Once upon a time there was a period of intense academic debate about the understanding of the phenomenon of public policy implementation. It lasted from about the moment of the publication of Pressman and Wildavsky’s influential book *Implementation* in 1973 until sometime around the end of the 1980s. In 1997, one of us in an article asked whether implementation was ‘yesterday’s issue’ (Hill, 1997). The answer given to that rhetorical question was: ‘No’.

In this book we take a similar stance. In doing so, alongside a discussion of literature explicitly concerned with implementation will be a recognition of four facts. The first is that the phenomenon ‘implementation’ was a matter of concern and, to some extent, academic study before the word was used. The second fact is that, as we have discovered whenever we have attempted computerized literature reviews, the word ‘implementation’ is used in many contexts by writers who approach it from very different backgrounds to the public administration and public management specialists who also use it. Third, it is a fact that such writers, without using the word implementation, may equally explore it in ways which public administration specialists regard as relevant. Fourth, implementation inevitably takes different shapes and forms in different cultures and institutional settings. This last point is particularly important in an era in which processes of ‘government’ have been seen as transformed into ‘governance’. The latter means that a wider range of actors may be participating and that simplistic
hierarchical models are being abandoned. Hence linking the study of implementation with the study of governance is a central element in this book.

This is an exploration of the state of the art of the study of implementation as what we consider to be a sub-discipline of political science and public administration. Our objective in this book is to bring together the major insights presently available from implementation theory and research. We do not present a new theory on implementation here, but rather give an overview and make relevant connections. Because of the latter, the exercise can be called ‘synthesizing’ or ‘third-generation’, terms used by Goggin et al. (1990). Specifically, however, when we observe inconsistencies, anomalies or conflicts in or between implementation publications, we see it as our primary task to report on these before, eventually, making suggestions to ‘solve’ them.

Throughout all this literature, examination of implementation – simply ‘what happens between policy expectations and (perceived) policy results’ (DeLeon, 1999a: 314–15, paraphrasing Ferman, 1990: 39) – has had a dual character. There has been a concern to explain ‘what happens’ and a concern to affect ‘what happens’, with inevitably many of those interested in the first question being interested in the second too. In this book we will primarily look at efforts to explain what happens, and consider issues concerning studying and researching implementation. We think it important to be aware of these two questions as separate, not in the least because they are related in a specific way. Good research we see being assisted if a measure of detachment can be achieved from the preoccupations of those who want to control events. Effective control we consider as being facilitated by a sensitivity to both the complexity of the task and the nature of the normative issues at stake.

We also recognize that the issues of understanding the process and the issues of controlling it may be of interest to rather different readers. In the last analysis, however, our primary focus on efforts to explain ‘what happens’ is justified by the fact that if one lacks understanding, one is less likely to be able to control. At the same time we are aware of the possibility that different kinds of audiences may want to use the book in rather different ways. Hence we will introduce what is to follow by describing the contents of the chapters in a way that takes that concern into account.

---

**Structure of the book**

In this chapter we will introduce some key conceptual issues. In particular asking what we are talking about when we use the word ‘implementation’ and terms related to it.

Chapter 2 starts from the proposition that, just as in the real world, ‘implementation’ had existed before this label was invented (otherwise how could the medieval cathedrals have been built?), there was some kind of ‘implementation theory’ before and beyond the kind of studies we usually refer to with this term.
In Chapter 2, this type of theory, some of it in early political science, some of it in sociological and socio-legal work, is discussed.

Chapter 3 goes on to examine the theoretical work that blossomed around and after the publication of Pressman and Wildavsky's *Implementation* (1973), work that can be seen as a kind of dialogue between ‘top-down’ and ‘bottom-up’ approaches to theory. Chapter 4 looks at the way theory has developed since efforts were made to synthesize these alternative approaches. Together these chapters reflect the body of theoretical knowledge incorporated in implementation studies. Readers who are familiar with the theory, or particularly impatient to see what new things we have to say, may want to skip over these chapters. They will find many references back to specific parts of them in the later chapters.

Chapter 5 positions the development of our topic in its societal context, exploring the relevance of policy implementation in the practice of public administration. That chapter particularly considers the implications of the changing nature of governance for the study of implementation.

Against the background of these implications, in Chapter 6, studying implementation is positioned in an analytical framework that, on a meta-theoretical level, may serve as an alternative to the so-called ‘stages model’ of the policy process.

Chapter 7 explores research on implementation, drawing upon much empirical work done in recent years. Methodological and programmatic issues are discussed. Suggestions are offered on how to do implementation research, pitfalls are identified and ways to avoid them are suggested. This chapter is particularly pertinent for those whose concern is with questions about how implementation can be studied.

