

VB VAN POELJE AWARD 2018

JURY REPORT

Presented at the NIG Conference

VU University Amsterdam, on 7 November 2019

Ladies and gentlemen,

Today we are happy to announce the winner of the 42nd 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), Sanneke Kuipers (Leiden University), Albert Meijer (Utrecht University), Trui Steen (KU Leuven), Will Tiemeijer (WRR), Bram Verschuere (Ghent University), and Esther Versluis (Maastricht University).

Before outlining the shortlist and the winner, we will provide some insights into how PhD research develops over the years, by showing some facts and figures. This year, the jury read 21 dissertations that we considered to belong to this longlist for a prize in public administration. 19% of the books were defended at Flemish universities, and 81% at Dutch universities. This year, slightly more male candidates finished their PhD, with 57% of the books.

This year's average length is 246 pages per book. The trend that dissertations are predominantly written in English has continued. In the past year, even the monographs were 90% English. Interestingly enough, the division between monographs and article-based dissertations has proven less predictable. In 2015, as many as 50% of the

dissertations were article-based. At the time, the jury was convinced that this number would slowly increase to almost all PhDs being published as collections of articles, perhaps in a more hybrid form. This seemed to be confirmed in 2016, when 84% of dissertations were article-based. In 2017, however, this percentage declined to 55%. This year, 67% of dissertations were article-based and 33% traditional or 'classic' monographs. In the former, most young scholars demonstrate their ability to create clear and coherent lines of argumentation throughout the various articles in the book – but not all manage this. In addition, it appears that a downside of article-based dissertations is a lack of more theoretical depth.

In terms of methodology, we see a return to a more qualitative methodological approach compared to last year. While last year 75% of the researchers applied a mixed method design, this year this was done by 43% of the scholars, while 38% resorted to a purely qualitative design. 19% used a quantitative approach. Most research in the field of public administration is still case study driven, with a majority of the cases concentrated on European soil (86%).

Overall, the jury has read many interesting dissertations and learned a lot about a wide variety of topics. We've read, amongst others, about the influence of agencies on EU policy making, the role of the Indonesian state in palm oil sector sustainability, credibility of political leaders, crisis-induced learning by public organizations, hybrid managers in medical management, and the role of hosting providers in web security.

After discussing the 21 books on the longlist – each book being read by three of the jury members – we selected three books to be nominated for the shortlist: one from Utrecht, one from Nijmegen and one from Antwerp. These three finalists were read by all jury members.

In alphabetical order, the following dissertations were shortlisted for the Van Poelje prize 2018.

1. *Carolyn Moser – Utrecht University*

EU civilian crisis management. Law and practice of accountability

This dissertation deals with the very important topic of the accountability of EU civilian crisis management. In times of declining trust in, and perceived legitimacy of, governments – and perhaps in particular of the EU – it is crucial to further examine this topic. The book explores a clearly defined research question: ‘To which extent has the transfer of powers by member states to Brussels-based EU civilian crisis management structures been matched with the establishment of appropriate accountability mechanisms at the European level?’ The dissertation demonstrates an interesting and novel theoretical approach in exploring the notion of ‘Europeanized intergovernmentalism’ – arguing that EU civilian crisis management is intergovernmental in form, and Europeanized in content. This dissertation carefully outlines how the concept of accountability can be analysed at three levels and three dimensions, and structurally applies this framework in the empirical chapters. In addition, it convincingly illustrates the usefulness of combining law and public administration in the analysis, thus revealing the striking tension between law and practice in the topic at hand. The dissertation displays a high level of rigor and thoroughness and, moreover, is a good read, using creative titles and clear language. In times of Euroscepticism, it comes to an important conclusion, that is perhaps somewhat counter-intuitive: the EU is much more accountable in the field of crisis management than one might think at first sight.

2. *Dorian Schaap – Radboud University Nijmegen*

The police, the public, and the pursuit of trust. A cross-national, dynamic study of trust in the police and police trust-building strategies

This dissertation evaluates both the trust of the public in the police, as well as the strategies used by the police to build trust. Via (historically) comparing England and Wales, Denmark and the Netherlands, we learn to understand the differences and

developments in trust in the police. Theoretically, the dissertation clearly combines the relevant frames of proximity policing, instrumentalism and procedural justice, illustrating the author's capabilities of working with theoretical frames stemming from different disciplines. The sub-questions posed ask for a variation in methodological approaches, guiding the reader through a longitudinal survey analysis to illustrate differences between the countries, as well as in-depth case studies to better grasp the country specific situations. While the project is very ambitious in its many sub-questions (we would almost state, 'don't try this at home'), the author manages to bring it all together, as well as to reflect on the shortcomings of the approach. The dissertation is written as a monograph, making the book a coherent read, leading to the interesting observation that while the police is very much focused on performance, procedural fairness is actually more important. The jury particularly appreciated the concluding section, where the author illustrates his capacities to contextualise and to reflect upon the wider implications of his research, discussing the options for the police to build trust.

3. *Vidar Stevens – University of Antwerp*

Managing the Ostrich's dance. A study on the management of collaborative networks for the promotion of policy innovations

This dissertation analyses policy innovation, and in particular how management enhances collaborative processes of policy innovation. A very relevant topic, to shed further light on the importance of collaboration for governments confronted with societal challenges. Using the metaphor of the ostrich's dance – showing how these birds are both known for laying flat on the ground when confronted with danger, as well as doing courtship dances when starting relationships – this book illustrates how civil servants in network relations can also demonstrate both types of behaviour. While the article-based approach somewhat undermines the opportunities for theoretical innovation, the book is to be applauded for its strong methodological approach. Using exponential random graph modelling, demonstrating inferences about learning interactions between actors involved in policy innovation networks, proved to be a valuable approach to providing insight into the three networks chosen. The jury appreciated the extensive conclusions, reflecting on the practical relevance.

In the end only one book can win. Despite the difficulties of comparing these books, we picked a winner unanimously. The winning book is praised for its ambition, as shown in both its theoretical as well as methodological scope and strength. In a trend of dissertations becoming more and more focused on 'smaller' topics, whereby relevance seems to be overruled by rigor, we appreciate work that attempts to contextualize and to extract the wider significance of the case studies at hand. For its international comparative, interdisciplinary character, and its ability to highlight explicitly what the wider implications of the theme are, the winner is ...

Dorian Schaap for his book *The police, the public, and the pursuit of trust*.

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

Prof.dr. Taco Brandsen, Dr. Sanneke Kuipers, Prof.dr. Albert Meijer, Prof.dr. Trui Steen, Dr. Will Tiemeijer, Prof.dr. Bram Verschuere