
1. Contextualizing government-in-action

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1.1 INTRODUCTION

In the Netherlands, but maybe in other countries as well, the yearly payment of income tax for citizens with an average income has become an almost fully automated process. All citizens of the country have a digital ID enabling them to log in while seeking contact with public agencies. When those citizens, in or around March, are obliged to do so, they see on the screen a range of personal data already collected by the Tax Office itself. These data – their salary earned last year, paid contributions to their pension and so on – then have to be complemented with personal information about particular costs and the like, which only the citizen involved could register. After a few months the citizen receives – as yet via normal post – a letter from the Tax Office informing him or her about the final tax payment due for the past calendar year. In an average case, without peculiarities, it may happen that apart from the specified amount of money, the letter is a fully automated one. Hence the contact of this taxpayer with the Tax Office has taken place almost completely from ‘screen to screen’.

In contemporary government ‘voice to voice’ contacts with citizens also increasingly have a (semi-)automated character. Someone dialling the telephone number of ‘customer services’ or a ‘help desk’ of a modern organization – either public or corporate – often hears a taped voice of a person offering a ‘menu’ of choices. Meanwhile, the repertoire of services the organization has to offer may be playing. It may take a while – and several steps within the ‘menu’ – before one hears a human voice that is not taped. And then it may happen that the primary task of the person concerned, in a *front office* sitting behind a computer screen, is to make referrals to an employee working in a particular department in a *back office*. Here, as well, face-to-face contact remains limited to a minimum.

If there is one phenomenon this picture indicates, it is the pervasive spread of information technologies having penetrated a substantial part of the daily encounters between individual citizens and government in the broad sense of the word. The governmental side in this kind of state/citizen interaction can be characterized as ‘screen-level’ or ‘system-level bureaucracy’ (Bovens and Zouridis 2002). Of course, not in all parts of the public sector has face-to-face interaction been replaced by voice to voice or even screen to screen contacts. In the classroom, the general hospital or a business inspection, it is still, respectively, the teacher, the nurse or medical consultant and the environmental inspector who are directly, face-to-face, interacting with the individual citizens involved, approaching the latter in their roles as pupils and their parents, patients and managers.

There is another aspect the picture highlights, one of fundamental importance. The picture focuses on a particular side of government, that of the locus where state and society have direct contact. It is here, at the ‘street level’ of bureaucracy or ‘front line’ of the state, that citizens, in diverse roles, interact with government.

In particular, the development of the welfare state has led to a substantial increase in the number of points of encounter between government officials and individual citizens. While the very forms of those encounters have evolved over time, the situation at the street level shows both continuity and change. As such, these encounters are an object of scholarly inquiry. The aim of this *Research Handbook* is to identify issues researchers see themselves confronted with when looking at what happens at the street level of government bureaucracy in its context. That context is multiple, as will be shown throughout the volume but particularly in this first chapter.

Under the heading ‘Contextualizing government-in-action’, in the present introductory chapter the historical context of the phenomenon *street-level bureaucracy* gets attention. What kind of developments in and around the modern state can be observed and how have such developments shaped the evolution of government-in-action, particularly when government bureaucracy at the street level is concerned? In Chapter 2 positioning street-level bureaucracy research is central. Given the development of the study of government-in-action, what kind of insights have been gained and how can the state of knowledge be characterized? In Chapter 3 titled ‘Conceptualizing street-level bureaucracy in context’, the major contours of a conceptual foundation of street-level bureaucracy theory and research will be sketched. How can what happens at the street level of government bureaucracy be conceptualized as positioned in its environment?

This introductory chapter now continues by addressing, in broad terms, the evolution of the modern state and its role in society. In the third section the focus is on the implications of that evolved role for the street level of government bureaucracy as the locus where state and society directly connect. The chapter ends with an outline of the *Research Handbook* as a whole.

