Dutch public value dynamics in historical perspective: testing current theoretical explorations


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Historical research and public value dynamics

Recently, some important conclusions regarding the study of public values have been made. First, Beck Jørgensen and Vrangbæk (2011: 486) have noted how the topic of public value dynamics (i.e., change and continuity of public values and value systems over time) has been relatively neglected. Second, Beck Jørgensen (2009: 452-455) noted how existing theoretical approaches to public values and value dynamics often fail to study public values in their relevant political-ideological, philosophical (and thus historical) context. These two conclusions are, of course, interrelated. Understanding and explaining public value dynamics for instance requires us, according to Beck Jørgensen, to “be familiar with the history of each value” (2009: 456). Similar calls have been heard elsewhere. Beck Jørgensen and Bozeman (2007: 355) set out for a ‘public values research agenda’ and the first topic of interest concerned the (historical) origins of public values. They also noticed the disadvantage of quoting values out of (historical) context, which leads to the removal of values “from the message or argument of which they form a part, thus robbing them of specific meaning” (idem: 357-358). Likewise, Donald Moynihan noted how “we need better historical accounts of the debate over administrative values, capable of linking these debates to the broader environment” (2009: 820).

It is the argument of this present paper that historical insights (consider emphasis on path dependency, life-cycles of values or the occurrence of time-lags and/or pendulum shifts) are often taken into account when studying value dynamics but that this usually does not happen explicitly or by means of actual historical research. Rather, it is often done by means of methods and theories connected to organizational and/or public management studies. Just one example is – in all aspects highly interesting – work by Groenewegen & Correljé (2009) on value trade-offs in public

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1 This paper contains parts of my forthcoming PhD-thesis at Leiden University entitled: *Hidden Morals, Explicit Scandals. Corruption and Public Values in the Netherlands (1748 – 1813)*.

2 Consider the main argument of Raadschelders and others (2000) that while history and historical notions are omnipresent in public administration research and theory, this is hardly ever explicitly recognised. A notable exception is research on Danish public values in historical context (cf. Beck Jørgensen & Vrangbæk, 2011; Beck Jørgensen, Vrangbæk, & Sørensen, 2009).
infrastructure management in which they hold that different time horizons should be taken into consideration when studying value change.³

A lack of historical research into public value dynamics seems strange since it tends to ask big questions, it has a strong emphasis on time, it takes a long-term perspective and pays close attention to the intricate workings and consequences of a contingent and ever changing institutional context (cf. Pierson & Skocpol, 2002: 696-697; Thelen, 2000, 2002, 2003). It is therefore well suited to investigate public value change that takes place in a long-term, often slow-moving, incremental and unpredictable way.⁴ A critical historical approach to public value change comes close to describing the way in which social reality actually works. Social processes take a long time to unfold, are often cumulative, incremental and take place at different speeds and/or levels. In addition, the benefits of a historical approach to value dynamics become apparent when we realize that the latter can really only be perceived as “the product of social struggles and popular arguments about proper conduct” (Roberts, 1994: 412). This means that when values and value systems clash, people on all levels, in all times and in all functions have to balance old and new values which potentially leads to change. It is interesting to compare such ideas to discussions on the ‘conflictual change mechanism’ to explain public value dynamics. Such a mechanism focuses “on the conflicts that may arise when different values collide” (Beck Jørgensen & Vrangbæk, 2011: 487). It focuses on the opposition and clashes between values and carriers of values and states how values depend on the powers of their value carriers. Clashes and conflict, importantly, trigger organizational responses (idem: 490ff.).

³ There is a fluid ‘play of the game’ level (with a certain amount of rational-intentional determination and implementation of public values) but there is also a time horizon of ‘embeddedness’, where informal institutions, customs, traditions, norms and religion influence evolving, changing values and value systems. This is a less visible and slower-pace level but is, perhaps, more lasting in the long run. These horizons are likely to work alongside each other, implying that value change occurs at a different pace on different levels. Their idea is reminiscent of the work of famous Annales historian Fernand Braudel who made a distinction between focusing on durée (short span) or histoire événementielle (a history of events) and longue durée (slow and often imperceptible effects of space, climate and technology on the actions of human beings in the past) that influence each other (see Wallerstein, 1998).

⁴ Compare Pierson (2003: 187) who wrote how historical-institutional research with an emphasis on time is able to show that causal chains are often not straightforward, in a direct line from x to y. Rather it is often that “x triggers sequence a, b, c which yields y”. Compare in this sense potential problems with rational-choice institutionalism and a strictly teleological change mechanism built on the idea of intentional value change (cf. Beck Jørgensen & Vrangbæk, 2011: 488).
In this paper I draw on the main arguments and conclusions of my forthcoming PhD-thesis in which I investigated public value dynamics in The Netherlands between 1748 and 1813 as it becomes apparent from scandals of political corruption. The study includes three in-depth case studies on political corruption scandals in which (usually implicit) public values become explicitly debated. It is based, firstly, on Michael Johnston’s call (1996; 2005: 72) to investigate how the content of notions such as ‘abuse’, ‘public role’ and ‘private benefit’ (and, I argue, public values as well) are contested and thereby acquire meaning in specific times and places. It is, according to Johnston, precisely in the clash over boundaries between old and new, or between opposing parties that concepts like corruption, or any other public value, acquire their meaning. Secondly, the approach in my thesis rests on a typology of four sources of public values—taken from Ben Hoetjes (1977, 1982)—to investigate different perspectives on political corruption and different public values (representing, in a way, Johnston’s boundaries). The first source is best opinion, public rectitude or the ‘morality of the time’ of ideologists and ‘opinion/makers’. This source refers to the moral authorities of their time that spoke out against the status quo of existing political culture. Second, there are legal (-bureaucratic) rules of public office, to be found in court cases or instructions from which values can be deduced. Third, there is public opinion as expressed in popular pamphlets and political press. Fourth, there are the functioning codes of the ‘shop-floor’ level. Each of these sources (at least in theory) provides a potentially different or opposing view on one and the same act of corruption. Each therefore sometimes values the same behavior differently. Together they provide a combined, detailed and varied view on what is considered abnormal and normal, right and wrong or unacceptable and acceptable behavior in a given context. Disagreement between sources and a shifting ‘balance of power’ among them also goes a long way in explaining institutional dynamics underlying public value change over time (see below).


