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Public Values Research in the 21st Century: Where We Are, Where We Haven't Been, and Where We Should Go

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This introductory article addresses current gaps and future challenges in PV research. It suggests avenues for viable PV research in the 21st century in terms of content, context, and methodologies. In doing so, it argues how the contributions to this special issue contribute to meeting some of these challenges and how they complement and sometimes confront each other. To conclude, this article shortly introduces each of the seven individual contributions that make up this special issue.

Keywords: cultural context, public administration, public values, public values perspective

IN MEMORIAM

On June 11, 2015, our dear friend and colleague Professor Torben Beck Jørgensen passed away. Torben's contributions to our field of study have been immense. He was one of the first Public Administration scholars who started writing about public values (PVs) at the start of this century. Ever since, he has produced over 15 scholarly works on the topic, some of which are among the most cited in the field. Just a few months ago, Torben published an overview piece on PVs together with Mark Rutgers in which they identified a Public Values Perspective (PVP) on Public Administration. Torben also organized and hosted the first biennial workshop meeting of the Public Values Research Consortium in Copenhagen in 2008. This special issue is based on the fourth meeting of the consortium in Singapore in 2014. I dedicate it to Torben and his legacy to the field.

INTRODUCTION

Public value (PV) research in Public Administration has mushroomed tremendously in the 21st century. In the past 15 years, scholars in our field have produced over 150 English-language

journal publications on the topic with a spike from 2007 onward (Van der Wal, Nabatchi, & De Graaf, 2015). Undoubtedly, this spike was influenced by two key publications in that year (Beck Jørgensen & Bozeman, 2007). All this seems to suggest PV research in our discipline is a flourishing, "sunshine" industry. Recently, Beck Jørgensen and Rutgers (2015) even proposed a distinct "Public Values Perspective" or PVP on Public Administration to complement other existing streams of research within PA that address PVs. They assert (2015, p. 4):

In the study of public administration, there are roughly three lines of research that explicitly examine public values as their core concern: First, there is administrative ethics where the focus is on issues concerning public integrity and corruption ... Second, there is public value management. The inspiration for this line of research is the idea of public managers as creators of public value ... Finally, there is what we would like to call a Public Value Perspective (PVP). This concerns not a singular approach or conceptualization, but a diversity of approaches that are characterized by taking as their starting point the intrinsically normative nature of public administration and the attempt to bridge theoretical and empirical perspectives on this issue.

Surely, the idea of a distinct yet overarching PVP appears attractive to anyone who believes all PA scholarship is about PVs in some way; indeed, as Beck Jørgensen and Bozeman assert, "there is no more important topic in Public Administration and Policy than public values" (2007, p. 357). Nevertheless, there are various avenues and types of

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research that have been underrepresented so far and merit further scrutiny. This introductory article to the special issue on PVs¹ will first shortly list four of such avenues and types before introducing how the individual contributions address some of them.

IDENTIFYING AND COMPARING POLICY, COUNTRY, AND CULTURAL CONTEXTS

First of all, PV research so far has been surprisingly mono-cultural (read: Western) in nature, both conceptually and empirically, with few exceptions (e.g., Berman, 2012; Van der Wal & Yang, 2015; Yang & Van der Wal, 2014). Clearly, political and administrative contexts in which PVs are shaped, prioritized, neglected, and assaulted differ widely between developed and developing countries, and between the global North, East, West, and South. Without getting trapped into the decade-old and unsolvable debate on the existence of a universalistic, “global” ethic (see Lawton, Van der Wal, and Huberts, 2015, 327–328), we can easily identify a number of relevant areas in which PV scholarship has been lacking while such scholarship would contribute to a more robust PVP.

For instance, PVs which are taken for granted in Western, liberal democratic settings such as freedom of speech, democracy, transparency, and political responsiveness may be much less self-evident in non-Western, more autocratic settings—or even considered undesirable by producers as well as recipients of these PVs in such settings (cf., Van der Wal, 2015). More research is needed to:

- a. Produce baseline data on which PVs are important and why in developing, non-Western settings;
- b. Compare how different actors prioritize PVs in such settings, such as politicians, administrators, citizens, and employees from non-profit and private-sector employees;
- c. Identify, contextualize, and meaningfully differences between Western and non-Western settings in terms of how and why particular PVs are considered important for being a “good public servant.”