1.2 THE WELFARE STATE AND BEYOND

Defending the polity, externally, and maintaining order, internally, may be deemed the oldest tasks of government. In forms varying in time and place, these tasks provide the rationale of any government role whatsoever, enabled by some form of organized tax collection (Finer 1997). In the Dutch Republic of the seventeenth century the night watch had become so integrated in social life – as expressed by Rembrandt’s famous painting – that, in retrospect, the founding form of government appearance in the Netherlands is still referred to as the ‘Night Watch State’ (Schama 1997). One could say, this makes soldiers and police officers ‘street-level bureaucrats’ *avant la lettre*. Independent of state form, level of economic development and geographical location, any state has these kinds of public officials.

The second major cluster of government tasks is more related to economic development and has to do with industrialization. Particularly in the nineteenth century, technological advancement in the form of inventions like the steam engine and electricity enabled the rise of factories as well as fuelling trade and commerce. The modern state got its material basis when adopting a role in creating infrastructure, ultimately at the national level of the countries concerned. Thus, literally markets were created. Industrialization exposed huge social problems as well: low income or even straightforward poverty, child labour, bad housing, diseases. Apart from the important role of church and charity, political

representatives initiated government action. This is hence the time in which politics and administration became differentiated in their mutual relationship, both in Europe (Weber 1947) and in the USA (Wilson 1887). The ‘civil servant’ became somewhat more visible, while gradually governments also adopted an inspecting role. The latter happened, for instance, where work circumstances were concerned.

Once faced with large-scale unemployment, in various countries governments initiated public works and started handing out modest social assistance benefits. They did so not only from motives of care (de Swaan 1988), but as much from economic motives, feeling supported by the new doctrine introduced by Keynes (1937) stressing the socio-economic relevance of public expenditures. In this way the path was paved for social workers and the rise of the ‘helping professions’ more generally, as an extension of the range of traditional crafts and occupations. After World War II, particularly in Western Europe and the USA but not only there, this happened under the heading of a ‘welfare state’. Sustained economic growth enabled collective needs to be addressed, resulting in extensive government intervention in various realms of life by all sorts of public provisions and services – the third cluster of tasks of the state.

When overviewing the evolution of government-in-action, Hill and Hupe (2014, Chapter 5) characterize the period from the 1930s on as the *age of interventionism*. This being so, the history of the modern state, sketched here in very robust terms, may seem linear but in practice involved ‘punctuated’ change. In the 1980s and 1990s, for instance, the ideology of *New Public Management* on an almost global scale induced the phenomena of government retrenchment and ‘policy implementation contracted-out’ (Hood 1991; Hill and Hupe 2014). Currently, however, in various countries ‘government is back’, with political authorities often pursuing a neo-conservative agenda. A difference with straightforwardly taking the lead in (employment) programmes in the 1930s and 1960s – cf. Roosevelt’s *New Deal*, Johnson’s *Great Society* and the like – is that national governments now may be more selective when taking up a role concerning particular issues. That selective character justifies a characterization of the present era as the age of *neo-interventionism* (Hill and Hupe 2014: 112).

Against this historical background it seems relevant to consider how, in various geographical contexts, public sentiments induced political considerations pointing to a need to give more attention to the street level of government bureaucracy. These considerations often stemmed from feelings of disappointment about what had been achieved. Admittedly random, one can select examples of ‘dashed expectations’ like the following:

- American dissatisfaction with the Rooseveltian aspirations to turn the Democratic Party (with its reactionary Southern roots) into a modern left-oriented reform party. Here the Kennedy/Johnson era led to more disappointment.
- Growing recognition in the UK that the welfare state – about which the British proudly boasted – had many flaws when looked at in terms of what it actually delivered.
- French failure to get out of the vicious circles of changing and incompetent governments requiring action ‘on the streets’ to try to drive things forward.
- German peace in a partitioned land; moving forward a little from the Christian Democrat-dominated centrism.

- Swedish feeling that the ‘people’s home’ project was an authoritarian top-down-driven one (see Rothstein 1998).