Technically, the Netherlands did not yet exist. More accurately, we should speak of the Republic of United Dutch Provinces (1555 – 1795), the Batavian Republic (1795 – 1806), the Kingdom of Holland under Louis Napoleon (1806 – 1810) and the period in which this Kingdom became a part of the French Empire under Napoleon Bonaparte (1810 – 1813).
In line with aforementioned arguments, this paper aims to show the need for historical investigation into public value dynamics. It also aims to provide more knowledge of value dynamics in general and in the Dutch setting between 1748 and 1813 in particular. This, importantly, is meant to yield more than empirical conclusions. It is also meant to test, substantiate and/or complement current (often abstract and/or non-historical or non-flexible) theoretical explorations of public value dynamics. I will tackle these aims by discussing some findings and theoretical conclusions for each source of public values and for each of the three case studies examined in my PhD thesis. Due to obvious space restrictions, the following will only provide broad or general findings, analyses, and conclusions.

**Perspectives from Dutch best-opinion (1748 – 1813)**

Various best-opinion proponents of three important successive administrative and moral reform movements between 1748 and 1813 (so-called Doelists around 1750, Patriots around the 1770s and 1780s and Batavians after 1795) explicitly articulated and proposed specific public values to morally improve public administrative behavior. While there was much variety as well as disagreement, the movements and their representatives undoubtedly also had many things in common. There was ideological continuity, which can be seen as proof of the existence of a continuous current of revolutionary zeal and desire for administrative moral reform throughout the entire period (cf. Israel, 1998: 1120-1121; Leeb, 1973; Schama, 1977). Shared ideals and public values expanded, gained momentum and increasingly became institutionalized between 1748 and 1813 which led to an almost constant reassessment and refining of the position, functioning and proper moral behavior of public officials therein.

Chief among the new and/or reinforced public values were achieving more political participation for ever larger and different groups of people outside the often closed circle of city regents. To many reformers throughout the period, core public values such as loyalty, integrity or justice were explicitly connected to changing and widening notions of ‘people’ (compare an emerging idea of popular sovereignty), ‘community’ and/or ‘common interest’. Doelist demands around 1750\(^7\) included greater political participation for a wider group of people and politics serving a wider

\(^7\) Of men like the Haarlem cloth merchant Hendrik van Gimmig (mid-18\(^{th}\) century) or the Huguenot journalist Jean Rousset de Missy (1688 – 1762).
common interest. For example, they called for the sale of offices to benefit the community instead of regents’ wallets (Van Gimnig, 1748b: article [art.] 8; see also Knuttel, 1978: Pamphlet 18169, 1748, p. 29ff; De Voogd, 1914: 48-52). Similar but now expanded, reinforced, refined and redefined values returned with a vengeance in the Dutch 1770s and 1780s, in part spurred on by early French and North-American philosophers and revolutionaries. Popular sovereignty, common interest, participation and representation became really big issues (i.e., important public values) (Van der Capellen tot den Poll, 1781: 24; Kossmann, 1987; Zwitzer, 1987: 6, 9-10, 13). Crucial reformers of the old system, such as Joan Dirk van der Capellen (1741 – 1784), meant to ensure that public officials were to be humble custodians of the people’s interests rather than haughty despotic usurpers who ruled with impunity (Van der Capellen tot den Poll, 1781: 21-22). They expected public officials to be loyal and accountable to people outside oligarchic regent circles and to adhere to principles not belonging to ‘traditional’ regent thinking that consisted of maintaining harmony, rotation of office and serving family interests. In the works of several best-opinion authors in 1770s and 1780s a new sense of political community (increasingly an actual union rather than a collection of autonomous provinces and cities) was therefore explicitly connected to a new sense of political corruption and desired public values. A good, virtuous and non-corrupt Patriot administrator was to uphold his oath and duty to the nation and was meant to subordinate particular interests (to himself, his family and his fellow regents) to those of the ‘common land’ (such as general wealth and prosperity).

Such ideals reached their (temporary) peak in the Batavian state and constitution after 1795. Batavian best-opinion authors took the earlier Doelist and Patriot lines of argument several decisive steps further ( Jourdan, 2009: 9; cf. De Lange, 1971: 506; Van Sas, 2005: 289). The bulk of the Batavians wanted to create a true nation in the sense that it should represent a more-encompassing community and common good covering the entire Republic. Through new central institutions such as a national assembly, rudimentary elections and a constitution, public values such as representation, accountability and legitimacy were either new or acquired new meaning. To many reform-minded Batavians corruption constituted behavior that did not fit such ever widening notions of community. Corruption now explicitly meant betraying trust and power invested in you by the people. To many, corruption came to

8 Such as Isaac Gogel (1765 – 1821) and Willem Anthonie Ockerse (1760 – 1826).
mean harming the newly built unitary and centralized nation. This harm was done, in particular, by engaging in political faction strife, by serving personal instead of communal interests, by extravagant spending and lavish living in times of economic decline, by bowing to foreign – first English and later also French – pressures and interests and by allowing particularism to continue. The latter meant that the Batavians wanted to end a political culture in which a large variety of autonomous actors and levels all tried – and were able – to hold on to as much independence as possible (De Jong, 1987: 34; Price, 1994).

