

VB VAN POELJE AWARD 2016

JURY REPORT (NOVEMBER 2017)

Prof.dr Mirko Noordegraaf, chair, on behalf of the jury:

Prof.dr Taco Brandsen, dr Jos Koffijberg, prof.dr Filip de Rynck, prof. dr Trui Steen, prof.dr Katrien Termeer en prof.dr Esther Versluis

To be presented at the NIG Conference, University of Maastricht, on 9 November 2017

Ladies and gentlemen,

This is a special Van Poelje Award year – today, we will announce the winner of the 40th (!) Van Poelje Award, for the best dissertation in the field of public administration in The Netherlands and Flanders.

‘We’ is the jury, with members coming from various universities, most of them previous winners: prof. Taco Brandsen (Radboud University), dr Jos Koffijberg (Stichting Visitatie Woningcorporaties Nederland), prof. Filip De Rynck (University of Gent), prof. Trui Steen (KU Leuven), prof. Katrien Termeer (Wageningen University and Research Centre), prof. Esther Versluis (Maastricht University), and myself, prof. Mirko Noordegraaf (Utrecht University).

The composition of the jury will change, by the way. As I have been appointed as new chair of the Vereniging voor Bestuurskunde (the Dutch Association of Public Administration), I will hand over the chair to one of our members, prof. Esther Versluis, from Maastricht University. At the same time, two other long-serving members will end their terms: prof. Katrien Termeer, from Wageningen, and prof. Filip De Rynck, from Gent. I would like to thank them for their valuable contributions to the jury, and to our discipline. It will be very difficult to replace them, but luckily, we have managed to appoint three new

jury members: prof. Bram Verschuere (University of Gent), prof. Albert Meijer (Utrecht University) and dr Sanneke Kuipers (Leiden University). I thank them for accepting our invitation, and I wish them good luck. From a VB point of view, I would like to stress the importance of the award, and as far as I am concerned we will seek new ways to link the award to yearly activities. Finally, I thank student-assistant Evelien van Leeuwen (Utrecht) for her valuable support to the jury.

Let me return to today, the 2016 Van Poelje award. Compared to the last couple of years, a higher number of dissertations was sent to and read by the jury. The so-called 'gross list' consisted of a record number of 46 books, which was reduced to a 'long list', with 37 books coming from Dutch and Belgian universities. 62% came from a Dutch university, 38% from a Flemish university.

Despite the Dutch/Flanders origin, most dissertations are written in English. Last year 87% of the books were written in English, this year 84%. And, like last year, an increasing amount of books is no longer a monograph, but is composed of multiple papers, some of which already published. Last year, the number of more traditional or 'classic' monographs and more contemporary or 'modern' paper-based designs was balanced, 50-50. This year, 84% of the dissertations used a combination of papers, with a focused introductory chapter and a more overall concluding chapter.

The jury is aware of the debates that such modern books generate. We think that the new batch of paper-based books has added value for these debates, as they contribute to joint considerations concerning quality, authorship, composition, and the like. This year, the jury sees further improvements in how paper-based books are set-up and executed. Young scholars increasingly show a capability of creating clearer lines of argumentation throughout the book, and they show more balanced mixes of co- or multi-authored and single-authored chapters.

In terms of methodology, an increasing number of books use a mixed method design. The most applied research design, 63%, is a combination of quantitative and qualitative techniques. Most of the dissertations, 72%, include at least one case study. The cases that are studied vary in terms of content, but also in location.

7 dissertations focus on a study within Flanders, for instance how discourses play a role in the political context of the Flemish agricultural system. 5 Dutch cases were studied, for instance a study about the effectiveness of research master programs in the Netherlands. 5 dissertations study a topic within the European Union, one study for example examines EU cohesion policy and accountability issues. 5 studies focus on subjects outside the European Union, with examples like: the study of the effect of decentralizations on local governance in Turkey; a study into the performance of public services after reform programs in Uganda; and a study into the lack of understanding of sustainability in Kenya's energy development.

