

The polity of implementation: Organizational and institutional arrangements in policy implementation

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Abstract

Policy implementation is a formative stage of the policy process. It determines policy's form and effect while also lying at the intersection of politics, policy, and the public. Policy implementation takes place within a given institutional setting and requires specific structure and organization to conduct it both of which allocate decision power and mint specific roles in the implementation process. Nevertheless, current implementation literature tends to overlook implementation arrangements as structures influencing, and influenced by, power. This special issue draws on various aspects of implementation arrangements to demonstrate the significant, yet underexplored, polity of implementation. To do so, this introduction begins by reviewing the conceptual frameworks available in the current implementation scholarship. This is followed by a discussion of the special issue's seven contributions. Finally, the conclusion proposes recommendations for conducting future research on the polity of implementation.

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1 | INTRODUCTION

Politics, conceived as the solution to societal problems, relies on *policy* as the substantive content of the identified solution and *polity* as the structural dimension of decision power allocation. Given that public policy is the exertion of state power over target groups to solve societal problems, power—understood as an individual or collective authority's capacity to make a target population act in a manner that they would not have without the authority's order or intervention¹—is a core element of policymaking in general, and implementation in particular. Nevertheless, there is an inadequate discussion of the polity perspective in implementation. The allocation of this power, however, is highly significant in implementation. The special issue this article introduces is dedicated to the polity of implementation, that is, implementation arrangements. The seven contributions it comprises shed light on the varied roles that implementation arrangements play in the process of putting policies into practice.

Following the seminal distinction of Pressman and Wildavsky (1974) of implementation as a separate component of public policy, policy implementation is well accepted as a formative stage of the policy process that determines policy's form and effect while also lying at the intersection of politics, policy, and the public. Initially, the top-down perspective guided implementation research, considering decision-making and implementation two discrete stages (e.g., Elmore, 1980). Later, a bottom-up approach, which disputed the top-down perspective, not only emphasized the adaptation of policy to a local context during implementation (e.g., Hjern, 1982; Hjern & Porter, 1981), but also identified policy with decisions and actions of implementation agents who interact with the public directly (Lipsky, 2010[1980]). More recently, attempts have been made to integrate these two approaches (e.g., Matland, 1995).

Policy implementation is a process that takes place within a given institutional setting and requires a specific organizational structure. Peters (2014) famously argues that implementation structures can be considered institutions, too (also Imperial, 2021). These two structural dimensions of policy implementation, namely, institutional setting and organizational design are what we term the “implementation arrangement.” Specifically, the institutional setting is exogenous to the formal policy decision and provides the restraining and enabling context within which the policy must reach its goals. In contrast, the organization is a part of the policy design, and it defines the competences of and the resources available to the implementing agents. Institutions and organizational structure therefore allocate decision power and mint specific roles in the implementation process. Notably, the concept of implementation arrangements itself implies their importance for carrying out policy provision and its effects. Implementing agents produce policy outputs within a set of formal and informal institutions and according to the opportunities available within their organizational boundaries. Target groups respond to these outputs within the same institutional context, and this response influences the policy's effectiveness. Furthermore, implementation arrangements are not only fundamental for policy outputs and outcomes; they also influence the ways citizens experience and perceive government. Policy implementation therefore also embodies a political process that begins with the transformation of political will into formal policy. This process continues with implementation that implementing agents continually shape through their discretionary power and whose goals may not always coincide with the dominant political interests or with the public's priorities. Indeed, implementation arrangements are not “fire and forget”; they require maintenance, constant reconsideration, and active tuning to local circumstances.

Whereas scholars adequately and comprehensively document the political and agency dimensions of implementation, there is a lack of research into and comprehensiveness of its

institutional and organizational dimensions. Much of the current implementation research stresses the two dimensions of politics and agency. It portrays the *political* dimension through the vast research on member-state implementation and compliance in the EU. The literature also examines the *agency* dimension through extensive scholarly attention to public management and street-level bureaucracy, which focus on the individual behavior of implementing agents. Street-level bureaucracy focuses on the direct interaction between the public and implementing agents, which were distinguished by Lipsky (2010)[1980] and known as street-level bureaucrats as well as frontline workers. Street-level implementation actions exert immediate, major implications for the individual citizen and for the public, therefore considered to manifest the public policies they carry out. Implementation embodies a political process that begins with the transformation of political will into formal policy. The implementation process provides room for innovation and implementers may use policy entrepreneurship strategies that aim to change policy outcomes (via a change in the policy design). Extensive literature indeed focuses on what influences street-level implementation actions (see review in Gofen et al., 2019).