Chapter 8 elaborates on that topic in terms of the framing of recommendations from implementation studies, suggesting that such activities have to be located in an understanding of institutional contexts and policy objectives.

Chapter 9, the final chapter, is about the future of implementation studies. Given the rise of a scholarly field like public management and new research topics like ‘public service performance’ (Boyne et al., 2006) the status of studying policy implementation is assessed.

---

**Some matters of definition**

**Public policy**

Implementation, to us, means just what Webster and Roger say it does: to carry out, accomplish, fulfill, produce, complete. But what is it being implemented? A policy, naturally. There must be something out there prior to implementation; otherwise there would be nothing to move toward in the process of implementation. A verb like ‘implement’ must have an object like ‘policy’. But policies normally contain both goals and the means for achieving them. How, then, do we distinguish between a policy and its implementation?
With these sentences Pressman and Wildavsky (1984: xxi) highlight a question that is of more than linguistic relevance. They continue:

We can work neither with a definition of policy that excludes any implementation nor one that includes all implementation. There must be a starting point. If no action is begun, implementation cannot take place. There must be also an end point. Implementation cannot succeed or fail without a goal against which to judge it. (1984: xxii)

The question at stake here is one of logic. In its most general form, the act of ‘implementation’ presupposes a prior act, particularly the ‘cognitive act’ of formulating what needs to be done and making a decision on that. In everyday terms, while we may vary what we do when we take action, we very often make a decision to take action – go on a journey, for example – and think about how to do it, before carrying out that action. But two further groups of questions follow from that basic one. The first is, who is the formulator, who is the decision-maker and who is the implementer? If they are not integrated as a single actor, there is a need to identify the variety of actors involved. The second group of questions is about whether the formulator or decision-maker has more power, or a role that is more legitimized, than the implementer. The former group of questions concerns empirical ones, while within the latter group the one about legitimacy addresses a normative issue. The act of formulation and decision-making may take place ‘at the bottom’. But even then, it is to be followed by implementation; otherwise the former act remains without consequences. The logical connotation of the original question may be called the ‘implementation follows formulation and decision theorem’.

If implementation in the context of public administration presupposes policy, what is then meant by policy, and particularly by public policy? In academic writings on the latter subject, many definitions are provided. Partly, the variety has to do with semantics, partly with diversity in the stress on a specific aspect of the phenomenon as observed in the real world. From the available variety of definitions, we will use Hogwood and Gunn’s. They identify the following elements in the use of the term ‘public policy’. Though policy is to be distinguished from ‘decision’, it is less readily distinguishable from ‘administration’. Policy involves behaviour as well as intentions, and inaction as well as action. Policies have outcomes that may or may not have been foreseen. While policy refers to a purposive course of actions, this does not exclude the possibility that purposes may be defined retrospectively. Policy arises from a process over time, which may involve both intra- and inter-organizational relationships. There is a difficult issue here about what is exactly meant by public, since private actors may participate in all aspects of public policy-making. Thus, Hogwood and Gunn say, ‘Public policy involves a key, but not exclusive, role for public agencies’ (1984: 23). The implication of ‘key’ may be seen in the extent to which the involvement of government legitimizes the action. We could invoke here the notion here of ‘state’ action, but that too takes us into a complex issue in the modern world (explored further in Chapter 5).
Policy is subjectively defined. Hogwood and Gunn summarize this characterization in the following definition: ‘Any public policy is subjectively defined by an observer as being such and is usually perceived as comprising a series of patterns of related decisions to which many circumstances and personal, group, and organizational influences have contributed’ (ibid.: pp. 23–4). Other authors also underline the subjective aspect in the definition of public policy. Heclo (1972: 83), for instance, states that what is ‘policy’ and certainly what is ‘the policy’ depend on the observer.

For obvious reasons, this subjectivity has not prevented authors from offering ex cathedra a specific definition that can serve as a way of talking about public policy in similar terms. In his textbook, Anderson, for instance, gives the following definition of policy: ‘A purposive course of action followed by an actor or set of actors in dealing with a problem or matter of concern ... Public policies are those policies developed by governmental bodies and officials’ (1975: 3). Similar definitions can be found in various public policy textbooks (see, for instance, Kuypers, 1973; Hoogewerf, 1978; for a variant, see Van de Graaf and Hoppe, 1989). In this kind of definition, public policy is about means and ends, which have to have a relationship to each other. Where the political functionaries provide the objectives, it is the task of administrators to develop the appropriate instruments. That they are expected to do so in as systematic a way as possible, stems from the fact that these administrators are doing their work in public service, dealing with collective problems. Public policy focuses on what Dewey (1927) once described as ‘the public and its problems’. Similarly what Lasswell called the ‘policy orientation’ (Lerner and Lasswell, 1951; Lasswell, 1970) is problem-focused, multi-disciplinary, uses multiple methods and is contextual. In his textbook on public policy, Parsons refers to what can be called a ‘clinical’ attitude as characteristic of ‘the policy sciences’: ‘Knowledge of society could provide a way of making it better’ (1995: 20). Parsons describes the title of Wildavsky’s book Speaking Truth to Power (1979) as a typical expression of the belief in social science as a form of engineering or medicine. Parsons sees the policy focus as most closely associated with the contributions of four scholars: Harold Lasswell, Herbert Simon, Charles Lindblom and David Easton. Lindblom’s position is special, in the sense that he stresses ‘non-rational’ aspects of policy that have to do with power, social interaction and the connections between various phases and stages. 1