Overseeing these examples and the other dissertations we read, we can only conclude that our PA domain is a lively and varied discipline, with many relevant topics being studied in varied ways. We even read about the 'footballization' of our society and the challenges this brings for local administrators, or socialization processes and their effects on Dutch veterinary inspectors.

Concerning research approaches, we observe innovations. Last year we noticed the upcoming of experiments in the area of public administration (8%), the number of experiments has been stable this year. An example of an innovation in research approaches we observed this year is for example, (a book I will discuss later on), a virtual reality design.

Finally, although the short-listed books are written by men and we will have a male winner this year, as opposed to the previous female winners – Nanke Verloo, Leonie Heres – the long-listed books were balanced in terms of male and female authors, 50/50.

During the first meeting of the jury in June, in Utrecht, 37 dissertations were discussed. This meeting led to a short list with four dissertations, which were then nominated as potential winners of the Van Poelje Prijs 2016. These books represent a nice mix of Dutch and Flemish universities: the Technical University Delft, Radboud University Nijmegen, Wageningen University, and the University of Leuven.

Let me now turn to the nominated books – the four books that we put on the short list. Only one book can be the winner, and before I announce who this

winner will be, I will briefly summarize the books, as each of these books can be seen as a high-quality PA/public administration dissertation. These are the nominated books, in alphabetical order (author's last name):

1.

Jeroen Candel, *Putting Food on the Table. The European Union Governance of the Wicked Problem of Food Security*, Wageningen University.

In this book, Candel brings together various academic fields to study one empirical field – the field of food security. Backed by the broad central RQ – [quote] “*whether and how the European Union is capable of governing the wicked problem of food security*” [end of quote] – the author relies upon governance theories, theories on wicked issues, theories on policy integration and EU governance theories to study the complex nature of food security, how food security is framed, the EU capabilities to govern food security, and the extent to which policy approaches get more integrated. Various published papers deal with these aspects, and although the study mainly upon a framework developed before and ends in a relatively abstract way, at the end the sub-questions and main question are systematically answered. Candel shows that the European Union is capable of dealing with challenges, but EU food security governance is also characterized by [quote] “relatively high degrees of symbolic or discursive decision-making” [end of quote]. The jury members especially liked the chapters on policy integration. Although this book is a ‘public administration’ (or public policy) book, it also mainly focuses on food and food policy, with papers published in food journals. This makes it all the more present-day public administration. Academic analysis is linked to a societal issue, it traces processes at various levels, it cuts across policy arenas, and it offers both academic and practical implications.

2.

Joost Fledderus, *User Co-Production of Public Service Delivery: Effects on Trust*, Radboud University.

As the title suggests, this book focuses on co-production in and around public service delivery on the one hand, and trust on the other hand. It emphasizes the growing importance of co-production, set against the importance of active citizens and participatory governance, and it wants to analyze whether co-production enhances trust in service delivery. After a concise introduction, 5 papers are presented, all (but one) already published. They cover the theoretical and empirical aspects of the central RQ: *To what extent does co-production of public service delivery by users lead to trust in service delivery, trust in (local) government and generalized trust; and by which mechanisms and conditions can this relationship be explained?* The empirical aspects are part of a mixed-methods design, in which the authors trace mechanisms, conditions and effects by both qualitative and quantitative investigations, with both longitudinal and non-longitudinal measurements, and experiments surveys, interviews as well as vignettes. Although the analysis (and conclusions) highlights certain factors and ignores others (why?), and the jury members pose questions on the empirical material (work activation is coproduction?) and nature of the experiment, the author highlights specific outcomes which are relevant, both academically as well as practically. For example: participation in co-production is the result of (self)selection, leaving out certain groups of users. And co-production does not so much result in trust – it *presupposes* trust to work well.

3.

Peter Oomsels, *Administrational Trust: An Empirical Examination of Interorganizational Trust and Distrust in the Flemish Administration*, University of Leuven.