While these two dimensions of politics and agency are critical for understanding implementation, their current dominance tends to overshadow the institutional and organizational aspects of policy implementation, which shape the most important structural factor of implementation: discretion. Institutions and organizations determine a policy's degree of discretion by affecting the distribution of decision-making power among actors that partake in policy delivery (Thomann et al., 2018). Moreover, politics occurs within an institutional framework of a polity at the meta-level of political systems while individual agency and management occurs within the organizational bounds of specific arrangements and regimes. To address this substantial lacuna in current implementation research, this special issue introduces various *institutional and organizational aspects* that interact with implementation as a political process.

Drawing on the well-accepted notion of implementation as the process between “great expectations” and “ruined hopes,” (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1974) this special issue posits exploring a deeper understanding of institutional and organizational dimensions of implementation. It does so by assembling contributions that shed light on implementation arrangements that are either formally designed (rules in form) or actually practiced (rules in use). By including contributions from various policy fields, diverse organizational settings, different theoretical frameworks, and different countries, the special issue attempts to bridge empirical areas of exploration that are otherwise unlikely to interact. Our specific aim is threefold: First, to allow a more nuanced conceptualization of implementation arrangements, including their components and dimensions. Second, to enable a wide-ranging discussion of the ways implementation arrangements influence and are influenced by additional aspects of the policy sector. Lastly, to create a dialog by bringing together different perspectives with the aim of further developing a comprehensive approach to implementation research.

This introduction proceeds as follows. The next section summarizes the different conceptual approaches the contributions employ to examine implementation arrangements. Subsequently, we provide an overview of the contributions' empirical findings. We then outline three specific threads of research that emanate from the contributions: the multilevel context, horizontal coordination, and the organizational features of norms, values, and accountability. The conclusion proposes connecting these lines of research to form a research agenda that provides a deeper understanding of the organizational and institutional dimensions of policy implementation.

2 | CONCEPTUAL APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF IMPLEMENTATION ARRANGEMENTS

Implementation arrangements embrace the structural components of policy implementation, that is, the institutional setting and the organizational form of the public policy. The contributions in this special issue employ several conceptual approaches to study the structural part of policy implementation. Several contributions employ institutionalism, including its various sub-schools. A significant share of the contributions builds on the related concept of multilevel governance. Other contributions refer to the program evaluation and performance management literature to argue that the organizational part of policy implementation plays a crucial role. Another contribution argues that policy as the exertion of governmental power aims to solve societal problems by interfering with individual freedom of choice and that this logic also applies to implementation arrangements that are meant to change behavior. We close the special issue with a final conceptual approach from the tools of government literature. We discuss these approaches in greater detail in the following sections.

2.1 | Institutionalism, old and new

Institutions distribute decision power and are therefore mighty determinants of social processes (Peters, 2019). This distributor role applies to politics in general and especially to implementation as a political process. Most contributors refer to institutionalism in one way or another. Interestingly, the institutional perspectives in use are not only from neo-institutionalist schools (Hall & Taylor, 1996), they also stem from classic concepts from old institutionalism. While old institutionalism considers institutions from a legalistic perspective of sets of formal rules, new institutionalism employs a broader concept that includes informal institutions, including repetitive social actions that generate expectation reliability.

2.1.1 | Old institutionalism

The legalistic perspective of old institutionalism focuses on how formal rules and regulations determine social behavior. This perspective's focus on formal rules is important for the study of implementation arrangements because it views them as part of policy plans that are otherwise seen as mainly administrative processes. As Busscher et al. (2022) show, the structuring logic of formal rules also applies in hybrid public-private implementation networks. The authors study institutional design strategies that regulate interactions within hybrid implementation networks. They identify five respective rules that define formal action prescriptions for network actors: interaction rules, position rules, access rules, reward rules, and product rules. These rules are formalized through contracts. Busscher et al. (2022) study the effect of the different forms of these rules for the tendering process and the actual implementation process. They find that these institutional design strategies play a decisive role in influencing implementers' opportunities for building institutional capital, a concept that belongs to sociological neo-institutionalism (NI) rather than old institutionalism, and which we discuss in the next subsection.