What, in general, is striking about the definitions of public policy indicated here is the purposive character public policies are expected to have, and the way in which they are expected to be related to (societal) problems. For implementation theory and research, this means that contextualization is important; ‘implementation’ is always connected to specific policies as particular responses to specific problems in society.

The policy cycle

Since Lasswell’s seminal publications on public policy it has become quite usual to speak of a ‘phase’ or ‘stage’ model of the policy process. When we broaden our
scope and look beyond this process in a narrow sense, in fact, we can observe a variety of analytical ways of distinguishing between different ‘stages’ in the process from thinking to action.

Many writers have set out models of the ‘stages’ of the policy process (see, for example, Simon, 1945; Lasswell, 1956; Mack, 1971; Rose, 1973; Jenkins, 1978; Hogwood and Gunn, 1984; Dror, 1989). Typically these models embrace processes regarding how issues get on the agenda, followed by initiation (Jenkins) or ‘deciding to decide’ (Hogwood and Gunn), then information assembly, followed by more precise formulation. After this, the models include application and implementation. Finally, there may be feedback and evaluation, and at the end decisions about ‘policy maintenance, succession or termination’ (Hogwood and Gunn, 1984: 4). Perhaps the most differentiated model is presented by Dror (1989: 163–4). He distinguishes between the major stages of meta-policy-making, policy-making and post-policy-making. Because each of these has sub-stages, there is a total of 18 (sub-) stages. ‘Executing the policy’ is the sixteenth stage in the cycle; so a very ‘late’ one.

Like the means/end definition of public policy, the stages framework is widely used in textbooks on the subject. Criticizing it, Nakamura (1987) speaks of the ‘textbook approach’, portraying it as unrealistic. It is said to neglect the sometimes blurred distinctions between the ‘phases’. In general, it is judged as rationalistic (Nakamura, 1987; D.A. Stone, 1989; Lindblom and Woodhouse, 1993; see Jenkins-Smith, 1991, for perhaps the most elaborate criticism; and Van Gunsteren, 1976, for a general critique of rationalist thinking in public affairs). Although we understand the nature of these comments, we see a continuing role for the stages framework. It is useful analytically and heuristically for both the study and practice of the policy process. Like Parsons (1995: xvii), we do have an additional requirement, however:

[T]he idea of ‘stages’ must be expanded to include a wider contextualization of different frameworks and methods or approaches. There can be no one definition of policy analysis (Wildavsky, 1979: 15), and no one theory or model can capture or explain the complexity involved in what Easton once termed the ‘web of decisions’ (Easton, 1953: 130) which comprise public policy.

The strength of the stages framework, as stressed by Parsons (1995: 80–1), is that it provides a systematic approach to capture the multiplicity of reality. Each ‘stage’ relates to a specific part of the context in which public policy is being made, while within that partial context various variables and approaches can be seen as appropriate. It is from this perspective that in Chapter 6 we will develop a framework adapted from the stagist one.

Implementation

What can be called ‘public policy’, and thus has to be implemented, is the product of what has happened in the earlier stages of the policy process. Nevertheless,
the content of that policy, and its impact on those affected, may be substantially
modified, elaborated or even negated during the implementation stage, as
Anderson points out. ‘[P]olicy is made as it is being administered and adminis-
tered as it is being made’ (1975: 79). Yet implementation is something separate
from policy formation. Only very seldom are decisions self-executing, implying
that there is no separate implementation stage. If generally there is such a stage,
then there is also a good case for the separate analysis of that part of the policy
process. ‘Much that occurs at this stage may seem at first glance to be tedious or
mundane, yet its consequences for the substance of policy may be quite profound’

One of the most influential definitions of implementation is that formulated
by Mazmanian and Sabatier (1983: 20–1):

Implementation is the carrying out of a basic policy decision, usually incorporated in a
statute but which can also take the form of important executive orders or court deci-
sions. Ideally, that decision identifies the problem(s) to be addressed, stipulates the
objective(s) to be pursued, and in a variety of ways, ‘structures’ the implementation
process.

