Frontline Organizations as Experimental Settings for Policy Change:

Why Public Management Matters Even More

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ABSTRACT

Public managers' role in policy change, and particularly in policy formation, has been understudied, especially among middle and lower levels of management. By focusing on street-level management, which occupies the sole highest managerial position in frontline organizations, this study shifts attention to a process during which local street-level implementation adaptations are later formally adopted as a new policy instrument, termed here *street-level policy innovation.* This research develops an analytical framework derived from a street-level policy innovation in practice drawing from the case of the Free Sidewalk program in Mexico. The framework aids to identify street-level policy innovation by looking at three key processes: (1) The re-design of implementation arrangements to address implementation gaps; (2) The accumulation of evidence for the effectiveness of the newly introduced instrument; and (3) The adoption of the experimented instrument as a formal policy change. Street-level policy innovation echoes the well-established notion of bottom-up innovation in the public sector, however, is triggered by delivery efforts exercised on the ground in an attempt to address local implementation gaps. Alighting the role of frontline organizations as a setting to explore, experience, and experiment with new policy instruments which suggests new theoretical and practical insights into the understudied interstices between policymaking and public management.

Key words: policy innovation; frontline organizations; street-level organizations; street-level management; clientele-agency perspective; public management; implementation; policy design; policymaking

Introduction

Policy innovation in the public sector is a highly demanded process at the cornerstone of any healthy democratic policy regime (Hjelmar 2021). Existing literature places emphasis on the structural complexities of public sector innovation (Cinar, Trott & Simms 2019; Cinar, Simms, Trott & Demircioglu 2022; Cinar, Trott & Simms 2021) with the aim to replicate conditions that foster innovation practices. However, further challenges in the extrapolation of on-the-ground practices of public sector innovations arise when generalization drives the researchers focus by frequently overshadowing the individuals as public sector agents (Meijer 2014). This article responds to the general question of how public sector agents are able to produce policy innovation by shifting the attention to the understudied interstices of public management and policymaking (e.g., Barrett 2004; Hicklin and Godwin 2009; Howlett 2011; Lipsky 2010; Lynn, Heinrich and Hill 2000; Meier 2009; Meier and O'Toole 2006; Noordegraaf 2000; Nowlin 2011; Robichau and Lynn 2009; Sowa and Lu 2017; Terman 2015; Winter 2012). Specifically, "management and managerial behavior are crucial but underexplored and underexamined variables in the policy literature" (Howlett and Walker 2012, 212), so that relatively little is known about the role of public managers in policy change in general, and in policy design in particular (e.g., Mintrom and Luetjens 2017; Flink 2017; Park and Sapotichne 2019). Indeed, the well-documented contribution of public management in the policy process (Hicklin and Godwin 2009; Meier and O'toole 2001; O'Toole and Meier 1999), mostly refers to their downward role in steering or maneuvering implementation

(Mintrom and Luetjens 2017). In contrast, managers' influence on, or participation in, policymaking venues is understudied (Baekgaard et al. 2018). When considered, managers' contribution is mostly portrayed as exerting upstream voicing efforts as an integral part of policy implementation to present ideas that emerge following their familiarity with the field (e.g., Currie and Procter 2005; Floyd and Wooldridge 1994, 1997; Gatenby et al. 2015; Howlett and Walker 2012; Mintrom and Luetjens 2017; Sowa and Lu 2017).

Focusing on the downward roles of public management in carrying out implementation, and identifying their upward roles as exercising voice efforts, current literature overlooks the possibility that managers, especially those who are close to the field, may *develop and implement new* policy instruments as part of their responsibility to adapt implementation to the local context they are embedded in (e.g., Carey and Matthews 2017; Currie and Procter 2005; Hjern and Porter 1981; Ridder, Bruns, and Spier 2006). Moreover, implementation adaptation efforts, which reflect introducing a policy instrument that differs from formal directives, are often referred to as noncompliance (e.g., Brodkin 2003; Author 2013; Hill 2006; Lipsky 1980; Majone and Wildavsky 1978; May and Winter 2009; Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2000; Sandfort 2000).

To better understand this understudied process, within which on-the-ground, local implementation adaptation later evolves into an official policy change, this study suggests shifting attention to a unique public management category, namely, street-level management, which includes police-station chiefs, school principals, and heads of social services (Gassner and Gofen 2018; Oberfield and Incantalupo 2021). Street-level management occupies the sole top managerial position in frontline organizations (also known as "street-level bureaucracies," "human service organizations," or "street-level organizations") within which public services are *directly* delivered to locally-defined publics (Brodkin 2012; Lipsky 1980; Smith 1965). Being in charge of, and

directly accountable for, the direct delivery of public services, street-level management experiences first-hand the discrepancies between what is *expected* from the implementation of a policy instrument and its *actual* outcomes, which is often followed by investing efforts to adapt implementation arrangements on-the-ground to the local clientele served (Gassner and Gofen 2018, 2019; Gassner et al. 2020). Therefore, street-level management plays a key role in reconciling strategic objectives with operational imperatives (Gatenby et al. 2015). Notably, despite the understanding that "if the public wants to affect public service policy delivery, it must look not to the behavior of individual workers but to *managers* and policy makers" (Lipsky 2010, 212; our *emphasis*; see also, Brodkin 2012; Hupe and Buffat 2014), the distinct contribution of street-level management is overlooked both in public management scholarship as well as within the street-level literature, which predominantly focuses on direct-delivery interactions with citizens and "neglects the actual fragmentation of superior layers" (Keulemans and Groeneveld 2019, 2; see also Evans 2011). Specifically, this study focuses on the process through which street-level managers (SLMs) address local implementation gaps by introducing on the ground a new policy instrument that differs from instructed, that is later formally adopted as a wide-range policy change, a process termed here as *street-level policy innovation.*

Our analysis demonstrates what street-level policy innovation entails on the ground by drawing on the implementation of the Free SideWalk program (FSWP) in Guadalajara, a large city in Mexico, which aims at liberating sidewalks from wrongly parked vehicles. Originally, the program utilized a punitive approach (issuing fines), which produced undesired consequences during implementation, including confrontations with citizens and bribery practices. To address these implementation gaps, the SLM purposely replaced the punitive approach with an educational approach, which was introduced via a mix of policy instruments, including warning notices that

temporarily replaced the use of fines. This replacement, in which formally directed policy instruments are switched with a distinctively different composition of instruments, was first carried out as an implementation adaptation, and eventually was officially adopted and formally introduced as a key facet of the city's strategy, while altering local government policy of transit and urban mobility.