Khawaja and Khalid (2022) study an institutional reform in Pakistan that also employs the legalistic perspective. The 2014 "Right to Services Act" in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province is

a reform that changed citizens' formal rights by allowing them to claim correct service delivery through the introduction of public servant liability that penalizes the public servant and provides compensation in kind or time. The reform takes place within the context of the Good Governance agenda in international cooperation. Despite the use of the term “governance,” it is a legalistic project that aims to change government institutions in developing countries. The authors show how the formal reform of the accountability regime succeeded in improving implementation performance, even in the early stage of the reform.

Furthermore, formal political institutions play a central role in contributions that focus on multilevel governance, which is a form of interaction that is a function of a system's degree of federalism and decentralization. Both highly federalized Switzerland (Wittwer et al., 2022) and the European Union share this form of interaction. However, as Ettelt et al. (2022) show in the case of England, multilevel governance also occurs in centralized systems like the UK. We discuss the contributions that focus on multilevel governance below.

2.1.2 | Neo-institutionalism

New institutionalism was a powerful reorientation movement in the social sciences in the 1970s and 1980s (Hall & Taylor, 1996; March & Olsen, 1983; Peters, 2019; Zucker, 1977). March and Olsen (1989) developed NI as “an attempt to supplement ideas of consequential action, exogenous preferences, garbage cans, and inefficient histories ... NI also represents a shift in focus from the logic of consequences ... to alternative forms of intelligence and behavioral logics. In particular, it explores a logic of appropriateness based on a sense of identity (...) Actors behave in accordance with their interpretation of rules and practices that are socially constructed, publicly known, anticipated, and accepted” (Olsen, 2001, p. 193). New institutionalism includes both formal and informal institutions. Informal institutions such as, for instance, culture are particularly important in comparative perspective contrasting implementation in various countries as this collection does. Hall and Taylor (1996) famously distinguish between three schools: sociological NI, economic NI, and historical NI. The arguments of all three schools appear in several of this issue's contributions.

Busscher et al. (2022) employ the concept of institutional capital (Cars et al., 2017). Institutional capital includes three forms of capital: intellectual capital, social capital, and political capital. The authors show how institutional design strategies determine the creation of these institutional capitals. This perspective is in line with sociological institutionalism's logic of appropriateness, which states that socially constructed rules impact actor perceptions of opportunities, and consequently, their behavior. The authors find that institutional strategy design plays a major role when private network actors build institutional capital that in turn determines implementation performance.

Michel et al. (2022) in turn study the role of institutional logics for the implementation of a participative budgeting project in Mexico. Institutional logics are at the intersection of sociological and economic institutionalisms. They are in line with sociological institutionalism in that institutional logics are the manifestation of how social actors interpret their roles in a political process. They are therefore social constructs that mold actor behavior. However, at the same time, Michel et al.'s (2022) study follows a consequential logic that is in line with economic institutionalism. The authors examine how different institutional logics and more concretely, their interactions, determine the successful implementation of the participative budgeting project. Institutional logics therefore also stem from self-interest and their interaction serves as the

independent variable that explains the success of the project. This analytical setup follows the logic of consequence of economic institutionalism that states that individual utilization-maximizing, or at least rent-seeking behavior, determines institutions and institutional outcomes. Michel et al. (2022) find that institutional logics do play a role in implementation success. However, in the examined case, participatory budgeting was only detrimental in the presence of clashing institutional logics.

Finally, Darcis et al. (2022) studies the implementation of a paradigm shift from hospital-centered and segmented mental healthcare to a patient-oriented and integrated regime in Belgium. She finds that the legacy of the old regime was very powerful and largely inhibited the implementation of the reform. This legacy included professional and cultural values that had been institutionalized over 40 years and that proved to be insurmountable barriers for the reform. This finding is in line with historical institutionalism that argues in favor of the power of path dependency (Mahoney, 2006; Peters et al., 2005). It refers to the importance of history and the effect past decisions have on reproducing behavior, role perceptions and values that institutionalize over time and that limit institutional change. Darcis et al. (2022) confirms the existence of this phenomenon when she concludes that soft regulation based on voluntary action is not sufficient to overcome the institutionalized established paradigm in Belgian mental healthcare.

