

## **Panel proposal NIG Annual Work Conference 2017**

**Title: 'Towards a design-oriented Public Administration'**

### Organizers

Prof. dr. Arwin van Buuren

Department of Public Administration and Sociology, Erasmus University Rotterdam

Burgemeester Oudlaan 50

[vanbuuren@fsw.eur.nl](mailto:vanbuuren@fsw.eur.nl)

Dr. Rianne Dekker

Utrecht University School of Governance (USG/USBO)

Bijlhouwerstraat 6-8 Utrecht

[r.dekker1@uu.nl](mailto:r.dekker1@uu.nl)

William Voorberg, Msc.

Department of Public Administration and Sociology, Erasmus University Rotterdam

Burgemeester Oudlaan 50

[voorberg@fsw.eur.nl](mailto:voorberg@fsw.eur.nl)

Margot Hermus, MSc.

Department of Public Administration and Sociology, Erasmus University Rotterdam

Burgemeester Oudlaan 50

[hermus@fsw.eur.nl](mailto:hermus@fsw.eur.nl)

### Description of Panel Theme

Public policy development in the Western world has become a complex challenge in which multiple actors are involved (e.g. NGO's, private companies, but also citizens and civil society organizations). Government is expected not only to collaborate with a wide range of actors in the implementation of policy, but also in the design of policy. As such, policy development has become a process of co-creation between various actors. In order to deal with this increased complexity and to come up with smart solutions for pressing societal issues all kinds of living labs, policy experiments and other ways of 'learning-by-doing', gain rapid popularity in public administration (Gascó, 2016). In these various methodological practices, we recognize a revival of 'design thinking' in public policy and service delivery (Bason, 2016; Considine, 2012; Cowan, 2012). This is a useful approach to public policy

development, since it allows for creativity in policymaking and creates a setting in which prototypes can be developed and tested. Hence, design thinking enables a creative learning process of policymakers in co-creation with actors from government, the private sector and/or civil society (Crosby, 't Hart, & Torfing, 2016).

This panel defines design-oriented public administration as research practices, which are characterized by an *abductive* way of thinking, i.e. coming up with provisional hypotheses as a basis for developing prototypes, which *may* be a sufficient solution to the problem (Kolko, 2010; Liedtka et al. 2007) . Consequently, design thinking is characterized by coming up with *educated guesses* for a specific problem and gradually improve and refine them via an iterative process of development and testing. Furthermore, design is a *collaborative* processes which includes participation of stakeholders from government, the private sector and/or civil society. Lastly, design processes can take place in real-life settings such as 'living labs' (Bergvall-Kåreborn & Ståhlbröst 2009; Van Geenhuizen 2013) or in structured environments such as innovation labs or software simulations and games.

This panel is dedicated at exploring the principles, methodological underpinnings and practices of applying design to the field of public policy and governance. Design thinking is relatively new in the PA and PM literature. Authors have only recently attempted to explore what possible design steps are to effectively design public policy (Bason, 2016; Crosby et al., 2016; Van Buuren, forthcoming). Therefore, this panel hopes to contribute to the identification and validation of these design steps. By doing so, this panel explores the potential of design thinking for the creation of public policy and public services in a complex multi-actor environment. Hence, this panel aims to serve the following objectives:

- Explore the variety of design-oriented methodological practices in PA ;
- Enhance the methodological rigor of design methodologies in public administration;
- Add academic validity to the process of abduction;
- Explore how the academic validity of prototype development and testing can be enhanced within the field of public administration;
- Elaborate on the potential of design thinking for public policy problems.

#### Linkage between panel and subtheme NIG research program

This panel relates predominantly to theme 2: Multi-actor governance in complexity. Due to contemporary challenges, such as globalization, an ageing population and climate change, new solutions are required to effectively draft and implement public policy. At the same time, given that in the New Public Governance paradigm, public policy is co-created in close collaboration with relevant stakeholders (Calabrò, 2012; Osborne, 2006), governments are urged to innovate in a complex multi-

actor context. Design is an attractive way to make public policy much more need- oriented, and also creates room for exploration and a margin of error. However, research has yet to show under what conditions design can be a viable asset to public service delivery. This panel aims to make a modest contribution to this ambition.

Type of papers and topics to be submitted to the panel

In this panel, we welcome papers, which elaborate on our conceptual understanding of design and design thinking in public administration. Furthermore, we welcome papers, which empirically illustrate how design processes and processes of prototype development and testing can be organized. This may include papers reporting on living labs, design experiments, but also simulations in which a specific prototype is tested in an artificial (e.g. software) environment. Besides traditional paper presenters, we welcome contributors who wish to present a prototype and discuss how this prototype was developed and tested.

## References

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