

‘You need the nerve to open doors yourself’

‘It was quite by coincidence that I ended up in Wageningen in 2011. I didn’t know much about agriculture or food; I had studied Public Administration at Utrecht and done research on police collaboration between the Netherlands, Germany and Belgium. I found that very interesting, but when I applied to the Police Academy to continue down that path, I didn’t get in. My thesis supervisor suggested that research might suit me. I had never considered that option, but I thought: “Wow, that’s a good idea.” So I went to Wageningen to do a research Master’s. But there was too much overlap with what I’d done at Utrecht, so I wanted to stop after just three months. One of my supervisors forwarded a Wageningen PhD vacancy to me.

Turning points: sometimes you recognize them immediately, and sometimes only in retrospect. In this series, members of the WUR community talk about a decisive moment they’ll never forget. This time, assistant professor of Public Administration and Policy Jeroen Candel.

It came from Katrien Termer, whose class I was taking at the time. Just before I finally dropped out of the Master’s, I went up to her after class and said, “I’m Jeroen and I responded to the vacancy ad.” Later she told me that spontaneous move played a positive role in the selection process.

And that’s how I came to join the Wageningen Public Administration chair group in 2011, to do research on European food security policy. Over the past nine years, I have totally specialized in this area.

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The nice thing is that not many public policy specialists work on agriculture/food, even though it’s in the media every day. There are

so many public administration and policy issues at stake! I enjoy advisory work and at the same time I get inspired to develop new theories in this field. Without good coaching and a little push from my supervisors back then, I would never have gone in this direction. It taught me the importance of mentorship. I want to be a good mentor myself, both on the subject matter and on broad skills and talents. And from that moment with Katrien I learned that you need the nerve to open doors yourself too. Things don’t just fall into your lap.”