2.2 | Multilevel governance

Multilevel governance denotes the interaction dynamic between the center and the periphery in multilayered policymaking and implementation settings. Multilevel governance goes beyond the mere description of the institutional structure of decentralized and federalist systems such as the EU, Switzerland, or the USA. It also includes the processes of negotiation and coordination between different levels of government (Benz, 2007, p. 297). Multilevel governance is therefore a function of specific institutional contexts that focuses on the vertical and horizontal processes between and within the different layers of government (Mavrot & Sager, 2018; Thomann et al. 2019). This perspective is apparent in several contributions in the special issue, but it is most prominent in Wittwer et al.'s (2022) analysis of member state cooperation in the implementation of a national regional development policy in Switzerland. Switzerland possesses an institutional setting that is like that of the EU due to the extensive autonomy of its member states (cantons) and because the implementation of federal policy rests upon multilevel governance (Sager & Thomann 2017). The Swiss national regional development policy provides incentives for each economic development project funded by intercantonal cooperation. However, intercantonal cooperation is not mandatory and the federal level has no sanctioning power if cantons decide not to cooperate. Wittwer et al. (2022) employ the Institutional Collective Action framework (Feiock, 2013) to study the drivers of voluntary intercantonal cooperation. They identify important institutional constraints to intercantonal cooperation in the form of institutional heterogeneity and competition among cantons. They conclude that stronger centralized steering is necessary if member state cooperation is a prerequisite for policy success.

While this contribution includes a decentralized and federalist setting, multilevel governance remains relevant in centralized systems where the central government relies on local authorities for policy implementation. Ettelt et al. (2022) study the case of policy pilots in England and investigate what motivates local authorities to participate in such pilot schemes. They find that some local authorities participate because they expect that by doing so they will

establish a better relationship with the central government, which may ultimately allow them to influence national policymaking. While there are few examples of this expectation coming to fruition, this motive suggests the need for vertical communication across different levels of government, which is essential for multilevel governance.

2.3 | Evaluation and performance management

Policy evaluation and performance management systems are core elements of modern public management. They both aim to inform decision-makers about the suitability of their decisions and organizations, and they also hold public service delivery bodies accountable. Several contributions in this special issue employ the performance perspective in terms of both evaluation and performance management.

Evaluation is the scientific assessment of the accuracy and effectiveness of the design and implementation of public interventions such as policy programs or laws (Sager et al. 2021). Given evaluation's interest in whether a chosen policy ultimately succeeds in solving the societal problem it is meant to solve, implementation and implementation arrangements are a core element of policy evaluations. While evaluation is an applied science that chiefly pursues the practical goal of providing empirical evidence for policy decisions, it still relies on a set of theoretical tenets. One major conceptual pillar of policy evaluation is the distinction between design failure and implementation failure. In order to succeed, a policy must rest on both a sound causal model of change and provide the planned deliverables. Both are necessary conditions: if either design or implementation fails, the policy will not achieve its goal (Kaufmann et al. 2021; Linder & Peters, 1987). Implementation arrangements are therefore crucial in the study of policy effectiveness.

The evaluative lens is present in several of the analytical models assembled in this special issue. Wittwer et al. (2022) directly focus on the goal achievement of their respective policy implementation processes as dependent variables. Witter et al., in particular, draw their data directly from evaluation they conducted for the implementing agency. Darcis et al. (2022) builds on the finding of several evaluations that reveal that the three Belgian mental healthcare reform projects did not achieve their goals. Ettelt et al. (2022) find that the pilots conducted by English local authorities only serve their purpose of experimental policymaking when they are evaluated by central government. The local authorities therefore volunteer as subjects of evaluation. Finally, Khawaja and Khalid (2022) and Michel et al. (2022) perform implementation evaluations of institutional reforms.

Gofen and Gassner (2022) use the evolution of the Israeli Police performance management system as their actual research subject. By comparing four of this system's reforms, they observe how the original intent of hierarchical control gave way to the system's new function as management tool in the hands of police stations themselves. This shift demonstrates the different uses of evaluative information ranging from control and accountability to enlightenment and learning to operative management.

2.3.1 | Tools of government

The evaluation perspective underscores how implementation arrangements contribute to policy success. Consequently, implementation arrangements can be understood as an element of the policy instrumentation. Policy in its core is the exertion of state authority over target groups to achieve a desired situation. This exertion of power goes beyond the substantial policy

instruments that Evert Vedung famously categorized into a carrots, sticks, and sermons taxonomy (Vedung, 1998). Michael Howlett (2000) complements these substantive policy instruments with procedural instruments that organize and structure relationships among state actors and between state and society to indirectly influence target group behavior. Implementation arrangements serve this purpose. Several contributions in this special issue study implementation arrangements as tools of government.

