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### Leading social policy analysis from the front

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# 1. Leading Social Policy Analysis from the Front

*Tijs Laenen, Bart Meuleman, Adeline Otto, Femke Roosma and Wim Van Lancker*

This *Liber Amicorum* is a tribute to the manifold contributions Wim van Oorschot made to the field of Social Policy. At the occasion of Wim's retirement, 45 colleagues eagerly accepted the challenge to write a chapter explaining how Wim influenced their way of thinking and working.

Describing the influence and career of an academic giant of Wim's caliber is for sure no easy task. To characterize Wim's role as a scientist, colleague and friend, it is compelling to resort to cycling terminology<sup>1</sup> (which is quite fitting for the avid cyclist Wim is). Wim clearly stands out as a leader in the *peloton*, who guides his team with great vision and strategy. Yet, he is not the team leader who wants to be served by a handful of *domestiques*. Instead, he takes the lead in the *paceline*, reducing wind resistance for his team members. Wim is more concerned about the success of the team than about his personal achievements. In the finale of a race, he is not afraid of *leading out*, so that a teammate can finish the sprint. Whenever he is triggered by a scientific problem, he becomes a true *baroudeur*, who goes *à bloc* on a breakaway and paves the road for the rest of the *pack*. In short, Wim is a colleague *hors catégorie*.

This book is organized in three main parts, each referring to a particular area of influence, and ends with an epilogue by Wim. Notwithstanding the tremendous importance of Wim's writings, the book starts by shedding light on his outstanding service to the

academic community (Part II, *The academic career of Wim van Oorschot*). Wim has shown great dedication in mentoring and socializing several generations of social policy analysts. On top of passing on scientific knowledge, he continuously showed future generations of researchers how to be productive, balanced and generous academics (Chung, Chapter 2; van Gerven, Chapter 3). Yet as a policy analyst, he understood very well that there is an institutional dimension to changing academic practice. Without any doubt, Wim's most impactful contribution in this regard is his pioneering role as co-founder of ESPAnet (Clasen and Kvist, Chapter 4) and the important role he played in various other scientific co-operative networks, such as the European Social Survey (ESS) and the European Data Center for Work and Welfare (EDAC). Wim also left an important mark as a teacher. He won several 'best teacher' awards, and both in Tilburg and in Leuven he was cherished and revered by his students and by his colleagues.

The remainder of the chapters in Part III and IV engage with the wide array of theoretical and empirical contributions Wim has made to the field of social policy analysis. Broadly speaking, Wim's scientific work can be categorized in two interrelated subdomains, namely the study of welfare institutions and the analysis of public attitudes towards welfare. Part III (*Social policies, their causes and consequences*) highlights the lessons Wim has taught us regarding the character of European social policies; processes of policy formation; and the consequences these policies have for the economic conditions and wellbeing of populations. A key contribution of Wim has been his suggestion to study benefit reciprocity as a central dependent variable in comparative welfare analysis, rather than merely relying on social expenditure or social rights data (Nelson, Chapter 6). The attention for benefit reciprocity was already present in Wim's PhD thesis (entitled *Realizing rights*), in which he shows that the issue of benefit non-take-up should be understood as a multi-level problem, taking

factors at the level of claimants, administrators as well as policy makers into account (Schols and Peeters, Chapter 9). His theoretical, multilevel model of non-take-up remains hugely influential to date. Moreover, attention for the bottom-up implementation of policies by street-level bureaucrats has created interesting opportunities to bridge the fields of social policy and social work (Hermans, Chapter 8). Focusing on benefit reciprocity – arguably the dimension of social policy that shapes the everyday experience of citizens most strongly – has shown to be an insightful approach in addition to the popular welfare regime paradigm (Arts, Chapter 5).

Characteristic for the ‘van Oorschot-approach’ is that, besides structural contexts and the emergence of new social risks (Cantillon, Chapter 7), cultural ideas are conceived as an important driver of policy change (Pfau-Effinger, Chapter 16). Such a cultural analysis of the welfare state warrants a multi-level approach that pays attention to the interplay between micro (individual) and macro (institutional) factors (Pulignano and Doerflinger, Chapter 12). From this vantage point, Wim has been among the pioneers studying trends such as increased welfare targeting and means-testing, the Europeanisation of social policy (Schoukens and Pieters, Chapter 10), or increasing labour market flexibility (Bekker and Pop, Chapter 11). The importance of this work is evidenced by the fact that the concepts Wim developed over the years are well-suited to understand new evolutions, such as the use of automated decision-making processes in social policy (Van Lancker and Van Hoyweghen, Chapter 13) or universal basic income (Muffels, Chapter 14; Houtman, Chapter 15).

Part IV, *Popular attitudes towards social policies*, deals with a second focal point in Wim’s research: the normative beliefs, cultural values and preferences citizens have with respect to welfare policies and their target groups. By meticulously studying notions of solidarity (for a conceptual clarification, see Vandeveld, Chapter 31) and the legitimacy of welfare arrangements, Wim

contributed to a veritable cultural turn in social policy (Taylor-Gooby, Chapter 17; Staerklé, Chapter 18). Among many contributions, Wim's theory of welfare deservingness is the one that has resonated most powerfully in the field. This framework stipulates that citizens employ five criteria – Control, Attitude, Reciprocity, Attitude and Need – as heuristics to decide *who should get what and why* (Bonoli, Chapter 20). The key concepts in Wim's deservingness theory show relevant linkages to processes of stereotyping (De Tavernier and Draulans, Chapter 21) and explain why certain welfare arrangements are more popular than others. Yet, various chapters in this book illustrate that this efficient and versatile framework offers levers to understand attitudes towards migration (De Coninck, Swicegood and Matthijs, Chapter 23; Reeskens and Van der Meer, Chapter 25), diversity (Meuleman, Chapter 24), eco-social policies (Otto and Gugushvili, Chapter 27) and perhaps even other-than-human subjects (Hannes, Chapter 22).

However, his work on deservingness is by no means Wim's only contribution to the literature on welfare attitudes. Wim systematically elaborated the idea that individuals' welfare attitudes are multi-dimensional (Laenen and Roosma, Chapter 19), in the sense that they, for example, can support the goals of the welfare state, but take a more critical stance towards the concrete implementation or the beneficiaries (see Abts and Achterberg, Chapter 26, for an elaboration of the notion of welfare populism). The various dimensions are, to a certain extent, rooted in social structural positions (Lux and Mau, Chapter 28) and ideological worldviews. Besides focusing exclusively on individual differences, Wim's work contains a strong comparative component, studying welfare attitudes cross-nationally (Halman and Sieben, Chapter 30) and across welfare regimes (Gelissen, Chapter 29).

Taken together, the book demonstrates the impressive width and depth of Wim's academic work, which will continue to inspire many researchers in the years to come.

NOTE

1. Readers who are less familiar with the glossary of cycling can look up the italicized words on [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glossary\\_of\\_cycling](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glossary_of_cycling) (accessed 14 January 2021).