Similarly Pressman and Wildavsky say in their preface to their first edition
(1973): ‘Let us agree to talk about policy as a hypothesis containing initial con-
tions and predicted consequences. If X is done at time t1, then Y will result at
time t2’ (1984: xxii). Thus defined, implementation is a complicated process, or
rather sub-process. Therefore much can go wrong. ‘The longer the chain of
causality, the more numerous the reciprocal relationships among the links and
the more complex implementation becomes’ (ibid.: xxiv). Nevertheless, it is
inevitable that this chain is usually long.

Seen ‘from the bottom’, the perspective on implementation is fundamen-
tally different. For those at the end of Pressman and Wildavsky’s implementa-
tion ‘chain’ there is not so much concern about ‘the transmission of policy
into a series of consequential actions’, but a policy–action relationship. The
latter rather ‘needs to be regarded as a process of interaction and negotiation,
taking place over time, between those seeking to put policy into effect and
those upon whom action depends’ (Barrett and Fudge, 1981a: 4). Many imple-
mplementation scholars in one way or another refer to what Barrett and Fudge call
the ‘policy–action continuum’. For Dunsire, policy implementation is seen as
pragmatization (1978a: 178). John speaks of ‘the post-legislative stages of deci-
sion making’ (1998: 27), while he elsewhere calls implementation ‘the stage in
the policy process concerned with turning policy intentions into action’
(ibid.: 204). O’Toole identifies the central question in implementation
research as: ‘What happens between the establishment of policy and its
impact in the world of action?’ (2000a: 273). Elsewhere he defines policy
implementation as ‘what develops between the establishment of an apparent
intention on the part of government to do something, or stop doing some-
thing, and the ultimate impact in the world of action’ (ibid.: 266). Earlier, and
even more concisely, O’Toole remarked that policy implementation ‘refers to the connection between the expression of governmental intention and actual results’ (1995: 43). Boiling down all kinds of elaborate definitions, DeLeon calls the study of implementation ‘little more than a comparison of the expected versus the achieved’ (1999a: 330). We noted in the introduction to this chapter Ferman’s particularly concise definition. It is one we will keep very much in mind in this book.

Implementation and policy formation

The process emphasis, ultimately expressed in the continuum between policy and action, implies that in the implementation stage policy-making continues. This empirical observation is contrary to the emphasis in the theory of bureaucracy developed from the classic theoretical contributions of Max Weber and Woodrow Wilson. In that theory, discussed further in Chapter 2, administration starts where politics – read here: ‘policy’ – ends. This characterization of the relation between the two, both as a hierarchy and a strict dichotomy, has been normatively embedded in the institutions of the rule of law and democracy. In the study of politics and government the possibility that, instead, there could be interaction between the different phases, as well as between functionaries playing different roles like the ones of decision-maker and implementer, has been ignored for a long while. The fact that the ‘black box’ of implementation was not opened in much political science influenced by this view was what made Hargrove (1975) speak of the ‘missing link’.

What is needed is a way of combining the analytical benefits offered by the ‘stages’ model with a recognition of the interaction between the stages. We consider that this is best achieved by talking of policy formation (rather than making). This is then distinguishable, in most cases, from an implementation process within which policy will continue to be shaped. If the term ‘policy-making’ stands for the policy process as a whole, then both implementation and policy formation refer to respectively ‘late’ and ‘early’ sub-processes in that process. While some authors focus on policy design (Ingraham, 1987; Weimer, 1993) and others on the societal and ‘bureau-political’ struggle around it (Lindblom, 1965; Allison, 1971), this combined character of thought and action is crucial. Although Allison (1971), in his analysis of the Cuban missile crisis, was one of the first to point out the synchronic relevance of these different views on policy formation, he did not synthesize them. Nevertheless, the interplay between ‘intellectual cogitation’ and ‘social interaction’ particularly in the sub-process of policy formation, and expressed in the combination of, respectively, formulation and decision-making, can to a certain degree explain the often ambiguous character of policy that has to be implemented. Therefore this interplay is crucial for the study of implementation (for a systematic elaboration of this mixed character of policy formation – although in Dutch – see Kuypers, 1980; see also Van de Graaf and Hoppe, 1989).
Outs and outcomes

One of the most influential models of the relationship between politics and administration is Easton’s ‘political system’ (1953). ‘Inputs’ go into that system and the things that come out are called ‘outputs’ and ‘outcomes’. Implementation can be seen as a part of the ‘throughput’ taking place within the ‘system’. Sometimes, in both the practice and the study of implementation, the distinction between inputs, outputs and outcomes is overlooked. Given, for instance, concern about lack of crime prevention, the political opposition in a legislature may call for more ‘police on the street’. The idea is then that a larger number of personnel – in operational service – will automatically lead to a decline in crime. All kinds of intervening, but perhaps less manipulable, variables are often forgotten. In fact, policy inputs (‘more police’) here are taken automatically to produce policy impacts or outcomes (less crime) (Mazmanian and Sabatier, 1983: 22). Also in ‘output’ analysis the issues of defining and operationalizing the various categories at stake are sometimes muddled. This is the case, for instance, when the researcher merely looks at indices like expenditures. It is argued here that these should be regarded as ‘input’ rather than ‘output’ variables (for an advance of this argument, see Hill and Bramley, 1986; for the use of this argument in the analysis of welfare state performance, see also Mitchell, 1991).