To set the theoretical background for street-level policy innovation, the following review first discusses the recent emerging call to further develop public managers' role in policymaking in general, and in policy design in particular. Next, the review suggests that the current vast and rich street-level implementation scholarship overlooks the unique position of street-level management, to invent, explore and experiment with new policy instruments in frontline organizations. This review also emphasizes that recent interest in street-level policy entrepreneurship (e.g., Arnold 2015; Cohen 2021), which refers to the involvement of street-level workers in policy formulation, also overlooks both street-level management as well as the possibility that local implementation adaptation will be later formally adopted as a new policy instrument. After specifying the research approach and the case, our findings present street-level policy innovation as a policy change that follows an evolving process that begins with concrete, on-the-ground delivery efforts to address local implementation gaps, replacing existing policy instrument with new ones, and it concludes with the formal adoption of the newly-introduced instruments. A discussion section presents our contributions to the theoretical debates and the conclusion delimits policy implications and further lines of research.

Public Management's Role in Policymaking

The role of agency managers in policy change has been addressed by the literature on public sector innovation (Hjelmar, 2021), which acknowledges that organizational innovations originate from different sources, although recent scholarship has focused on two types: top-down and bottom-up innovations (Arundel et al, 2019). The former usually derives from political compromises pushed by government leaders, while bottom-up innovation stems from the interactions between SLB's and their target populations. By comparing the two types of public sector innovations, some have argued that top-down approaches hinder employees' job satisfaction because it constrains their self-determination (Demircioglu, 2021). On the contrary, bottom-up innovations are positively related to employees' job satisfaction and commitment when they emanate from their own ideas. In other words, grassroots innovations promote employees' autonomy. Casali and Hollanders (2015) found that bottom-up innovation agencies in Europe account for more than 34% of the public sector organizations included in a survey study in 2010, and that those agencies give their directors the discretionary ability to support ideas proposed by their employees and middle managers.

However, as argued by Saari et al. (2015), regardless of the origin of the ideas that pursue organizational change, they require the bridging efforts of middle managers to create communication arenas, networks, and mediating tools, which implies that these actors are crucial to creating the conditions for sustainable public innovations. Saari and colleagues claim, based on two cases related to children's daycare services in Finland, that public sector innovations have broader effects when agency managers are capable to combine bottom-up processes with top-down demands through different coordination strategies.

It is now well-accepted that strategic choices and pursued actions of public managers exert critical implications for varied policy outcomes (Meier and O'toole 2001) and in general, managerial behavior is crucial (Howlett and Walker 2012). Nevertheless, the role of public

managers in the policy process is underdeveloped and underexplored (Barrett 2004; Brodkin 2012; Hicklin and Godwin 2009; Howlett 2011; Lipsky 2010; Lynn, Heinrich and Hill 2000; Meier and O'Toole 2006; Robichau and Lynn 2009; Winter 2012), particularly with respect to policy design and policy change (Flink 2017; Howlett and Walker 2012; Mintrom and Luetjens 2017; Noordegraaf 2000; Nowlin 2011; Park and Sapotichne 2019; Sowa and Lu 2017; Terman 2015). Moreover, substantial scholarly attention emphasizes "the primacy of management above all other activities and managers above all other groups of people" (Diefenbach 2009, 901-902; see also: Hood 1991; Pollitt and Bouckaert 2011). Nonetheless, current literature focuses mainly on the contribution of various managerial functions to policy implementation, to policy adaptation and to policy outcomes (Baekgaard, Mortensen, and Seeberg 2018; Hicklin and Godwin 2009; Nicholson-Crotty and Miller 2012; Park and Sapotichne 2019). Indeed, close-to-the-field management, for example, is considered to connect "the dots between how the design of policy instruments translates into street-level implementation" (Hicklin and Godwin 2009, 15; see also May and Winter 2009) and to serve "in-fact as the connecting link between 'steering' and 'doing'" (Gassner and Gofen 2018, 564). Moreover, the responsibility for translating policy instruments as-written to actual implementation actions inherently involves constant adaptations, which often reflect attempts to adjust practical delivery efforts to "implementation structures as they are understood by participants" (Hjern and Porter 1981, 221). In accordance, adaptations entail the redesign of delivery arrangements in order to address gaps identified after delivery had started on-the-ground, responding to the dynamism, unexpectedness, and ever changing "routines" of street-level implementation (Lipsky 1980; May 2012; Maynard-Moody and Portillo 2010).

In contrast to the well-documented translation and adaptation roles of public managers, which implies a predominant *downward* focus, their *upwards* roles have been much less studied in the

public sector, especially among middle and lower-level management (Chen, Berman and Wang 2014; Currie 2000; Meynhardt and Diefenbach 2012). Notably, occupying a significant structural position that allows senior managers with a better understanding of the ways formal policy meets the ground (Floyd and Wooldridge 1992), lower levels of management is considered significant contributor to organizational strategy and change (Balogun 2003; Gatenby et al. 2015; Thomas and Linstead 2002). Studies that do explore upwards role of middle managers identify it with *voice efforts,* in which lower-level managers synthesize and communicate operational information and knowledge and champion new ideas or policy alternatives to more senior managers (Chen, Berman, and Wang 2017; Currie and Procter 2005; Floyd and Wooldridge 1997). Identifying upward contribution with voice efforts echoes the general notion of bottom-up innovation in the public sector, which focuses on the ways through which ideas presented by close-to-the-field stakeholders may influence decision-making (Sabatier 1986; Barrett 2004; Hjern, Hanf and Porter 1978; Goggin et al. 1990).

In sum, the above review suggests that public management role in policymaking and particularly in policy formation is understudied. The following section elaborates on the well-documented roles of frontline organizations in order to convey that despite the acknowledgement of their unique structural position, current literature overlooks their role as a setting to explore, experience, and experiment with new policy instruments.

