

# **Governance as the hidden essence of welfare state reform: the case of social support in the Netherlands**

---

**Paper for EGPA Conference Malta, 2 -5 September 2009  
Study Group VIII: Third Sector “Co-production and Innovation”**

**J.C.V. van der Veer MSc**  
*Department of Governance Studies,  
Faculty of Social Sciences  
VU University Amsterdam*

Contact: [jcv.van.der.veer@fsw.vu.nl](mailto:jcv.van.der.veer@fsw.vu.nl)

*Version: August 19, 2009*

*! Work in progress, please do not quote or distribute!*

## **ABSTRACT**

This paper presents the premise that the content of social policy is constituted by operational policy choices, rather than by nationwide welfare state reform programs. It will be argued that an understanding of welfare state reform could not be obtained *ex ante*, by analyzing policy visions in written, but rather should be found in the local design of operational tools and strategies that allow the provision of social policy measures. The paper starts from governance theories, which inform us that current policy practicalities are embedded in a complex multi-actor setting of collaboration, negotiation, and contextual understanding. Illustrated by preliminary empirical case study material of ongoing PhD research on local social support in the Netherlands, the paper will show that operational policy, i.e. ‘the mode of doing policy’, could be elaborated without settling a comprehensive vision concerning the content of social policy beforehand. In addition, the case suggests that the working and the consequences of operational policy execution are essential for the elaboration of the specific features of social policy.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Governments across Western Europe are in the midst of radical transformations of their welfare state institutions (Gilbert, 2002; Newman, 2005; Powell & Hendricks, 2009). As a result of large-scale structural developments like ageing of population and individualization trends, governments are reconsidering the allocation of social rights and responsibilities. Building comprehensive knowledge on such expressions of welfare state reform is high on the research agenda of social policy scholars. Although organizational structures and practices are recognized as elements of social policy, the concept of *governance* is not yet widely used as a frame of analysis in social policy (Daly, 2003). First and foremost, social policy theorists focus on the content of social policies, i.e. the policy visions on social welfare (reform), the types of services deployed, and their intended outcome. The lack of interest in the dynamics of the policy process itself is surprising since current policy practicalities are embedded in a complex multi-actor setting of collaboration, negotiation, and contextual understanding (Kjær, 2004; Kooiman, 2003; Peters & Pierre, 2005). Putting governance in the study of social policy hence offers a dynamic view on welfare state reform that helps to analyze and understand what is going on in social policy. Newman, accordingly, fiercely claims that “the study of social policy can be enriched by a greater focus on the dynamics of the policy process itself” (2002, p. 347). This paper will elaborate on this thesis with exploratory case study material.

The argument proceeds as follows. The paper starts from social policy theory and presents the Social Support Act (*Wet maatschappelijke ondersteuning* or *Wmo*) in the Netherlands as a case *par excellence* of welfare state changes towards an ‘enabling state’ (Gilbert, 2002). Next, an analytical framework based on governance theory will be introduced to study empirically how this reform works out. Illustrated by preliminary case study material of ongoing PhD research<sup>1</sup> in the Netherlands, the paper will then present a process analysis of governance ‘in action’. The conclusion recapitulates the argument and suggests more in-dept case study research to improve our understanding of the nuts and bolts of welfare state reform.

---

<sup>1</sup> The PhD-research project *Manufacturing Local Governance* aims to understand how municipalities design arrangements for the provision of social support by disentangling the characteristics of design processes. In a few municipalities a careful reconstruction of designing processes and emerging social support arrangements is being carried out, in order to construct a typology of ‘generative mechanisms’ that specifies the variety of linkages between social support arrangements and the preceding processes of design.

## 2. TOWARDS THE ENABLING STATE

### *Welfare state reform in Europe*

All Western countries have been confronted with a multitude of pressures that call for reorganization of their welfare state regimes. Often these pressures are ambiguous. As Daly and Lewis (2000) note, demographic and financial pressures have increased the demand for care, while social factors – in particular changing norms related to family and the role of women – have acted to decrease the supply of care. Against the background of these tensions, system reform came into force to meet the proportional rise in the ageing population and the increased costs of care. In this paper, attention is focused on the specific area of social support. The term social support is here meant to describe the promotion of participation in society and the independent functioning of people with a disability or mental and/or psychosocial problems by means of prevention-based activities or the provision of welfare services and extramural (non-residential) care. Obviously, however, social security and health care are passing through similar transformation processes. Central to the modernizations that are put in force is a reorientation of the ‘social contract’ between state and citizen that was inscribed in the social democratic welfare state (Cox, 1998; Ossenwaarde, 2007; Pfau-Effinger, 2006). Governments are seeking to build a more ‘modern’ contract based on responsibility and diversity. Foremost, there is an increasing demand that citizens recognize obligations when they lay claim to their rights. Emphasis is less on predetermined social benefits and services and more on activation. Social welfare policies, accordingly, are more and more designed to enable people to socially participate by means of paid work or voluntary activities. In addition, there is a growing concern to follow an individual-differentiated instead of an institutional-universal approach. The desire to review situations not according to uniform rules but on a case-by-case base, results in (ICT)-arrangements to clarify citizens’ demands of support as well as social programs tailored to the particularities of neighborhoods.

To suggest that the welfare state is under fundamental challenge does yet not imply the end of social welfare programs. To state it differently, arguing that the essential character of the welfare state is changing does not necessitates loyalty to the “hollowing out thesis” that the steering capacity of the state is eroding (Rhodes, 1994). Although governmental power is retreating – reflected by a political desire to leave more to civic and private initiatives, a contrasting tendency is happening simultaneously. In order to ‘empower’ individuals to participate effectively in social and political activities, state institutions appear to perceive

disclosure of personal information as essential for effective, made-to-measure support. As far as the latter is concerned, governments are gradually reaching more into citizens' private lives (Newman, 2005). To capture the current shifts as pictured without determining whether the role of the state is reducing or not, we join the paradigm of the 'enabling state' as put forward by Gilbert (2005). In essence, this paradigm materializes welfare state reform as a societal shift towards one in which the state "provides social protection through public support for private responsibility" (Gilbert, 2005, p. 6). As Gilbert describes, governments concentrate decreasingly on redistribution policy and turn to activate citizens to find ways of taking care of themselves and to foster social inclusion and social cohesion. By centralizing 'activation' as the cornerstone of welfare state reform, the paradigm departs from the unilateral discussion about the direction in which the role of the state is changing. Rather, the paradigm accentuates the social goals of new welfare policy, i.e. to enable everybody to participate in society.<sup>2</sup>

