

## CALL FOR PAPERS

Special issue – PPA – Wicked problems and collaborative governance  
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### Public Policy & Administration Special issue on ‘Wicked problems and collaborative governance’

#### Guest Editors:

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An important part of the Rittel and Webber’s original wicked problem-definition is that actors may not agree on problem definitions and policy preferences (cf. Head & Alford 2015). One might argue that in the face of wicked problems it is required to overcome such disagreement. But, given a main characteristic of a wicked problem being the disagreement on problem nature and preferred responses, then how are the individual/partisan and collective/joined-up perspectives and action logics reconciled? Where do the actor positioning dynamics come from to respond to wicked problems?

A popular answer among governance and public policy and administration scholars of all stripes has become: fostering collaborative governance approaches contributes to public problem solving. As Bartels and Turnbull recently (2020, p. 1335) explained, also referring to older literature,

‘some degree of coordination is beneficial to the performance of individual organizations and can generate public value. Hence, “boundary spanning” (Williams 2002) and creating “collaborative advantage” (Huxham and Vangen 2005) involves building and sustaining relationships of mutual trust, understanding, commitment and reciprocity. While the strength and shape of relationships varies according to network types, in more collaborative networks “the traditional commitment to producing goods and services must give way to a commitment to improved relationships and forming a new whole” (Mandell and Keast 2007, 593).’

In other words, the collaborative governance literature has so far taken for granted the possibility to align the individual/partisan and collective/joined-up perspectives, moving from the assumption that when actors in policy networks have such shared understandings, successful collaboration develops. However, in a world characterized by increased complexity, cultural plurality and multi-dimensionality of social problems, a micro-level actor analysis underpinning the meso-level network analysis recognizes that there is no singular network or process of collaboration to be understood (cf. Bevir and Rhodes 2017).

We believe that especially with respect to this issue, additional contributions to our understanding are required. While the collaborative governance-literature starts from the process of collaboration, we aim to start from the actor, not yet engaged in a collaborative process (a decentred actor perspective). Why would actors engage in collaborative processes if their problem definitions and preferred solutions may differ? How do actors come to recognize the importance of the problem definitions and preferred solutions of the others? How do we get from individual perspective to joint-up collaboration? Moving from this decentered perspective,

this SI aims to advance the collaborative governance literature by contributing to a better conceptualization of the governance of wicked problems. We see it as an ongoing actor positioning-process in which actors strive for different, actor-based understandings of the nature of the issues, the purpose of the collaboration, and its rules of engagement.

Specifically, we look for papers that can shed light on the following fundamental issues:

- *Public Leadership*. What is the role of public leadership in bringing together and/or dealing with different actors' expectations and values?
- *Policy Integration and Network Management*. What is the function of policy 'integrator,' a term used in the field of integrated care, or the function of network management in the public administration literature? Wicked problems require management and integration, but how is it produced?
- *Strategic Actor Positioning*. How does the process of strategic actor positioning occur in the wake of wicked problems and within/across collaborative governance settings?
- *Boundary Spanning*. Wicked problems are wicked because of a constellation of involved actors among which boundaries vis-à-vis the understanding and conception of problems exist. Accordingly, what are the roles and main features of boundary spanning processes from a decentred theoretical perspective?
- *Rational and Cultural Elements*. How can we distinguish and/or reconcile between the rational and cultural functionality of collaboration?
- *Tensions and Multi-Level Systems*. What are the tensions between vertical management processes and horizontal policy integration processes? How can we distinguish and/or reconcile between the multidimensionality of problem cases at street-level and the unidimensional logic of policy fields at the level of policy formulation?
- *Hybridity*. How wicked problems are governed in in hybrid organizational settings, including public enterprises and public-private arrangements?
- *Framing*. What is the role of framing and of the presentation of problems as a response to wickedness?

We do not aim for articles related to a specific societal domain, like health, social policies, environmental policies etc. Our emphasis is on the actor positioning process more than on the understanding of a societal field.

Timeline:

- Before February 15, 2022: If desired send a message to Duco Bannink (d.b.d.bannink@vu.nl) for consultation about the Special Issue;
- February 15, 2022: Submission of extended abstract (about 1,500 words, including up to ten key references). Send to: [d.b.d.bannink@vu.nl](mailto:d.b.d.bannink@vu.nl);
- March 1, 2022: Selection of abstracts by guest editors;
- Around March 15, 2022: Zoom conference, briefly presenting and discussing the abstracts in order to support special issue coherence;
- June 15, 2022: Full paper submission to Public Policy & Administration. Follow the standard journal guidelines for formatting and length of the article. Each paper will undergo a blind peer review as per the normal journal procedures;
- Late 2022/early 2023: international online webinar to discuss and present the main results of the Special Issue and future research perspectives, to be organized in cooperation with key academic societies within the fields of Public Administration & Public Policy (e.g. EGPA, IRSPM, PUPOL) (tbc)