Frontline Organizations' Roles: Focusing on Policy-clients, Overlooking Policy-design?

It is now well-accepted that organizations within which public services are *directly* delivered to locally-defined publics, such as fire stations, child protection agencies, social service organizations, police stations, schools, and health care clinics, "form the operational core of the state…[therefore]

their practices assume deep political importance, potentially building or undermining support for government as a vehicle for advancing social welfare, equity, and justice" (Brodkin 2012, 947; See Lipsky 1980; Smith 1965). Indeed, these organizations are considered to have "intrinsic importance to social well-being" (Lynn, Heinrich, and Hill 2001, 5) and to represent "the face of government to many people" (Smith 2012, 442). Responsible for transforming and operationalizing formal policies into street-level implementation, frontline organizations are provided with substantial discretionary power and serve as the connecting link between "steering" and "doing" (Gassner and Gofen 2018), while playing a key role in structuring citizen-government relationships (Brodkin 2013). Their unique characteristics also include limited resources, an "action imperative" work mode, difficult to supervise, developing an information monopoly about the environment within which they are embedded, required to respond to constant, dynamic and ever changing circumstances and emergencies, and, in general, serving as the organizational setting that reconciles the constant discrepancies between policy directives and local policy-clientele priorities (Brodkin 2003; Evans and Harris 2004; Hill 2003; Hupe and Hill 2007; Lipsky 1980, 2010; Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2000, 2003; Sandfort 2000; Smith 1965; Smith 2012). Moreover, unresolved tensions are inherent to frontline organizations for varied reasons, including being the sites "of policy conflicts" (Brodkin 2013, 26), serving as a site "wherein politically contested policy projects may be advanced indirectly through administrative means… that alter the arrangements and conditions of street-level policy work" (Brodkin 2013, 23) while acting as "the gatekeeper to the government benefits and an array of citizenship rights" (Smith 2012, 442). Indeed, frontline organizations are positioned at "the intersection of conflicting needs and alternative definitions of the common good" (Hoggett 2006, 176).

Acknowledging the immediate, major implications that direct-delivery interactions exert for citizens, extensive scholarly attention focuses on the implementation actions exercised in frontline organizations by street-level bureaucrats (SLBs, also referred to as street-level workers, frontline officials and frontline workers) and on the ways they exercise their discretionary power during direct-delivery interactions with individual policy-clients (e.g., Brodkin 1997, 2012; Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2000, 2003; Meyers and Vorsanger 2003; Riccucci et al. 2004; May and Winter 2009; Soss, Fording and Schram 2011; Sandfort 2000; Smith 2012; Tummers et al. 2015). This predominant focus on direct-delivery interactions and their implications is reflected also in the well-established threefold role of the organizations, namely, delivering policies, that is, carrying out policies that legislative and executive authorities determine; mediating policies by constructing policies on the ground through shaping their content and by distributing benefits and services; and mediating politics by voicing upwards the needs and priorities of policy-clients' requirements (Brodkin 2013; See also Hoggett 2006; Smith 2012). Hence, in contrast to the numerous studies that explore one-on-one direct-delivery interactions, the unique structural position and the key role of street-level managers, such as school principals, police-station chiefs, heads of social-services bureaus, and heads of health agencies, "have been overlooked as a unique category endowed with akin characteristics and responsibilities" (Gassner and Gofen 2018, 552). Notably, street-level management plays a key role as overarchingly in charge of and accountable for street-level implementation of multiple policies to a local policy-clientele, and often the first managerial tier to experience, to identify and to address implementation gaps that are relevant to the local clientele served (Gassner and Gofen 2018, 2019). Consequent to overlooking street-level management as a unique category, to current predominant focus on downward influence of public managers, and to identifying their upward role with voice efforts is overlooking the possibility that street-level managerial activities may influence upwards, on latter policy design. Specifically, this study aims at

shifting attention to formal adoption of a policy instrument that *follows* its actual implementation on-the-ground, a process termed here as *street-level policy innovation.* Approaching frontline organizations from a policymaking perspective, street-level policy innovation demonstrates that frontline organizations may serve as a source for bottom-up policy innovation by experimenting with new policy instruments during well-documented adjustments of direct-delivery arrangements exercised in an attempt to better harmonize street-level implementation with the particularities of the local context.

Research Approach

To explore the process during which local efforts exercised by SLMs in order to address implementation gaps evolve into a formal change of policy, analysis draws on theoretical sampling (Eisenhardt 2008), whereby a particular instance of this process is examined to refine ideas, develop emergent themes, assess their adequacy and relevance, identify conceptual boundaries, and elaborate on the evolvement of the process (Charmaz 2000). Tracing a policy change is fraught with methodological difficulties, especially as regards changes that are informally implemented rather than formally declared (Authors). Moreover, a case study of a single country with a small sample inhibits generalization, nevertheless, it allows undertaking exploratory data gathering and theorizing around upwards influence of implementation adaptation that has to come before large-scale comparative work (Yin 2008). The theoretical underpinnings derived from our analysis exposed four key phases between SLM's work on the ground towards the final policy formalization. These phases were (1) Re-design of implementation arrangements to address identified implementation gaps; (2) Accumulation of evidence for the effectiveness of the newly introduced instrument; and (3) Formal adoption of the experimented instrument as a formal policy change.

The Free Sidewalk Program in Mexico

We used a policy program in Guadalajara Mexico as our case study from where we aim to uncover the processes that leads towards street-level policy innovation. We have chosen this program conveniently taking advantage on the full access the organization provided to the research team to understand thoroughly the process of innovation. Using this case allowed the research to transcend frequent barriers in research that inhibits unveiling the individual as agents and its context, in this case, the street-level manager within its institutional milieu.