### ***Conceptualizing welfare state reform***

Having argued that the enabling state concept does not imply by definition a decline in governmental intervention, it is an empirical question how welfare state reform proceeds. The answer to this question depends on the type of measurement, the institutional sector, and political-administrative context within it takes place. Welfare state reform should thus be studied in a case-by-case design. Before we move on to present an explicatory case from the Netherlands to start such an endeavor, an analytical framework to empirically study welfare state reform is introduced. Gilbert (2009; 2001) presents a framework that distinguishes two competing conceptions of social welfare. The *institutional conception* sees social welfare as an integral and ongoing first-line function of society. It is seen as a primary means by which citizens fulfill their social needs. Opposed to this conception, the *residual conception* sees welfare as a safety net when regular channels for meeting one's needs fall short to perform effectively. In this view, social welfare is not seen in itself as a substantial institution, but rather as a supplemental activity. Rather than taking in a universal approach in which all citizens are (potentially) subject to social policy, state intervention is directed to individual citizens, under clearly defined conditions. According to Gilbert, which conception is followed

---

<sup>2</sup> Several metaphors have been introduced for descriptive as well as prescriptive reflections on welfare state reform (see Ferrera & Hemerijck, 2003, p. 59). Among them can be referred to Giddens' (1998) notion of 'third way politics', the concept of 'modernization' (of welfare state institutions) used by the European Commission and 'recalibration' as defined by Ferrera, Hemerijck and Rhodes (2000). For this paper, we selected the concept of the 'enabling state' as it most explicitly centralizes changes in the *content* of social policy – being our point of departure to analyze welfare state reform, rather than the positioning and functioning of state institutions.

by a specific government is reflected in choices regarding the bases of social allocations. He groups social allocations in four allocative principles, namely; ‘attributed-need’, ‘compensation’, ‘diagnostic differentiation’ and ‘means-tested need’ (see Figure 1).

Allocations made on the basis of ‘attributed need’ assume that needs are normal occurrences in society. In this principle, social policies are designed to improve the eligibility for various different target groups, according to their specific demands. At the other end of the continuum, where ‘means-tested need’ is the allocative principle, state programs provide temporary support to individual citizens until they are self-sufficient again. The principles of ‘compensation’ and diagnostic differentiation fall in between them. Under targeting based on ‘compensation’, services are granted to groups of people having common needs that are not met by existing social arrangements due to a historically deficit status. This principle is close to the institutional conception as group-oriented allocation is leading principle, but it starts from the idea of temporary activities to re-establish equity, instead of structural, ongoing arrangements. Finally, ‘diagnostic differentiation’ is an allocative principle closer to the residual conception as it stresses more upon the individual disabilities, to be detected by a more or less ‘mechanical assessment’ of the applicant’s specific fingerprints. To determine the need for social welfare provisions, professional judgment of the individual’s unique situation is leading (Gilbert & Terrell 2009, p. 111-118; Gilbert 2001, p. 214-220).

As the author is first to admit, the four allocative principles are not mutually exclusive even though the two basic conceptions underlying them may seem unable to unify. In practice, various combinations of allocative principles are found, reflecting compromise over competing values is unavoidable in design and application of social welfare policies (2009, p. 116). Consequently, the framework is most functional when used dynamically, as a tool to search for developments in the design of social policy, instead of a static template that divides real-life practices into fixed categories. This will be exactly the purpose it serves in this paper.

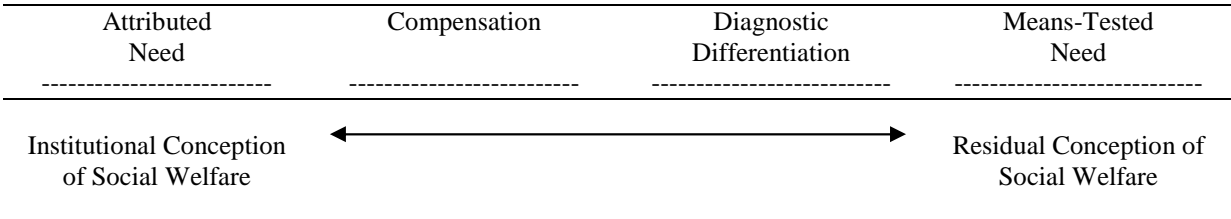


Figure 1: Allocative Principles and Conceptions of Social Welfare (Gilbert & Terrell, 2009, p. 111)

### 3. LOCAL SOCIAL SUPPORT IN THE NETHERLANDS

#### *The Social Support Act*

As Green-Pedersen, Van Kersbergen and Hemerijck (2001) state, the Netherlands are in the midst of welfare state reform, which reflects elements of the enabling state paradigm. As proclaimed by successive cabinets, “government is a key mediator rather than an autonomous problem-solver” (2001, p.322). As a reaction to large-scale structural changes involving demographic trends, they have promoted societal responsibility of civil society associations (cf. WRR 2002). In this respect, the Local Social Support Act (Wet maatschappelijke ondersteuning or Wmo) is a *case par excellence*.<sup>3</sup> The Act, enforced in 2007, requires all 441<sup>4</sup> Dutch municipalities to facilitate the social and political participation of all citizens, regardless of their physical, mental, and/or social hindrances. It outlines that municipalities have the responsibility to enable citizens to function independently and to increase social participation, social cohesion, and active citizenship (Timmermans, De Klerk & Gilsing, 2007). Hence, municipalities have to decide on how to provide appropriate measures, within a national framework of performance fields.

In this section, the basic principles, policy framework and legislative framework of the Social Support Act<sup>5</sup> will be discussed respectively, in order to situate the new Act in the context of welfare state reform discussions. First of all, the Act reflects three basic principles on the relations among state, market and civil society actors. The Act draws on a communitarian discourse as it aims to strengthen social cohesion (Etzioni, 1997). It motivates to construct a social infrastructure in which citizens and self organizations are working together to support themselves by ways of social activities as neighboring and communal services and informal care (meaning long-term care offered by friends, family, or acquaintances). Additionally, the Act introduces the concept of ‘third party government’ (e.g. Brandsen, Van de Donk, & Kenis, 2006; Salamon, 2002; Savas 1987; Stein 1993) and encourages municipalities to ensure delivery of social support to third parties such as welfare organizations, care providers, and housing associations (cf. Article 10) . Indeed, The Dutch welfare system has traditionally

---

<sup>3</sup> The Web site of the Ministry for Health, Welfare and Sport provides information (in English) on the Social Support Act: <http://www.minvws.nl/en/themes/social-support-act/>

<sup>4</sup> The number of municipalities as of 1 January 2009, according to Statistics Netherlands (CBS).

