

## Panel 1: Administrative History in the Netherlands: The State of the Art?

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*"Sociology", said the historian, "I know what that is. It is history with the hard work left out". "And history", replied the sociologist, "that is sociology with the brains left out"* (MacRae, 1956: 302).

### Introduction

In 2009 we organized a panel around the question of whether historians and social scientists studying the history of public administration could learn from one another. As we found out they actually could, we aimed at repeating the exercise. Much, after all, can still be achieved by focusing on interdependency and exchange between these disciplines, despite the differences in scholarly traditions MacRae points at in the quote cited above. After the 2009 panel a small website<sup>1</sup> and a discussion group on LinkedIn<sup>2</sup> have been launched to pursue these aims. Meeting face to face at least once a year remains a necessity though.

### The Panel: What did we aim for?

With a panel on Administrative History we had two main goals in mind. First, we aimed to get an overview of the "State of the Art" of present-day work done by scholars in the Netherlands on administrative history (cf. Van der Meer & Raadschelders 1991).

Administrative history is a discipline which borders on many academic fields of research such as public administration, (political) history and philosophy. While different departments of different Universities across the Netherlands are actively working on different aspects of Administrative History<sup>3</sup>, much can be done to improve knowledge of each others' work. What, we wish to know from this panel, are people working on? Which questions are being asked? Which themes are being addressed? What methods are being developed? What conclusions are being drawn and can we learn from interdisciplinary approaches? The panel thus aims to promote interdependency and explore possibilities for enriching our ways of conducting research.

The second aim of the panel was to increase our knowledge of public administration and politics in the Netherlands in past and present. Possible questions could have been: what are the origins of our present-day institutions? Where do issues of citizenship, citizen engagement or citizen participation originate? Can we increase our understanding of broad but slow-moving processes of democratization or bureaucratization? Can we see wider developments in thinking on ethics or correct public official behavior? Can we make sense of a public – private divide from a historical perspective? How do public services develop and are civil service systems shaped in the course of history?

### A call for papers

Papers should have ideally followed the aforementioned two basic aims of the panel. Without repeating the kind of questions that could be asked, this, firstly, means that we would especially welcome contributions on methods of (comparative) historical research; interdisciplinary theoretical approaches and papers that might lead to discussions on the strengths and limitations of interdisciplinary approaches in administrative history and the current state of affairs within the discipline. Second, it means that we are especially welcoming papers on 'administrative history proper', defined as "the study on origins or evolution of administrative ideas, institutions and practices (Caldwell, 1955: 455) or as "the study of structures and processes in and ideas about government as they have existed or have been desired in the past and the actual and ideal place of public functionaries therein (Raadschelders 1998: 7). This broad definition, in our view, offers plenty of possibilities for a wide variety of papers with an emphasis on structures and processes, organizations and institutions and individuals within public administration and politics.

### Linkage to NIG research program sub-themes

The types of questions raised above are (or should be) obviously closely related to the general theme's within the NIG research program. In principle, any understanding of present-day issues and questions stated in any of the three research themes can benefit much from a historical, comparative approach. For example, theme one's

emphasis on citizens and governance wants researchers to delve into changing relationships between citizens and public organizations. A historical comparative approach might just be the way to get a detailed view on such long term changes. As for assessing the "future of the nation state" (theme 2), this might benefit much from having knowledge of its past first.

After all, issues such as centralization and regionalization have a long and complex history which (partly) accounts for the way in which they are being dealt with today.

1 <http://www.socialsciences.leiden.edu/publicadministration/research/ah-forum.html>

2 <http://www.linkedin.com/home>

3 Work that is being done includes historical research in Leiden and Amsterdam on corruption and values of public administration in historical perspective (<http://www.corruptionproject.nl>); research on early modern political and administrative history at the Erasmus Center for Early Modern Studies (<http://www.erasmus.org/index.cfm>); historical research into the foundations of Dutch democracy at University of Amsterdam (<http://www.geschiedenis-uva.nl/index.php?m=studenten&cat=onderzoek>) and work at the University of Leiden on civil services and urban communities in historical perspective (<http://www.hum.leiden.edu/history/csuc/>).

## References

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