Road injuries due to illegal parking is a well-known issue in Mexico in general (Bartels et al. 2010) and in Guadalajara in particular, mainly due to the growth in car ownership (Roque and Masoumi 2016) accompanied by a bad quality of public transportation and a poor level of basic infrastructure for the safety of pedestrians (Cortes et al. 2016; García De Quevedo, Gonzalez and Asprilla 2018; Híjar, Vazquez-Vela, and Arreola-Risa 2003). Guadalajara, which is among the largest cities in Mexico (1.5 million inhabitants, INEGI 2015), belongs to the Guadalajara metropolitan area, which includes additional nine municipalities, with a total of approximately 5.3 million inhabitants (INEGI, 2020). Recognizing that the obstruction of sidewalks by cars frequently causes accidents with a high pedestrian mortality rate (Bartels, et al 2010), in 2015, the newly-elected mayor of Guadalajara decided to implement the Free Sidewalk program (FSWP), designed to address the obstruction of sidewalks by wrongly parked vehicles. The program's importance within the local government agenda is reflected in its announcement early after the new mayor took office (Guadalajara Press Release, October 2015). Notably, although the Mexican constitution establishes public transit and parking policies among the set of public safety functions assigned to municipalities (CPEUM 2019; Art. 115. III. H), their discretion to design their own policies is

limited because many state governments have proclaimed legislation and introduced central policies for local urban affairs (Authors). This jurisdictional overlap has become a source of conflict, frequently resolved with the intervention of Mexico's Supreme Court to clarify the roles of different levels of government (DOF 2011). Similar to other municipalities within the metropolitan area, the analysis in the next section revealed that such as the neighbor city Zapopan, Guadalajara announced the FSWP in 2015 amidst a political dispute with the state level government of Jalisco.

To discourage drivers from parking illegally and obstructing sidewalks, the program's main instrument was issuing a fine ticket with an average cost of $111 USD per event, which varies depending on the type of law infringement (see portal.guadalajara.gob.mx/program-banquetas-libres). As approximately 15 percent of the average monthly household income in the city, the fine is a substantial burden for a regular citizen (ENIGH 2016).

Data Both quantitative and qualitative instruments were applied to formulate an embedded case study design (Bryman 2012), as follows: To initiate rapport with members of the frontline organization in Guadalajara, and to allow a general understanding of the program and its implementation, a semi-structured open-ended group interview was conducted at the end of 2015 with five managers, including the street-level manager (SLM), who occupies the sole top position in the organization, as well as the general operation manager (GOM1), two managers in the legal affairs unit (LA1/2), and the director of the communication office (CO). Next, to better understand the day-to-day activities in the field, as well as the direct interactions with citizens, non-participatory structured observation session was performed by two teams of researchers who each accompanied a group of five SLBs operating the program during one day (see Appendix A for detailed observation scheme).

Further data collection included two waves of semi-structured, open-ended, individual interviews with managers of the frontline organization, first in 2016 and later in 2019 (see Table 1). Interviews in 2016 (N=5) focused on the underlying logic of the implementation adaptations, whereas later interviews (N=5) focused on the influence of local adaptations and especially on their formal adoption.

Table 1. Around here

Additionally, data from SLBs who directly interact with lawbreakers were collected through a semi-structured questionnaire (N=20), representing 80 percent of the workers in the organization, which also allowed triangulation (Hendren, Luo, and Pandey 2018) as regards informants' claims regarding the design and effects of implementation adaptations (see Appendix B). The triangulation procedure took the form of a simple check between data from two sources to increase validity and reduce the regular bias that using one method only may bring. Because policies are "creatures of words" (Majone 1989), to allow for systematic and comprehensive exploration, data also draws on formal in-house documentation, including policy plans, council member minutes, and official press releases, as well as news articles (Appendix C).

Street-Level Policy Innovation

In order to address implementation gaps identified during direct-delivery interactions, street-level implementation arrangements are often adjusted and adapted to the local context after direct-delivery begins (e.g., Carey and Matthews 2017; Lipsky 1980; May 2012; Maynard-Moody and Portillo 2010). To convey that street-level implementation adaptations initiated and exercised by a frontline organization in order to address local implementation gaps with policy-clientele, may later

be officially adopted as a formal policy change, this process is termed here as *street-level policy innovation.* This term also emphasizes the underexplored role of frontline organizations as a setting to explore, experience, and experiment with new policy instruments, which manifests the contribution of street-level management to policy design.

Street-level policy innovation echoes the well-documented notion of bottom-up innovation in the public sector (Sabatier 1986; Barrett 2004; Hjern, Hanf and Porter 1978; Goggin et al. 1990), however differs. Specifically, bottom-up innovation in the public sector entails voice efforts on the political agenda, such as defining problems and promoting policy solutions, exercised by varied, multiple close-to-the-field stakeholders, including citizens and NGOs (Orr 2006; Schmid, Sewerin, and Schmidt 2019). In contrast, street-level policy innovation aims at distinguishing a bottom-up policy change that refers to the adoption of policy instruments *already* implemented on-the-ground in frontline organizations, which are well-established as playing a key distinctive role not only in implementation but also in the public sphere in general (Brodkin 2013). Street-level policy innovation also differs from the emerging notion of street-level policy entrepreneurship, which refers to the effort of street-level bureaucrats to articulate policy ideas in decision-making processes (e.g. Frisch-Aviram, Cohen, and Beeri 2018; Lavee, Cohen, and Nouman 2018) or to their innovative implementation activities (e.g., Arnold 2015; Keiser 2010; Maroulis 2017), nonetheless, overlooks both the unique position of managers and the possibility that street-level implementation adaptation will evolve into an official policy change.

In practice, street-level policy innovation emerged as orchestrated by the SLM, who explicitly mentioned retrospectively that one must put feet on the ground and exercise the change *before* involving higher-ups, saying "*You have to launch the most you can and then later align it to your strategic axes of the plan [...] to the decision-making authorities, if you don´t launch it in the beginning then you don't launch it later because later so many fronts will open"* (SLM1.W2). Street-level policy innovation emerged as comprised by three phases: (1) Re-design of implementation arrangements to address identified implementation gaps; (2) Accumulation of evidence for the effectiveness of the newly introduced instrument; and (3) Formal adoption of the experimented instrument as a formal policy change. In the following, each of the four phases is specified drawing on the FreeSideWalk case.