<sup>5</sup> Staatsblad (2006). *Wet van 29 juni 2006, houdende nieuwe regels betreffende maatschappelijke ondersteuning (Wet maatschappelijke ondersteuning)*. nr. 351; *Zorg en maatschappelijke ondersteuning*. Tweede Kamer 2003-2004, 29538, nr. 1; *Nieuwe regels betreffende maatschappelijke ondersteuning (Wet maatschappelijke ondersteuning)*. *Memorie van Toelichting*, Tweede Kamer 2004-2005, 30131, nr. 3.

been characterized as a mixed system (*gemengd bestel*) that shows the intersection of state, market, family, and voluntary sector relations (Trommel & Van der Veen, 1999; WRR, 2004). The novelty is to be found in the transformation of this partnership and the specific roles descriptions. Significantly, the Act urges municipalities to facilitate and link civic initiatives rather than solely dedicating and controlling state-aided social expenditures from the centre (see Span, 2009). Finally, the Act changes the relationship among state and citizens as it is the first Act that introduce a model of horizontal accountability in the Netherlands (Sullivan, 2003). This model requires municipalities to arrange civil participation and public accountability by involving local citizens and stakeholders in policy making and policy evaluation (cf. Article 3, 9 and 11).

- 
1. The promotion of social cohesion and quality of life in villages, districts, and neighborhoods;
  2. Prevention-focused support for young people experiencing problems growing up and parents experiencing problems raising their children;
  - 3. The provision of information, advice, and client support;**
  - 4. Support for informal caregivers, including help finding effective solutions if they are temporarily unable to carry out their tasks, as well as support for volunteers;**
  - 5. The promotion of social participation and the independent functioning of individuals with a disability or chronic mental problem and/or psychosocial problems;**
  - 6. The provision of services for individuals with a disability or chronic mental problem and/or psychosocial problems that enable them to maintain and enhance their independence or social participation;**
  7. The provision of social relief, including women's refuge, and the pursuit of policies to combat acts of violence committed by an individual from the victim's domestic circle;
  8. The promotion of public mental health care, except for the provision of psychosocial aid in the event of disasters; and
  9. The promotion of addiction policy.

---

Figure 2: Constituents of social support referred to in Article 1(1)(g) of the Social Support Act

The Act encompasses a policy framework of intertwined activities that municipalities should elaborate to enhance citizens' participation (see Figure 2). In this paper attention is centered to performance field 1 and performance fields 3 to 6 since they all relate to the definition of social support chosen for this paper (i.e. the promotion of participation in society and the independent functioning of people with a disability or mental and/or psychosocial problems by means of prevention-based activities or the provision of welfare services and extramural (non-residential) care).<sup>6</sup> As can be read from figure 2, promotion of social cohesion and quality of life is at the top of the list. This follows from the assumption that social cohesion averts citizens to claim governmental support in terms of grants and state-offered social

---

<sup>6</sup> The performance fields 7, 8 and 9 that concern medical activities and care for vulnerable citizens, and performance field 2, care for youth welfare, are excluded since they refer to social policy sectors other than under study in this paper.

services. Subsequently, municipal activities as support to informal caregivers and volunteers (performance field 4) is listed prior to direct municipal actions as for example making public buildings more accessible for the disabled and the elderly (performance field 5). Performance field 6 implies the actual provision of individual, tailor-made measures, like household assistance, transport for local mobility, and the provision of wheelchairs, which complement the collective services referred to in performance field 5. Performance field 3 functions as a hinge amidst the aforementioned performance fields as it requires municipalities to inform and advice citizens about all available local activities and measures that the Act covers and to assist them in their choice among them. All in all, the performance fields appear to follow a rationale that citizens' self organization is before state activities and that preventive activities are prior to the provision of public welfare and care measures.

### ***Situating the Social Support Act in terms of welfare state conceptions***

Reflecting on the basic principles and policy framework of the Act as has been sketched, the Act seems to embody a conception on social welfare that allies with the current discourse on the enabling state. More specifically, by promoting of social cohesion prior to professional welfare and care measures, the Act does not have the character of a 'service law' that directs municipalities to provide public services. Rather, it urges municipalities to activate citizens by encouraging and facilitation self organization. The notion of 'participation of all citizens', however, appears to reveal elements of different conceptions of social welfare. On the one hand, the Act clearly poses welfare and care measures provided by the state as a 'safety net', since it urges municipalities first of all to enable informal care giving and to promote volunteer work. On the other hand, the Act appears to reflect a universal approach on social welfare, in which social support is a structural institution interwoven in local society. Government's appeal towards citizens is far-reaching. That is to say, the Act explicitly addresses *all* citizens, in one way or another, to participate. Citizens are being motivated to be active as a member of local society in terms of supporting others and as a co-producer of local social support policy. Moreover, the Act urges municipalities not to wait to start supporting a citizen until he is in need of some type of support, but to take in a pro-active, preventive approach to prevent him to become in need of care.

Reading of the legislative framework, finally, also leaves scope for discussion about where to situate the Social Support Act on the institutional- residual continuum of social welfare.

Predecessors of the Act<sup>7</sup> implied the *social right* that citizens are entitled to state-aided services under specified conditions. The Social Support Act, by contrast, holds municipalities responsible to *compensate* for the limitations faced. At first sight, this seems to be a less far-reaching obligation to governments than answering social rights and, accordingly, a shift towards a more residual conception of social welfare. As a result, however, of a requirement added after an amendment to the Wmo bill by Dutch Lower House, municipalities are obliged to enable people to run a household, to be mobile in and around the dwelling, to meet other people and, in so doing, to form social ties (cf. Article 4). Citizens can bring their municipality to court when they consider themselves insufficiently compensated. Elaborating on this requirement, it appears to be far-reaching. That is to say, it explicates not only a requirement for municipalities in terms of output, i.e. to arrange individual measures, but also in terms of the – far less effectible – outcome that the provided services are sufficient to maintain or enhance the receiver’s participation.