Besides, it can be observed that outputs and outcomes are sometimes confused. A great deal of implementation literature is about the extent to which policy makers have successfully grappled with the question whether their policies have been properly designed to address the problems they were alleged to address. Not surprisingly it does this in terms of whether wars on poverty, crime, and so on, have actually dealt with those problems. Lane and Ersson argue: ‘Thus, outcome analysis in evaluation research came to include all kinds of results that were relevant to the understanding of policies, including outcomes that had no link whatsoever with a policy but affected the evaluation of whether a policy had succeeded or not’ (2000: 62). They emphasize the need for a clear distinction between outputs and outcomes, saying of the latter: ‘Outcomes are the things that are actually achieved, whatever the objectives of policy may have been. Outcomes are real results, whether intended or unintended, at the same time as outcomes are not government action’ (ibid.: 63).

For implementation research, dependent variables may be outputs or outcomes, after the implementation process, but where they are the latter it is particularly important to identify influences that are quite independent of that process. This distinction is explored further in terms of its specific relevance for research in Chapter 7.

Making judgements about implementation

Speaking of outputs and outcomes implicitly or explicitly means making judgements. Comparing what is achieved with what was expected (DeLeon, 1999a)
can often lead to the observation of an ‘implementation gap’ (Dunsire, 1978a). An alternative term is ‘implementation failure’. In daily practice such qualifications are easily used. Similarly, in the study of implementation a qualification in terms of ‘success’ or, more often, ‘failure’ is commonly given. And indeed, sometimes, as in the case of a specific serious accident or disaster, the use of the label ‘policy fiasco’ seems justifiable (Bovens and ‘t Hart, 1996; Bovens et al., 2001). What has to be kept in mind, then, is that the judgement given in such a case, however analytically supporte it may be, is into the end – and should be – a normative one. The question here is: Does the researcher or analyst consider this normative judgement as separate from or as integrated into the empirical analysis? Parsons applies Morgan’s metaphorical models of organization (1986, 1993) to explore the value of adopting alternative perspectives on implementation failure. He shows that using a different metaphor means looking at and labelling the causes and consequences of implementation failure in a different way. Implementation failure can be seen, for instance, as a result of a poor chain of command and of problems with structures and roles (machine metaphor); as a result of difficult ‘human relations’ or ‘the environment’ (organism metaphor); as a result of poor information flows or ‘learning’ problems (brain metaphor); as a result of labour/management conflict (domination metaphor); as a result of the ‘culture’ of an organization (culture metaphor); as a result of subconscious forces, group-think, ego defences or repressed sexual instincts (psychic metaphor); as a result of a ‘self-referencing’ system (autopoietic metaphor); or as a result of power in and around the implementation process (power metaphor) (Parsons, 1995: 489). Important here is that no one metaphor a priori provides a better picture. Actually, what one portrays as empirical reality depends upon what kind of metaphor is used.

This interpretative view involves integrating values, although in sets varying according to the metaphor, into the way of looking at the world. When doing so, the researcher is always right, or in any case as long as he or she chooses the metaphor best fitted to the context at hand. A systematic and controlled confrontation between ‘theory’ and ‘empirical reality’ is thus avoided. There is no check on the provisional character of knowledge. Because values are completely integrated into the way of looking at reality, any attempt to interpret the findings is irrelevant. There is no sense in discussing from a normative standpoint what the conclusions of an analysis could be, because these form an integral part of such an analysis. From the beginning until the end, the analysts then have positioned themselves between the reader and the empirical object, making an interpretation of the latter independent from theirs difficult.