In her contribution, Yang reports on a comparative interview study into value preferences between civil servants from China and The Netherlands, in which she examines whether their PV preferences are in accordance with their respective administrative traditions. They turn out to be only partly characteristic of administrative traditions; however, these traditions do explain the most poignant differences between both groups. Mostafa and Leon-Cazares’ contribution examine relations between two constructs closely related to PVs—public service motivation (PSM) and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB)—and perceived organizational performance and show that OCB is less inflated in a collectivistic society like Mexico compared with cultures that propagate individual achievement.

POLITICS AND NOT JUST ADMINISTRATION

As recently argued by Van der Wal (2014), PV scholarship has until now completely ignored politicians, corroborating Fry and Raadschelder’s (2013) diagnosis of increasing segregation and troublesome relations between Public Administration and Political Science. Such segregation impedes our understanding of how PVs are manifested in public sector decision-making. It makes one wonder if we can even claim real progress in this field without any evidence on legislative and executive actors (Van der Wal, 2014). Indeed, we have to go back almost four decades for large-scale comparisons between values of politicians and administrators (e.g., Aberbach et al., 1981; Putnam, 1976; Searing, 1969).

However, political-administrative dynamics across countries in recent decades limit present-day applicability of these seminal works. Such dynamics include increased clashes between public managers and politicians on primacy in policy-making, increasing media attention for public managers, and alleged politicization of the senior civil service (e.g., Lee & Raadschelders, 2008; Rhodes & Wanna, 2007; Hart & Wille, 2006). Moreover, their Western signature limits their applicability to non-Western contexts where political-administrative dynamics differ widely (or, in some cases, are completely absent). This point harks backs to our previous section on cultural context and specificity.

¹ In 2006, researchers were invited to participate in a research workshop on public values hosted by the European Group of Public Administration (EGPA) at the annual conference, which took place in Milan. The background was clear. Although workshops on ethics, corruption, and the like could be found on international conferences, the workshop conveners (Barry Bozeman, Georgia Tech, and Torben Beck Jørgensen, University of Copenhagen) were unsatisfied with the marginal attention at international conferences and also wanted a broader perspective. In 2008, University of Copenhagen hosted a research workshop on public values and public interest (this time, the conveners included Mark Rutgers, Leiden University). The workshop concluded by founding the Public Value Consortium. This consortium has no rules, no statute, and no obligations besides an agreement that a workshop should be organized every second year. The next workshop took place in Leiden (convened by Mark Rutgers and Patrick Overeem, both Leiden University) in 2010, followed by a workshop in 2012 at University of Illinois in Chicago (conveners were Mary Feeney, University of Illinois, and Stephanie Moulton, Ohio State University). In January 2015, the *American Review of Public Administration* published a symposium based on a selection of papers from the Chicago Workshop. The fourth workshop took place in 2014 at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, Singapore (convened by the author of this editorial and editor of this special issue Zeger Van der Wal). The papers in this special issue were presented at the 2014 Singapore workshop. A fifth workshop will take place in January 2016 at Arizona State University.

Again, Yang's contribution to this special issue is relevant here as it addresses this shortcoming upfront by comparing formally politically neutral civil servants with civil servants who are party members as part of their job descriptions, and do not view political-administrative differences in the same way as their Western-European counterparts. Thompson's intriguing contribution examines values invoked by the United States Congress through their legislation concerning the civil service over a period of more than a century. It shows that there is value in comparing what administrators self-report in terms of the PVs that *are important* to them with what other governance actors propose or proclaim their PVs *should be* (cf., Van der Wal, 2008). Witesman and Walters' article examines the connections between public administration's conceptions of "public values" or the values that guide public servants, and political preferences including party affiliation, ideology, and candidate preference. Their results show PV preferences of administrators are far from "apolitical"; in fact, they sometimes correlate with individual political preferences.

"REAL" VERSUS ESPOUSED PVS: BEYOND SELF-REPORTING

This observation brings us to the third key issue in PV research. For decades, a key concern in such research or value research in general for that matter has been the ability to distinguish between "espoused truisms" (Van Rekom, van Riel, & Wierenga, 2006, p. 175) and "values in use" (Argyris, 1976, p. 30). However, the majority of PV research relies on fairly basic self-reporting survey methodologies that are prone to self-confirmation bias and validity threats, and at best provide a perception of the PVs considered most important to individuals and organizations (although it has to day proved impossible to "survey an organization").

