



National Report on EU Governance Research

The Netherlands

by

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RESEARCH ON EU MULTILEVEL GOVERNANCE IN THE NETHERLANDS: A STATE OF RESEARCH

By: Jacques Thomassen and Martin Rosema

INTRODUCTION

In the Netherlands EU multilevel governance has become a major research theme in both political science and public administration. At first sight this development seems to be less strong in economics and law. However, to a large extent such a conclusion would be based on a superficial observation. Although the *term* multilevel governance might be less common in economics and law, the same empirical phenomena and similar theoretical concepts are prominent in these disciplines as well.

There is a striking similarity between the major themes on the academic research agenda and the development of the political and public agenda. On all three agendas the legitimacy and the democratic quality of EU institutions and decision-making processes, seem to be the most prominent issues. To some extent the major research questions with regard to these issues are very classical ones and developed from traditional state-oriented normative views on democracy. From this perspective the relationship between the several institutions of the Union in terms of accountability and democratic control is an important topic, in particular the relationship between politics and administration. Equally important are issues in the broad context of political representation, like the development of a European party system, the representativeness of the European parliament, and the involvement of citizens across Europe in European politics. Ever since the debate on the draft constitution and the rejection of it by a referendum the legitimacy of the Union has become a major item both in the public debate and in academics.

A second major theme is the relationship between the EU and 'lower' levels of government, not only the national level but the regional and local levels of government as well. The increasing academic interest in this relationship runs parallel with an increasing public concern about a shift of power towards 'Brussels'. In law the relationship between national and European law is a major research theme. This is partly based on the concern that the diffusion of power over international institutions has led to a disconnection between political power and legal control. Both in law and public administration the enforcement of European regulations and the transposition of European Union directives into national law has become a major research topic. In political science there is an increasing interest in the question to what extent Europeanisation has an impact on the national system of political representation, on the development of the party system and on the possible development of 'Europe' as an issue in national elections. In economics the theoretical perspective of fiscal federalism is an important source of inspiration.

Equally important is the developing academic interest in the patterns of influence in the other direction: to what extent can and do Dutch policy makers influence European decision making; to what extent can and does Dutch parliament scrutinize the input of the Dutch government in EU decision making.

It is obvious that in the Netherlands academic research on EU multilevel governance is growing fast. To some extent this is the result of the interest of individual researchers and research groups in these topical issues, but the development of EU multilevel governance research is also enhanced by the explicit policy of the Dutch research council (NWO) and national research schools to stimulate this kind of research in the general context of the study of the *shift from government to governance*.

I) STRUCTURAL BACKGROUND

Until recently there were no specific research facilities for this field of research. Nevertheless both at the universities, at the level of the national research council (NWO) and several think tanks and government advisory councils and agencies, EU governance and multilevel governance have become an important research theme.

The Social Science Research Council of NOW developed and funded a special research programme *Shifts in Governance: Problems of Legitimacy and Accountability*. This programme started in 2001. One of the most important themes of this multidisciplinary programme was the development of multilevel governance, its causes and consequences for the legitimacy of national and European governance. This special programme funded several projects.

In 2005 The Hague Institute for the Internationalisation of Law (HiIL) was founded. HiIL is an international research institute that has as its objective to study the internationalisation of law in a world where national borders in the traditional sense are eroding and where the inter-connectedness of societies across state borders is becoming a fact of life. HiIL aims to add to the increasing body of knowledge regarding globalisation by studying the consequences for national legal systems as they increasingly form part of a multilevel legal order. Research projects are planned to be multidisciplinary, combining insights from legal studies with research in political science, economics, and other social sciences.

The Netherlands is a relatively small country in which cooperation in research projects across universities traditionally has been high. An important incentive for interuniversity cooperation is the existence of interuniversity research schools. The Netherlands Institute of government (NIG) is a national research school in which all departments of public administration and political science but one cooperate. The school is responsible

for a joint Ph.D. programme and has a joint research programme. One of the main topics in this programme is multilevel governance.

A focus on the legal dimension of multilevel governance may be found in the research programme of the Lus Commune research school. This programme focuses, *inter alia*, on constitutionalization processes at the national, regional (EU) and global level and the interaction between these processes.

In the Netherlands there are two main inter-university networks for economic research: Tinbergen Institute and NAKE (Netherlands Network of Economics). The better part of the research programme of the Tinbergen Institute deals with the analysis of markets (esp. financial and labour markets) and governance structures at various levels (global, European, regional), however without explicitly using the multilevel governance jargon that is common within political science and public administration.