In fact, at stake here is a classic epistemological issue that divides the ‘positivists’ in their various variants from the ‘interpretivists’. We see the value of metaphorical ‘explanations’, of the kind presented by Morgan and Parsons, as contributions to public discourse. But as criteria for the development of a field like implementation studies, we think a broader academic engagement is required, aiming at the accumulation of knowledge. Our stance is that, both on different occasions and in several parts of the empirical cycle, we see functions for interpretative contributions,
mainly of a heuristic and evaluative (‘making sense of’) kind. As far as the development of empirical studies is concerned, we consider that such contributions have uses. However, these are particularly functional in the ‘early’ parts of the empirical cycle, concerning problem definition and the formulation of working hypotheses; as well as in the ‘later’ parts of that cycle, focusing on the interpretation of findings, the drawing of conclusions and the formulation of advice. Of course, values are always involved. Nevertheless, concepts need to be defined and operationalized in a neutral fashion, so that there can be an orientation towards testing in one way or another. In the ‘middle part’ of the empirical cycle we therefore plead for a systematic, theory-driven, and if possible comparative, approach to empirical reality; for conceptual parsimony; and for aiming at the testing of propositions, in a quantitative, qualitative or combined way. In a fully-fledged research design the goal will be to explain variance. In any case, our perspective implies a need to make research decisions explicit and to justify epistemological stances when doing implementation research.

Implementation and evaluation

Talking of an ‘implementation failure’ or ‘implementation deficit’ means giving a normative qualification as a result of a comparison between what is observed and what is expected, where the latter is defined in terms of the values either of the observer or of one or more of the actors involved in the process. In that sense, an evaluation is then provided. Nevertheless, the distinction between implementation and evaluation as two successive ‘stages’ in the policy process is analytically relevant enough to maintain. The definitions of evaluation given in the literature vary in broadness. In a monograph on the subject, Fischer defines policy evaluation as ‘the activity of applied social science typically referred to as “policy analysis” or “policy science”’ (1995: 2). He refers to Dunn, who speaks of policy analysis as an applied endeavour ‘which uses multiple methods of inquiry and argument to produce and transform policy-relevant information that may be utilized in political settings to resolve policy problems’ (1981: 35). Classic texts are Patton (1978), Rossi and Freeman (1979) and Palumbo (1987), or, for a ‘naturalistic’ approach, Guba and Lincoln (1987).

Lane asks:

Is implementation analysis the same as evaluation analysis? The concept of implementation as evolution amounts to a strong denial of any identity between the two, because if objectives and outcomes continuously interact, how could the outcomes be evaluated in terms of a fixed set of objectives?

Browne and Wildavsky conclude that the conceptual distinction between evaluation and implementation is important to maintain, however much the two overlap in practice. They state: ‘Evaluators are able to tell us a lot about what happened – which objectives, whose objectives, were achieved – and a little about why – the causal connections’ (Pressman and Wildavsky, 1984: 203).
Parsons makes the implementation/evaluation distinction by indicating that evaluation examines ‘how public policy and the people who deliver it may be appraised, audited, valued and controlled’, while the study of implementation is about ‘how policy is put into action and practice’ (1995: 461). The conceptualization used in this book can be summarized as shown in Table 1.1.

### Table 1.1 Implementation and evaluation research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Implementation</th>
<th>Evaluation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Object</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process/Behaviour</td>
<td>Outcomes/Values links</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outputs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcomes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Causal connections</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research act</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Value judgements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explanation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theory building and testing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analytical judgements</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Parsons makes the implementation/evaluation distinction by indicating that evaluation examines ‘how public policy and the people who deliver it may be appraised, audited, valued and controlled’, while the study of implementation is about ‘how policy is put into action and practice’ (1995: 461). The conceptualization used in this book can be summarized as shown in Table 1.1.

**Implementation research**

Theory and research on public policy implementation concern ‘the development of systematic knowledge regarding what emerges, or is induced, as actors deal with a policy problem’ (O’Toole, 2000a: 266). In 1973, Pressman and Wildavsky were amazed that there was so little that deserved the heading ‘implementation research’. Some years later they described the situation quite differently (1984: 163):

The study of implementation is becoming a growth industry: tens, perhaps hundreds, of studies are underway now. Yet researchers are visibly uneasy. It is not so much that they expect to discover all the right answers; they are not even sure they are asking the right questions ... But this uneasiness is not surprising, for the attempt to study implementation raises the most basic question about the relation between thought and action: How can ideas manifest themselves in a world of behavior?

Implementation research has grown to what can be seen as a sub-discipline, developed particularly within the disciplines of political science and public administration. In the past 30 years, the field has flourished (see Saetren, 2005), but disappointment has been expressed about the low degree of theoretical coherence and the lack of cumulative effect from the research undertaken (O’Toole, 1986). Some authors are very dismissive: ‘While the concept of implementation remains useful as a conceptual tool to understand the failure and success of policy, the project of creating implementation analysis as a separate field of study has largely failed’ (John, 1998: 30). In Chapter 5, we
look at the development of the field in its societal context, exploring reasons for such a negative judgement – a judgement that we can understand, but do not agree with. Why we are more positive on both the state and the future of the field has to do with the recent emergence of the phenomenon and the concept of ‘governance’.