This, necessarily very brief, overview indicates three points. First, empirically a variety of contexts is apparent, each of which has particular institutional forms and other traits. Second, there is, one way or another, a multi-level relationship between state and society. Citizens may ask for government measures (on the input side) but also react against the (degree of) realization of the latter (on the side of outputs and outcomes). Third, the role of ‘street-level bureaucracy’ is crucial here, positioned as it is in the implementation part of the policy process, while ‘on the ground floor’ linking state and society. The discovery within academia of the relevance of what happens there cannot be treated as isolated from, particularly, the disappointment in the USA in the 1970s about the implementation of extensive policy programmes. Over time, other developments in society were also conducive, some of them occurring along national demarcation lines. Within the social sciences too changes in perspectives enabled ‘street-level bureaucracy’ to become a topic on the scholarly agenda.

1.3 GOVERNMENT BUREAUCRACY AT THE STREET LEVEL

Linking State and Society

The origins of modern implementation writing should be understood in terms of disappointment at US *Great Society* reforms (see the subtitle of Pressman and Wildavsky 1973). The wider context is a combination of dissatisfaction with conventional reform stemming from great aspirations for a better democracy and a better future in general, as expressed in the 1960s and 1970s especially by young people. It is pertinent to see the work of Lipsky (1969), who introduced the concept of *street-level bureaucracy* in a conference paper, as a vital contribution to the emerging ‘bottom-up’ theme. That is the case, inasmuch as it began to be argued that what ‘happened in Oakland’ should not be analysed simply in terms of a failure of the ‘top’ to get its message across.

In the 1960s new concepts of democracy emerged, as propagated from within society itself. The so-called ‘protest movement’ embodied a sometimes radical critique of indirect and representative democracy. Instead, more direct and participatory forms of democracy were advocated and even practised. They were linked with legal concerns about popular rights and justice.

Furthermore, fundamental changes in labour relations were accompanied by greater attention to the human factor. In the sociology of organizations, Taylorism was prevailing, with the ‘assembly line’ as a leading metaphor. Now, however, the ‘human relations’ approach, developed in the 1930s, came to the fore, followed by more flexible models (Mayo 1933). At the same time, the perspective on organizations as arenas of power struggle took hold (Gouldner 1954).

This is the politico-cultural background characterizing what may be seen as the decades epitomizing the *age of interventionism*. Also within academia itself some crucial contextual factors can be observed as having contributed to scholarly attention going in a converging direction. In the study of modern politics and government since Wilson (1887)

and Weber (1947), bureaucracy had become an object of interest on its own. Nevertheless, in early Weberian inspired work and also in much popular writing and novels, the view on bureaucracy traditionally was one of seeing it as a 'steel frame' and a source of 'red tape'. Now, however, the black box of bureaucracy was opened. Particularly, the acknowledgement of the relevance of the interaction between individual citizens and public servants as a negotiated space was novel.

Street-Level Bureaucracy as a Concept

Contextualizing street-level bureaucracy also means tracing the academic background of the terminology itself. Michael Lipsky first used the term in a conference paper presented in 1969. He expounded it further in a book published in 1980 and at the same time its use was developed in research by two of his research students, Jeffrey Prottas (1979) and Richard Weatherley (1980). Since then the term 'street-level bureaucracy' has dominated the discourse on what has evolved into a scholarly theme of its own. However, the term does have alternatives and predecessors – like 'at the coal face' and 'at the grass roots' (very old and given prominence by Selznick 1949), 'the point of entry' (Hall 1974), 'the public encounter' (Goodsell 1981), '*le guichet*' (Dubois 2010). It can be noted that all these labels are used to indicate a particular locus, while 'people processing' (Prottas 1979) refers to the kind of activities undertaken there. It is interesting to see that Goodsell starts his book with a reference to an article by Herman Finer (1939) titled 'Officials and the *public*' (emphasis added).