(1) Re-Design of Local Implementation Arrangements to Address Identified Implementation Gaps

Two unintended consequences emerged from the daily implementation of the program, which directed sending teams of SLBs to issue drivers who park their car illegally with fines. One was the hostility towards the SLBs by citizen offenders during their direct interactions. According to the SLB questionnaire, 35% of SLBs in the organization reported "somewhat and strongly agree" in feeling nervousness while facing law offenders. A 35% of SLBs stated "somewhat and strongly agree" in preferring avoiding facing citizens. These tensions were usually expressed in verbal quarrels between SLBs and citizens, were explicitly reported to us by different informants, and we also observed it during our field observation sessions. Additionally, a growing sense of public distrust was being

perceived among the local public, which was reflected, for example in the need to cancel a large number of tickets, reaching up to 600 to 800 tickets monthly, while according to the interviews, a normal amount of monthly cancelation is around 180 (LA2.W1). This high rate of cancellation was ascribed to SLBs' mistakes in filling the ticket, however it was portrayed in two contrasting ways, that is, simply as human mistakes, or as purposeful abuse of discretionary power following self-serving motivations.

Moreover, the fine ticket design provided offenders with the opportunity to game the system during the interaction between SLBs and citizens. For example, in the words of a PPUD's legal assistant "*the law gives citizens the opportunities to appeal the fine ticket sanction only up to three days after the sanction is given, but [due to the format] citizens were challenging fine tickets even after one or three years later, strange isn't it? and in bunches of 20 or 30 tickets, which gives you an idea of something going wrong"* (LA2.W1).

Regardless what was the source of the high level of cancellation, all managers-informants agreed that the punitive approach cultivated a pervasive understanding of fines in the public's mind. Specifically, although the imposition of fines was regulated in the Income Law for the Municipality (Jalisco Government 2015), the perception of fines among the general public was that they only served the purpose of collecting revenues for the city government, instead of enticing people to comply with rules. An interviewee stated that the fine tickets were designed to inform two things after a sanction was made *"that you [citizen] could pay fast and easy, and that a benefit existed if you pay before the next three days, therefore the message [of the ticket] was that the program's objective is collecting revenues"* (LA1.W1).

In an attempt to address these implementation gaps, the SLM decided to cancel the punitive approach reflected in the formal policy, which directs issuing fines for wrongly parked cars. Instead,

according to the SLM, an educational approach was initiated and introduced, with the SLM expectation that it will make people realize the benefits, rather than the burden, in freeing sidewalks for pedestrians' safety. Moreover, the SLM presented the situation as the mayor having clear and well-defined objectives, that is, placing people first, however only vague ideas as per the instrument. This situation was portrayed by the SLM as allowing him with the opportunity to be creative as long as results will soon follow, therefore presenting a pragmatist approach that focuses on delivering results rather than following directed rules.

The interviewee explained that the mayor told him *"I want you to be the director of mobility because I want the municipality to claim back [from state-level government] the constitutional competences in transit and transport affairs with a new focus on mobility [...] the mayor had previous experience on how exhausting was the work at the street-level but was not sure at that point what a director of mobility should do."* (SLM1.W2)

This is how, early in the administration around the 30th of September of 2015, the SLM was appointed to the Public Parking Unit Department (PPUD). It was the only organization within the municipal government with the nearest legal attributions in terms of mobility policy (Parking Regulation Act - Municipal Gazzette 2003; Art.2), but it was located very low in the hierarchy of the government. *"I had to work with what I had. [according to regulations] The unit I had [PPUD] was not a budget executing unit"* (SLM1.W2). This situation placed challenges to the SLM's re-designing efforts of the FSWP, because any adaptation should begin only by making changes that had low or no budgetary implications. The shift from a purely punitive approach to a more educational one started by introducing the use of warning notices before imposing fines. That is, instead of issuing a fine ticket to offenders right away, authorities decided to deliver lawbreakers a writing admonition explaining why illegal parking was dangerous for pedestrians. Furthermore, warning notices helped

to change the role that frontline workers had been playing until then, as they provided them with a new tool to interact with citizens: instead of being regarded as purely "fine collectors", warning tickets allowed them to play a role as educators. According to the interviewees, warnings would make people think twice next time they wanted to infringe the law (CO.W1).

The use of warnings notices had been underexploited by previous administrations, and the change required no new regulatory reforms nor greater budget. Early after taking control of the frontline organization (PPUD), the SLM reached the municipal "Coordination of Public Space Regulation", another department within the local government, and with the support of the director of legal affairs, the PPUD carried out a study on the legal basis of the fine ticket's format. This served as evidence that fine tickets were badly designed and prepared the terrain to the introduction of warning notices. According to the SLM, changing the format was not a difficult task, although it required the consultation and involvement of other legal and public communication areas within the municipal government.

[Figure 1. Timeline of Street-Level Policy Innovation about here]

(2) Accumulated Evidence of the Newly Introduced Instrument's Effectiveness

Two implications of the educational approach adaptations indicated success in eliminating the implementation gaps of the punitive approach. First, mistakes in filling tickets diminished, so that ticket cancellation dropped significantly, as stated by the legal assistant of the frontline organizations, after the educational approach was implemented, the reduction of tickets that needed to be canceled were around 60 to 70 percent less tickets (LA2.W1). Second, fostering a positive interaction between SLBs and offenders as the hostility drastically reduced, as stated by one of the program's managers: "*warnings are kind of a preparation before the imposition of fines, which produces a very drastic reaction among people (…) When receiving a warning notice, a driver might get confused at first,*

but later the agent [SLB] has leeway to calm them down and explain that it does not produce a charge, but only a cautionary notice" (FOM.W1). In addition, while 65 percent of the SLBs indicated that they prefer imposing fines to issue warnings, 60% agreed that warnings were more instructive than fines, and all of them (100%) agreed or strongly agreed that citizens are grateful when agents talk to them rather than when they issue a fine. This perspective was also shared by managers, as acknowledged by one of them, "*when you impose a fine, people develop barriers that prevent them from understanding the benefits of the program*" (FOM.W1). Thus, warnings were deemed useful in their repertoire of intervention, since SLBs could avoid the use of fines without violating the program's objectives. In the SLB survey, the two most auto-reported FSWP's objective was to "free sidewalks and public spaces" (40%) and "inform and raise awareness" (30%).