Like the book by Fledderus, this dissertation focuses on trust, and chooses a multi-theoretical, multi-level and mixed methods design, but apart from this, it is a different scholarly work. Besides the fact that it is situated in Flanders instead of the Netherlands, it primarily studies interorganizational trust, i.e. trust in-between line and staff departments of the Flemish government, instead of citizen trust. More specifically, it analyzes [quote] “*subjective evaluations made by boundary spanners in interorganizational interactions*,

characterized by risk, dependency and uncertainty, comprising the intentional and behavioral willingness to suspend vulnerability, on the basis of positive expectations held about the counterpart organization” [end of quote]. The book, moreover, is very ‘complete’, as it brings together theories, hypotheses, empirical materials, in a highly systematic and precise way. It is a very thorough analysis of how processes of creating trust and distrust – both with positive and negative effects – occur, and how these processes can be influenced. The research demonstrates how spirals of increasing distrust can be overcome. Although the jury questioned the grand and rather ‘self-referential’ nature of the text, the book represents a traditional ‘proeve van bekwaamheid’ (‘proof of competency’).

4.

Theo van Ruijven, *Multidisciplinary Emergency Management. A Comparative Study of Coordination and Performance of On-scene Command Teams in Virtual Reality Exercises*, University of Delft

As already indicated by the main title and subtitle, this is a ‘full’ book. The author studies emergency management in case of critical infrastructures that are under threat, with a particular focus on resilience – [quote] “We must understand how technical artefacts and actors interact when the system is disrupted in order to understand how the infrastructure is recovered and ‘bounces back’ ” [end of quote]. In order to study this, the author wants to know [quote] “*how emergency response actors coordinate multiple emergency management objectives and procedures, and how the way they do this determines emergency management performance*” [end of quote]. Van Ruijven uses 20 virtual reality exercises in which operational emergency management teams respond to emergency scenarios: the Westerschelde hazardous materials scenario; the Westerschelde tunnel evacuation scenario; the urban hazardous materials scenario; and the port carbon monoxide scenario. He also uses video-ethnography in order to trace influential actions and interactions. Based upon these empirical activities, the author draws many conclusions, such as: how core tasks are performed early on, and how officials deal with less common tasks, affect outcomes; the amount of communication does not

determine outcomes – little communication can be effective; a central position in the communication network is important; waiting and postponing decisions has negative effects on performance. In terms of resilience, the author concludes – amongst other things – that team leaders and key actors must have knowledge of emergency processes. This relates to the multi-level approach that the author adopts: street level workers are linked to team, unit and organizational levels. Although VR exercises differ from ‘real’ emergencies, this contextualizes our understanding of emergency management.

As indicated, only one book can win – this is explicit VB policy!

Choosing a winner was not easy, as the four dissertations each have their own distinctive strengths, and as they are very different in terms of how theory is built and used, how methods are applied, in terms of style and their relevance, also set against rigour. The book written by Candel represents modern-day PA, analyzing the wicked problem of food security at the level of the European Union, for both PA and food audiences. The book by Fledderus is the most concise dissertation of this year’s books, with two big and important themes (coproduction and trust), and with a clear set-up and line of argumentation. The book by Oomsels is a very elaborate work, almost a ‘life’s work’, with an in-depth analyses of inter-organizational trust. The book by Van Ruijven is highly original, is situated at multiple levels, and use innovative methods including virtual reality exercises.

Despite the difficulties of comparing these books, we picked a winner during our second major meeting, our Leuven meeting – ‘Leuvens beraad’ –, unanimously. (By the way, as two of the jury members were also supervisors; they ‘retired to the hallway’ during the final decision-making round.)

And the winner is...

Because of its contribution to the literature on policy framing and policy integration as far as highly complex or wicked issues is concerned, because of its strong paper-based set-up and its mixed methods approach, the Van Poelje Prijs 2016 goes to... *“Putting Food on the Table. The European Union*

Governance of the Wicked problem of Food Security', written by Jeroen Candell!

Jeroen, please come forward to receive the award.

Prof.dr Mirko Noordegraaf, chair of the jury.