

## NOMINATIONS DISSERTATION AWARD 2018



**(Organization Sciences) Thijs Willems: 'Monsters' and 'Mess' on the Railways: Coping with Complexity in Infrastructure Breakdowns.**

Infrastructures are the structures and built constructions defining how we move, communicate, store, dispose of stuff, buy, distribute, arrange, organise, etc. They are so basic in our daily lives that they generally operate invisibly on the background of society. Only when infrastructures break down they come to us as something meaningful to scrutinise and investigate. This ethnography on the Dutch railway system argues that distinctions between functioning or broken down infrastructures cannot be drawn unproblematically. Rather, it urges us to rethink infrastructure as a process in which breakdowns and repair work are constitutive of how infrastructure functions. Analysing diverse railway breakdowns, ranging from the very mundane to dramatic ones, the dissertation illustrates what is at the core of breakdowns: their complexity. Two different perspectives on complexity are discerned: one in which complexity shows up as an enemy that must be tamed and managed, and one in which railway employees deal with it in practice. What turns out as truly disruptive is not the breakdown itself, but the ways in which the two perspectives on coping with complexity interrelate and are played out.

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**(Communication Science) Corné Dijkmans: From monologues to dialogues: Interactivity in company social media use.**

In recent years, the presence of companies on social media (such as Facebook and Twitter) and their interactivity on these online platforms has increased significantly. Online media have become an indispensable element in the communication mix of companies, although they may also pose risks (e.g., by their public character). In this dissertation, the effects of social media use by companies are studied on their relationships with consumers. The dissertation shows that online interactivity of companies – via online engagement of consumers – may contribute positively to improvement of their corporate reputation; among customers but particularly among non-customers. Relationships with consumers can be further strengthened if companies use a conversational human voice in their social media activities (e.g., showing understanding for

different opinions, admitting possible mistakes). This dissertation offers new theoretical and practical insights, and may contribute to the optimisation of company communication strategies.

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**(Political Science and Public Administration) Mariken van der Velden: Political “Frenemies”: Party strategies, electoral competition & coalition cooperation.**

The overwhelming majority of governments formed after elections have been coalition governments, in which two or more parties cooperate. Oftentimes the policy preferences of voters and future and/or current coalition partner(s) do not align. Parties, therefore in a coalition government need to weigh whether being friends with their coalition partner(s) is more beneficial than being enemies. The result of this trade-off is decisive for their communication strategy. The current literature explaining changes in party communication does not account for these trade-offs coalition government participation brings. In this thesis, Mariken poses and answers the question how past coalition participation and future coalition considerations influence parties to change their communication by refining existing theories on party competition. Using novel data and innovative empirical strategies, Mariken demonstrate first the differences in communication strategies between government and opposition parties and subsequently shows that these differences stem from parties' anticipation of coalition participation.

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**(Sociology) Arjen de Wit: Philanthropy in the welfare state: Why charitable donations do not simply substitute government support.**

Arguments in political debates often plea for a less top-down government with little rules and less public spending. The expectation is that neighbours, volunteers and charitable donors can fill the gaps left by the government. But can they? This dissertation shows that governmental budget cuts do not simply lead to higher private donations to non-profit organisations. Charitable donors are often not aware of government spending, which is partly due to selective media coverage. Organisations may attract about twenty percent more donors by providing explicit information about a reduction in government support, but this is partly at the expense of other organisations. Many households have a fixed budget reserved for total giving within which they choose their



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organisations. Thus, government spending leads to redistribution of philanthropic giving rather than an overall increase.

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