Darcis et al. (2022) finds that the implementation failure of the Belgian mental healthcare reforms was due to a lack of binding regulation that did not allow existing culture and professional barriers to be overcome. Khawaja and Khalid (2022) observe that the institutional reform of the accountability regime in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province reallocated power in favor of citizens in a manner that already made a difference for quality service delivery at an early stage of implementation. Busscher et al.'s (2022) study of institutional design strategies highlights the importance of implementation arrangements for allowing hybrid public–private implementation networks to achieve their goals.

Ettelt et al. (2022) refer to the concept of Anglo-Governmentality (Miller & Rose, 2009), which posits that the neoliberal state in the UK and other Anglophone countries did not lose steering power over local authorities, as intended by neoliberal anti-statism. Instead, the neoliberal state grew its power through the introduction of controlling schemes such as evaluation and performance management, and through the provision of management knowledge and advice. Policy pilots are a part of this development, as the authors argue, and hence constitute an instrument of the Anglo-Governmentality toolkit. Howlett (2000) speaks of “Managing the ‘hollow state.’” In the same vein, the changing form and content of the Israeli Police performance management system (Gofen & Gassner, 2022) is a manifestation of the evolution of a tool of government over time.

Having established the contributions' main conceptual approaches for their study of implementation arrangements, we discuss their empirical findings in the next section.

3 | CONTRIBUTIONS AND EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

This special issue assembles research from various parts of the globe. The contributions cover empirical findings from the Belgium, England, Israel, Mexico, Netherlands, Pakistan, and Switzerland. The range of policy sectors the contributions examine is equally broad. One contribution focuses on regional development policy: Wittwer et al. (2022) analyze a national regional policy in Switzerland. Two contributions stem from the field of healthcare and social policy: Darcis et al. (2022) studies three mental healthcare reform projects in Belgium, and Ettelt et al. (2022) focus on policy pilots in social and healthcare policy in England. Busscher et al.'s (2022) field of study is infrastructure policy in the Netherlands, while Gofen and Gassner (2022) use the Israeli Police as their empirical venue. Two contributions focus on institutional reforms that are not linked to a specific policy sector: Khawaja and Khalid (2022) study a new accountability regime for public service delivery in Pakistan, and Michel et al. (2022) analyze a participatory budget project in Mexico.

Table 1 provides an overview of the seven contributions including their research questions, empirical data, and core findings as well as their implications for the study of implementation arrangements.

The empirical findings of the contributions underscore the importance of institutionalist and organizational dimensions for the implementation process. First, the findings emphasize

the power institutional reforms have to improve public service delivery and public management. Khawaja and Khalid (2022) already demonstrate the impact of a new accountability regime at an early stage of the reform. Busscher et al. (2022) illustrate the determining role that institutional design strategies play in successful collaborative implementation networks. Michel et al. (2022) show the strength of participatory budgeting despite actors' differing institutional logics. Gofen and Gassner (2022) empirically map how the evolution of a performance management systems changed their purpose and made them useful for the target group who was originally controlled by it. Second, the findings reinforce the idea that implementation arrangements are important in both the success and failure of policy programs. Darcis et al. (2022) emphasizes that the soft enforcement regime was responsible for the mental healthcare reform's failure to establish a new paradigm. Busscher et al. (2022) show how different institutional design strategies determined whether public-private networks would succeed in implementing large infrastructure policy projects. Wittwer et al. (2022) found that a lack of central steering was responsible for implementation deficits in regional development policy. Third, Ettelt et al. (2022) show that experimental implementation schemes, in their case policy pilots, can serve a governance purpose that goes beyond the original project's goal by (re)defining the relationship between central government and local authorities.

These insights illustrate the relevance of implementation arrangements and the need for further investigation into the organizational and institutional aspects of policy implementation. In the next section, we propose three strands of research inspired by these findings that may ultimately contribute to a future research agenda on the topic.