Throughout 2015 and 2016, further innovations succeeded and additional educational instruments were implemented, mainly hiring people on wheelchairs as SLBs for FSWP implementation, which aimed at increasing drivers' awareness to the risks that people with disabilities face with the obstruction of sidewalks (El Informador 2015). In addition, an educational mobility course named *Educavial* was introduced by the frontline organization, designed to sensitize citizens to pedestrian safety, with participation offered to offenders in exchange for a substantial discount in their penalties (Guadalajara Press Release 2016a). Hence, as the FSWP slowly institutionalized, the evidence for its success became more and more apparent. In May of 2016, the FSWP became celebrated for its success by the Rockefeller Foundation, which included Guadalajara in its list of *"most resilient cities of the world"*, partly as a result of its urban mobility policy innovations (Guadalajara Press Release, May 2016b). These innovations were giving precedence to pedestrians in the use of public spaces and urban infrastructure, granting people universal access to transportation

services, and favoring the use of public transportation and non-motorized vehicles over private cars (Municipal Gazzette 2017a).

(3) Formal Adoption of Local Implementation Adaptations as a Policy Innovation

Since its early implementation in 2015, the educational approach of FSWP was gaining recognition as evidenced by attention from local media and the mayor of Guadalajara. The FSWP became publicly a flagship program of Guadalajara's government (Milenio 2015). Further attention was paid by the mayor to the FSWP in varied ways, which were followed by resources: *"[the mayor] saw that FSWP agents worked very well, because I worked a lot with them, and he started to contemplate the possibility of addressing also trash and waste issues, he [the mayor] told me `what do you need so your organization could assume further attributions to address street commerce and sanction business that invade the sidewalks´"* (SLM1.W2). However, the SLM himself stated that these other mayor's ideas were not effectively actionable due to regulatory impediments.

In the year of 2016, the frontline organization of PPUD was replaced with the "Direction of Mobility and Transport" (DMyT), which was structured under the direct supervision of the mayor's office. Moreover, the FSWP was provided with budget for the following years within the mayor's period in office. Importantly, following the mayor's closer outlook of the DMyT and the program, was followed by instructing other municipal organizations to consider the DMyT's educational approach in a number of additional different municipal projects *"every new launched policy that implicated public spaces, streets, markets, sidewalks, public works, the FSWP was called upon to help in its design, that is how new possibilities began for me to interact and understand issues from other governmental agencies"* (SLM1.W2). Moreover, the new educational approach was adopted as a guiding principle in the design of policy instruments *"FSWP become a vector that spread the core policy notion of what the DMyT was doing in Guadalajara… everyone thought initially that we*

only fine people […] but we end up using the FSWP as the main [cognitive] vector that help us explain what meant this [new] perspective of mobility[citizens before cars]" (SLM1.W2).

Concurrently, the new frontline organization was gaining political capital in meeting mayor's interest and serving as means to operationalize forward other policy ideas within the government, such as "to put order in the city". As a result, the SLM was engaged in additional different policymaking activities, including the participation in the design and formulating regulatory reforms in the municipality: *"we practically made the initiatives. We were behind the changes in the municipal legislation and regulation because we designed the new parking regulation act…"* (SLM1.W2).

By mid-July of 2016, the city council of Guadalajara enacted the "Integral Management Act", a new statute that restored municipal authority to control urban mobility, a policy competence that the municipal government had yielded several decades ago to the state level government. This policy change was reinforced by immediately replacing the Parking Regulation Act issued in 2003, which restrained the municipal government's authority to the supervision of public and private parking spaces. These reforms made possible the government of Guadalajara to reclaim back the power to manage a broader variety of mobility issues, such as road safety, transportation of persons using motorized and non-motorized vehicles, sidewalk quality standards, and the norms of conduct that drivers should follow in their interaction with pedestrians and with other vehicles (Municipal Gazzette 2016). Moreover, the new regulatory framework provided the legal basis for the authority of the DMyT, to extend its power and attributions, and finally consolidate into formal policy, which originated in efforts to address local implementation gaps, and evolved to assigning DMyT with the responsibility for the design and implementation of different public transportation plans and

strategies as well as overseeing the development of mobility infrastructure (Municipal Gazette 2017b).

Importantly, in contrast to a typical trend in Mexico, where most policies end as soon as the incumbent government is replaced (Authors), the FSWP has continued its operations, transcending government administrations. Furthermore, the municipality of Zapopan has not only closely followed Guadalajara's lead in terms of the FSWP (see Zapopan's main website)[1] but, more importantly, both municipal governments had established inter-municipal cooperation to enforce these policies jointly. Additionally, according to interviews made with current officials of the frontline organization in Zapopan (SLM2.W2 and GOM2.W2), additional Mexican cities in the north, such as San Pedro Garza, one of the most affluent municipalities in the state of Nuevo Leon, have approached Zapopan and Guadalajara's design team with the aim of extrapolating the program.

Discussion

Our research distinguishes street-level policy innovation as a possible pattern of policy change within which street-level adaptations exercised by SLMs are later formally adopted as a new policy. Our findings respond to recent calls within the academic discussion to focus on public management's influence on policymaking in general and on policy design in particular (Hicklin and Godwin 2009; Howlett 2011; Lynn, Heinrich and Hill 2000; Meier 2009; Meier and O'Toole 2006; Noordegraaf 2000; Nowlin 2011; Sowa and Lu 2017; Terman 2015), which consider implementation through administrative systems as a "missing link" in policy research (Barrett 2004;

[1] The program websites in the two municipalities can be accessed through https://guadalajara.gob.mx/programa-banquetas-libres and https://www.zapopan.gob.mx/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Ficha_tecnica_banquetas_libres.pdf

Brodkin 2012; Lynn, Heinrich and Hill 2000; Robichau and Lynn 2009; Winter 2012). This study responds to an additional emerging theme which emphasizes the management of frontline organizations as a blind spot, explicitly arguing that "if the public wants to affect public service policy delivery, it must look not to the behavior of individual workers but to *managers* and policy makers" (Lipsky 2010, 212; *our emphasis*; see also, Hupe and Buffat 2014; Meier 2009). While leadership is, without doubt, an important factor in the process of pushing forward street-level policy innovation, this research focus to uncover an overlooked role of frontline organizations and of their top managerial position, that is, to experience, experiment, and explore new policy instruments, while merging three well-established lines of research, namely, bottom-up innovation in the public sector, middle management, and street-level implementation.

