

Abstracts

Amanda Smullen, Sandra van Thiel
and Christopher Pollitt
Agencies and the paradox of autonomy

In the 1990s, most western states have established contract agencies in the course of administrative reform. This paper discusses the experience with agencies in the Netherlands. It shows that the international New Public Management Paradigm has been translated into a rather specific financial type of autonomy for contract agencies. However, it can be questioned to which extent agencies truly possess autonomy. Interdependencies and agency characteristics are stronger determinants of the degree of autonomy than formal and financial regulations.

Odile Verhaar
Ethics of religious accommodation in public office. Headscarves in the Dutch police

Contrary to what is characteristic for the so-called *hands-off* approach to cultural identities, it is argued here that the issue of accommodating 'Islamic' headscarves cannot be solved by referring to general principles such as 'the separation of church and state'. The *evenhandedness*-approach to cultural identities assumes that contexts 'co-determine' deliberation about toleration of the practices of cultural minorities. In line with this approach, I shall situate the question whether the Dutch police-organisation should allow Muslim policewomen to cover their head with a special police headscarf in the political and administrative context of 'neutrality', and 'public office'. Comparing this case to a seemingly similar one – headscarves for judges – I shall argue that, given the context in the Netherlands, the working of 'police-neutrality' in daily practice cannot provide good arguments *against* accommodation of headscarves for female police, whereas the interest of *visible* 'equal representation' can.

Gerhard Nijhof
Legitimizing disablement

Using 'life stories' from autobiographical interviews of 17 individuals suffering from a long-standing illness as research-data, the nature of explanations and warrants for no longer being able to work were investigated. In two third of the life stories explanations and warrants were found for not being able to work any more. In the lifestories five types could be observed: presenting the personal condition as one of 'generalized deterioration', following a 'inevitable and natural course', with 'low perspectives for progress', accompanied by a process of 'social dissociation', and the (probably impending) 'use of social security as a usual and legal phenomenon'. In these explanations and warrants the informants develop a moral career of someone being unable to work, who has to orient her or himself to a life without work.

Rien Rouw
Modernisation, civilisation and 'tension releasing violence' in Dutch society

The level of violence in Dutch society has given rise to sincere anxiety. This specifically concerns the type of violence which is generally called pointless, or rather: tension releasing violence. Research shows that the general level of violence has remained stable. However, it seems likely that specific forms of violence have actually increased, that specific groups have increased the use of violence, or that violence is used more frequently in specific areas.

This article finds an explanation for this phenomenon in the way in which society is organised. Firstly, it points at the atmosphere of aloofness or indifference predominating in public areas which allows aggression and violence to thrive. Secondly, it shows that violence may well have an 'outlet valve' function in a peaceful and over-regulated society. This may be the case to such an extent that non-peaceful zones have arisen in which violence is part of everyday life. To conclude, the article states that a society which is based upon reason and self-control has a weak spot and a strong tendency towards violence.

Jan Terpstra
Changing supervision on the social insurance system

For the last ten years the supervision on the social insurance system in The Netherlands has changed in many respects. These changes are closely associated with institutional developments in social security and with changing policy paradigms. The growing importance of supervising or regulatory agencies is to a considerable part a consequence of the growing popularity of the New Public Management. However, this new way of thinking about government and social policy leads to two fundamentally opposing models of supervision. In the first model supervision is seen as an instrument of central government controlling social security organisations. In the second model supervision is seen as a kind of reflexive regulation in a field with a growing emphasis on governance and on regulation at a distance. Recent governments' proposals of changing the supervision of social security are discussed and compared with these two models.