All in all, the enforcement of the Social Support Act appears to ally with the concept of the enabling state. However, the basic principles as well as the policy and legislative framework of the Act reveal diverse elements that can be situated at different spots on the continuum between an institutional and a residual conception of social welfare. The Act indeed reflects comprise over competing values, as Gilbert (2009, p. 116) assumes to be unavoidable in design and application of social welfare policies. Beyond questioning, however, the introduction of the Social Support Act marks a new stage in the ongoing process of decentralization in the Dutch political-administrative system (Van Berkel, 2006; Denters & Kolk, 2005; Fleurke & Hulst, 2006). It leaves elaboration of the broadly defined performance fields to municipalities and encourages them to experiment and to build new and innovative governance arrangements. This very decentralization or *devolution* (see Hague & Harrop, 2007) thus means that the various valued outcomes of social support must be balanced at the local level. It is to be negotiated on a local level what the exact broad defined societal goals of the Act are to be meant and what instruments are to be implemented to accomplish those goals. As such, the new Act requires from municipalities not only a great deal of organizing and steering capacity, but also to conclude on normatively charged discussions on societal goals. Identifying these characteristics, how welfare state reform under the Dutch Social Support Act occurs can best be studied on the local level.

---

<sup>7</sup> Namely, the Services for the Disabled Act (the Wvg) and parts of the Exceptional Medical Expenses Act (the Awbz).

#### 4. STUDYING WELFARE STATE REFORM IN ACTION

##### *Governance theories*

As Newman (2002) fiercely states, studies on social policy can be enriched by reading of governance processes. According to Newman, “it is not possible to ‘read’ the substance of social policy from the contents of White Papers, the manifestos of politicians, the guidance flowing from government departments, nor even the allocation of budgets across different programmers” (2002, p. 353). In view of that, we have to depart from policy visions committed to official documents and ‘dive’ into the policy process itself, in search for what is essentially going on in social policy. This paper uses governance as a frame of analysis for a comprehensive understanding of policy transformations under the Dutch Social Support Act. In essence, governance studies denote that beyond the state as the central actor to serve the public interest, individual citizens, civil society actors and private organizations are of increasing importance. As a consequence, the importance of the *process* as well as *context* of policy development and implementation is stressed in governance studies. In this paper, the term governance is used broadly, as a framework to analyze the interactions and steering modes that enable collective action (Kjær, 2004; Kooiman, 2003; Peters & Pierre, 2005). To speak of governance rather than government emphasizes the involvement of a multitude of actors, which are interrelated not only through forms of hierarchical (state) steering, but also through market and network coordination mechanisms (Meuleman, 2008). Following this definition of governance, the concept is a useful vocabulary to analyze the dynamics of power relations among the actors that make up the daily practice of social policy (Daly, 2003).

As Hill and Hupe (2009) address, one of the consequences that can be drawn from the conception of governance is that the ‘stages model’ of policy analysis is no longer suitable. Since governance studies imply a de-centred view of the state, the vertical chain of formulation-and-decision thus has become “a lightly woven treat, loosely coupling societal actors of various sorts” (2009, p.109). Hence, policy processes are best to be analyzed as continuous processes of contextual interpretation, persuasion, and reorientation, enacted by various actors. This raises the question, yet, how to fulfill a systematic, empirical study of governance processes. Fortunately, governance theorists do not leave us with nothing but fuzziness and complexity. As Carmel and Papadopoulos (2003) argue, the concept of governance analytically can be divided into two separated concepts: formal and operational policy. In fact, formal policy concerns the content of policy; the legislation and regulations

that embody policy principles, objectives and intended outputs. Operational policy concerns the 'mode of doing policy', i.e. the organizational arrangements and the procedures for policy design and delivery. This division enables an analysis of policymaking in two distinct domains, while concurrently stressing their unity (Van Berkel & Borghi, 2006). Specified to the case under study, the over-all formal policy of the Social Support Act is to enable everybody – old and young, the disabled and able-bodied – to participate in society; the operational policy of the Act includes, among others, the de-central organizing principle and the idea of third party government.

In addition, governance theorists underline that policies are always displayed on different administrative levels. Going downwards in a political-administrative system, a constitutional level, a collective choice level and an executive level can be seen as distinguishable sublevels (cf. Ostrom, 1999; Hupe & Hill, 1996). The constitutional layer of governance, to start with, reflects state-wide activities that deal with the conformation of a new order of policies. However, it is on the collective choice level, within organizational settings, where formal and operational policies are being further shaped. This holds particularly for the case under study. As already noted, the Social Support Act sees local knowledge and implementation capacity as essential to develop cohesive and effective social policy. Here, the loci of the collective choice level are Dutch localities where (governmental and non-governmental) actors involved in social support policy interact. Finally, it is on the executive level where individual actors, like the street-level bureaucrat and the contracted private service deliverer, implement formal and operational policy choices. In so doing, they inevitably adjust policies to the specific circumstances and their individual capacities, beliefs and/or interests. Combining the two dimensions and the three layers, a conceptual framework for the study of governance processes can be modeled (see Figure 3).

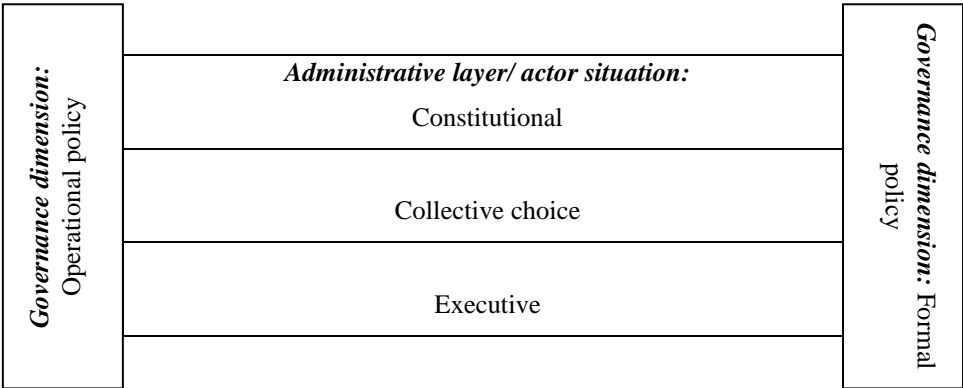


Figure 3: Conceptual framework for the study of governance processes

### ***Process Analysis***

A useful operational procedure for answering how Dutch municipalities arrange local social support is process analysis, through which successive interactions among actors are carefully recorded. As Pettigrew (1997, p. 338) defines, a process is “a sequence of individual and collective events, actions, and activities unfolding over time in context”. Following this clarification, processes are seen as dynamic phenomena, resulting in an empirical emphasis on action. Consequently, the strategy of process analysis forces the researcher to focus on shifts, developments and reconsiderations in the course of events. Although actions are seen as driven forces of processes, Pettigrew argues that a focus on only human actions is too limited for a comprehensive process analysis. He assumes that change is historical, contextual and processual. Change is historical because actions in the past shape actions in the presence; it is contextual since different levels – micro, meso and macro - of society are interconnected and it is processual because it interconnects actions. Pettigrew (1990, 1997) suggests case study research as most suitable to capture the complexity of organizational change, since it enables to investigate a phenomenon within its real-life context.