Threefold contributions emerge from focusing on *street-level policy innovation*. First, bottom-up innovation in the public sector focuses on varied close-to-the-field stakeholders, such as citizens or NGOs investing *voice* efforts in an attempt to promote policy solutions by influencing agenda setting and decision-making (Sabatier 1986; Barrett 2004; Hjern, Hanf and Porter 1978; Goggin et al. 1990). Managers contribution to bottom-up innovation in the public sector echoes this notion by implying a clear-cut separation between managers' role as responsible for policy implementation and managers' direct or indirect involvement in policy design, exercised through voice (e.g., Currie and Procter 2005; Floyd and Wooldridge 1994, 1997; Gatenby et al. 2015). Our analysis of a *street-level policy innovation* further emphasizes the key, yet understudied role of street-level management (Gassner and Gofen 2018 2019). While management of frontline organizations is overlooked in recent emerging notion of street-level policy entrepreneurship, which focuses on efforts exercised merely by frontline workers (e.g., Arnold 2015; Keiser 2010; Maroulis 2017; Frisch-Aviram et al. 2018; Lavee, Cohen, and Nouman 2018), *street-level policy innovation* here

demonstrates the contribution of implementing on-the-ground policy solutions to identified gaps during direct-delivery carried out by street-level management, which holds major discretionary power in transforming and operationalizing formal policies into street-level implementation (Gassner and Gofen 2018). Specifically, street-level policy innovation further exemplifies the unique structural position of street-level management, which serves as the first government tier not only to identify implementation gaps but also to address them. It is an interstitial position between decision-makers and a local public, facilitates street-level management influence on policymaking. Street-level managers' position facilitates a more nuanced understanding that integrates imperative street-level implementation actions within formal policy design. Moreover, their responsibility for street-level adaptations allows them to produce concrete evidence as per the effectiveness of a new policy instrument, which in turn, contributes to their positioning as a reliable source of policy innovation.

Second, and related, the role of middle-management is often portrayed as comprised of two, separate distinct downward and upward influences. Downward influences entail carrying out higher-up decisions and facilitating adaptations, whereas upwards influences entail voice efforts that champion alternatives and synthesize information (Floyd and Wooldridge 1994). Demonstrating an overlooked potential *upward* influence of implementation adaptations, street-level policy innovation suggests reciprocal interlinks between downward and upward influences of street-level management, therefore challenges current tendency to identify upwards influence merely with voice efforts and in general to separate upward and downward roles of middle-management (e.g., Carey and Matthews 2017; Currie and Procter 2005; Floyd and Wooldridge 1994).

Third, frontline organizations are well-documented to play a key threefold role, that is, to deliver policies, to mediate policies, and to mediate politics (Brodkin 2013; Hogett 2006; Lynn, Heinrich, and Hill 2001; Smith 2012), all of which reflect identifying frontline organizations with direct-delivery interactions between frontline workers and citizens. Street-level policy innovation uncovers an additional, overlooked role, namely, serving as a source for policy innovation by exploring and experimenting with new policy instruments. This role is facilitated by the direct interaction between frontline organizations and policy-clients, which provides on-going and rather immediate understanding of policy instruments' outcomes and implications.

Conclusion

Street-level policy innovation is a driver of public sector innovation. The literature on that subject has placed emphasis on structural conditions aiming to understand factors that may bring light to produce a general plan for having a more dynamic public sector (Cinar, Trott & Simms 2019; Cinar, Simms, Trott & Demircioglu 2022; Cinar, Trott & Simms 2021). This is a well-known cornerstone for any healthy democracy (Hjelmar 2021). Our research, on the other hand, clarifies a frequently overlooked explanation: the role of individuals as agents (Meijer 2014). More specifically, within the street-level bureaucracy literature, innovation has been addressed from the perspective of the street-level workers. Less attention is paid to the role of street-level managers. As mentioned before, street-level managers are those agents in charge of street-level organizations. These are organizations that deal with the public in general, in touch with population targets, and whose frontline workers are directed to place on earth what is written in a policy or a norm (Brodkin 2013; Gassner and Gofen 2018).

Looking at the innovation process in the FSWP in the local government of Guadalajara in Mexico, we have been able to access the intricacies of policy innovation through the lenses of a street-level manager. From there, the research team was able to understand and construct a policy change story that is clearly different from other explanations regarding public sector innovation and to policy change. The analysis unveils a framework composed of the following four processes:

1) The re-design of implementation arrangements to address implementation gaps
(2) The accumulation of evidence on the effectiveness of the newly introduced instrument
(3) The adoption of the experimented instrument as a formal policy change.

Our research yields some practical implications for policy designers and politicians in general. One is to remind them that mid-level managers have the capacity to produce their own evidence and to become problem seekers and solvers. We believe there is a great deal of opportunity for democracies, especially for developing countries and their bureaucracies, to make their public sector more dynamic by providing middle managers further instruments to become a more important actor of the policy process in general, but more specifically for public sector modernization.

Furthermore, we believe this framework is useful to understand many other cases of policy change and public sector innovation that address the agency of middle and street-level organization mangers. However, further research should pay a more careful attention to the role of leadership, an important aspect that our analysis did not address explicitly.. Also, another line of inquiry is understanding the influence of the governance structure, the political context, and other institutional factors that have an influence on street-level policy innovations.