Based on the previous, I conclude that best-opinion texts between 1748 and 1813 had a rather ‘classical’ or wide understanding of corruption as the general decay of the body politic (cf. Friedrich, 1989: 18; Heidenheimer, 1989a: 4-5; Johnston, 1996: 322). Individuals were often only accused of corruption in terms of the supposed lack of polity-wide impact of their actions. Corruption by and large meant the decay, collapse or poisoning of the political community and/or communal welfare as a whole; especially from the Patriot period onwards. Furthermore, moral decay was often inextricably linked to ‘corruption’ or decay in other key areas of society, such as politics, economy and culture (Kossmann, 1995, 119-120).

Accordingly, the public values espoused by best-opinion were broad and general rather than specific and narrow although accusations of political corruption by best-opinion authors could also be based on the latter. First, best-opinion authors occasionally accused public officials of deviating from the formal legal-bureaucratic duties of their office. These were often general references to upholding one’s oath and/or instruction. Sometimes public officials would also be accused of not adhering to formal and informal rules of office rotation and seniority (cf. Gabriëls, 1989: 276). Sometimes quite elaborate visions on corruption as the deviation of legal-bureaucratic public values such as merit, ability, neutrality and hierarchy could be found as well (Swildens, Van der Capellen, & Van der Capellen van de Marsch, 1785: 190-195). However, there does appear a general lack of references to legal-bureaucratic values in the best-opinion texts I have studied. This is explained by the absence of a Rechtsstaat and signals, more importantly, that other sources of public values (see below) were more instrumental in determining and changing debates, perceptions and public values. Secondly, best-opinion authors did sometimes base their arguments and allegations on so-called ‘market-centered definitions of corruption’ – meaning
individual public misconduct because of ‘maximizing’ behavior (cf. Heidenheimer, 1989a: 9; Johnston, 1996: 323; Van Klaveren, 1989: 26) – even though this was rare. It happened, for instance, when Doelists accused city administrators of lining their own pockets, and when officials in the new Batavian state were accused of stealing public money for private financial gain in 1798. Yet, throughout the period it seems to have remained largely acceptable according to best-opinion authors for public officials to personally benefit financially from their public office but only as long as communal or polity-wide interests were not harmed. This too may have had mostly to do with the fact that certain structural legal-bureaucratic arrangements (such as fixed salaries, pensions, a chance of promotion etc.) were not (yet) in place.

Views from Dutch corruption scandals and alternate sources of public values

Apart from best-opinion and its usually abstract and general ideas and values, there were also legal, public-opinion and shop-floor views on public values and corruption. In the following I provide an overarching perspective on the public values and perceptions of corruption from these other sources as they have emerged from the three case studies. As before, main empirical findings are presented in combination with some important theoretical conclusions regarding public value change.

Taxation, corruption and moral reform (1748 – 1756)

A first case discusses the link between corruption and public value change and bureaucratization and moral reform in the context of Holland’s changing system of taxation around 1750. Moral protest from an angry populace coincided with internal and external political instability of the Dutch Republic and helped turn a previously ‘private’ system of tax farming into a highly bureaucratic apparatus (cf. Kerkhoff, 2011). The case clearly shows how public authorities on various levels took an active stance in improving both the system of taxation as well as the underlying morality of what was essentially a first-of-its-kind form of near complete public service delivery. In separating the public and private sphere and setting up a public system of tax collecting, the authorities were forced to think of the moral standards that should be upheld by the new, now public, officials. Interestingly, aims to increase tax revenue appear to have been subordinate to aims to decrease ‘corrupt’ or immoral public
behavior. This makes sense when we ask ourselves how people could have known beforehand that ‘going public’ would increase tax revenues? Rather, reform occurred because of popular moral protest and a strong desire of various high-ranking administrators to levy taxes on a more equal footing. In addition: a system of taxation that had until then been based on utilizing self-interest for maximum financial gain for authorities as well as tax farmers was now thoroughly revised to end abuse of office, smuggling, nepotism and extortion. This happened in the interest of a new, and wider, common good based on new legal-bureaucratic values. Public officials were indeed believed to do a better job than private ones (see Ma, 2003, 441-442) but 'better' was not defined in terms of economic efficiency. It was instead based on the assumption that public rather than private officials would better ensure proper administrative conduct, cause less corruption or abuse of office and increase the legitimacy of public institutions. Rather than increasing economic efficiency, attempts to reform institutions and to ‘go public’ were thus mainly based on the assumption that this would enhance social legitimacy of and trust in the new organization and its employees. This allows for a critical evaluation of institutional-economic and rational-choice theoretical explorations of anti-corruption efforts and increases the strength of a theory based on a logic of social appropriateness (March & Olsen, 2004).

