
Preface

Public servants are not very popular. In the eyes of the public they are serving (*sic*), they are seen as wasting taxpayers' money, doing boring work and having a nine-to-five mentality. They are either considered elitist, reserved and *weltfremd* – the ones working at the departments – or petty, fond of rules and hardly service oriented – the ones working at the street level. The focus of this *Research Handbook* is on the second category of public servants mentioned here: the teachers, police officers, social workers and other so-called 'lower' public servants doing their work in direct interaction with citizens. Since Michael Lipsky coined the term in 1969, *street-level bureaucracy* has developed into a scholarly theme of its own. The knowledge and insights gained make it possible to put the popular but prejudiced view outlined above into perspective.

As a *Research Handbook* this volume is informative about what street-level bureaucrats are doing but more particularly about how to study them in ways deemed theoretically and methodologically appropriate. It was a pleasant surprise when, in June 2016, I received the invitation 'to serve as editor of a "Handbook of Street-Level Organizations and Public Policy"'. Emily Mew, who sent me that invitation, appeared to be a nice person to work with. As also Harry Fabian has been, who later became my main contact at Edward Elgar Publishing. Christine Gowen and Elaine Ross contributed to a smooth copy-editing process.

In that late but crucial stage of preparing the book manuscript, I was pleased to get the assistance of Anneke Heylen and Inge Vermeulen of the KU Leuven Public Governance Institute, my current academic home. This was possible thanks to the welcome support of Annie Hondeghem, the Institute's director. In 2017 Edoardo Ongaro, Fabienne Maron and Deborah Agostino facilitated an authors' meeting in Milan which enabled discussion of draft chapters and enhanced the coherence of the *Research Handbook*.

This Preface is the place to thank the authors of all the chapters not only for the valued content of their contributions but also for their responsiveness, active participation and stamina. As the editor of the *Research Handbook* I may have been relentless and rather straightforward in giving them feedback. In any case, it was always very gratifying when the amended version of a chapter showed the results of our deliberations. The acceptance of the publisher's invitation and of my invitation to the authors implied that an intensive period of working together would follow. The present volume is the result: truly a co-production.

This being so, the task and role of a handbook's editor remain special. A substantial part of the thinking underlying my own chapters was done previously, in 2012–13, during a Visiting Fellowship at All Souls College, Oxford. The Warden, Fellows and domestic staff are thanked for the hospitality, stimulating conversations and excellent facilities the College offered.

For myself, the two years it took to bring about this book meant that substantial time was spent in my study at home – practising a 'very active retirement', as Guy Peters

once put it. One person in particular enabled this *splendid isolation*. Therefore, I want to acknowledge her here: Nynke, my private Warden.

Peter Hupe
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