

## International Conference: The State of the Art in the History of Politics

30 November – 1 December 2017, Royal Library The Hague

Registration: [www.aanmelder.nl/OPG/](http://www.aanmelder.nl/OPG/)



On the occasion of the start of its second lustrum, the National Research School for Political History OPG organizes an international conference to discuss the state of the art in the history of politics. The central issue for this conference is to look for the commonality between the many approaches to the history of politics that have bloomed in the past decades. Does political history still have a core of shared topics, problems and concepts, or is the field fragmented into a wide array of studies on things political? We aim to answer these questions from an intellectual as well as a practical perspective: What do we mean when we study politics? What do we study, if we aim to study the history of politics? And what are promising new directions for political historians to work on?

### **The state of the art in political history**

Since the 1980s, political history as a historical sub-discipline has gone through a series of reinventions, each of which can be considered as attempts to define the specificity of an approach to history that for a long time was equated with history per se. It was only after the rise of social, economic and cultural history that political history came to be viewed as a part, yet not the whole of history, which moreover had failed to compete with other approaches due to its elitist, superficial, and narrowly national perspective. In response to these challenges, many of the historians who persisted in their interest in things political, have made huge strides in renewing the field, first of all by embracing the particularity of a history focused on politics: the political now came to be understood as a domain or aspect of society with its own historical development.

Approaching the political as a specific historical phenomenon enabled its historians to reintegrate elements from competing sub-disciplines: intellectual history high-lighted the changing conceptualizations of the political; cultural history offered insights on the nature of changing cultures, traditions, repertoires and styles of politics; neo-institutional social and economic theory contributed to a renewal of an interest in distinctly political institutions like the state, constitutions and regimes. Each of these innovations also contributed to a rethinking of the national state as the self-evident context of historical research; while more traditional political historians still may struggle with the odium of tediousness, those who are more à la mode recognize the political in every aspect of global, local, transnational and transversal history, while also the historians of the social, the material, or the technological easily acknowledge the political dimensions of their object of study.

### **Questions for historians of the political**

Considering these remarkable changes, it may now be the time to present an overview of the state of the art in the history of politics and to ask the question what it is that binds the historians of the political in their common endeavor. What are the main topics, puzzles, questions and methods that have evolved over the last couple of years? Does a history of politics dissolve in a series of disparate

domains – from the politics of identity to the politics of science; from the politics of style to the politics of memory? Or is there still a core of political history – a focus on power, authority, legitimacy, participation, representation, or deliberation; or on the political as an agonistic field of friends and foes, defined in the extreme by the use of violence?

Or more pragmatically: what are the main topics that historians of politics are currently involved in: democracy, collective violence, social movements, state formation? And even more down to earth: which places and times are the object of interest of historians of politics – is it still the nation state, or is it the local, the transnational, or the global; old and new cities, regions, empires, or international institutions like the United Nations? Is it only the most contemporary history, or also earlier times; good old ‘*histoire événementielle*’ or also developments that last longer than yesterday’s news?

Finally, this also involves the political nature of the history of politics. Like any other discipline within the humanities, history is a discipline of considered and contested prejudices, that are only overcome by systematic questioning the limits of our understanding. Yet historians of politics might be distinctly aware of the political mechanisms that are at work in the construction of these limitations, including their own role in legitimating or criticizing the political assumption of their own time and that of their predecessors. So what is the political nature of a history of politics, especially now that we all are supposed to focus on impact and social value of our scholarly work?

### **Intellectual and practical aims**

These are the questions that we want to address in a conference aimed to map the state of the art in the history of politics. While a primary goal of the conference is to enhance our self-understanding, and to offer all of us who are embroiled in our specific topic a chance to get a quick overview of the terrain we all are treading, a further goal is to explore new opportunities for research and collaboration, most of all to scholars of a younger generation who look for ways to create new routes through uncharted territory. In this way, we hope to contribute to the main goal of the National Research School for Political History OPG, which is to function as a platform for training of researchers and for the development of research on political history in the Netherlands and abroad, both for upcoming and for established historians of the political.

### **Explorations and experiments**

This will not be a regular conference with lectures or paper panels. Instead, together we will explore the field of the history of politics, discuss old and new ways through the terrain, and engage in an interactive approach to present and develop innovative research. To achieve these goals, the activities at this conference are organized along three separate lines:

- **Debates:** There will be five debates, each preceded by a key note on main issues of the debate. The key note lectures will be presented by international scholars, the panel contains a mix of scholars from older and younger generations and from different disciplines.
- **Presentations:** In between the debates, PhD-candidates and research master students present their work with poster presentations and advanced researchers pitch new projects.
- **Research sandpits:** New research plans are developed in an experimental mode of sandpits.