From the case on taxation I also conclude that changing public values and perceptions of corruption were closely linked to developments of bureaucratization, professionalization and organizational reform in the area of tax collecting. Being corrupt increasingly entailed not adhering to bureaucratic values or working within a bureaucratic framework. Public values such as loyalty to one’s superior, neutrality in the execution of one’s duties, maintaining hierarchy in a system, keeping one’s administration (i.e., your books and ledgers) in order and/or displaying professional expertise and punctuality were either new or reemphasized. It also became wrong to mix public office with private interests; a quite revolutionary thought in a world that barely knew such a separation. Officials were also accountable according to the new bureaucratic standards. In this sense, changing public values and perceptions of

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9 And there was much doubt that it would. In 1748 the possibility of increasing revenues was far from apparent. Only gradually turned out to be cheaper and more efficient (Heringa, 1983, 83-89, 100-101; Ma, 2003, 441-444) and only in hindsight did people realize that revenues did in fact go up considerably after 1748.
corruption should indeed be regarded as a phase from patrimonial to rational legal authority (Hoetjes, 1977: 53-55; see also Rubinstein, 1983; Rubinstein & De Graaff, 2010: 21).

Even though some ‘old’ elements of the tax system remained after 1748 and some new or supposedly ‘modern’ elements already existed before 1748, the case of taxation shows definite changes in the relationship between public authorities, tax officials and tax paying citizens. The bureaucratic reforms went beyond ‘merely’ bringing about centralization or uniformity in the system; they went to the heart of a changing public morality. This shows the theoretical and empirical relevance of the use of Max Weber’s ideal type of bureaucracy to study and explain public value change. This is in turn interesting because the moral dimension of bureaucratization is often forgotten (Raadschelders & Rutgers, 1989: 28) while bureaucratization is obviously so closely related to changes in ethics, morality and individual behavior. From a theoretical point of view the benefits of using the ideal-type to assess public value change seem paramount. Bureaucratic reform around 1750 provided an important impulse for changing expectations, assumptions, rules and regulations that is likely to have guided and helped shape public official behavior of decades and potentially even centuries to come. This can (again) be linked to a theoretical conclusion concerning the use and benefit of structural functionalist theoretical explorations to explain public value change. As soon as bureaucratic procedures and regulations were put in place, the need for and tolerance of ‘corruption’ (compare taking a part of fines as legitimate salary which often led to abuse) seem to have decreased.

Finally, debates on the behavior of corrupt tax officials displayed both a narrow and a broad view on and use of political corruption and public values. The corrupt behavior of individual officials was framed in narrow terms of stealing money, extorting people, serving personal interests and not following the (legal-bureaucratic) rules of one’s office. At the same time – echoing best-opinion, see earlier – a wider and more classic view on political corruption and public values can also be seen. Public opinion in a stream of pamphlets was, for instance, quick to link the actions corrupt tax officials to the general decay of society embroiled in radical political and social change (Dekker, 1996; Israel, 1998: 1067-1069, 1072-1075; Randeraad & Wolffram,
1998: 37). Corruption, according to public opinion and shop-floor, also meant self-enrichment and wallowing in luxury, especially in times of economic hardship.

*Princely patronage and patriot cause (1770s and 1780s)*

A second case offers a study of corruption in the years of Patriot agitation and revolt during the 1770s and 1780s. As I mentioned earlier, Dutch ‘best-opinion’ Patriots stressed, reemphasized and/or renewed public values such as popular sovereignty, civic freedom and political participation. The times were also marked by the emergence of a distinctly political press with a growing audience spread over the entire Republic from roughly 1750 onwards (cf. Broersma, 2005; Harline, 1987; Pollmann & Spicer, 2007). This had a major effect on widening the scope of debates on corruption and public values. In many ways – although different sources of values showed different opinions, see below – the Patriot period witnessed full-fledged attempts to finally get rid of ‘old’ structures of office rotation, collegial harmony on the shop-floor, nepotism and the patronage of a Stadholder and his clique on the one hand and ruling regent oligarchies on the other. Confidants who the Stadholder appointed in various governing bodies offered proof that corrupt ways were destroying the values of a once virtuous Dutch Republic. The corruption of ‘Lieutenant-Stadholders’ and the Stadholder’s patronage was not just targeted by ideologically inspired Patriots (such as Van der Capellen) and various political pamphleteers of the day. It was also targeted by ‘practically’ motivated and self-serving excluded local regents (compare the use of a rational/choice explanation here!). Ironically, both these ‘groups’ fought against the system of patronage but for very different reasons. The first group turned against nepotism, patronage, rotation of office and venality because these practices harmed the public interest, understood by them to entail popular sovereignty, participation, protection of the citizen against arbitrary and/or despotic rule and the rejuvenation of commerce and trade. The second group of excluded regents, on the other hand, was seemingly merely looking for ways

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10 The Stadholer (since William of Orange (1533 – 1583) stemming from the House of Orange) was a powerful political figure in the Dutch Republic who was the commanding officer of the Generality army and had the power to appoint high officials in various governing bodies (cf. Gabriëls, 1989). He was also responsible for provincial justice and the keeping of the peace. The Stadholder could claim the right to speak in important Provincial and Generality bodies and was often called in to resolve conflicts. This highlighted his powers and prestige (cf. Damen & Stein, 2011: 53-54; Israel, 1998: 300-306). While initially a representative elected by separate Dutch provinces, the Stadholderate became hereditary in 1747 and with it the dynasty of the House of Orange (Kings and Queens of the Netherlands since 1813) was born.
to get rid of the Stadholder and his confidants so they could yet again turn to the old
politics of collegial harmony and rotation. It signaled that different time horizons (see
earlier) are at play and that change does not come about abruptly. It signals that old
and new often co-existed for quite some time.