## **5. SHIFTS IN SOCIAL SUPPORT POLICY: A CASE FROM THE NETHERLANDS**

### ***Case study design and selection***

For this paper, a process analysis of the transformation of social support policy in one Dutch municipality has been conducted. To maximize the utility of information from this single case, the case has been selected on the basis of expectations about its informative value. The selection strategy fits in with ‘paradigmatic case-based methods’ as distinguished by Flyvbjerg (2006). Paradigmatic cases are strategically selected on the basis of general background knowledge about the case as well as the empirical domain the research is embedded in. The case that has been selected encloses elements of a paradigmatic case. First, we selected a relatively large (more than 100,000 inhabitants) municipality in which reform of the local social support policy has been high on the agenda for almost one decade, already before the introduction of the new Social Support Act. This choice facilitates access to rich data, which covers a wide time framework. Second, the reform program launched in the locality reflects the fundamentals the Social Support Act propagates. More specifically, the reform program clearly reflects the idea of ‘participation of all’ as well as the idea that informally arranged support proceeds professional state-aided support. Accordingly, the case is expected to have metaphorical or prototypical value. Yet, only after the execution of the

case study and subsequent discussion this value can be fully determined (Flyvbjerg, 2006 p. 230-233). As methods of data collection, content analysis of relevant materials (e.g. council reports, plans, byelaws, official papers, and minutes of meetings) has been carried out, complemented with face-to-face interviews with several key persons - local officials as well as representatives of external organizations that were involved in the reform program. The several written and spoken narratives told, all with particular individual experiences and gaps are eventually integrated to portray an overall picture of what occurred (Rubin & Rubin, 1995; Weiss, 1994).<sup>8</sup>

### ***Local social support under construction: an analysis of the reform process***

In this section of the paper, the multi-layered governance framework will be used to systematically understand the reform process of social support practices in the locality under study. In summary, the case study results are twofold. First, the case shows that operational policy, i.e. ‘the mode of doing policy’, could be elaborated without settling comprehensive formal policy beforehand. A broadly defined formal policy agenda was fertile soil for years of experiments. Step by step, an arrangement has been worked out in which different functions of social support provision, i.e. information, assessment, approval and delivery, are connected to form a closed chain. The central element of this system became a counter that arranges access to and information on a range of different services in one place (the concept of a ‘one-stop-shop’). At the outset of the reform process, local government officials and external public managers - all fervent to raise the quality of public information and the efficiency of interorganisational collaboration, were the key figures. In the time of experiment and elaboration of the operational project, little by little the outlines of the Social Support Act became clear. This event – the introduction of new policy at the constitutional level, served as a stimulus to speed up the process and helped to justify and affirm the, costly and lengthy, process. However, the reform of the local system of social support then already got going and was intended to be realized regardless of the exact features of the new Act.

Second, the case shows that the working and the consequences of operational policy execution are essential for the elaboration of the specific features of social policy. That is to say, the specific substantive policy choices, as the type of measures to be designed and the

---

<sup>8</sup> The software tool *ATLAS.ti* (see <http://www.atlasti.com/>) has been used for the administration and coding of the collected textual data. Subsequently (following Huberman and Miles, 2001), a data matrix is constructed to extract patterns from the large quantities of data.

activities that the municipality facilitates, are to be crystallized by the working of the operational system and the cooperation among municipal and external organizations. Yet, at the final stage of the transformation process, it became increasingly clear that financial and organizational pressures at the executive level are operating as bottlenecks to implement the idea of chain management as elaborated. At the moment it is an open question how this affects the design and delivery of (new) types of social support measures.

In the following, a reconstruction will be given of the events and decisions unfolding over time. The process narrative is told as a sequence of three stages, each embodying a distinctive part of the process. First, the outset of the local transformation process will be described (stage 1). Subsequently, the implementation of the new Act in the municipality's administrative system and the deliberations on 'new' local social support by local politicians will be portrayed as parallel processes (stage 2a and 2b). Finally, the working of the system and its consequences for the future of the reform process is sketched (stage 3).

### ***Stage 1: fertile soil for discovery and design***

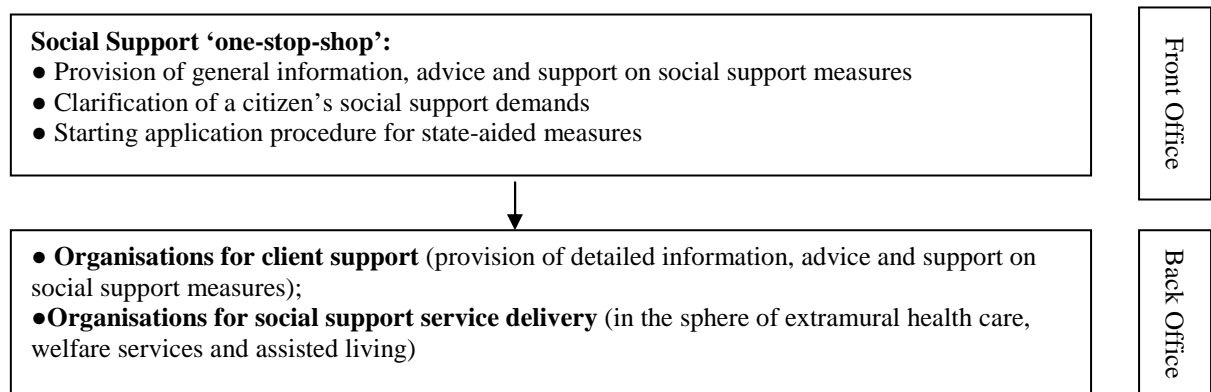
In the late 1990s, 'participation' was a theme high on the social agenda of the locality in question. Traditionally, the municipality has been confronted with a relatively high demand for care and welfare related services. It residences a relatively high amount of lower educated elderly people who, at that time, poorly find their way to social services. The social democrats, traditionally well presented in local council, announced a broadly defined policy vision that emphasized the importance for citizens to be self-sufficient and of equality. Particularly local citizens with a relatively low social-economical status were intended to be supported. As a derivative of this wide-ranging social goal, the importance of access to and information on a range of different services in one place - instead of sending citizens from pillar to post, was declared by members of local council.