There are no institutional obstacles and in general no typical Dutch obstacles, for the development of research on EU questions and multilevel governance in particular. As far as obstacles are concerned, they are of a more substantive nature and the same as anywhere else. As most paradigms in relevant disciplines are based on or related to the existence of sovereign national states the concept of multilevel governance is often considered to be a somewhat vague concept. Therefore, for many scientists it is difficult to accept this concept as useful and even more difficult to accept multilevel governance as a new area of research.

Research and teaching does have an impact on research on EU and multilevel governance, to the extent that public administration, political science, law and economics have their traditions and institutes of learning and research. The situation is somewhat improving by the developments mentioned above. *Shifts in governance* was an interdisciplinary programme, forcing scientists from a different background to at least take into account developments in the several disciplines represented in the programme.

An even more explicit attempt to combine insights offered by different disciplines may be found in the establishment of the Hague Institute for the Internationalisation of Law (HiIL; see above), where multilevel governance will be studied from an interdisciplinary perspective, albeit with a focus on one particular issue area: national law.

In general, it seems that law and economics have just begun in analysing their research problems in terms of multilevel governance, which makes the connection with the 'more experienced' social sciences more difficult to make. It must be noted, however, that this is largely a matter of use of language. The concept of multilevel governance may be a recent phenomenon in those disciplines; the topics associated with this terminology have nevertheless been studied.

A) Research and Teaching Infrastructure on EU Matters

The Netherlands has fourteen universities. Research on multilevel governance in Europe has been conducted at most of them. Much research is conducted under the flag of the interuniversity research school Netherlands Institute of Government (NIG, see above). One of the school's five research programmes, in which about 70 researchers participate, is entitled "Governance in the European Union".

Four universities have been assigned the status of Jean Monnet Centres of Excellence: Radboud University Nijmegen, Maastricht University, University of Groningen, and University of Amsterdam. Half of the 28 Jean Monnet Chairs are in one of these universities, while others are mainly spread across the University of Leiden, Tilburg University, Erasmus University Rotterdam and the University of Twente. These chairs are usually either in European Law or European Economics.

Among the research programmes that are directed at single universities, several can be identified that focus explicitly on multilevel governance in Europe. One of them is "Multi-layered governance in Europe and beyond", directed by Hans Keman from the Free University in Amsterdam. The research programme directed by Jacques Thomassen from the University of Twente, entitled "Governance in a complex society", stands out as one of the few in which researchers from different disciplinary backgrounds participate (political science, law, economics). This is one of the research programs of the Institute for Government Studies (IGS).

Several universities have institutes in this field, such as the Center for European Studies (CES) at Maastricht University and the Centre for European Studies (CES) at the University of Twente.

The Netherlands Institute of Government (see above) offers a joint Ph.D. programme. Ph.D. students writing their dissertation on EU matters take part in a so-called research colloquium for two years.

The Netherlands Scientific Council for Government Policy (Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid – WRR) is an independent think tank for Dutch government. The WRR advises government - asked and unasked - about a variety of themes in a long-term perspective. The development of multilevel governance is one of the main themes the council lately has been focussing on.

The Social and Cultural Planning Office of the Netherlands (Sociaal en Cultureel Planning Bureau) is a government agency, which conducts research into the social aspects of all areas of government policy. Its reports are widely used by the government, civil servants, local authorities and academics. Like the WRR it shows an increasing interest in the development of multilevel governance and in particular the legitimacy of the EU.

The Netherlands Institute of International Relations, better known as 'Clingendael', is a think tank. It is a non-profit foundation established under Dutch law. Its objective is to promote the understanding of international affairs. Special attention is devoted to European integration. Clingendael currently employs some 75 staff, the majority of whom are researchers and training staff.

The T.M.C. Asser Institute in The Hague is a research institute that focuses on Private and Public International Law, International Commercial Arbitration, and European Law. Academic research is conducted in collaboration with participating organisations, which include law faculties from universities as well as other institutes. The T.M.C Asser Institute has a library, which includes a European Documentation Centre.

The European Institute of Public Administration (EIPA) in Maastricht carries out training and research on public administration and European policies. The general aim of the institute is to support the European Union and its Member States and the countries associated with EIPA by providing relevant and high quality services to develop the capacities of public officials in dealing with EU affairs by way of training, applied research, consultancy and publications.