Accusations of corruption in Patriot times could accordingly be tied to very different
value systems. To the shop-floor regents the single most important measure for
corruption still seems to have been harming collegial shop-floor harmony that was
still inextricably tied to the core of what it meant to hold public office. To them it was
corrupt not to honor ‘contracts of correspondence’.\footnote{These contracts provided
detailed accounts of which members of town councils were to get office and
which were not. To the regents the contracts of correspondence were long considered accepted practice
because they prevented faction strife in order to further their shared interest which was, in turn, a
prerequisite for their personal interest. Increasingly these contracts however came to be regarded as
corrupt because it often led to oligarchisation and exclusion of some from public office (Van Deursen,
2004: 277; De Jong, 1987: 56; Kooijmans, 1987: 95-95; De Witte van Citters, 1873).} The shop-floor regents had no
intention of widening the political sphere or the idea of common good to include more
and different groups of people in the political process. What still mattered most to this
regent oligarchy was their self interest and keeping power away from Stadholder,
reform-minded Patriots or ‘populace’. To best-opinion (see earlier) and public opinion
corruption meant exactly the opposite: a corrupt public official took care of his own
interests instead of looking out for the bigger community.

In addition, the core contrast between the two ‘groups’ is proof that the Dutch
Republic of the 1770s and 1780s started to witness the emergence of some sort of
‘ethical monism’. Although different parallel value systems still existed\footnote{The concept of value pluralism (Normenpluralität) in historical context is explained by Von
Thiessen (2009: 94-98; 2010: 205-220) who discusses how parallel norms existed within sixteenth and
seventeenth century societies. According to Von Thiessen, early modern administrators constantly had
to deal with values from two distinct moral codes. The first involved legally and formally fixed norms
in service of the community. The other consisted of the informal or ‘face-to-face’ norms of
administrative praxis (cf. Nützenadel, 2009: 121-142; Wagenaar, 2010: 1-2).}, it was
increasingly less possible or desirable to adhere to both systems at the same time (i.e.,
shop-floor harmony and self-interest on the one hand and best-opinion and public
opinion ideals of the common good on the other). It was a process that would, I argue,
be shaped much further at the end of the eighteenth century (see below). Also, finally,
both narrow and classical views on corruption and public values are again visible in
the case and the latter still seemed to have the upper hand.
The Patriots continuously framed individual acts by the Stadholder’s confidants as acts that harmed the entire body politic. To the Patriots, old practices of office rotation and collegial harmony literally and figuratively stood in the way of moral, political and economic rejuvenation. They wanted to make society healthy again, if only to bring about a new glorious ‘golden age’. Fellow shop-floor (but excluded) regents considered gathering wealth and keeping offices for oneself as bad because it deprived them from a ‘fair’ share of the pie. To them the acts of the Stadholder’s confidants corrupted their old and ‘just’ system of administration. Among both groups we therefore find little evidence to support institutional economic approaches that view corruption as purely financial maximization. The Patriots seemed to have a wider agenda and to the shop-floor regents the principle of harmony entailed more than financial gain.

Gin, cloth and salted meat: corruption in the Batavian Republic (1798)

A third and final case in the PhD-thesis involves corruption and public values in the context of major transformations of the Dutch state following the Batavian revolution of 1795 (cf. Palmer, 1954; Rosendaal, 2005; Van Sas, 1989; Van Sas & Te Velde, 1998; Schama, 1977). Investigations by a newly instated National Assembly uncovered how three radical directors of the Batavian executive government had bought French military and political support for a coup d’état to overturn their moderate fellow directors. Using an eclectic collection of individuals with a desire to capitalize on the Revolution as their ‘henchmen’ (cf. Colenbrander, 1905-1922: xlix; Schama, 1977: 284), they managed to secure a deal with the French through payment of cash money as well as goods (cloth, gin and salted meat) meant to be provisions for French troops camping in the Batavian Republic since 1795. In order to acquire these goods, the representatives – who were in typical early-modern fashion ‘politicians’ as well as private businessmen – decided to use their own businesses to produce these goods and to use public credit to pay themselves for it. They essentially made sure they were serving the ‘revolution’ as well as their personal business interests.

In many ways – though certainly not in any absolute, teleological or strictly intentional sense – the investigation into the dealings of the radical directors\textsuperscript{13} offers a

\textsuperscript{13}Most prominently among them were Stephen van Langen (1758 – 1847), Wybo Fijne (1750 – 1809) and Pieter Vreede (1750 – 1837).
view on the final fulfillment of earlier attempts at moral and administrative reform in the Republic. The ideals of the previous Patriot movement appear to have been only dormant and resurfaced after 1795.\footnote{Many Batavians were actually former Patriots returning from exile in France. They had sought refuge there after Orangists and a Prussian army had crushed the Patriot revolt in 1787 (Israel, 1998: 1113; Schama, 1977: 102, 129).} With the French Revolution having broken all sorts of barriers regarding previously nonnegotiable issues, the Dutch Batavians seized their chance to construct a unitary and centralized state that was based on improved and yet again widened public values such as popular sovereignty, civic freedom and ‘true’ political representation. State-formation, politicization and a rudimentary initial attempt of democratization had a profound effect on public values and debates on corruption of the time.\footnote{Compare the work of Bayly (2004: 101, 159, 286-288) who wrote how the long nineteenth century witnessed debates on the nature of good government.} The shift away from particularism (see earlier) and towards a centralized unitary state seems also (still) to have been based on a new and wider notion of common good and public interest and therefore on new public values. A central unitary state with a parliament, a constitution and a new political-administrative apparatus with more standardized procedures (such as a uniform code of law) brought about fundamental discussions about how the new government was to behave.\footnote{In the Batavian period the new foundations of a ‘Napoleonic Model’ of government were laid. For The Netherlands such a system included (sometimes new) elements as centralisation, territorial unity, uniformity of laws and procedures and emphasis on a constitution (see Lok, 2009; Van der Meer & Raadschelders, 1995; Peters, 2008; Wunder, 1995).} It brought debates on how the state’s power – now more or less directly derived from the people through actual elections – should be exercised and brought further politicization and ideological strife with regard to proper and improper public administration and public values.\footnote{Recently, a variety of case studies has tackled the particular issue of changing public values in the midst of early nineteenth-century processes of ‘modernisation’ (cf. Asch, Emich, & Engels, 2011: 7-9, 19-27; Engels, 2006; Engels, Fahrmeir, & Nützenadel, 2009; Kerkhoff, et al., 2010). In 2013 a special issue of the Journal of Modern European History, edited by myself, Pieter Wagenaar and Ronald Kroeze, will be entirely devoted to this theme with an emphasis on cross-national (European) and/or cross-temporal (diachronic) comparison.}

