

VB VAN POELJE AWARD 2023

JURY REPORT

Presented at the NIG Annual Conference, February 6, 2025

Ladies and gentlemen,

Today we are happy to announce the winner of the 47th Van Poelje Award. The Van Poelje prize is the award for the best dissertation in the field of public administration in The Netherlands and Flanders, awarded by the *Vereniging voor Bestuurskunde*. The prize is named after one of the founding fathers of public administration in The Netherlands – Gerrit Abraham van Poelje (1884-1976). Although it is now already February 2025, the 47th Van Poelje award pertains to the best dissertation of the calendar year 2023.

The jury is traditionally composed of members from various universities and one practitioner: Martiene Branderhorst (City of The Hague), Taco Brandsen (Radboud University), Wouter van Dooren (University of Antwerp), Stephan Grimmelikhuijsen (Utrecht University), Tamara Metze (Delft University), and Steven Van de Walle (KU Leuven). My name is Sanneke Kuipers, from Leiden University, chair of the jury. In 2025, Taco and I will both leave the jury after many years of service, and we are happy to have found very bright new jury members: Jan Kees Helderman (Radboud), Thomas Hoppe (Twente), Toon Kerkhof (Leiden), and Brenda Vermeeren (Erasmus) to take over. Stephan Grimmelikhuijsen has kindly agreed to take over the chair of the jury for 2025.

Last year, the jury read 18 dissertations that we considered to belong to the longlist for a prize in public administration. We were surprised by the relatively modest harvest of 2023, which we assume may be the result of the pandemic years before that. Multiple institutes reported that they had no dissertations from the calendar year 2023, but expected to make up for it in the subsequent year. So we brace ourselves for next year's jury task. Half of the books were defended at Flemish universities, and the other half at Dutch universities. All except one dissertation were written in English. The majority of these books were article-based as opposed to a monograph.

The jury read some 5,000 pages on a wide range of interesting topics in the broad field of public administration. Among the topics were collaborative networks in local policy making, EU decision making, public sector accountability, leadership, red tape and democratic power sharing.

Overall, we considered the quality of the work as high. We discussed how a solid design, coherence of sub-studies and well executed mix of research methods this year seems to have become the norm rather than the exception for article-based dissertations. More account giving on the phd defendant's own contribution to the articles (lead, solo, co-production, part of a project) would be helpful for the jury to assess the young authors' accomplishments.

After discussing the 18 books on the longlist – each book being read by three of the jury members – we arrived at a selection of three books that stood out as favorites of at least two jurors. The three nominees on the shortlist were read by all jury members. All were article-based. The jury noticed how all short listed books centered around a single core concept, that was subsequently researched from different angles and with a variety of methods..

1. In alphabetical order, the following dissertations were shortlisted for the Van Poelje prize 2023. Thijs de Boer, *Understanding the Drivers of Voluntary Accountability by European Union Agencies: Look to the Forum!* defended at Leiden University. This PhD research addresses why and how EU agencies seek accountability voluntarily, by looking at the audience which they address. The organizations are driven to provide voluntary accountability because they seek to cultivate a relationship with a specific target group. The dissertation nicely builds on the tradition of reputation research and the accountability literature, and adds important insights through thorough study using a coherent and appropriate mix of methods.
2. Lars Brummel, *Navigating between the state and the streets* defended at Utrecht University. This dissertation addresses how public sector organizations navigate between accountability demands from their political and executive principals, and from societal stakeholders. It finds that media pressure does influence public organizations through social accountability, but also that public sector organization practically and strategically use societal accountability to find legitimacy for their organizational decisions. The dissertation offers original findings that underpin existing but undersubstantiated ideas about media pressure and accountability towards a larger public. Additionally it is methodologically diverse and has a strong research design and argumentation.
3. Vivian Visser, *Who is invited? A mixed-method study on governments' and citizens' perspectives on invitational governance* defended at Erasmus University Rotterdam. Her doctoral study offers new insights for the public administration field by looking at how citizen initiatives are

encouraged and facilitated by local governments through invitational approaches. The social differences and status of citizens play a role in the way they participate, the way they are approached by governments, and the way they perceive invitations. But status does not always work in the direction you would expect. The thesis is very original, combines a sociological approach with a core public administration topic and research question.

As always, only one book can win. While the high quality of the three books on the shortlist made it difficult for us to choose, we opted for the book that was most politically engaged, socially relevant and demonstrated the most innovative own contribution. Therefore, this year's winner of the Van Poelje award is

Who is invited? by Vivian Visser

To make the research findings land more widely, the Van Poelje award jury would like to invite the winner to write a brief perspective for the journal *Bestuurskunde* highlighting some of the more practical implications of her findings for a public administration audience.

For now: massive congratulations!

Prof.dr. Sanneke Kuipers, chair, on behalf of the jury:

Dr. Martiene Branderhorst, Prof.dr. Taco Brandsen, Prof.Dr. Wouter van Dooren, Dr. Stephan Grimmelikhuijsen, Prof.Dr. Tamara Metzge, and Prof.Dr. Steven Van de Walle