This political statement gave a free rein for local government officials to further elaborate their ideas. Especially one official working as a policy advisor in the sector of social support then already goes with an innovative idea for system reform. Designed as a central gateway to services, he pictured himself a citizens' desk that firstly and foremost is dedicated to find out a citizen's needs and demands, before handling applications for care and welfare services. The mass of detailed information resulting from the comprehensive exploration of citizens' needs and desires eventually allows, as he believed, the municipality to create that type of services

most appropriate to enhance and prolong citizens' ability to take care for oneself (see text box below). By the end of 2001, the bench of Mayor and Aldermen formally decided to draw up a plan for a 'one-stop-stop'.

**An all-embracing notion on social support: a 'one-stop-shop', information and chain management.**

The 'one-stop-shop' provides access to and information on a range of different services in the sphere of social support, like welfare services, extramural health care and assisted living, in one place. Counsellors at the Front Office are expected to work with an operational system that firstly and foremost is dedicated to finding out a citizen's needs and demands as precise as possible. Rather than reacting upon a demand expressed by citizens visiting the desk, a consult starts with an open conversation in which counsellor and citizen together explore the exact reasons behind the experienced constraints to be self-sufficient or to socially participate. Such a close detection is especially of value for groups of citizens having difficulties with finding words for their needs and desires. It is only after this open conversation that a search for the type of support most suitable to compensate those needs and demands starts. When filing of the consults is well developed, the demand of support could be determined at the level of neighbourhoods and districts. Eventually, then, specially made collective services, like social activities and local transport facilities, can be designed to prevent the need of professional care in the future. All in all, the 'one-stop shop' is at the heart of a shift from supply steering (providing services according to availability and organization's rationale) to demand steering (providing services according to needs and client's rationale).



However the municipality under study ascribed itself a central position in the improvement of chain management and the settlement of a 'one-stop-shop', the absolute necessity of support of private organisations was acknowledged from the very first of the process. It became clear that only after cooperation of the various organisations, each responsible for a different link in the chain, the intended changes could be accomplished. Yet, the municipality recognised that assembling the parties was hindered by the fact that they were financed by different organizations, at different administrative levels. Several of those organisations, fortunately, recognised the need to raise the quality of public information as well as the efficiency of interorganisational collaboration. One of the key players, a health insurance company covering a large majority of the insurances taken out in the region, warmly received the plan

to work up a connected chain from a client's demand, through the application for a service, towards the supply thereof. The project gradually grew into a regional partnership project by 2002, including ten municipalities and different private and semi-public organisations, all being active in a region of about one million inhabitants. Together, the partners explored what type of requests could be expected in the 'one-stop-shop', for what social support related issues professionalism should be enhanced and in what manner the integrated system might be digitalised. Being convinced the partnership could function as a seedbed for generating working knowledge on how to reform information and advice on care and welfare, the project was presented to the Ministry for Health, Welfare and Sport in 2004 to serve as an exemplary project in exchange for financial support. As such, the project further professionalized as an 'experimental field' and 'trailblazer' for change in the sphere of local social support.

### ***Stage 2a: pressures from above: the implementation of new rules***

As from the early 2000s, exploratory debates and studies on system reform took place in steady succession in national political-administrative circles. Little by little the outlines of a new constitutional framework became clear. Although it was only halfway through 2006 that the definitive version of the Social Support Act was declared, it became obvious that municipal tasks and responsibilities in the sphere of welfare were somehow or other going to be extended. Even though the municipality had started restructuring the chain management in the sector of local care and welfare even before the contours of the Act became clear, the Act served as a driving force to speed up the regional project running for several years. The Act legitimizes the project as it motivates municipalities to design coherent social support policy that smartly connects the activities of third parties. Yet, significantly, it necessitates municipalities to arrange information, advice, and support to citizens on social support (performance field 3 of the Act). Accordingly, the enactment of the new Act urges to further professionalize the dissemination of information by training to counsellors and improving the physical accessibility of the 'one-stop-shop'. In addition, with the new local Act approaching, the municipality clearly demanded to leave its own mark on the 'one-stop-shop' as a front piece exposing the municipality's excellent implementation of the new Act.

The enforcement of the new Act also incited the municipality under study to reconsider the specific organization form of the 'one-stop-shop'. A municipal service instead of a partnership agreement with external organizations as being experimented with during the regional project was assumed to be the best answer to the new financial responsibilities the

new Act has brought about. The Act grants municipalities to receive an annual funding - based on certain social and demographic indicators, regardless of the actual expenditures on social support measures (open-ended financing). The municipality therefore desired to have a grip on all applications and to execute the 'one-shop-shop' as the exclusively gateway to social support measures as from 2007.

### ***Stage 2b: elaborating local social support***

As the Social Support Act prescribes, the bench of Mayor and Aldermen is expected to formulate a 4-year policy plan that outlines, among others, how the performance fields are going to be specified in local regulations and activities. Yet, around the year of the enforcement of the Act elaboration of operational policy was given priority over specification of formal policy on social support by means of a local policy plan. Clearly, attention was fixed on the implementation of the new rules into the administrative processes and the formulation of new local procedures and service delivery contracts. A group of local councillors acting as spokesman for care and welfare policy yet expressed their willing to being 'leaded through the process'. Notwithstanding the specialistic and technical character of the implementation process they requested to being closely involved and informed by municipal officials knowledgeable about the new Act. In addition, they wished to already initiate a process of brainstorming and informal deliberation to prepare decision-making on this complex policy issue. The involved municipal officials happily accepted the initiative. As a result, a small group of narrowly associated political representatives from both governing and opposing political parties did recurrently meet to prepare formal decision-making and to keep each other informed on administrative as well as political developments. Concurrently, municipal officials had informal meeting with members of the standing advisory body for disability issues and the standing advisory body for elderly issues as 'hands-on experts' to discuss the local implementation of the new Act and to sound out reactions to policy plans.