This, I argue, especially occurred in the first years of the Batavian Republic. In debates surrounding corruption new or reemphasized questions were asked regarding such values as representation, legitimacy of government and administration, responsibility and accountability and a stricter separation between public and private sphere. The case shows how mixing public office with private commercial interests had become less tolerable according to a growing number of people. Here too,
accusations of extravagant individual behavior, wasting the nation’s time and money, were increasingly heard in times of – now national – hardship. The case also (again) proves the strength of structural functionalist explanations for changing public values and perceptions of corruption. A certain amount of what was called ‘Italian Statecraft’ (hole-and-corner dealings, scheming and plotting, employing bad means for a righteous end) was considered an acceptable necessary evil as long as it could alleviate the nation’s troubles. At the same time, the fact that some people (i.e., the radicals and their coup d’état) had not used proper diplomatic channels was also deplored.

Corruption in Batavian times – while stemming from the same root – was therefore framed differently than in earlier Doelist and/or Patriot times. The line between corrupt and non-corrupt behaviour now came to be based on ‘new’ or reemphasized public values (such as legitimacy etc., see earlier), on an even broader notion of the public interest and on a clearer separation of public and private. Corruption seems to have been used in both its wide classical and its more narrow modern sense. It was used to refer to the individual wrongful behavior by some leading Batavian representatives who served personal interests (maximizing profit) while performing public duties. Also (again), apart from some references to oath and instruction, legal codes did not seem to be a criterion with which to assess or condemn behavior as corrupt. As in the second case concerning Patriot times a public office centered definition of corruption was lacking in the third case study. Instead, a public interest perspective was again (or still) dominant. Corruption mainly denoted behavior that contributed to the general moral decay or degeneration of the nation and the new Batavian political structure.

The case, finally, also shows a next and perhaps more vital step in a transition from early modern value pluralism to a late eighteenth-century coherent political view on corruption. Pockets of value pluralism undoubtedly remained. Some still behaved as though they could function according to a different value system and still believed (or wanted to believe) they could mix public and private as long as it was in some way still in the interest of the nation. However, due to a much clearer line between the public and the private spheres their behavior was increasingly condemned. In many ways, the case thereby shows the completion of ‘ethical monism’ started in Patriot times and the beginning of the end of value pluralism. Public functionaries could no
longer really be in two worlds at the same time. Now, there was only one public world in which one set of norms and values was idealized and enforced, of which the personal (private) sphere should no longer form a part.

**Explaining public value change**

The decades between 1748 and 1813 in The Netherlands have shown continuous attempts at moral reform. Still, old and new were often intertwined, things did not change overnight and attempts at reform could take a long time to find their way into everyday practice. In this respect it is certainly useful – if not necessary – to think of public value change as something that happens on different levels (or time horizons) that do not always run parallel. Yet, the cases have also shown significant public value change. As mentioned, public official behavior that had by and large been acceptable around 1750 stood a good chance of being fiercely condemned a mere fifty years later. In the following I provide some final conclusions regarding Dutch public value dynamics between 1748 and 1813. At the same time I will assess how this is able to test and complement some current theoretical explorations. I will do so in general terms and broad strokes only.

A first conclusion is that a contextual, long-term and comparative perspective has shown large-scale and lengthy but slow moving processes. This has uncovered how a changing broader institutional environment had quite a dramatic effect on changing public morality. The interplay between continuity (slow moving) and radical (fast and sudden) changes in social and political processes is able to partly explain changing public values and perceptions of political corruption. A historical notion of path dependency proves useful to realize that decisions and actions around 1800 were at least partly shaped and determined by decisions and actions in previous decades. Doelists, Patriots and Batavians had much in common and showed a slow moving process of attempts at moral reform but the actual realization of their ideals needed ‘critical junctures’ such as tax riots, Patriot revolt and Batavian revolution. Furthermore, a historical approach has shown how great wealth and misappropriation of (public) funds became increasingly unacceptable in times characterized by economic, social, political and/or military difficulties. A feeling of economic decline clearly led to debates on corruption and cries for moral reform (and more government) in all three sub periods between 1748 and 1813. The threat of war and/or
the inability of administration or ‘government’ to deal with it\textsuperscript{18} equally led to repeated calls for new and improved administration and morals. This, we might say, is a rather timeless notion which historical research is able to uncover. Even today accusations of corruption seem more prominent due to credit-crunch, banking crisis and economic uncertainty. In difficult times fundamental questions concerning public official behavior (such as the use and spending of public money) seem to almost inevitably arise.

