



Research School Political History / Onderzoekschool Politieke Geschiedenis

Invitation
Opening of the Academic Year 2024
20 September 2024

When people (think they) have a choice
with Peter van Dam, Bram Mellink and Chaja Merk

Allard Pierson, Oude Turfmarkt 127-129, Amsterdam,
15.00 – 17.30 (doors open at 14.30; drinks at 16.45). Participation is free of charge.
Registration: bureau@onderzoekschoolpolitiekegeschiedenis.nl

We warmly invite you for the inaugural session of the national Research School Political History. This gathering provides ample opportunities for political historians to meet each other and to welcome our new research master students and PhD candidates. As always during our opening sessions, we discuss a specific theme relevant to the field of political history.

This year newly appointed Professor of Dutch History at the University of Amsterdam, Peter van Dam, and Bram Mellink, present a keynote. After their presentation there will be a conversation with storyteller and climate activist Chaja Merk about storytelling as politics.

Speakers



Peter van Dam is professor of Dutch history at the University of Amsterdam. His research focuses on the history of civic initiative and activism as well as the history of historiography. His current research revolves around the question how people have tried to make the world more sustainable.



Bram Mellink is assistant professor of Dutch History at the University of Amsterdam. His research interests include the history of hiv and aids since the 1980s, the history of neoliberalism and the (political) history of individualisation.



Chaja Merk is communications specialist at Milieudefensie, public speaker & intersectional climate activist.

When people (think they) have a choice

The history of politics starts wherever people mobilise, organise, and empower themselves, to change existing power structures. The conviction that a situation - previously understood as given - can be altered, provides the starting point for attempts to acquire and exercise power. Over the last years, a striking mismatch between public and scholarly perception of political activities outside traditional institutions has developed. Whilst public rallies, civil disobedience and other forms of protest outside institutional settings are increasingly criticized in public, scholars have doubled down on the idea that we need to look beyond these institutions to understand politics. The latter is often paired with romantic notions of 'bottom up' mobilisation as a better kind of politics which is closer to the lives and ideas of the population at large.

We aim to challenge this opposition of top down and bottom up perspectives on politics, highlighting instead how processes of politicisation take place in every realm of society, from the offices of bureaucrats and the newsrooms of media outlets to birthday parties and local discussion groups. During the opening session, we will discuss how do people move from changing their mind to making an impact in these various settings. How do they articulate their positions? Which means do they use to make an impact? We will highlight how such a perspective helps us to reconnect institutional and extra-institutional dimensions of politics and how it informs a transnational history of politics. Finally, we aim to turn the table on political historians: how are the histories we write political? How do we aim to make an impact through the stories we tell?

Program details

- 14.30 Doors open
- 15.00 Welcome by **Jacco Pekelder**, academic director OPG
- 15.05 Politics on the move – **Peter van Dam & Bram Mellink**
Beyond 'top down' and 'bottom up' – methodological perspectives
How politics are made within institutions
Political trajectories in civil society
- 15.45 Discussion
- 16.00 What is political about history?
Storytelling as politics – a conversation with storyteller and climate activist
Chaja Merk
- 16.30 Issue of certificates to PhD candidates who have completed their training
by **Carla Hoetink**, director of studies RSPH
- 16.40 Closing remarks by **Marijke van Faassen**, chair RSPH
- 16.45 Drinks
- 17.30 End of program