in building legitimacy and exemplifying that the state and its agents deliver concrete and tangible outputs to the citizens they serve. If the state's visibility as a provider of public goods and services decreases, it may negatively affect citizens' perceptions of the state. Thus, in this panel we ask *whether changes in the way public services are delivered to citizens have had democratic implications for citizens in their new role as customers.*

A panel on the changing nature of citizen-state relationships is important at this time. First, the effects of public service reforms on citizens, and especially the decreased state involvement and new governance modes of the delivery of basic services, are increasingly recognized – yet, empirical

evidence in this area is limited. Second, citizen choice facilitated by market and related methods interact with, and even crowd-out, citizens' political voice activity. Increasingly research examines trade-offs between citizen voice and choice behavior. Third, in times of austerity, governments across Europe and beyond increasingly shift back state involvement in the provision of key services, providing room for private and non-profit organizations to deliver government services. Citizens increasingly find themselves in the role of customers rather than citizens. Taken together, the developments are substantially altering the nature of contemporary democratic citizenship.

2. Linkage between panel and NIG subtheme

The proposed panel is strongly embedded within the NIG Public Management subtheme. Public management reform is a well-recognized theme within Dutch and Flemish public administration research. Core elements of this subtheme include evaluation of impacts of public management reform, agencification and joined-up government, and the international comparative analysis of state and administrative reform. The panel touches upon all of these elements. Public sector reforms have changed government structures, interactions between government and citizens and ideas about the role of public service delivery in modern society. Large waves and different varieties of public sector reforms were already witnessed in the 1980s and 90s (Pollitt, Van Thiel, & Homburg, 2007). Strikingly, new waves of reform have occurred since, while evidence for the effects of the reforms on democratic citizenship is still lacking. Yet, a discussion of the effects is highly relevant in both the academic and the practical debate.

3. Type of papers

In this panel we seek papers that are theoretically well informed empirical contributions (qualitative or quantitative), looking at the intended and/or unintended effects of public sector reforms on democracy (broadly defined). Also, theoretical explorations about reform–democracy relationships are invited. The panel is open to discussions in various policy fields.

The workshop is inviting researchers in all stages of their career to submit a contribution. Our goal is to facilitate a dialogue between senior and junior scholars, therefore, a great emphasis will be placed on inviting senior researchers.

About the authors

- Sebastian Jilke is postdoctoral researcher at the Department of Public Administration, Erasmus University Rotterdam
- Sandra van Thiel is professor of public administration at Radboud University Nijmegen
- Sjors Overman is a PhD candidate at the Department of Public Administration, Radboud University Nijmegen.
- Kutsal Yesilkagit is professor of international governance at Leiden University.