B) Assessment of the Relevant Information Facilities

Libraries and European Documentation Centres

Most of the fifteen European Documentation Centres (EDC) are associated with a university library. Other EDCs are associated with the European Institute of Public Administration (EIPA) in Maastricht, the T.C.M. Asser Institute in The Hague, and Hogeschool Drenthe in Emmen.

European Documentation Centres in the Netherlands

T.M.C. Asser Institute, The Hague	Maastricht University
Erasmus University Rotterdam	Service Buro Europe, Maastricht
University of Amsterdam	Radboud University Nijmegen
University of Twente, Enschede	Tilburg University
University of Groningen	Utrecht University
Free University, Amsterdam	Wageningen University
University of Leiden	
European Institute of Public Administration (EIPA), Maastricht	Hogeschool Drenthe, Emmen

Databases

Two general databases are those of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (www.knaw.nl), and the Netherlands Scientific Organisation for Scientific Research (www.nwo.nl). These databases include brief descriptions and list researchers involved in research projects in a wide variety of fields. They do not list publications of research projects.

C) Instruments of Communication and of Cooperation

Journals and periodicals partly or fully dedicated to EU issues.

For more than 55 years, the *Internationale Spectator* has been the only general and independent monthly journal in the field of international politics in the Netherlands and the Dutch language area. It does not exclusively focus on EU issues.

Netherlands-based European law journals include: Common Market Law Review, Legal Issues of Economic Integration, European Constitutional Law Review, SEW: tijdschrift voor Europees en economisch recht, Nederlands tijdschrift voor Europees Recht, Maastricht Journal on European and Comparative Law.

National associations

Formally, the Netherlands is a member of the European Community Studies Association (ECSA). However, in practice its activities do not compare to those in other countries, such as EUSA, ECSA-Canada, or ECSA-Denmark.

Thematic networks or cooperation platforms connecting institutes and research centres

See the information above on NIG, Ius Commune, HiiL and NWO.

D) Source of Knowledge

In general Dutch scientists in this field of research are strongly internationally oriented. Therefore, it would be difficult even to distinguish a national research agenda from an international one, let alone to answer this question. Dissemination of knowledge, at least in the Netherlands, can no longer be described in terms of being imported or domestically generated. In this field of research national borders hardly exist anymore.

National research is fairly well accessible to foreign scholars, as the number of publications in English – in particular of those, which are considered to be key publications – clearly outnumber those in Dutch. (It must be noted that to some extent this observation is tautological, as the English language is an important criterion to decide what publications are key.) Nevertheless, a substantial number of articles and books are also published in Dutch. Few works are published in other languages.

The presence of Dutch scholars in international conferences is very high and always has been. To the extent that this is still possible, it is increasing. Even for Ph.D. students it has become self-evident to participate in international conferences.

II) EVALUATION OF THE STATE OF RESEARCH ON EU MULTILEVEL GOVERNANCE (5-10 pages)

A) Review of Country Research as presented in the Survey

Screening the database in view of:

- *The general trends regarding the distribution of projects according to disciplines, number of scholars working on the topic (including gender distribution), level of international cooperation, source of funding;*
- *The thematic focus of the projects as well as their core theoretical and methodological orientations;*
- *The balance between theoretical reflections and empirical research;*
- *Scope of analysis (broad or narrowly tailored to specific issues or object of analysis);*
- *Relative emphasis on academic as compared to applied research.*

The research projects in the Connex database have been identified by a combination of means, which include a couple of formal databases, several websites, and personal communication with researchers in the field. A major database about research projects in the Netherlands is the so-called “Nederlandse Onderzoek Databank” from the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW). This database comprises information about numerous research projects, including researchers involved and abstracts of the projects. The Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO), the most important organisation for the funding of academic research, also has a database that lists projects funded. These databases have one major disadvantage: they are not regularly updated and consequently do not list publications resulting from the projects.

Most of the research projects identified is conducted in the fields of political science (including public administration) and law. In part, this bias may be the result of the fact that the notion of (multilevel) governance has long been used to a rather limited extent in other fields, like economics. Consequently, it is more difficult to identify relevant projects, even though their content may be strongly related to the theme of multilevel governance. To a large extent, this also applies to law. This is presumably not a typical Dutch phenomenon.