Since Michael Lipsky coined the term, the research into street-level bureaucracy has developed substantially; for an overview see Hupe, Hill and Buffat (2015a). Knowledge and insights have been gained, while some authors prefer to speak, somewhat broadly, of street-level organizations (Brodkin 2012). Zacka (2017: 23–24) identifies three commonalities. Street-level bureaucrats work 'at the bottom of organizational hierarchies, they interact with clients directly and they are vested with a meaningful margin of discretion'. Distinctive features are indeed the direct contact with individual citizens, but also, second, the fact that – one way or another – public tasks are involved; and, third, the apparent training, in some form, needed to perform such tasks (Hupe, Hill and Buffat 2015b: 16).

One can say that Lipsky (1971) and Pressman and Wildavsky (1973) put, respectively, street-level bureaucracy research and implementation research on the scholarly agenda. Since then both have grown into scholarly themes, partly overlapping, partly evolving side-by-side. They share certain theoretical and methodological issues, like the problem of the specification of the dependent variable (Hupe 2013) and the problem of 'too many variables' (Goggin 1986) on the side of potentially explanatory factors at the various levels concerned. Apart from these issues, empirical studies of street-level organizations and street-level work tend to focus on specific sets of variables while using an in-depth focus. The result is a range of studies worthwhile as such but hard to compare. Making the study of street-level bureaucracy 'both generalizable and comparative', therefore, is an issue as such (Hupe, Hill and Buffat 2015c: 326). Here, some topics this *Research Handbook* is about are put on the table.

Part of the Policy Process

Like all empirical phenomena, street-level bureaucracy can be justifiably studied in its own right. This being so, the link with the policy process is crucial. It is in the bureaucratic encounter, ‘when the state meets the street’, that public policies get their final substance and form (Goodsell 1981; Zacka 2017). When the policy objectives have been formulated and decided upon and the policy instruments have been chosen, implementation is expected to follow accordingly. However, as the devil is in the detail, more than half a century of implementation research has underlined how crucial it is to study public policies beyond the official documents in which they have been written and to look at what happens at the very points where they are turned into practical reality. As a starting point in implementation research, the bottom-up view as phrased by Lipsky can be adopted: public policies are ultimately made at the street level. This means, among other things, that ‘policy politics’ is going on there (Brodkin 1990). Implementation is taken as more than just an administrative act. As Zacka (2017: 25) stresses, what happens at the street level is special, not least from a democratic point of view:

Street-level bureaucrats often work alone and are hard to monitor. Given that they occupy the lowest ranks of the bureaucratic hierarchy, they also find themselves forced to resolve any ambiguity, vagueness, or conflict that exists in public policy – for they cannot delegate it any further.

The position of public servants working at the street level of government bureaucracy – or, if preferred, of the public sector in the broad sense of the word – is a particular one, because it is there, at the very *bottom* of a hierarchical chain, that ‘the buck stops’. This implies that they must resolve issues that, deliberately or not, may have been left unresolved further ‘upward’. The reasons why practising the ‘impossible jobs’ (Hargrove and Glidewell 1990) at the street level is a complicated task, are related to the very fact that the teacher, police officer and other public servants working there are being confronted with the full weight of demands and expectations coming from both ‘upward’ and ‘sideward’. Placed in the pivotal position between state and society, the *street level* of government bureaucracy is being influenced by a range of ‘vectors inward’ of different size coming from various directions, in a disconnected way (Weatherley 1980). The distinction between ‘state agency’ and ‘citizen agency’ captures the dynamics of working at the bottom of a hierarchy (vertical dimension) while simultaneously interacting with individual citizens (horizontal dimension) (Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2000). This *agency* at the micro level is embedded in a *structural* context from which various influences, particularly exercised from the organizational and system scales, can be observed. It is on the ground floor of government where it may be experienced most strongly what it means that goals are numerous and sometimes contradictory, incentives are diverging, while also commitments and capacities are varying in multiple ways.