4 | THREE STRANDS OF FUTURE RESEARCH

The contributions to this special issue follow their own research questions and employ their own corresponding theoretical approaches. Despite the resulting heterogeneity, thematic emphases emerge. In the following, we highlight three strands of inquiry that draw on the contributions and that may inspire future research on the polity of implementation: cooperative multi-tier implementation, institutional steering in hybrid settings, and organizational beliefs, values, and norms. These lines of research are not new or original. However, as argued by the contributions, their scientific treatment so far lacks an in-depth analysis from an institutionalist and organizational perspective.

4.1 | Multilevel governance, beyond federalism and decentralization: Vertical and horizontal cooperation and steering

The organization of a state serves as a core institutional condition for implementation processes through its distribution of power and responsibility. The contributions in this special issue explore the distribution of power between vertical and horizontal implementing units and emphasize how this distribution affects public service delivery and the problem-solving capacity of public policy. Implementation is collaboration. The institutional fragmentation addressed in the contributions refers to the horizontal fragmentation of implementation as well as the fragmentation of the vertical federalist two-tier structure (Wittwer et al., 2022).

The multilevel governance literature captures these dynamics in federalized multi-tier systems. The contributions in this special issue, however, go beyond this specific system context to

TABLE 1 Summary of results

Contribution	Research question	Case(s) and units of analysis	Policy sector	Data and methods	Core findings	Implications for the study of implementation arrangements
Busscher et al. (2022)	How do institutional design strategies impact implementation in public-private networks?	Netherlands; implementation of three national infrastructure projects: Depoldering Noordwaard, A15 Maasvlakte-Vaanplein, A2 Maastricht	Infrastructure policy	Secondary data analysis of 46 open interviews, document analyses, and site visits	Institutional design strategies can facilitate or hinder private actor's ability to build institutional capital in implementing networks	Institutional design strategies significantly influence the opportunity for private actor's effective network management
Khawaja and Khalid (2022)	How does the reform of accountability institutions impact public service delivery?	Pakistan; implementation of the 2014 "Right to Services Act" in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province	Four core issuing services: land ownership certificates, birth and death certificates, citizens' building plans, domicile certificates	24 qualitative interviews and focus group discussions	The institutional reform of the accountability regime has improved service delivery and has activated a system of checks and balances in public sector departments, which enhance their performance and accountability	Strengthening citizens' rights toward public agencies that delivery services impacts the quality of implementation
Michel et al. (2022)	How do institutional logics interact in multi-actor implementation processes?	Mexico; participatory budgeting in the municipality of Cananea (state of Sonora)	Budgeting	Semi-structured interviews with 13 local officials and two top officials, focus group with 11 street-level officials	Out of four observed types of interactions between institutional logics (those that coincide, complement, clash or are unrelated), only clashing ones negatively impact implementation	Differing institutional logics do not necessarily create a predicament for multi-actor policy implementation

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Contribution	Research question	Case(s) and units of analysis	Policy sector	Data and methods	Core findings	Implications for the study of implementation arrangements
Darcis et al. (2022)	What are the barriers to implementing an institutional paradigm shift from hospital-centered and segmented to community-based and integrated mental healthcare?	Belgium; implementation of three mental health policy plans	Mental healthcare	Document analysis, 85 semi-structured interviews, 77 non-participant observations of meetings	The institutional legacy, in the form of professional and cultural barriers, hampered the implementation of the reform.	Soft regulation and management at arm's length are insufficient for overcoming established institutional regimes
Wittwer et al. (2022)	What are the institutional conditions that facilitate voluntary member state cooperation in the implementation of national policy?	Switzerland; all cantonal (member state) regional development offices	Regional development policy	Full sample, written survey of all 23 responsible subnational units, comprehensive secondary data on all 977 implemented development projects	In a highly federal and decentralized system, there are strong institutional constraints to cooperation between higher-tier subnational entities	If a federal program seeks to establish the voluntary cooperation of autonomous subnational units, it must employ binding top-down intervention
Ettelt et al. (2022)	Why do local authorities volunteer for pilot project schemes in multilevel governance arrangements?	UK; directors of local authorities in England involved in national pilots and working in adult social services	Health and social care policy	26 interviews with directors of adult social services in local authorities	Participating in national pilots provides local authorities with access to ideas and resources and a mandate for change	The ambiguity between autonomy and dependence in multilevel settings prevails in the system of "Anglo-Governmentality"; however, it also largely relies on the perception of local authorities

