

## **VB VAN POELJE AWARD 2017**

### **JURY REPORT**

*Presented at the NIG Conference*

*Leiden University – Campus The Hague, on 1 November 2018*

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Ladies and gentlemen,

Today we are happy to announce the winner of the 41<sup>st</sup> Van Poelje Award. This Van Poelje prize is awarded for the best dissertation in the field of public administration in The Netherlands and Flanders. The prize is named after one of the founding fathers of public administration – Gerrit Abraham van Poelje (1884-1976).

The jury is composed of members from various universities and one practitioner, most of them previous winners: Taco Brandsen (Radboud University), Jos Koffijberg (Stichting Visitatie Woningcorporaties Nederland), Sanneke Kuipers (Leiden University), Albert Meijer (Utrecht University), Trui Steen (KU Leuven), Bram Verschuere (Ghent University), and Esther Versluis (Maastricht University). This is the last year that Jos Koffijberg served on this jury, and we will very much miss his long and detailed jury reports, and dedicated focus on the link to the profession.

Before starting with the more interesting content, let's start with some facts and figures. Perhaps a bit boring as such, but over the years very telling as a way to keep track of the developments in our public administration sector. Compared to the last couple of years, 2017 saw a lower number of dissertations. While the previous three years we had 37, 31 and 28 books on the longlist, this was a 'meagre' year with only 23 submissions. Of these, the jury read 20 dissertations that we considered to belong to this longlist for a prize in public administration. This year only two from a Flemish university, and the other 18 from Dutch universities. Half of the books were written by men, half by women.

Despite the Dutch/Flemish origin, most dissertations are written in English. This year even the highest share since the origin of the Van Poelje prize, with 90% of the books written in English. Another trend we witnessed the last couple of years seems to be reversed – at least for now. 2015 saw 50% of the dissertations in the form of a bundle of articles, some of which already published. In 2016 this percentage increased to 84% of the dissertations. This year this number declined again with 55% of the dissertations in the form of bundled articles, and 45% in the more traditional or ‘classic’ form of a monograph. Like last year, the jury again sees further improvements in how article-based books are set-up. Young scholars increasingly show a capability of creating clear and coherent lines of argumentation throughout the various articles in the book. A more mundane observation: dissertations seem to become shorter. While we have never checked this before, we have the impression that with an average of 236 pages per book, this is less than it used to be.

In terms of methodology, we again see an increase in the use of a mixed method design. With 75% of the researchers applying a mixed method design, this more and more seems the default approach to public administration research. The remaining 25% use a purely qualitative approach. Next to using a mixed method approach, most research in the field of public administration is case study driven. The cases that have been studied in the dissertations vary in terms of content, but also in location. While 40% of the cases were Dutch or Flemish in origin, this year showed an increase in the number of non-Western cases with 25% of the books focused on the implementation of seed policy in Ethiopia, public service delivery in Tanzania, and wastewater treatment in Mexico – to name but a few. Another 25% of the cases focused on other Western countries or the EU. And finally 10% were of comparative nature – comparing Western and non-Western countries, for example analyzing how the authority of UN universal periodic review in the field of human rights is perceived in various countries.

Overall, the jury has read many interesting dissertations and learned a lot about a wide variety of topics. We’ve read about political crisis management during the US financial crisis, the risk of old age poverty in emerging countries, and post conflict cooperation between policy and citizens. While we’ve learned a lot, the jury would also like to make the following observation: often it seems difficult to extract the wider significance of the case study at hand. Ideally, concluding chapters would highlight more explicitly what the

wider theoretical and societal implications of the research are. In addition – particularly in our field of public administration – we would appreciate some form of reflection on what the research findings imply for the profession.

After discussing the 20 books on the longlist – each book being read by two of the jury members – we selected three books to be nominated for the shortlist: one from Leiden, one from Maastricht, and one from the UvA.

In alphabetical order, the following dissertations were shortlisted for the Van Poelje prize 2017.