A historical approach has also offered other plausible explanations of the relationship between a changing institutional context and moral change. The case studies have shown how the connected processes of bureaucratization, state-formation, democratization and politicization were clear catalysts for moral reform. A Weberian ideal-typical approach centering on bureaucratization has proven highly promising to see changing public values and perceptions of political corruption. In addition, changing public values and perceptions of political corruption between 1748 and 1813 in the Dutch context can be related to some of the explanatory elements of ‘modernization’. With it, the Sattelzeit-hypothesis of Koselleck and others (1972; 1982; 1985) can be confirmed for the Dutch context. They linked transitions in political, social and economic structures in the German Lands between roughly 1750 and 1850 to changes in the meaning and function of key political and social concepts (cf. Richter, 1995: 19-20).\textsuperscript{19} Similar developments can be seen in the Netherlands (cf. Van Sas, 2005: 18; Velema, 1999). Most importantly, democratization seems to have led to a broader public of readers and the emergence of new genres of communication. The rise of a political press (i.e., public-opinion) had a major impact on changing public values because it allowed crucial discussion. It also led to new groups of people who claimed a bigger share of the political pie. This had an influence on public values and perceptions of corruption because it ended, in many ways, long-standing assumptions towards ‘good administration’ in which all parties

\textsuperscript{18} Compare the threat of the French armies in 1747 and the disaster of the Fourth Anglo-Dutch war between 1780 and 1784.

\textsuperscript{19} For the German situation (which can thus equally be seen in the Dutch context!) Koselleck and others found four crucial elements contributing to changing concepts: Demokratisierung (a broader public of readers and the emergence of new genres of communication), Verzeitlichung (concepts became more dynamic because of democratisation and came to refer to an as yet unrealized future), Ideologisierbarkeit (the content of concepts shifted from being concrete and specific to being abstract allowing them to be used for general ideologies) and finally Politisierung (concepts were connected to current political conflict).
(rulers and ruled) believed that regent oligarchic administration based on shop-floor codes was best for everyone. Also, democratization together with politicization did seem to make certain public values more dynamic and contested which paved the way for change.

Another (related) conclusion is that complex processes of bureaucratization, democratization, politicization and state-formation have led to a slow but steady widening of crucial notions of the common good, the public interest or the community and subsequent public values such as representation, loyalty and accountability. This runs counter to thinking (cf. Münkler & Fischer, 2001: 12527; Weintraub, 1997: 7) that the eighteenth century witnessed a decisive shift from a ‘classical Republican virtue model’ based on active citizen involvement in protecting a wide common good, towards a ‘liberal economic model’ based on individualism and self-interest (cf. Hirschman, 1977: 32-33). While this was visible to a limited extent, the idea of such a shift has to be denied, at least for the Dutch context. In eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Dutch sources of values it becomes clear that the Republican virtue model, a broad scope of politics and a wide ‘classical’ notion of corruption (see earlier) never went away and remained very much alive alongside a slowly emerging liberal economic model. In fact these two value systems continuously clashed and the former seems to have had the upper hand in the cases examined.

The widening scope of politics and of community greatly influenced a change in ideas on what was right and wrong public official behavior. It concerned a shift in the entire idea of the state and the role of government (from an emphasis on local sovereignty and particularism to an emphasis on national centralization and uniformity of rules) that was closely tied to changing ideas on the interests a public administrator was supposed to serve. From this we may (tentatively) conclude that institutional design’s assumption that institutions shape behavior and values and that some systems (bureaucratic, centralized, parliamentary, etc.) are indeed less prone to corruption than others (non-bureaucratic, particularistic, decentralized) (cf. De Graaff, Von Maravic, & Wagenaar, 2010: 18-19). Also, a change in the form of the Dutch state and a new moral attitude did not just make certain kinds of corruption (and ignoring certain new public values) more unacceptable. It also deliberately decreased the need for ‘corrupt’ practices. What we now consider to be corruption was not always perceived as such because of the specific structure of early modern society. Such acts as patronage
and/or brokerage, bribery, price-fixing, nepotism or deriving personal benefit from public office have not always been deemed inappropriate because they had a function in political-administrative life. We see this change most clearly, as mentioned earlier, in the case of taxation but it can also be deduced from the other two cases. Aims to end the Stadholder’s patronage in Patriot times included attempts to formally or informally restructure city governments and to improve ways of appointing officials in order to decrease the need for patronage. Since patronage, according to many Patriots, was no longer considered to have a beneficial function in political-administrative life, it lost its raison d’être. Similarly – as the third case tells us – an improved hierarchical, centralized and more or less representative structure of political-administrative activity around 1795 (i.e., the emergence of a strong state) was meant to decrease the need for patronage, brokerage and other ways of ‘informal’ delegation and use of power and authority. Corruption was ever less needed to make politics and administration work because its place was increasingly taken over by bureaucratic structures and new political-administrative arrangements (such as salaries, promotion, standard procedures and formal hierarchical structures).

The explanatory power of such (historically inspired) theoretical approaches as path-dependency, time-horizons, structural-functionalism and institutional design allows for another general conclusion: a singular institutional economics or rational choice perspective is not likely to provide enduring explanations for public value dynamics. This conclusion is supported by the existence of broad and/or classical notions of corruption (see earlier). They signal that we are indeed able to add additional complementary factors to an institutional economics or rational choice approach in order to better understand what corruption is and how, when or why public values change. When corruption is often referred to as the general decay or deterioration of the entire body politic this means, for instance, that corruption is more than the violation of an obligation or a duty in return for private benefit.