Rather than ‘a’ public policy or ‘a’ policy programme, any street-level bureaucrat is supposed to implement *simultaneously* a bundle of policies and programmes, often layered over time. Apart from the formal rules implied by such statutes, the same street-level bureaucrat is considered to adopt the standards of her profession, as well as to live up to social expectations. This means that multiple accountabilities are apparent, while ‘multiple mandates’ are at stake – to use May’s (2017) terminology. For research, the pivotal position of the street-level bureaucrat, as indeed the ‘pin’ linking state and society,

implies that the nested configuration of the multi-scaled system is taken into account. By consequence, the issue of ‘too many variables’ (Goggin 1986) not only has a quantitative but especially a qualitative character. It may refer to a problem of scholarship. When potentially relevant aspects may range from, for example, the working of the human mind, via individual policy preferences, to stated policy goals and types of democracy, while – to mention a few – all these to a greater or lesser extent may matter, how does a researcher treat them appropriately?

That is why, in terms of theory and methodology, research of street-level bureaucracy to a certain extent has a special character. It is the latter that is asking for an appropriate treatment in this *Research Handbook*.

Contemporary ‘Vectors Inward’

The fact that state and society at the street level directly connect with each other also implies that this locus is susceptible to influences coming from various directions and having both a structural and cultural character. Three developments can be highlighted here as having gained relevance over the years: ‘rule piling’, digitalization and cultural individualism.

‘Rule piling’. The modern state has evolved into an apparatus continuously producing formal rules. These rules can take various forms, ranging from constitutional charters and formal laws, via statutory regulations and executive orders, to policy programmes and operational protocols. The logic of rule-making implies the working of the ‘law of policy accumulation’ as identified and developed by in ’t Veld (1980 and various other publications). The essence of that ‘law’ can be interpreted as that rules, whether they are effective or ineffective, lead to more rules. As indicated above, at the street level all these rules literally come down as they are supposed to be ultimately applied there. It is in that locus that the implementation of public policies is expected – plural indeed and therefore simultaneously. Next, it is to a certain extent left to the individual street-level bureaucrats how to deal with the sum of those rules ‘piled up’ at the bottom of government bureaucracy as a consequence of the ongoing policy accumulation at the top.

Digitalization. Apart from being the engine behind economic growth, technological developments have a multi-dimensional impact on the human condition as such. It is evident that the spread of office technologies in their successive variants is universal (‘Granddad, what is a “fax”?’). On top of that global coverage, at the street level of government bureaucracy, technology has caused direct changes in the primary work process, like in the case of the Tax Office this chapter started with. Occupational requirements have changed. Former secretaries (f/m) may have become ‘office managers’ merely operating at ‘system level’ (Bovens and Zouridis 2002; see also Chapter 11 of this *Research Handbook*). On the other hand, medical doctors complain about the fact that too much paper work, nowadays done at the screen, keeps them from having direct contact with patients in the consultation room. Professionals in public service are confronted directly with the impact of the internet and social media. Teachers at primary and secondary schools, for instance, have to reflect on how to deal with smart phones in and outside the classroom, as well as with the effects of the usage of those devices (such as bullying).

Cultural individualism. Mass media communication has turned the world almost literally into a global village, while social media have created an archipelago of ‘bubbles’.

Although seeking shared identities *en groupe*, contemporary citizens consider themselves individually as being ‘their own boss’ (Hupe and Edwards 2012). As pragmatic consumers at the counter of the (post-)welfare state they may, in a more or less assertive way, require value for money from government too. For individual street-level bureaucrats this may occasionally lead to ‘impossible situations’, harbouring the possibility of a ‘breakdown of moral integrity’ (Zacka 2017, Chapter 5).