**See below how to contribute to the debates, to present your research,  
and to participate in the development of new research!**

## **Program The State of the Art in the History of Politics**

**30 November 2017**

**9.30AM-10AM**                **Reception and registration**

**10AM-10.05AM**            **Opening by Ido de Haan**

### **10.05AM-11.30AM**      **Panel: Writing the History of Political Culture**

The study of the cultural dimension of politics has proven to be one of the most enriching 'turns' in political history. Influenced by developments in the related fields of cultural anthropology and semiotics, it has come to encompass a wide and diverse array of topics, ranging from political ritual and symbolism to communication and discourse, political and social action and social movements. Since the 1990s scholars have also turned to the spatial and material contexts surrounding the spheres of power. Yet the concept of political culture is also criticized for becoming too unwieldy or too focused on micro-interactions to contribute to our understanding of macro-developments in politics. This session will explore how research into the cultural aspects of politics informs our insights into the nature and functioning of political power, and how we should evaluate its added value. What promising directions have so far been un(der-)explored, and to what extent can these relate to – and engage with – other scholarly disciplines? In short, what kind of possibilities does the study of political culture have to offer, and how may we avoid its pitfalls?

*Key note: Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger*

*Panelists: Marnix Beyen, Dennis Bos and Lotte Jensen*

*Chair: Dries Raeymaekers*

**11.30AM-12PM**            **Break**

### **12PM-1PM**                **Posters, pitches and sandpits**

#### **Poster presentations**

Research Master Students and PhD-candidates have the opportunity to present their research in a poster presentation on A0 format (118,9 cm (B) x 84,1 cm (H)). For guidelines about format and style see the website van de American Historical Association. Costs for preparing the poster may be reimbursed (up to 15 euro). Contact: Leonard van 't Hul (W.L.vantHul@uva.nl) before 15, October 2017.

#### **Pitches**

Are you a historian who would like to share your research with your fellow historians? Present your project, program or institute in a three minute elevator pitch at the OPG Conference The State of the Art in the History of Politics. We especially invite researchers and institutes who are starting new research or who have recently received a grant. Please send a 50-word abstract of your contribution to: Pieter Slaman. (p.j.slaman@fgga.leidenuniv.nl) before 15 October 2017.

#### **Research sandpit 1**

Sandpits are a method to formulate innovative research projects across disciplinary boundaries, first developed by the British Engineering and Physical Science Council. In the context of this two-day conference, we will experiment with an adapted version, that is much shorter, with more modest aims. The sandpit consist of a group of 12-15 people from different disciplinary backgrounds and varied historical interests, led by a technical chair and two mentors, who in four sessions of one hour

try to create one or several research groups which formulate a research project. The first sessions is aimed to find partners within the sand pit; the second to formulate a research problem; in the third session a rudimentary research plan is formulated; in the final session, each group presents its research plan. If there is a larger group interested to participate, several sandpits will be created. The chairs and mentors of the sandpits decide who is participating in his/her sandpit. Apply to participate by sending a one-page CV, a list of five main publication and 100 words description of field of interest to Ido de Haan (i.de.haan@uu.nl) , deadline 15 October 2017.

**1PM-2PM**

**Lunch**

**2PM-3.30PM**

**Panel: Writing the History of Political Institutions**

How to write the history of political institutions? Questions about the role of institutions in the political order are quintessential to political-historical research. In an era in which the role of national governments, parliaments and political parties seems to decrease while the influence of lobbyists, interest groups, NGO's and the EU increases these questions are as topical as ever before. Still, the question is how political historians should deal with these seemingly institutional changes. To what extent does a shift from national to international and from government to governance urge us to change our methods and research objects? What are the consequences of these dynamics for political-historical research today?

*Key note: Mark Bevir*

*Panelists: Carla van Baalen, Marieke de Goede, Anne Heyer*

*Chair: Ronald Kroeze*

**3.30PM-4PM**

**Break**

**4PM-5.30PM**

**Panel : The politics of the history of politics**

Present-day political developments such as the rise of right-wing populism or the problems European integration after Brexit confront political historians with the inherent political nature of their subject. Also, funding institutions and the general public increasingly require scholars to focus on impact and social value of their work; historians are now often asked to translate contemporary challenges into new research questions and to present the outcomes of their research tot non-academic forums. These are issues that are especially relevant for political historians. How to analyse the politics of social impact affecting the sciences and the humanities? Which political mechanisms play a role in the way political historians construct their research questions? What is the role political historians play in legitimating or criticizing the political assumptions of their own time and that of their predecessors? Also, do the current times require a more active role of political historians in societal debate and if so, which topics need to be addressed? This panel, consisting of both academic historians as well as historians that now work in a more political environment, will discuss the political nature of the history of politics as it comes to the fore in matters such as left-wing idealism, the memory of slavery, or the 'ever closer' European Union.