Certainly, other approaches have been used by researchers, including in-depth interviews, mixed methods, case studies of codes of conduct and policy decisions, experiments, and survey designs which distinguish between "real-life" and "aspirational" or "ideal" values, to name a few (Van der Wal, 2008, p. 471, 2011, p. 645). Still, as a field we have a long way to go in diversifying and validating our methodological approaches and our data in order to make more robust claims about *which PVs are really most important and why*.

Fortunately, nearly all the contributions to this special issue provide promising approaches to the study of PVs that go beyond one-off simplistic measures. They show that *which PVs* are considered most important depends on *whom you ask*; in fact, two groups may overtly and covertly disagree on the PVs they considered most important to their own professional ethos and conduct. In addition, these contributions show PVs change over time, along with paradigm shifts in the theory and practice of Public Administration, which have resulted in

more as well as less autonomy, discretion, and professional pride of public service professionals.

LONGITUDINAL AND QUALITATIVE EFFORTS

These findings bridge the previous and the fourth, final issue identified here as being crucial for the future of PV research: the need to engage in more qualitative, and particularly, longitudinal efforts. Only recently have we seen more substantive efforts to examine meaning, prioritization, and perception of PVs more in-depth through interviews, with samples ranging from around 40 to over 90 qualitative interviews (De Graaf & Van der Wal, 2008; Van der Wal, 2011, 2014; Yang, 2015). Such studies add greatly to the dominant quantitative measures of PVs as they elucidate how public actors wrestle with enacting and commensurating various PVs which are all important but often conflict in the tough daily practice of public governance (De Graaf, Van der Wal, & Lawton, 2011; Graaf, Huberts, & Smulders, 2015; Graaf & Paanakker, 2015).

However, while scholars have professed for decades public management reforms altered, devaluated, or even assaulted core PVs (Van der Wal et al., 2015), we haven't seen many longitudinal, empirical attempts that strive to validate such claims, with few valuable exceptions (Beck Jørgensen and Vrangbaek, 2011; Beck Jørgensen & Rutgers, 2014). Longitudinal research involving life subjects is notoriously time consuming and resource intensive, which arguably is why it is such a rarity in our field.

In this issue, the contributions of Thompson who tracks change across congressional discourse about the public service for over a century and Bennetts and Charles' historical case studies into public transport safety policy discourse both turn out to be highly valuable in shedding light on how PVs operate in societal and political debates, and change due to powerful events and new social norms. More such endeavors are needed to push our field of study forward in meaningful ways.

All in all, it is clear that many challenges to the study of PVs remain beyond this special issue. However, the rich, diverse, and innovative scholarship presented in the eight article contributions that follow corroborate once more that PV research is far from a "sunset industry" (Van der Wal et al., 2015, p. 15). Indeed, the contributions from various cultural contexts on four different continents applying a variety of methods and data make one optimistic about the future of the field. Torben would have been proud.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THIS SPECIAL ISSUE

To conclude, the individual contributions are introduced here in some detail, including key questions, methods, and findings. To start with, Reynaers and Paanakker study the first Dutch

detention center PPP to provide empirical insight into the safeguarding of PVs in semi-private governance settings and to uncover the challenges and opportunities for prison (semi) privatization. After their analysis of 11 in-depth interviews with public servants as well as consortium members, they identify two main ingredients for success in (prison) privatization efforts: careful deliberation between *both* partners in periodic re-assessment of the parameters of the contract on the one hand, and performance monitoring based on as much shared understanding as possible, on the other. Without such built-in possibilities of joint adaptation and refinement, the consortium can lose track of how to do justice to core penal principles such as achieving the bare minimum for safety, simply because of a reduced understanding of its role and its relevance for the overall functioning of the facility. Better knowledge of what it is to safeguard PVs in PPP or in privatized management may lead to better informed contracts and better service delivery, and may secure a collaboration that delivers satisfaction to both sides.

Thompson's paper is on administrative values as articulated by a group of elected officials rather than, as is the case in much of the PV literature, by administrators. He examines specific values invoked by members of Congress with regard to the federal civil service over the period 1883–2002. The longitudinal nature of the study further highlights the relevance of historical context to an understanding of “public values.” His study departs from conventional approaches to the investigation of PVs in three respects. First, the values that serve as a focus of this study are those articulated by elected officials rather than administrators or academicians. An analysis was conducted of the values invoked by members of the U.S. Congress in the context of debates on the federal civil service over the 120-year period, 1883–2002. It identifies the values with which members of Congress collectively associate the civil service and thus the federal administrative enterprise generally. Underlying presumptions include that (1) opinions and preferences of elected officials are relevant to how “public values” shape the attitudes and behaviors of government administrators and (2) valid inferences with regard to such opinions and preferences can be obtained through a review of debates over the structure and operation of the civil service system.