Regarding the thematic focus of the projects, two observations can be made. The first is, that the topics covered and methods used vary widely. Secondly, it may nevertheless be noted that one theme stands out as the most commonly studied one, namely that which in the CONNEX project is labelled legal framework. Many projects concern the effects of EU regulations at national law. Strikingly, this is true not only for projects conducted in the field of law, but also those conducted in fields of public administration and political science. In the latter field, a second theme that is repeatedly focused on concerns legitimacy and accountability.

The thematic focus can be further illuminated by briefly describing three key research programmes, which consist of a set of related Ph.D. projects. The programme "The impact of the EU on nation states: The case of the Netherlands", which has been directed by Peter Mair from the University of Leiden, started in 1998. This programme examines the effects of European integration on domestic politics. The respective projects focus on effects on national citizenship, sub national government, and socio-political actors (like trade unions); except for the latter, these dissertations have been finished. Another ongoing programme, which started in 2002 and is directed by Bernard Steunenberg from the University of Leiden, focuses on the transposition of EU directives. The programme comprises of four projects, which focus on food regulation, energy and telecom, transport, and social policy. A third research programme, which was started in 2005, is "Multilevel governance and public accountability in Europe". The three projects of this programme, which is directed by Mark Bovens from the University of Utrecht, focus on controlling European agencies, controlling European leaders, and controlling European technocracy.

The Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) funds a substantial number of the identified projects, in particular Ph.D. projects. In some instances research was funded on another basis, for instance by particular funds from universities. Most research, however, was not funded in such a way.

Regarding the gender distribution it is difficult to provide exact data, as gender of researchers is not documented as such in databases. The general pattern that can nevertheless be observed is the common one: project leaders are mostly male (unless Ph.D. researchers are considered leaders of their own project, instead of their supervisors), whereas among participating researchers the gender distribution is less skewed.

Most research is more appropriately qualified as academic rather than applied research. Even studies conducted on behalf of organisations, which explicitly aim at advising the government, such as the Netherlands

Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR) and the Social and Cultural Planning Office (SCP, see above) have a strong academic character.

B) Evaluation of the Resulting Publications

Research projects usually lead to publications, although it is often difficult to assess which publications were the direct results of a particular research project. Furthermore, identifying publications is difficult, because information tends to be put in databases when projects are started. Consequently, the resulting publications cannot always be easily identified. Moreover, many projects identified have started fairly recently and did not yet result in any publication. Consequently, their output in terms of publications cannot yet be judged.

In the case of Ph.D. projects, the resulting publication is by definition a dissertation (unless the project is not finished). Recent years have shown a decrease in the proportion of dissertations that are written in Dutch. Consequently, most dissertations are today written in English. In the Netherlands it is custom that Ph.D. candidates focus primarily on their dissertation, but the results of their projects are usually also presented in terms of conference papers as well as publications in national and/or international journals. Occasionally, a publishing house later formally publishes dissertations.

The general pattern seems to be one of a fairly equal division between national and international publications. Most research projects lead to publications in both Dutch and English. Hence, results are made known to the national as well as the international public. National publications often involve journals that have a relatively wide audience, occasionally also non-academic. Publications in other languages than Dutch or English are rare. (If one would nevertheless like to identify which language comes second to English, this would undoubtedly be German; this is no surprise, given the geographic position of the Netherlands.)

CONCLUSION

Dutch research on EU multilevel governance is well on track. In all relevant disciplines multilevel governance and the EU in general have become an important research topic. Dutch academics in this area of research are strongly internationally oriented and are involved in many international academic networks. Therefore, there is hardly a national research agenda distinguishable from an international one. If anything, it might be the traditional empirical orientation of Dutch political science. Because of this international orientation Dutch academics strongly contribute to the European scientific debate. As far as still possible this international orientation will become even stronger rather than weaker. To some extent this is the predictable consequence of the institutional context of Dutch universities and major research institutes. They are subject to an intensive external review system. Failing to meet the high standards review committees are using can have very negative consequences for research groups. One of the major criteria is excellence according to international standards, which is mainly operationalised as publishing in high quality English language journals. Publish (in English) or perish has become a fact of life at Dutch universities. Therefore, in addition to their intrinsic motivation to work in an international environment, Dutch academics simply have no choice if they want to survive.

If this sounds like a negative incentive, there are strong positive incentives as well. As mentioned above, both the National Research Council and national research schools as well as local university research institutes have taken a strong interest in research on governance in general and EU multilevel governance in particular.

Academic research is quite visible in the public debate, in particular after the 'no' to the draft constitution, although mainly via advisory research bodies such as the Netherlands Scientific Council for Government Policy and the Social and Cultural Planning Bureau.