Governance

Somewhere in the 1990s, ‘governance’ or ‘new governance’ was seen as having arrived (Pierre and Peters, 2000). This term refers to the way in which collective impacts are produced in a social system. Several authors have provided definitions of the concept of governance already, others focus on a specific sort of governance, while some authors distinguish different models of governance.


Kooiman (1999) gives a classification of the various ways in which the term ‘governance’ has been used in the literature thus far. He adds some categories to the list Rhodes (1997) made earlier. Kooiman distinguishes ten different meanings of the term: (1) governance as the minimal state; (2) corporate governance; (3) governance as new public management; (4) ‘good governance’; (5) governance as socio-cybernetic governance; (6) governance as self-organizing networks; (7) governance as ‘Steuerung’ (German) or ‘sturing’ (Dutch); (8) governance as international order; (9) ‘governing the economy’ or economic sectors; and, finally, (10) governance and governmentality. In the anthology of six definitions Kooiman next selects, he gives as his own: ‘solving problems and creating opportunities, and the structural and processual conditions aimed at doing so’ (1999: 69).

By adding an adjective, several authors particularly focus on a specific sort of governance. Kooiman, for instance, speaks of ‘modern governance’ (1993), ‘social-political governance’ (1999; see also Lawson, 2000, with ‘socio-political governance’) and ‘self-governance’ (Kooiman and Van Vliet, 2000). The latter uses the concept of ‘communicative governance’, also (Van Vliet, 1993). In the view of Pierre and Peters, the term ‘governance’ in Europe refers to ‘new governance’: ideas of the involvement of society in the process of governing. By contrast, in the USA, the term ‘retains much of its original steering conception’ (2000: 7).

In addition, some authors give a broad definition, which they then differentiate into a number of models of governance. Under that heading Pierre and Peters (2000), for instance, distinguish between three scenarios: ‘reasserting control’; ‘letting other regimes rule’; and ‘communitarianism, deliberation, and direct democracy’.

In fact, it seems possible to classify these varying meanings given to the term ‘governance’ into five categories. First, there are authors using the label in order to assign a certain historical phase – that is, the contemporary one – in the evolution of Western government. After the eras of planning (the 1960s and 1970s) came the era of the market (the 1980s). Since then, government has realized it cannot act alone, but nor can it expect the market the solution to provide all problems. That is why government engages with other parties in society. This is, concisely and in domestic terms, the essence of the argument here; that is why we now live in the age of governance. In this context, Richards and Smith (2002) speak of the transition from the Weberian to the postmodern state. Second, authors like Stoker (1991), Rhodes (1997), or John (2001) use the term governance to refer to a specific, ‘third way’, of ‘steering’, that is, via networks. Third, the term is used as a more or less neutral umbrella, under which some variants are distinguished, like models of governance (Pierre and Peters, 2000) or modes of governance (Kooiman, 2003). Fourth, governance is used as a label to conceptualize the multi-dimensional character of ‘government-in-action’ (for instance: O’Toole, 2000). Authors like Lynn and his associates (Heinrich and Lynn, 2000; Lynn et al., 2001) use the term as a basis for developing an analytical framework for studying the ‘logic of governance’. With what we call the ‘Multiple Governance Framework’ in the present book, we aim at a similar objective; see Chapter 6. Such meta-theoretical frameworks enable researchers to specify their leading questions and illuminate the differentiation of the kind of acts consisting of ‘governing as governance’ (Kooiman, 2003). Finally, with the adjective ‘good’ added – or not – the term governance may function as a norm for the behaviour of actors in contemporary public administration. The World Bank (2007), for instance, employs ‘governance indicators’ to rank the quality of government, society and its relations in countries on a world scale. Such indicators as ‘voice and accountability’, ‘political stability and absence of violence’, ‘government effectiveness’, ‘regulatory quality’, ‘rule of law’, and ‘control of corruption’ are used.

Implementation research and governance

Among these many definitions of governance circulating, the one formulated by O’Toole, in our view, shows an appropriate balance between comprehensiveness
and specificity; and is therefore used in this book. The conceptualization of
governance is designed ‘to incorporate a more complete understanding of the
multiple levels of action and kinds of variables that can be expected to influence
performance’ (O’Toole, 2000a: 276). Governance has consequences for the way
the object of implementation research is defined. Implementation research can be
placed under the heading of governance research, but in doing so it has to be
broadened. Then new connections, with other fields and sub-fields in the social
sciences, also need to be put into the picture. In some of them, like public man-
agement, converging movements can be observed. Lynn and his colleagues, for
instance, practise such ‘governance research’ (see Lynn et al., 1999, 2001). In
broad outline their project constitutes an effort to synthesize influences on gov-
ernment performance of several sorts and from several levels. As both a participant
in that project and an implementation researcher, O’Toole is positive about the
consequences of the former for the latter, because the project referred to is ‘taking
account of the standard concerns of implementation researchers and integrating
these with other kinds of related analyses’ (2000a: 278). In his view, ‘implementa-
tion per se has moved to the background, in favour of attention to concerted
action across institutional boundaries on behalf of public purpose’ (ibid.).