A tentative conclusion can be that, over the years, the demands experienced at the street level of government bureaucracy may have multiplied rather than diminished (see also Hupe and Buffat 2014). Simultaneously, in the past decades several dimensions of street-level bureaucracy have received research attention, although some more than others. The objective of this *Research Handbook* is to address the state of the art of street-level bureaucracy research by a systematic exploration of a range of theoretical and methodological issues apparent in the study of street-level organizations in their context, particularly their relationship with the policy process. The *Research Handbook* provides a contribution to the scholarly field of street-level bureaucracy, but as such also to the broader study of the policy process.

1.4 THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

Approach

The approach pursued to bring about this *Research Handbook* has been strongly editor-led, but to a certain extent it also has a bottom-up character. Several authors who have been publishing explicitly about street-level organizations were invited to write a chapter. Their work was known to the editor. Most of them had been participating in one or more of the panels and workshops on the subject matter he (co-)chaired or participated in. The editor hence ‘used’ this network of researchers when composing the structure of the *Research Handbook*. He approached candidate authors with the question about which theoretical issue or methodological issue of street-level bureaucracy research they could deliver a chapter. The response to the invitations was swift, high and very positive. It appeared that the majority of the invited authors were keen on writing a chapter on the research issue most central to them.

Given the objective of the *Research Handbook* and the approach pursued by the editor, the overall structure of the *Research Handbook* could become a robust one. Since the potential interest in writing a chapter had been explored, the editor made up the balance, differentiating the various parts of the book with a more specified table of contents as a result (see below). An authors’ meeting enabled discussion of draft chapters and hence enhanced the structure and argument of the *Research Handbook*.

Each chapter in the central parts of the *Research Handbook* deals with one particular research issue as a specific ‘theme’. *When confronted with that research issue while doing research, how is that issue dealt with and how could it be dealt with?* That is the meta-question for all chapters in Parts II and III of the volume. The focus is from a researcher’s perspective. For each chapter the questions at stake are: What problem, dilemma or pitfall does the researcher encounter when studying street-level organizations in the context of public policy? How is the problem (dilemma, pitfall) dealt with in existing research and

how could it be dealt with? Every issue addressed is framed in such a way that it can be recognized as one faced when doing research on street-level bureaucracy. Given the design of this *Research Handbook* a measure of redundancy is acceptable and even desirable. Making substantive cross-references throughout the volume therefore is important.

Content

This *Research Handbook* consists of five parts. Part I addresses street-level bureaucracy research in its historical and scholarly context. In the core of the volume, the focus is on theoretical issues (Part II) and methodological issues (Part III), respectively. Part IV highlights some new dimensions. In the concluding Part V, the editor looks back (given the findings of the book, what lessons can be drawn) as well as forward (points for future research).

Part I Street-level bureaucracy as a scholarly theme starts with the present introductory chapter. In the brief overview above, street-level bureaucracy has been positioned in its historical context, both as part of government-in-action and at a scholarly level. Hence, the rationale for the *Research Handbook* has been presented. Next, Chapter 2 overviews the state of the field, while exploring and characterizing the nature of the insights gained over the years in reference to street-level bureaucracy research, as positioned in relation to the literature on the policy process and, particularly, policy implementation. In Chapter 3 some unresolved questions get attention in discussing how what happens at the street level of government bureaucracy can be conceptualized as positioned in its environment.

Part II Theoretical issues in street-level bureaucracy research starts with Chapter 4 on specifying the dependent variable. When doing research on street-level organizations in the context of public policy, what exactly needs explanation? What concepts in such research have been used as dependent variables so far, with what consequences? And what appropriate options could be specified? Chapter 5 shows what it means when an institutional view in research is missing and addresses what is gained when such a view is adopted. Street-level workers play a pivotal role in bringing about policy outputs. At the same time, they develop routines, standards and structures. Hence, they both undergo and create institutional influences. What are the consequences for looking at street-level practice? Chapter 6 focuses on how to incorporate dimensions of social inequality. Power, knowledge and income may be unequally divided in a society. At the street level the consequences of these inequalities tend to be encountered most. While social inequality is treated as an objective fact, the question is how to deal with it in theoretical-empirical research in ways as 'clinical' as possible.

