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Open government and public trust: a new revaluation of the citizen perspective

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“Ambition is a funny thing: it creeps in when you least expect it and keeps you moving, even when you think you want to stay put.”

— Lena Dunham, 2014
writer, director, actress, producer

“Long shots are always fun. Good idea to sit down and talk about it, but I'm already excited....”

— Jan Gieskes, 2018
(former) Secretary of the Waarderingskamer

Acknowledgements

When on August 13th, 2018 I first pitched the idea to my boss that *‘although it might be a long shot, perhaps I could do a dual PhD via work’*, I immediately received a message of affirmative enthusiasm. From the very beginning, my employer, the Waarderingskamer, has offered unconditional support for this project. A project that now turns out to really be finite. The next most important thing he said was *‘And if you don't finish it, at least you will have tried’*. Although quitting before finishing is more repelling than the blood, sweat, and tears required to complete it, this particular statement made it possible to experience the entire process as something I had the privilege to do instead of something that had to be done. Even after a change of guard, management continued to fully support the project, and gave me complete freedom to organise the work in such a way that there was time to write.

Thanks to all my colleagues at the Waarderingskamer for their patience during the hours I was not available for work. Special thanks to the colleagues who helped reflect on the possibilities for measuring openness in our field, ir. Ruud Kathmann and mr. Jan Gieskes, and who assisted in the focus groups, mr. drs. Linda Hennink and ir. Marco Kuijper. Many thanks to all the organisations and municipalities that contributed to the

study, and thereby opened themselves up to criticism from their citizens. In particular, Ester Lewis-Visser and the municipality of Meierijstad as well as mr. Nard Elfers and Belastingssamenwerking Oost-Brabant, for providing access to objectors in their municipalities. Facing a critical eye is not easy and requires courage. My gratitude goes out to all respondents who participated in the survey study, the focus groups, and the interviews for sharing their criticism and enthusiasm. Their valuable contributions help to gain more insight into the relationship between municipalities and their residents, and between the state and its citizens.

In addition to my employer, I believe Leiden University cannot be omitted from this word of thanks. First of all, my supervisors, prof. dr. Kutsal Yesilkagit and dr. Carola van Eijk. Together they were able to maintain the helicopter view as well as make detailed suggestions for improvement. We met devotedly every four weeks, via Teams, as COVID caused the three of us to physically meet for the first time after more than 2.5 years. My gratitude goes out to the members of the reading committee for their reflections and for taking the time to provide me with valuable remarks and recommendations to help lift the quality of the structure and the content of the book.

Moreover, the Leiden University Dual PhD Centre is a place where one quickly feels at home. Thanks to all valuable colleagues and its director, dr. Johannes Magliano-Tromp, who, after seeing a first draft slightly averse, noticed that *'it contained a lot of ion-words'* (meaning words ending with ion). A phenomenon I was not familiar with, but with which he apparently meant plain bureaucratic language. Thanks to dr. Yvonne Kleistra, who, while not agreeing with thanking any of the university staff, did give the advice to start with these acknowledgements on time and who described any of my practical questions about fonts or printing services as *'atypical'*, which I took as a compliment. Special thanks also go out to dr. Mark Dechesne, who had the patience and dedication to thoroughly review the statistical options of the data of our 'quantitative working group members' and, while YouTubing and, above all, laughing a lot, introduced us to scientists from all over the world. And, of course, Petra Evers, who was happily supportive from the beginning to the very end.

The third pillar under this project has been the support of family and friends, who –solicited or unsolicited– listened to what and how I was doing, who served as guinea pigs for the survey questions, and Nina and Valerie, who walked the streets with me while discussing the large and the little things in life and distributing research flyers like true mail carriers. My sisters, Shirin and Laura, who agreed to stand by me as my paranymphs, and Rosa, Jamila, and Mama, who always sympathised even when things were tough. Another influential statement for this experience came from my father, prof. dr. Jan Just Witkam, who immediately labelled the Dual PhD programme as ‘*A (winning) lottery ticket*’. And that’s indeed how it felt.

Although I have tried not to ‘act like a PhD candidate’ at home, in the last year there may have been occasions where I’ve sent the children out of the room ‘*because I just cannot concentrate like this! Just give me ten more minutes.*’ And of course, my love, mr. Robbert Roef, who every so often started a sentence with ‘*Then you will have D R in front of your name...*’, affectionately continuing with statements as ‘*...you’ll still have such a horrible taste in music listening to SLAM FM*’. Although it is said that writing a dissertation is a solo – or even a lonely – endeavour, and ‘*co-PhD-ing is no-PhD-ing*’, to me, it felt like a team effort all along. Now, as the old Dutch folk singer André Hazes already stated in my year of birth, ‘*It is time, the highest time.*’ Hora est.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of stylized, cursive letters that appear to be 'M' and 'W' intertwined.

Mathilde Witkam
Leiden, 14 July 2024



Date of birth
20 september 1982

Place of birth
Leiden, the Netherlands

EDUCATION

Dual PhD programme

Leiden University

2019-2024

- Promotor: prof. dr. A.K. Yesilkagit
- Co-promotor: dr. C.J.A. van Eijk

Master International Public Law

Utrecht University

2001-2007

- Bachelor International Law
- Minor in Psychology
- Minor in Arabic language, culture and Islamic Law

Pre-university education

- Boerhaave College, Leiden 1999-2001
- Vlietland College, Leiden 1994-1999

OTHER INTERESTS

- Mother of Zoey, Zara-Lily, Floris and Philip
- Apprendre le Français
- Yin Yoga
- Drawing and design

About the Author

Mathilde Witkam

While working as a legal policy advisor, I participated in the Leiden University dual PhD programme.

The dual PhD programme of the Leiden University Dual PhD Centre offers professionals the opportunity to devote part of their working time to conducting PhD research. This project was facilitated by my employer, the Netherlands Council for Real Estate Assessment.

EXPERIENCE

Legal policy advisor

Netherlands Council for Real Estate Assessment (Waarderingskamer)

2014-present

- Legal information desk for municipalities, citizens and companies on the Act for Real Estate Assessment and related legislation
- Chair monthly case law consultation
- Handle information requests, objections and complaints
- Prepare policy notes for the board and committees
- Data Protection Officer (IAPP-certified: CIPM)
- Confidential counsellor (certified via interdepartmental network of confidential counsellors)