There are also conclusions to be drawn with regard to the theoretical idea of conflictual value dynamics (see earlier). The application of Johnston’s idea of change occurring through clashes, debates and contestation over public values and corruption on the one hand and of Hoetjes’ heuristics of (potentially clashing, overlapping and/or mutually reinforcing) sources of public values on the other, clearly underscores such a theory. Firstly, we have been able to see how a combination and comparison of (often
conflicting) sources of values provided interesting different perspectives on changing public values. We have also seen how such a combination explains value dynamics or possible transitions from ‘old’ to ‘new’. Some sources were not well represented and therefore seem to have had less of an impact than others. Especially public values from legal sources have, as mentioned, been scarce due to the absence of a Rechtsstaat. What is most interesting about this is that legal codes consistently seemed to be lagging behind the codes on the shop-floor and values expressed in best-opinion and public opinion sources. With the exception of the case study on taxation (although legal codes were also not always enforced there), legal codes could be there in theory but were mostly irrelevant in the actual practice of a corruption scandal. The cases of patriot and Batavian corruption show – albeit for different reasons – that prosecution and condemnation did not happen by means of legal or shop-floor but by public opinion codes instead. Another conspicuously absent or in any case unexposed element in discussions surrounding the corruption scandals were religious views on public values and political corruption. Only very occasionally have I found writers who espoused a somewhat religious view on public values. The fact that religious views and arguments were largely absent from the scandals is of course interesting. It could be due to an already quite advanced separation of state and church, at least in the minds of the ruling regents. The regents were not about to let any preachers teach them any moral lessons on how to behave in public office (cf. Van Deursen, 2004: 150). To clarify, this is not to say that religion did not have an influence on changing public values and perceptions of corruption but simply means I have not found any references to such sources or arguments in the cases investigated for my research. Given the representative nature and the size of the scandals this should, however, make one wonder and at least calls for further research.

A final conclusion can be made that underscores the idea of a ‘conflictual change mechanism’. This is again based on the use of Johnston’s clashes and debate and Hoetjes’ heuristics of sources of values. We have seen how public values from some sources did indeed conflict with those in other sources and that special attention by administrators to one particular value or set of values resulted in the (slow but steady) displacement of another. There have certainly been ‘conflicts’ between different

20 Most notably by Johan Bareuth, a Dordrecht preacher, fervent Orangist and moral authority of the day.
sources of values. In general the codes of the shop-floor often conflicted with ideas expressed in legal codes (if even these were applicable) and in best-opinion and public-opinion. Especially the rise of best-opinion and public opinion as sources of potentially new and/or different public values seems to have been key in displacing shop-floor views. At the same time differences and value pluralism have not occurred as often as one might have expected. The cases show increasing agreement about which public values were important and what constituted political corruption. As I noticed earlier, value pluralism seemed to slowly but steadily disappear and/or make way for an alignment of views. Possibly, the increased dominance of best-opinion, public opinion and legal-bureaucratic values (at least in the case of tax reform) over the (informal) shop-floor and the emergence of some form of ethical monism shows an important clash that might in itself have functioned as a driver of public value change.

**Final thoughts: informing policy & management**

Historical research and insight into public value dynamics also (naturally!) has consequences for present-day problems and dilemma’s concerning public (value) management, administrative morality and/or fighting corruption. For one, historical research tells us that definitions of political corruption based on any single standard (public office, market, public opinion etc.) are too limited. Because corruption clearly acquires meaning through broader contextual and institutional historical processes it is essential to widen our scope when defining corruption. Secondly, historical research shows how corruption and public values are and always have been socially constructed. Since there is no reason to think this has changed in our own time, this too serves as an important realization for our current understanding and study of corruption and public values. Furthermore, emphasis on an understanding of corruption as both narrow individual abuses of office as well as broad political or societal decay or degeneration proves very much applicable in current situations. As soon as one realizes that corruption is best regarded as a problem stemming from and affecting the entire body politic one realizes that it should not be solely considered as an individual act of public officials. Fighting corruption (i.e., taking away its causes) in any context therefore means one has to tackle broader processes and ideas (for instance through investigating disagreement between various current sources of values) as well as narrow individual actions. Targeting, especially, the individual
without paying attention to the system in which that individual functions does not seem to be a very useful approach. A similar lesson can be drawn with regard to bringing about change in public morality, for instance through codes of conduct or imposing moral guidelines. To understand better how, when and why to improve public morality, a broader approach that considers the contextual and contingent nature of public values and the opinions expressed in a large variety of sources of public values seems essential. This might also lead to a sensible conclusion that there is no code of conduct or moral guideline that is timeless, universally applicable or able to please everyone. A historical perspective on changing public morality that underscores the contextual and contingent nature of public values could also lead to an important ‘moral realization’ of ethical relativism: current times are not necessarily more or less corrupt than past times and different public moralities (between countries, among various actors within societies etc.) acquire meaning in their own contextual frames of reference. One should do well to realize one’s own context-bound morality before entering a discussion over the value of someone else’s. Finally, historical research shows us that our current public values have been shaped in decades if not centuries of social-political development and that they are here for a reason. This means that any current public morality can not – should anyone wish to do so – be changed either quickly or easily.

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21 Consider codes of ‘Good Governance’ proposed and implemented by such institutions as the World Bank or the IMF.


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