Multiple loci, layers, and levels

The widened heading for implementation research has several consequences.
First, with the distinction between government and governance, the difference
between structures and processes, between institutions and behaviour, and
between actors and activities has become important. In fact, the distinction
between locus and focus is at stake here, referring to the separate character of
the what and the how of scholarly attention. In the diversity of political-societal
relations within a (national) political-administrative system, a variety of loci can
be observed. For instance, looking at what civil servants in public bureaucracies
‘at the street level’ are doing, Lipsky (1980) leaves aside what takes place in the
Washington departments. Hanf and Scharpf (1978), on the contrary, pay atten-
tion to the external relations between both public and private organizations. It
is obvious, therefore, that not all implementation researchers are focusing on
the same locus, while exactly that variety needs to be incorporated into the
analysis of implementation and governance.

Second, explicit attention is given to the layered character of the political-
administrative system. Instead of the antagonistic top/bottom distinction, a
variety of institutional relations is addressed, both vertical and horizontal ones.
For the loci of the formal, legitimate political-administrative institutions,
including representative organs with a certain territorial competence, we would
like to reserve the term administrative layers. In a federal system, for example,
these layers involve the federation, the states, the counties and municipalities.
In a ‘decentralized unitary state’ like The Netherlands, apart from the ‘func-
tional’ water boards, there are three territorial administrative layers: the Rijk, the
provinces, and local government, each with a certain degree of autonomy. A specific public policy may be both formed and implemented at one and the same political-administrative layer. Many policies, however, while following their policy intentions–policy outputs trajectory, encounter a variety of such layers. While at each of the layers there are official competences and there is legitimate politics at work, it depends on the legal framework of the specific public policy whether just implementation or, in fact, ‘policy co-formation’ can be observed.

Third, the act of management is taken seriously; more or less a new feature in implementation research (often presented as ‘public management research’, see the discussion in the next chapter, p. 00). The term then refers to ‘the set of conscious efforts to concert actors and resources to carry out established collective purposes’ (O’Toole, 2000b: 21). Here we are talking about the realm of action. Our supposition is that in all of the loci in political-societal relations, action of a varied character takes place. Action may involve designing institutions as well as managing implementation. Research of such different activities means specifying levels of analysis. Consequentially, the acknowledgement of this multiplicity implies a contextual approach, both in research and in practice.

**Multiplicity demands contextualization**

The broadening of the perspective on implementation to a multi-disciplinary, multi-level and multi-focal exercise looking at a multiplicity of actors, loci and layers clearly should be welcomed. Hence, questions of implementation can be reframed in terms of ‘performance via governance in the delivery of policy results’ (O’Toole, 2000a: 281). Nevertheless, some things remain the same: ‘Explaining – and ultimately improving – the way policy intention influences policy action is the research agenda, by whatever name’ (O’Toole, 2000a: 283).

Interestingly, however, in his introduction written with Majone to the 1979 edition of *Implementation*, Wildavsky (Pressman and Wildavsky, 1984: 164) made an observation that can be seen as entirely relevant to this new perspective:

> If implementation is everywhere, as one of the authors suggested in another connection, is it ipso facto nowhere? ... No doubt this is why students of implementation complain that the subject is so slippery; it does depend on what one is trying to explain, from what point of view, at what point in its history.

It means, perhaps even more than before, that contextualization is needed. The consequences for the agenda of implementation research are explored further in Chapter 8.

It would be excessively repetitive in a chapter that has simply introduced the book as a whole, and explored some key definitional problems, to add ‘conclusions’ here. The essential process of siting the scholarly examination of implementation in the wider context of academic studies of the policy process is continued further in the next chapter.
Notes

1 See Parsons (1995: 27) for a list of the key texts on the study of public policy.
2 In an appendix to his book on politics, values and public policy Fischer (1980) points to some early examples of comparative research aiming at establishing causal linkages between dependent and independent variables of policy models. He mentions Rae and Taylor (1971), and, for a critical review of the literature, Jacob and Lipsky (1968). He also refers to Hammond and Adelman (1978) for an illustration of the integration of social scientific data about policy variables and normative judgements about the variables elicited from the political environment. As a ‘post-positivist’, Fischer is critical of the extent to which what he calls ‘the scientific approach’ – formal modelling – can contribute to integrating empirical and normative judgements.
3 Compare Popper’s statement (1959) on the preliminary character of all scientific knowledge.
4 For a relatively early use of the term, see Wittrock (1983).
5 Although we can no longer trace where and when, it was Robert Golembiewski who introduced this distinction to us.