*Key note: Marc Stears*

*Panelists: Dienke Hondius, Wouter Beekers, Wim van Meurs*

*Chair: Karin van Leeuwen*

**5.30PM-6.30PM**      **Research Sandpit 2**  
**6PM-8PM**              **Drinks and dinner at Dudok, The Hague**

**8PM-9.30PM**              **Special event (open for the general public, in Dutch) at Dudok, The Hague**  
**Democratie: Success Story of Verfallsgeschiede?**

**Debat ter gelegenheid van 100 jaar algemeen kiesrecht in Nederland**

Er is een opvallende discrepantie tussen de worteling van de democratie in de samenleving en het beperkte enthousiasme dat het eeuwfeest van het algemeen kiesrecht weet op te roepen. De stand van de democratie is blijkbaar zo zorgwekkend dat maar weinigen zich herkennen in het idee dat verkiezingen het feest van de democratie zijn. Dat is een politiek probleem, van eroderende politieke legitimiteit, maar het is ook een historisch probleem: waar komt die discrepantie vandaan, en op welke manier geven politiek-historici daarvan rekenschap? In het kader van de conferentie State of the Art of Political History zullen kenners van de Nederlandse politieke geschiedenis zich in een aantal korte statements over die vragen buigen om vervolgens in debat te gaan over de vraag of de geschiedenis van de democratie als success story of als Verfallsgeschiede geschreven moet worden.

*Panelists: Mieke Aerts, Carla van Baalen (o.v.), Mineke Bosch, Annelien de Dijn, Henk Kummeling (o.v.), Henk te Velde.*

*Voorzitter: Ido de Haan*

**1 December 2017**

**10AM-11.30AM**              **Panel: Writing a Global History of Politics**

Today, some two decades after the 'transnational turn' occurred, its impact appears to have been substantial, judged by the large amount of scholarship on flows of people, ideas, products, processes and patterns operating across national boundaries. At the same time, its effect has been unevenly distributed, with national historiographies and subfields that have hardly been affected. This panel aims to take stock of recent developments and answer these questions. What has been the overall result of pleas to move beyond the narrative of the nation-state and instead adopt a transnational, or even global, perspective? To what extent has the 'transnational turn' had an impact on the subfield of political history? What has been the impact of 'transnational history' on both Dutch historiography and historiography on Dutch history?

*Key note: Corinna Unger*

*Panelists: Kiran Patel, Remco Raben and Anne-Isabel Richard.*

*Chair: Liesbeth van der Grift*

**11.30AM-12.30PM**      **Poster presentations, elevator pitches and speed dates, research sandpit 3**

**12.30AM-1.30PM**      **Lunch**

**1.30PM-3PM**              **Panel: Writing the Political History of the Social**

One prominent thread in recent historiography articulates how society has been classified, organized and indexed by means of statecraft. Scholars like Scott, Patrick Joyce, Mary Poovey and Lutz Raphael have probed the mechanisms and politics of creating 'the social' in modern history. They ask questions that are key to political history and histories of power: How and why does the state distinguish between groups based on constructed categories of race, gender, class, nationality and age? What are the long term effects of this human 'indexing' in terms of inequality, social in- and

exclusion? How do state projects such as colonialism, population management, social engineering and welfarism (re)produce social categories? Central questions in this panel are how the new political history of the social relates to the older social history 'from below', how it affects our understanding of the state as a set of practices, things and networks, and how to analyze the implications of the 'scientization of the social' for the history of politics, policy, democracy and citizenship.

*Key note: Lutz Raphael.*

*Panelists: Gita Deneckere, Karwan Fatah Black and Geertje Mak.*

*Chairs: Harm Kaal and Stefan Couperus*

**3PM-3.30PM**                      **Research sandpit 4: presentation of research plans**

**3PM-4.00PM**                      **Writing Political History Today**  
**Closing remarks by Henk te Velde.**

**4PM-5PM**                         **Drinks**

#### **Information and registration**

[www.aanmelder.nl/opg/](http://www.aanmelder.nl/opg/)

[www.onderschoolschoolpolitiekegeschiedenis.nl](http://www.onderschoolschoolpolitiekegeschiedenis.nl)

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