In Chapter 7 the incorporation of aspects of national culture is central. Similar to differences in welfare state regimes, countries also differ in national culture. On what dimensions do the ways vary in which, for instance, diversity in gender, ethnic background and social class are dealt with? And what does this imply for the analysis of street-level bureaucracy? Chapter 8 is about dealing with diversity. Street-level bureaucrats interact with citizens with diverse backgrounds, while having varying backgrounds themselves. In studies of representative bureaucracy positive biases are stressed, but there are also chances of discrimination. What patterns do diverse street-level bureaucrats show in the ways they interact with clients? And do the same street-level bureaucrats treat diverse categories of clients in different ways? In Chapter 9 the way drama can be used to study

the street-level encounter is central. How can theatre techniques be applied as research strategies to capture the complexities of street-level dynamics?

Chapter 10 addresses dealing with hybridization. Contemporary public administration is characterized by mixed forms. Since the introduction of *New Public Management*, apart from forms of privatization, the not-for-profit sector has been extended with all sorts of organizations in one way or another fulfilling what are actually public tasks. At the same time, governmental organizations have incorporated market incentives. What does this mean for the ways street-level bureaucracy is conceptualized and studied? In Chapter 11 the issue of assessing the impact of management techniques and office technologies is at stake. In the work of street-level bureaucrats administrative tasks are performed in interaction with individual clients. On the other hand, managers may aim at standardization, assisted by digital technologies. How do these two logics relate to each other? And how can the actual influence of digital office technologies be conceptualized and measured? In Chapter 12 the incorporation of dimensions of first-line supervision is central. Although in some types of street-level organizations more than in others, public officials working on the ground floor of government may see their direct supervisors as part of 'the management'. On the other hand, those supervisors on the first line may view themselves as more or less powerless subordinate executives. How can the actual influence of first-line supervision on what happens in the organizations concerned be conceptualized and measured?

'Bringing dimensions of professionalism in' is what happens in Chapter 13. Professions and professionalism provide knowledge and norms, but also identities to individual professionals. Street-level bureaucrats can be seen as such. What does this mean for the conceptualization of the work of the latter? And when professionalism at the street level is to be assessed and measured, what can be looked at? Chapter 14 addresses the issue of policy re-design at the street level. Street-level bureaucrats are expected to implement public policies. Although they do so, at the same time they empirically are to be acknowledged as policymakers in their own right. In the latter role their stances and behaviour sometimes actually lead to changes in the content of the public policy involved. What does this mean for the conceptualization of street-level bureaucracy? Chapter 15 is about incorporating forms of accountability beyond hierarchy in street-level bureaucracy research. Democratic legitimacy is often seen as exclusively implying political-administrative accountability within hierarchical relationships. In street-level organizations, however, multiple accountabilities are practised. How has this insight been evidenced so far and what does this mean for theory and research?

The exploration of cross-country variation is central in Chapter 16. In many countries more or less the same public tasks are being fulfilled. Nevertheless, the institutions and institutional arrangements in these countries may be different, including at the local level. When looking from a comparative perspective at street-level bureaucracy, what dimensions seem relevant here? Part II of the *Research Handbook* is rounded off with Chapter 17 titled 'Explaining public task performance'. The number of potential explanatory factors seems endless. How can expected relationships between what happens at the street level of government bureaucracy, on one hand, and its environment, on the other hand, theoretically be grounded?