Bennetts and Charles propose a theoretical framework, based on PV theory, to explain why passenger transport security arrangements look as they do, and why they differ in their intensity and technological sophistication, against a contextual backdrop of ongoing global concern about terrorism, security at passenger transport infrastructures is now both expected and accepted by the travelling public. It is clear, however, that security arrangements differ greatly from place to place, and from mode to mode. In light of three historical case studies, they posit that security arrangements continually change as a result of the constant reprioritization of PVs pertaining to passenger transport infrastructure.

Mostafa and Leon-Cazares' study examines within a Latin American context the effects of PSM and OCBs on perceived organizational performance in the Mexican public sector. In an attempt to open up the “black box” of the relationship between PSM and organizational performance, this study also examines the mediating effects of OCBs on the relationship between PSM and performance. Using survey data on civil servants, findings show that PSM has no direct effect on perceived performance whereas OCBs have. The findings also show that PSM has an indirect effect on organizational performance through its positive influence on OCBs. OCBs generally receive lower scores in Mexico than in many Western, more individual cultures, again corroborating the importance of cultural context.

In their article on the co-creation of PVs by public actors who perform like social entrepreneurs, van Eijck and Lindemann focus on the spaces in which public need agendas (PNAs) are built and set. They set out to answer the question: How do social entrepreneurs manage spaces of PNAs? The authors define this agenda as a political agenda that captures and prioritizes local public needs, built and set through deliberative and collaborative activities among civil society actors in local spaces. These agendas form the basis of the co-creation of PV. The authors zoom in on the strategic practices of these social entrepreneurs, in crafting these spaces in which these PNAs are built and set, in particular the behaviour and institutional change that comes into play during the strategic practices of *provoking* and *pragmatizing*. We have learned that crafting spaces for PNAs is achieved in a complex interplay between social entrepreneurs' work activities, work relations, and work definitions. Social entrepreneurs craft spaces for PNAs when they collectively identify and prioritize local needs, negotiate ownership and appropriate services, and capture solutions in new or redesigned institutional arrangements. These activities take place in interdependent relationships with local stakeholders, who push and pull information in formal and informal meetings in order to build and set agendas. These meetings are venues in which the boundaries, nature, and reach of their work can be reframed and authorized, whilst agendas emerge and evolve.

Witesman and Walters' article examines the connections between public administration's conceptions of “public values” or the values that guide public servants, and political preferences including party affiliation, ideology, and candidate preference. The study reports results of a national survey that elicits citizen expectations of government using an adapted PV questionnaire. The same survey gathers information on party affiliation, ideological preference, and presidential candidate preference. Using quantitative analysis, the article explores the empirical connections between PV and political preferences—and the ways in which the value structures of people with different political preferences differ in fundamental ways. The authors find while most public

service values indeed appear not to favor political ends, a variety of specific public service values appear to consistently support either a Democrat/liberal/Obama profile or a Republican/conservative/Romney profile, clearly distinguishing citizens' political and ideological expectations about the role of government. They also find that some public service values correlate with specific candidate preferences but do not appear to be associated with political ideology or party affiliation, suggesting candidate capture of public service values that extend beyond voters' group identities. Public service values explain a substantial portion of both political party affiliation and ideology, suggesting effective capture of relevant public service values constructs by the predominant political parties and ideological groups.

Yang's study investigates the perceptions and prioritizations of five key civil servant values among 22 Chinese and 20 Dutch civil servants, based on a series of 42 in-depth qualitative interviews. It shows that Chinese and Dutch respondents interpret *loyalty* differently, as referring respectively to the political party or to the organization for which they work. The common difficulty in upholding *people-orientedness* in practice is attributed to different reasons, although both groups consider the public interest as ideally important. Interestingly, both view full *transparency* as unnecessary, and similarly, both value *effectiveness* more important than *efficiency*. Traditional contrasts in terms of the political-administrative regimes of both countries explain some of the key differences between both settings, more so than previous survey studies by the author were able to do. Her study offers substantial insight into civil servant values and a new perspective on cross-cultural value studies, along with implications for PV research and civil service

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