

VB-NIG dialogue 2022

THE DRAMA OF DEMOCRACY: RETHINKING THE RULE OF LAW IN PUBLIC GOVERNANCE

Drama and democracy have been linked since the ancient Greeks. The theater was a place where citizens came together to watch plays and to debate political questions. It was important for shaping the relationship between citizens and government, and in creating and maintaining democracy, beyond a mere set of institutions.

Those who use the words 'drama' and 'democracy' in a single sentence today usually do so for very different reasons. Our democracy squeaks and creaks. Institutions such as parliament, political parties, elections, but also the judiciary and the traditional media have been weakened. The prevailing political norms are subject to erosion. Furthermore, new forms of direct democracy reproduce existing relationships, and thus far fail to deliver on what they promise. Citizens feel unheard (e.g., Groningen gas extraction), are angry (e.g., Covid-19 measures), and take unilateral action (e.g., farmers' protests).

The responsiveness of governments to the needs and interests of citizens is, arguably, connected with the capacity of democratic institutions to uphold and strengthen equality, inclusiveness, transparency, accountability, but also participation. Indeed, democracy and the rule of law appear to be closely linked and mutually reinforcing. If considered not only narrowly, as an instrument of government, but as a rule of law to which an entire society is bound, then the rule of law is key in advancing democratic governance, especially so in today's networked society.

What does the drama of democracy, in particular the broken connections between citizens and government, mean for public administration and political science? What role can the rule of law play in restoring those connections and bringing to a halt the slow and steady decline of democratic governance?

What does this mean for politicians and administrators? What does it mean for researchers? Should the rule of law be given renewed attention in public governance, or even rethought?

When: Thursday October 13th, 2022; 13.00 -14.30hr

Where: Tilburg University

Who: We invite everyone to join in the dialogue: whether you are a practitioner or researcher, junior or senior etc. Everyone's ideas and opinions matter!

Program: In this plenary session, organized by the Vereniging voor Bestuurskunde (VB) and the Netherlands Institute of Governance (NIG), we will engage in a dialogue about the challenges, and, indeed, dangers of our time for democracy. We will examine how to deal with those challenges, circumvent those dangers, or perhaps even harness them for something positive through rethinking the rule of law in public governance.

We do this creatively, or rather dramatically, by presenting on stage different situations and scenarios, and by entering into a dialogue with each other, stimulated by a set of eminent speakers. We pose the kind of questions that were also generated by Greek plays, allowing us to stand back from the stage actions, and wonder about what we are really seeing: has it always been this way, does it have to be this way, will it always remain this way?