(Continues)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Contribution	Research question	Case(s) and units of analysis	Policy sector	Data and methods	Core findings	Implications for the study of implementation arrangements
Gofen and Gassner (2022)	How do performance management (PM) systems evolve over time?	Israel; four generations of the Israeli police PM system from 1999 to 2016	Police	Document analysis, 55 semi-structured interviews with police commissioners, district commanders, and police station chiefs	PM evolved as a part of a decentralization reform that shifted control from top-down to user management	Local managers can take advantage of top-down control schemes within their discretion and transform these respective instruments to serve their own purposes.

identify multilevel governance dynamics in centralized systems. The organization of the implementation process has implications beyond implementation, including how involved governmental units interact (Ettelt et al., 2022). This interaction is related to vertical steering capacity, which requires identifying the role of lower-tier layers and their willingness to collaborate at the horizontal level. As the contributions show, these interactions and decisions largely depend on formal and informal institutions. These institutional settings change over time given that implementation allows for learning and adapting original rules and directives (Gofen & Gassner, 2022). We propose the following non-exhaustive list of questions for future research:

- How do implementation arrangements impact the institutional identities of involved units?
- How do implementation arrangements strike a balance between central steering capacity and local autonomy?
- How do second-tier units overcome institutional barriers to collaboration in implementation?
- How does horizontal collaboration impact the vertical distribution of power in implementation arrangements?

These questions relate to the collaborative implementation literature that describes that discusses the inclusion of private actors in hybrid implementation networks that provide service delivery. We distinguish between the public and private realm and discuss the relevant research trajectories drawn from the contributions in the next subsection.

4.2 | Hybrid implementation networks: Bringing in the institutional perspective

The last three decades have seen major changes in the administrative backbone of public service delivery. Specifically, the New Public Management (NPM) movement of the 1990s encouraged the emergence of administrative structures that emulate a market situation, compete with other administrative units and the outsourcing of a significant chunk of public service delivery to private service providers. In contrast, the post-NPM reforms of the 2000s often boiled down to hybrid structures that focus on collaborative service delivery through public–private partnerships. The 2007 financial crisis further weakened the state's role in public services provision and delivery. Consequently, implementation often occurs in a fragmented landscape of policy delivery units that act autonomously and within networks. Some contributions examine this fragmented implementation landscape and the extensive coordination efforts it demands from implementing units and agents.

Research on hybrid networks thus far predominantly considers institutions as making up the basic context within which collaborative service delivery takes place. However, there is a lack of information about how the institutional setup of a network implementation scheme concretely determines successful collaborative service delivery. Network theories build on the notion of spontaneous coordination among network actors due to their interests, resources, and interaction modes. Institutionalism adds a structural perspective to this approach, which assumes that binding rules and norms play a much more dominant role. Busscher et al. (2022) clearly show the empirical value of this institutional perspective for the study of hybrid networks. Their insights, to a certain degree, debunk current network theory that rests on unrealistic assumptions in the case of implementation. Given that implementation pertains to public policy, and the exertion of public policy seeks to change the behavior of a target group to its

intended goal, its implementation also rests on state power, even if private actors or hybrid networks are delegated with the implementation responsibility. The structural form of state power is the institutional setting within which implementation takes place. Including private actors does not change the hierarchical principle of public policy that remains top-down at its core. The prevalence of institutions in hybrid implementation is thus both evident and understated. We propose the following non-exhaustive list of future research questions for the study of collaborative service delivery:

- To what degree do public-private implementation networks form spontaneously and to what degree is their organizational form determined by their institutional context?
- How does the market logic of public-private implementation networks collide with the state logic of public policy?
- How do the coordination decisions of network actors rely on market and state logics?
- How autonomous are network actors in implementing public policy?
- What is the role and effect of network managers in the implementation of public policy?

The network perspective paves the way for a focus on actors as it bridges the dimensions of agency and structure. Institutions determine behavior and shape actor identities.