During the informal meetings as well as the following formal decision processes, local council unequivocally declares in favour of the 'one-stop-shop'. Analysis of their political statements appears to show that the idea of a 'one-stop-shop' *as such*, fits well with different political ideas and discourses on social welfare. On the one hand, the idea of one single reception desk at which counselors accomplish a comprehensive exploration of a citizen's demand of care fits well with the ideal of compensating people with disabilities and minority groups. According to this view - for example expressed by social democrats and the advisory

body for disability issues, the 'one-stop-shop' is seen as a structural and ongoing governmental function. Yet, it also fits with a conception of social welfare more in the direction of social welfare as a residual function. Following this line of reasoning, a 'one-stop-shop' serves as a means to efficiently detect an individual's limitations and possibilities needed to take effective measures towards regained self-reliance. While the two views seem antithetical, they thus could persist side by side during the expansion of the 'one-stop-shop'.

Halfway 2008, the local council approved a first 4-year policy plan concerning social support. Broadly stated, the local policy plan can be pictured as a funnel, positioning preventive policy prior to caring policy; collective measures previous to individual measures and informal care foregoing professional care. Accordingly, the plan outlines initiatives to expand the local capacity of volunteer activities, like offering accommodations and promoting volunteer work among senior citizens, and presents initiatives to support informal caregivers. The municipal 'one-stop-shop' is described as a tool to connect the different domains of social support and to guide individual citizens in need of support through those different domains. As such, it is given an operational, instrumental status in the locality's policy plan, rather than an element of the political policy vision on social support.

### ***Stage 3: The working of a local social support demand & supply system***

Although the instrument of the 'one-stop-shop' is not explicitly normatively changed according to the policy plan, its working is essential for how the plan will be crystallized out into specific formal policy measures and regulations. More specifically, each of the three functions of the 'one-stop-shop' affects the features of social support policies to be designed. First, the 'one-stop-shop' is seen as the gateway to individually awarded social support measures. As such, its working determines the number of citizens receiving social support and, as a result, the municipal expenditures on professional care. However, prior to handling an application to professional care, the counselors working at the Front Desk are expected to find out whether types of support other than professional care, might be suitable. Collective services, like social activities, voluntary organized support and local transport facilities, are set in to compensate for the hindrances of citizens not eligible for professional care at present. In addition, those services are expected to prevent the need of professional care in the future. Finally, the demands for information the counselors at the Front Desk receive are expected to serve as a source of knowledge to find out 'blind spots' in the supply system of social support services. Needs and demands expressed by a citizen visiting the 'one-stop-shop' are

being archived more and more systematically since it is expected that this data can perfectly serve as input for the introduction of new preventive measures and alteration of existing welfare activities.

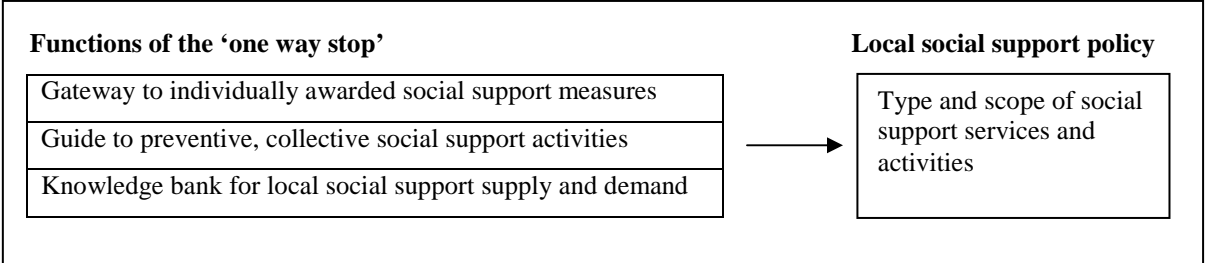


Figure 4: Working of the 'one-way-stop' as input for formal policy decisions

Coupling the three functions the care counter provides, it essentially serves as a frame that determines the type and scope of social support services and activities implemented within the locality under study (see figure 4). However the 'one-stop-shop' is working as from the enforcement of the new Act, all three functions are still under construction and have been elaborated ever since. Among other things, more intensive collaborations with external partners are being set up to open up all relevant information and effectively employ the data. Counselors working for organizations in the sector of social support are being encouraged to refer citizens to the central information counter of the municipality, in which their requests can be filed and analyzed systematically. However, it has been recognized that those interactions are hindered. First, not all organizations are totally aware of the all-embracing notion on chain management as preached by the municipality in the foregoing years. Yet, significantly, the regulations external organizations are being financed by, do not yet fully correspond to this ideal. Being funded on the basis of the number of services delivered or the number of citizens contacted, it is inconsistent with the interests of an individual organization to refer citizens to other organizations or to advise to apply for services other than the ones provided by the organization itself. At the moment, it is an open question to what extent and in what way these processes at the executive level will adjust the operational policy choices and, eventually, the formal policy choices on social support in the locality.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Illustrated by a process analysis of the transformation of social support policy in a Dutch locality, this paper has claimed that governance instruments could be the essence of social policy reform. During processes of welfare state change that are directed by broadly defined constitutional frameworks to be elaborated on a de-central level - like the enforcement of the Social Support Act in the Netherlands, tangible projects, events and activities on the operational policy level appear to be at the heart of system reform. The study's findings suggest that operational policy could be designed without formal policy being specified and decided upon. To state it even more extremely, it might be opportune for reforming social welfare execution practises to start from a broadly defined, widely supported formal policy. As the analysis shows, an instrument being connected up to a broadly policy vision that reflects policy intentions and goals propagated by a majority of left to right politicians is fertile soil for a sizeable, long term transformation project. Set in as a vehicle to feasible social policy reform, the instrument of a 'one-stop-stop' that arranges access to and information on social support services eventually appears to be the heart of the reform. The formal policy choices will be determined by the actual working of the operational system and the cooperation between municipal and external organizations involved in the provision of social support. Combining those findings, it appears that operational policy could not only precede formal policy making, but could also affect the content of social policies.

The argument that an understanding of welfare state reform could not be obtained *ex ante*, by analyzing nation-wide policy visions, but rather should be found in the local design process, consequences the need of exploratory research on (variance in) local effecting of social reform programs. To comprehensively understand the nuts and bolts of transformation of welfare states there is a need for research that centralizes governance processes 'in action' instead of 'static' social policy regulations. Only by taking a governance view on policy processes, the dynamics of policy 'in writing' and policy 'on the ground' will become visible. Accordingly, we recommended in-depth case study research to identify local responses and elaborations of national social reform programs. The findings of such studies will provide comprehensive material that contributes to the growing body of knowledge on 'new public governance'.