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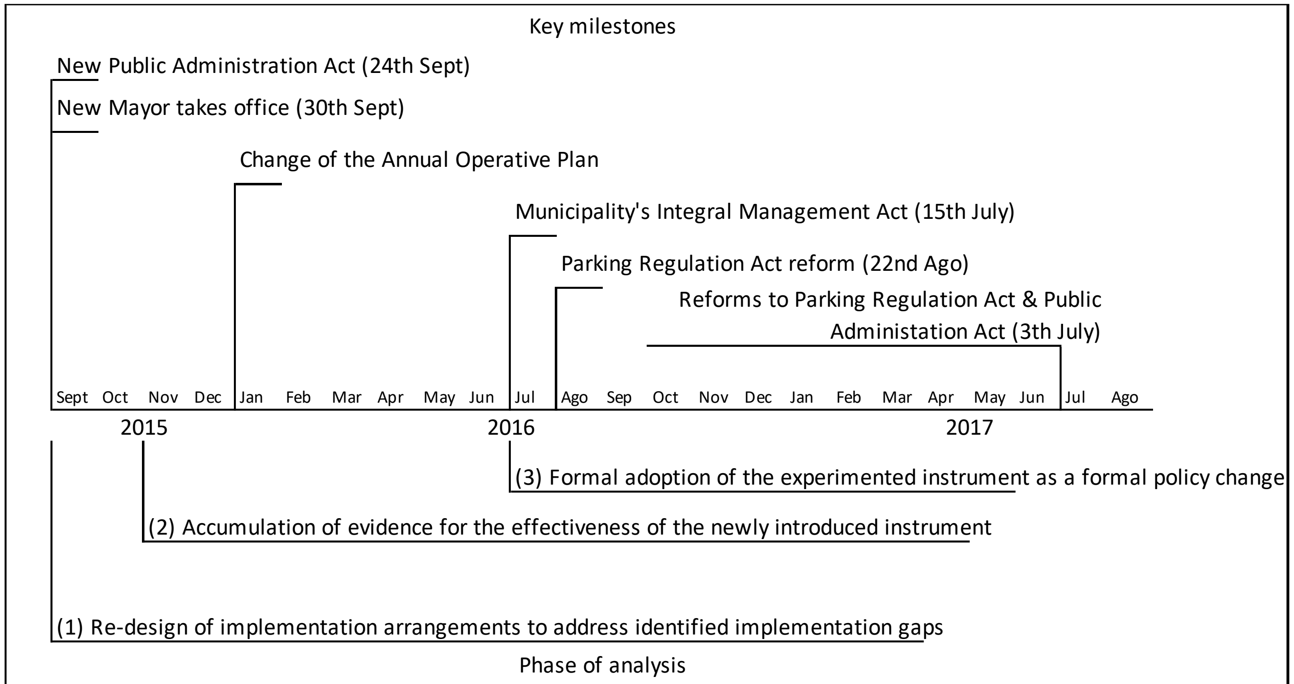

Figure 1. Timeline of Street-Level Policy Innovation

Appendix A: Non-participant structured observation

Objective: To know the process of operation of the program (infractions and warnings).

Relative to the routes (How are the routes)

- What are the schedules?
- What is the duration per operator (average)?
- How many streets and/or blocks does an operator cover?
- How are the routes determined?
- Are there logbooks of the routes and, if so, what information is collected?

Relating to operators (Details about their work)

- Do the operators go alone or accompanied? If accompanied, what accompaniment do they have?
- What equipment do they generally use to carry out their work?
- Do they take pictures?
- How does the interaction with offenders occur when the infraction is detected?
- How do they decide to proceed in each case, especially in the case of "gray areas" that require interpretation and assessment?
- When does a ticket versus a warning is issued?

Relative to information:

- How the operators report the information of each case at the end of their journey.
- How the collection and recording of the information is carried out.
- To what use is the information put?
- How many people participate in the management of information?
- What equipment do they have to process and organize the information?
- What happens when the tickets of infraction or warnings are illegible?

Appendix B: List of semi-structured interviews with SLBs

id	sex	age	time working in FSWP (months)	opinion about what is more effective	meetings reported with management (freq)
001-E	male	55	7	none	daily
002-E	male	40	4	Both	daily
003-E	male	22	4	fines	daily
004-E	male	27	4	fines	weekly
005-E	female	24	4	fines	daily
001-M	male	48	7	fines	daily
002-M	male	45	7	fines	daily
003-M	male	42	7	fines	daily
004-M	male	38	7	fines	daily
005-M	male	53	7	fines	indefinite
001-J	male	27	7	fines	daily
002-J	male	29	7	both	daily
003-J	male	37	4	fines	indefinite
004-J	male	30	4	fines	daily
005-J	male	42	7	fines	almost daily
001-G	male	34	7	fines	indefinite
002-G	male	45	5	fines	indefinite
003-G	male	46	4	fines	weekly
004-G	male	47	8	fines	indefinite

005-G	male	20	4	fines	daily

Questionnaire

Age

Time it takes to get to work (in minutes)

Average time it takes to get to work* *(Approximation-Own elaboration)

Time working in the program (in months)

Aim of the program according to the operators

What is more effective, infractions or warnings?

4. Affirmations Chart

- Personally, I prefer to infringe people over warn them.
- Posting warnings is more educational than posting infractions.
- Facing an offender makes me feel little nervous.
- Many people think that we are police officers.
- I feel more comfortable posting a warning than an infraction.
- Our work is undervalued by citizens.
- Offenders appreciate when we talk to them instead of giving them an infraction.
- I prefer to avoid facing the citizen.
- The work we do is very important

- Sometimes it is necessary to put yourself in the shoes of the citizen to know what to do with them.
- Sometimes following the rules to the letter can do more harm than good.

5. Do you think there may be more than one way to interact with the citizen?

6. Do you consider that the attitude of the citizen or offender influences the way you behave towards them?

7. Do you think that the more experience a colleague has, the better he or she achieves the aims of the program?

8. How do you find out about the decisions that your superiors make regarding the daily operation of the program?

9. Who do you receive instructions from?

10. Were you at the intervention that took place on Tuesday, April 26, in the Tetlán and Talpita areas in the afternoon?

11. Do you know about the new ballots that were used approximately a month ago to post warnings?

Table 1. Semi-structured open-ended interviews

Management level	Position	Key	City	Wave
Street-level manager	FSWP General Manager	SLM1	Guadalajara	1st and 2nd
Mid-level manager	FSWP General Operation Manager	GOM1	Guadalajara	1st
Mid-level manager	FSWP Communication Officer	CO	Guadalajara	1st and 2nd
Mid-level manager	FSWP Legal Affairs	LA1	Guadalajara	1st
Mid-level manager	FSWP Legal Affairs	LA2	Guadalajara	1st
First-line manager	FSWP Field Operation Manager	FOM	Guadalajara	1st and 2nd
Street-level manager	FSWP General Manager	SLM2	Zapopan	2nd
Mid-level manager	FSWP General Operation Manager	GOM2	Zapopan	2nd