Part III Methodological issues in street-level bureaucracy research begins with Chapter 18 titled 'Comparing public task performance'. Most research on street-level bureaucracy

has the character of single case studies. While comparative policy analysis and comparative public administration provide valuable insights, making the study of street-level bureaucracy truly comparative needs separate attention. If generalization implies contextualized comparison, particularly looking across countries, what does this mean for the development of a comparative research design? Chapter 19 addresses the quest for an appropriate methodology. Quantitative and qualitative research both have their intrinsic value. Given a concrete research object needing explanation, substantial dilemmas may occur when addressing the question which research design applies. What kinds of research goals and research questions require a quantitative or rather a qualitative research design? And what does an appropriate *mixed-methods* research design look like? In Chapter 20 quantitative data analysis is central. In the social sciences more and more research is data driven. This is enhanced by the fact that lately new quantitative research methods and techniques have been developed. Hence, the effect of a ‘hammer seeking a nail’ can be observed. Given the ongoing extension of the methodological ‘toolkit’, how can this effect be avoided? Chapter 21 is about qualitative data analysis in implementation and street-level bureaucracy research. Qualitative data collection enables researchers to observe and characterize implementation practices in detail. However, when using qualitative data analysis several issues must be confronted. How to deal with them appropriately?

The various levels of analysis relevant in street-level bureaucracy research get attention in Chapter 22. On each, different sets of explanatory factors can be observed. What does their selection mean for what is to be explained? A focus on networks as unit of analysis is central in Chapter 23. In a network society clients may be treated in interaction with street-level bureaucrats participating in intra- and inter-organizational teams. What kinds of insights do the literatures on networks and intra-organizational interaction have to offer here? And what implications can be identified for the way such interaction is conceptualized and measured? Chapter 24 is about Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA). The goal of QCA is to explain separate cases (causes of effects), rather than to estimate the average effects of variables (effects of causes). As such, this method can be seen as a ‘third way’ between a qualitative case study and quantitative statistical techniques. What opportunities does the method offer and what limits are to be observed? Chapter 25 is about what it means to use the vignette method and when it may be appropriate to do so. Asking people questions via a questionnaire is a widely used way to document the self-reported views of people. This being so, respondents may say S, but actually practise P. While direct observation of behaviour and social interaction is not always possible, confronting actors with constructed but real-life-based cases is an appropriate way to detect how they may act in particular situations. How can vignettes be used as a feasible method for doing cross-national comparative research?

Part IV New dimensions in the study of street-level bureaucracy starts with Chapter 26 which looks ‘across the borders of scholarly communities’. While street-level bureaucracy has developed into a scholarly theme of its own, relevant knowledge and insights on similar phenomena have been gained elsewhere as well, although under different academic headings. This can be expected particularly in the sociology of law, organizational psychology and business administration. On what points do these disciplines offer similar insights and what can be learnt from them? Assessing ethical conduct is the central issue in Chapter 27. Under headings like *good governance* or *improving the quality of government* across countries reforms have been undertaken. While the political objectives of such reforms may be more

or less clearly articulated, the real impact of the latter often remains opaque. This applies particularly for aims to enhance ethical behaviour at the street level. Even where procedures of complaint and appeal have been established, how do street-level bureaucrats actually deal with ethical dilemmas? Chapter 28 addresses normative issues in and around street-level bureaucracy. In politics and administration, what happens at the street level is – certainly ‘at the top’ – often presupposed and sometimes curtailed where deemed necessary, rather than understood and supported. This indicates an underestimation of the pivotal role of street-level bureaucrats in the policy process and of the ‘tough jobs’ involved. It also expresses a neglect of the ‘normative loneliness’ implied by this kind of work. What moral dispositions do street-level bureaucrats show and how does this relate to democratic government?

In *Part V Conclusion* an overview of the findings from the volume as a whole is provided in Chapter 29 in the form of a range of insights and lessons drawn from the successive chapters. As an ‘editor’s cut’ of the entire *Research Handbook*, this chapter invites the reader to explore the full chapter concerned in detail. The final Chapter (30) is titled ‘The ground floor of government in context: An agenda for street-level bureaucracy research’. In five decades of street-level bureaucracy research a variety of dimensions and topics have received attention. From the knowledge and insights gained, as shown, relevant lessons can be drawn. At the same time, several topics and aspects of research have remained relatively understudied. What could, at the end of this *Research Handbook*, be seen as pertinent issues to be addressed on an agenda for future research?

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