## LITERATURE

- Berkel, R. Van. (2006). The Decentralisation of Social Assistance in The Netherlands. *International Journal of Sociology*, 26(1/2), 20-31.
- Berkel, R. Van. Borghi, V. (2007). New modes of governance in activation policies. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 27(7/8), 227-286.
- Brandsen, T., Van de Donk, W., & Kenis, P. (Eds.). (2006). *Meervoudig bestuur. Publieke dienstverlening door hybride organisaties*. Den Haag: Lemma.
- Carmel, E., Papadopoulos, T. (2003). The new governance of social security in Britain. In Millar, J. (Ed), *Understanding Social Security*. Bristol: Policy Press, pp. 31-52.
- Daly, M. (2003). Governance and Social Policy. *Journal of Social Policy*, 32(1), 113-128.
- Daly, M., & Lewis, J. (2000). The concept of social care and the analysis of contemporary welfare states. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 51(2), 281-298.
- Denters, S. A. H., & P. J. Klok (2005). The Netherlands: in search of responsiveness. In S. A. H. Denters & L. E. Rose (Eds), *Comparing Local Governance. Trends and Developments*, pp. 65-82. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Evers, A. (2005). Mixed Welfare Systems and Hybrid Organizations: Changes in the Governance and Provision of Social Services. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 28(9/10), 737-748.
- Etzioni, A. (1997). *The golden rule: community and morality in a democratic society*. New York: Basic Books.
- Ferrera, M. & Hemerijck, A. (2003). Recalibrating the Welfare State. In Zeitlin, J. & Trubek, D. M (Eds), *Governing work and welfare in a new economy*, pp. 88-127. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ferrera, M., Hemerijck, A., & Rhodes, M. (2000). *The Future of Social Europe: Recasting Work and Welfare in the New Economy*. Oeiras, USA: Celta.
- Fleurke, F. & Hulst, R. (2006). A Contingency Approach to Decentralization. *Public Organization Review*, 6(1), 37-56.
- Flyvbjerg, B. (2006). Five Misunderstandings About Case-Study Research, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 12(2), 219-245.
- Gilbert, N & P. Terrell (2009). *Dimensions of Social Welfare Policy* (Seventh ed). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Gilbert, N. (2002). *Transformation of the Welfare State. The Silent Surrender of Public Responsibility*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gilbert, N. (2001). Renegotiating Social Allocations: Choices and Issues. In Gilbert, N. (2001) (Ed), *Targeting Social Benefits*. International Perspectives & Trends. New Brunswick, USA: Transaction Publishers.
- Green-Pedersen C., Van Kersbergen K., and Hemerijck A. (2001). Neo-liberalism, the 'third way' or what? Recent social democratic welfare policies in Denmark and the Netherlands, *Journal of European Public Policy*, 8(2), 307-325.
- Hague, R. & Harrop, M. (2007). *Comparative Government and Politics. An Introduction*. Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hupe, P. & Hill, M. (2006). The Three Action Levels of Governance: Re-framing the Policy Process Beyond the Stages Model. In Pierre, J. & Peters, B.G. (2006) *Handbook Of Public Policy*, pp. 13-30. New York: Sage.
- Hill, M. & Hupe, P. (2009). *Implementing Public Policy. An introduction to the study of operational governance*. London: Sage.
- Kooiman, J. (2003). *Governing as governance*. London: Sage.
- Meuleman, L. (2008). *Public Management and the Metagovernance of Hierarchies, Networks and Markets: The Feasibility of Designing and Managing Governance Style Combinations*. Heidelberg: Springer International.
- Huberman, A. M., & Miles, M. B. (Eds.). (2001). *The Qualitative Researcher's Companion*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications Inc.
- Newman, J. (2002). Putting the 'Policy' back into Social Policy. *Social Policy & Society*, 1(4), 347-354.
- Newman, J. (Ed.). (2005). *Remaking governance. Peoples, politics and the public sphere*. Bristol: The Policy Press.
- Ossewaarde, M. R. R. (2007). The New Social Contract and the Struggle for Sovereignty in the Netherlands. *Government and Opposition*, 42(4), 491-512.
- Ostrom, E. (1999). Institutional Rational Choice: An Assessment of the Institutional Analysis and Development Framework, in: P.A. Sabatier (Ed) (1999). *Theories of the Policy Process*, pp. 35-71. Boulder, Colorado: Westview.
- Pfau-Effinger, B. (2006). *Active citizenship: The new face of welfare*. Paper presented at the Welfare State Change. Conceptualisation, measurement and Interpretation. Store Restrup Herregaard. 13-15 January 2006.

- Peters, B. G. (2002). The Politics of Tool Choice. In L. M. Salamon (Ed.), *The Tools of Government. A Guide to the New Governance*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Pettigrew, A. M. (1997). "What is a Processual Analysis?", *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, 13(4), 337-348.
- Powell, J., and J. Hendricks (Eds.) (2009). *The Welfare State in Post-Industrial Society. A Global Perspective*. Springer.
- Rhodes, RAW (1994). 'The hollowing out of the state: the changing nature of the public service in Britain', *Political Quarterly Review*, 65(2), 137-151.
- Rubin, H. J. & Rubin, I. S. (1995). *The Art of Hearing Data*. Thousand Oaks, C.A.: Sage.
- Salamon, L. M. (Ed.). (2002). *The Tools of Government: A Guide to the New Governance*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Savas, E. S. (1987). *The key to better Government*. Chatham, New Jersey: Chatham House Publishers.
- Sullivan, H. (2003). New forms of local accountability: coming to terms with 'many hands'?, *Policy & Politics*, 31(3), 353-369.
- Timmermans, J., De Klerk, M. & Gilsing, R. (2007). *Onderzoeksopzet Evaluatie van de Wet maatschappelijke ondersteuning*. Den Haag: Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau (SCP).
- Span, K.C.L., Luijckx, K.G., Schols, J.M.G.A., & Schalk, R. (2009). De regierol van gemeenten nader bekeken: Een theoretisch empirische analyse van de literatuur. *Bestuurskunde*, 18(1), 92-100.
- Stein, R. M. (1993). Arranging City services. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 3(1), 66-92.
- Ven, Van de A. H. (2007). *Engaged scholarship: a guide for organizational and social research*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Weiss, R. A. (1994). *Learning from strangers. The art and method of qualitative interview studies*. New York, N.Y.: The Free Press.
- Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid (WRR) (2004) *Bewijzen van goede dienstverlening*. Rapporten aan de regering nummer 70. Den Haag: WRR.
- Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid (WRR) (2002). *De verzorgingsstaat heroverwongen*. Amsterdam: AUP.