1. *Carola van Eijk – Leiden University*

*Engagement of citizens and public professionals in the co-production of public services*

This article-based dissertation is a clear addition to the body of literature on co-production. The bundle answers the following overarching research question: ‘What are the motivations for individual citizens and public professionals to engage in the co-production of public services, and how do mutual perceptions of the co-production partners’ engagement influence the collaboration?’ The focus here is thus on the perceptions of individuals; both individual citizens as well as individual professionals. Exploring various case studies in the fields of client councils in organizations for elderly care and disabled people, advisory councils at primary schools and neighbourhood watch schemes, we learn that co-producers differ in their motivations and incentives, and we are provided with various explanations for *why* individuals feel more or less engaged with co-production. The various articles are methodologically very rich, exploring a diversity of methods such as Q-methodology, interviews, focus groups, participation observations, and survey research. While there is a clear introduction outlining the overarching theme of the dissertation, the format of an article-based book does somewhat affect the readability. Moving between different cases and different research designs, does make it more difficult for the reader to grasp the overarching lessons learned at the end of the book. The jury particularly praises the high quality of the individual articles – all of which are already published – as well as the very visible usefulness of this research as teaching material for students interested in co-production.

2. *Maarten Hillebrandt – University of Amsterdam*

*Living Transparency. The development of access to documents in the Council of the EU and its democratic implications*

This very topical dissertation evaluates the European Union's transparency policy in its most political institution: the Council of Ministers. On the crossroads of law and public administration, the book asks if this transparency policy works; does it indeed strengthen democracy? The research question is formulated as follows: 'How have institutional factors influenced the development of a transparency policy in the Council of the EU since its inception in 1992, and how should this policy be evaluated in the light of its aim to strengthen democracy in the Council?' An important question to ask in a time period in which the EU's democratic deficit is still heavily discussed. Analysing both the normative as well as empirical aspects of various constellations of the Council of Ministers – comparing the Environment Council, the Economic and Financial Council and the Foreign Affairs Council – Hillebrandt reveals that transparency increased, but that we see variation between legislative and non-legislative paths, as well as variation between the studied policy sectors. The jury commends this manuscript for its strong research design. The mixed-method approach of process-tracing, document analysis and a wide set of interviews provides a strong longitudinal insight into the empirical cases of the environmental, ecofin and foreign affairs Councils, and thus reveals insights into the actual working of transparency in practice that were a black box before. Even though one of the longest on the list this year – and perhaps a bit too long at times – the book is well written, and a very pleasant read for anyone who wants to learn more about transparency in action.

3. *Hortense Jongen – Maastricht University*

*Combating corruption the soft way. The authority of peer reviews in the global fight against graft*

This dissertation analyses the authority of peer reviews in the fight against corruption. The research aims to answer the questions of 'how much authority different peer reviews in the field of anticorruption hold, and how variation in the authority of peer reviews can be explained'. The jury considers the topic of the research highly relevant, and Jongen's analysis of the peer review mechanisms of the OECD, the UN, and the

Council of Europe provides good new empirical insights into how we can explain variation in authority of different types of peer review. The research is very systematically and rigorously executed and the book is well-written. The strongest element of this work lies in the excellent operationalization of peer review authority. How can we measure this? Jongen provides a convincing answer to this question. Herein, the dissertation can form an example for many PhD candidates struggling with the operationalization of their concepts. Theoretically speaking the manuscript is less innovative, and the jury hoped to have learned more about the wider implications of this research for peer review exercises in general.

In the end only one book can win. Choosing a winner was not easy – as it hardly ever is – particularly because the three 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, as well as in terms of style and their relevance. Despite the difficulties of comparing these books, we picked a winner unanimously. (By the way, as two of the jury members were also supervisors; they ‘retired to the hallway’ during the final decision-making round.) Because of the very relevant and topical new insights into the variation in transparency in different Council constellations, the very rigorous conceptual and empirical work, based on document analysis, interviews and process tracing, the winner is...

Maarten Hillebrandt for his book *Living Transparency*.

*Prof.dr. Esther Versluis, chair, on behalf of the jury:*

*Prof.dr. Taco Brandsen, Dr. Jos Koffijberg MPA, Dr. Sanneke Kuipers, Prof.dr. Albert Meijer, Prof.dr. Trui Steen, Prof.dr. Bram Verschuere*