4.3 | Actor identities: Organizational beliefs, values, and norms

Institutional fragmentation and network structures require organizational ties that hold implementation arrangements together in a way that goes beyond formal institutions. Norms and values play this role, and they are well established as important factors in informal institutions. Current implementation research underscores the importance of contradictory accountabilities and implementing agents' resulting dilemmas, such as the state-agent versus citizen-agent dichotomy. This special issue assembles contributions that focus on these organizational factors and their role in policy implementation. Busscher et al. (2022) show how network actors build institutional capital in public-private implementation arrangements. Michel et al. (2022) study the role of agents' institutional logics in multi-actor implementation. Khawaja and Khalid (2022) show how an accountability regime reform impacted target groups' perception of their rights. Institutionalized actor identities and professional beliefs prove to be major hurdles for a paradigm reform in Darcis' et al. (2022) analysis. Gofen and Gassner (2022) show how target groups can take over the tools intended to control them and turn them into instruments that serve their own interests. These findings highlight the importance of the organizational identities of implementation actors and how they interact with institutional and organizational implementation arrangements. Institutional constraints and opportunities not only determine actors' self-perception as powerful or powerless in the process of implementation; actors' organizational identities also determine the institutional form implementation arrangements take and how they change them over time. Again, we propose a non-exhaustive list of future research questions for the study of organizational actor identities.

- How do implementation arrangements translate into specific beliefs, values, and norms that determine actor identities?
- How do actor identities mediate the effects of the institutional context on implementation arrangements?

- How do organizational actor identities determine implementation arrangements?
- When do organizational actor identities hinder or foster policy implementation success?

In this section, we presented three thematic lines for future research and argue that these topics cover different important institutional and organizational aspects of implementation research. We come back to these three thematic dimensions in the conclusion where we aim to show how they relate to each other and that they may serve as a basis for a research agenda for future implementation studies.

5 | CONCLUSION

This special issue aims to shed light on the institutional and organizational dimensions of public policy implementation that the implementation research often overlooks. This introduction argues that this neglect is problematic given the importance of institutional settings and organizational decisions for the process of implementation. We therefore identify a gap regarding the polity of implementation, which this special issue aims to begin to fill.

The research in this issue draws from several different theoretical approaches to structure the empirical research of implementation. We observe that the contributions not only employ new institutionalism as an analytical framework; they also draw on old institutionalism. While old institutionalism rests upon the legalistic perspective of formal rules that is often found in policy implementation research, new institutionalism broadens this perspective to include informal institutions as well as to the ontological status of institutions. The contributions in this special issue view institutions as both independent and dependent variables given that both views add to the knowledge of the role of implementations arrangements. The contributions also employ multilevel governance as another important analytical approach. Another set of contributions broadly refers to the evaluation and performance management literature, including implementation arrangements, in their assessment of policy effectiveness. Finally, other contributions view implementation arrangements as tools of government that go beyond substantive policy instrumentation. Implementation arrangements are part of the government's organization of the state, which structures the interplay of its different layers.

The contributions employ these different approaches to study highly diverse geographical, political, and policy field settings. These empirical endeavors resulted in their own insights. However, the findings also complement each other and inspired our identification of the three strands of future inquiry that have to do with the polity of implementation: vertical and horizontal cooperation in multilevel settings, public–private arrangements, and organizational identities. We argue that these three lines of research allow us to fill the identified knowledge gaps on the institutional and organizational aspects of policy implementation. Each strand addresses a specific need for the analysis of a heterogeneous political reality of policy implementation. On one hand, the research demonstrates that the multilevel governance phenomenon does not only exist in multitier systems, it also occurs in centralized political systems. Next, current implementation research on the public-private nexus displays a strong focus on agency while neglecting structure. And finally, organizational actor identities currently appear in the literature as functions of agency, while appearing detached from their institutional context.

On the other hand, these three strands complement each other. Vertical and horizontal cooperation often occurs in combination with private implementing agents. The study of

multitier dynamics would therefore ideally include the additional dynamics of private implementation networks. Additionally, both structural elements interact with organizational identities. Implementation arrangements not only mold actors' self-perception; actors also play an important role in defining and developing the form of implementation arrangements.

This special issue aims to chart new territory in the study of policy implementation by focusing on its institutional and organizational dimensions. The contributions address the respective gaps and provide first steps toward a better understanding of underlying implementation dynamics. Together they pave the way for a future research agenda whose results will allow us to obtain further insights into the crucial stage of the policy cycle that implementation is.

ENDNOTE

¹ Loosely based on Weber (1980, pp. 122–124, compare Sager & Rosser, 2021, Rosser, 2018).

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available in this special issue.

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How to cite this article: Sager, F., & Gofen, A. (2022). The polity of implementation: Organizational and institutional arrangements in policy implementation. *Governance*, 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gove.12677>