

Enhancing Ethical Culture in Czech Civil Service Institutions

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Outline

1. **Two points of departure**

A. Political theory of care

B. The ethnographic turn in political research

2. **A case study**

A research project focusing on the development of the ethical culture at the Czech Ministry of Transport

Political theory of care

- ❖ Humans are **fundamentally interdependent beings** — human living well is a result of care giving, care receiving, care taking and care sharing
- ❖ If care is to acquire a more important place in the life of communities and polities, **care must be incorporated into what counts as the ‘normal’ subject of politics**
- ❖ We need to rethink the role and responsibility of larger social and political structures, such as the state and its institutions, in **securing care as a public value**

Care as a public value

To secure care as a public value requires that:

1. caring is legitimated as a **collective responsibility**
2. **the access to care-giving and care-receiving is relatively equally distributed** and not dependent on economic or social status
3. **the responsibility and actual work of caring is shared equitably** and does not fall disproportionately on disadvantaged groups

Care and public policies

1. Challenging the current institutional arrangements of care and rethinking **the content of our public policies** concerning health care, child care, care for elderly, dealing with poverty etc.
2. Rethinking **the function and organization of our public institutions** that are responsible for formulation and implementation of public policies (a care-oriented view of public administration — Burnier, Tronto, Bourgault)

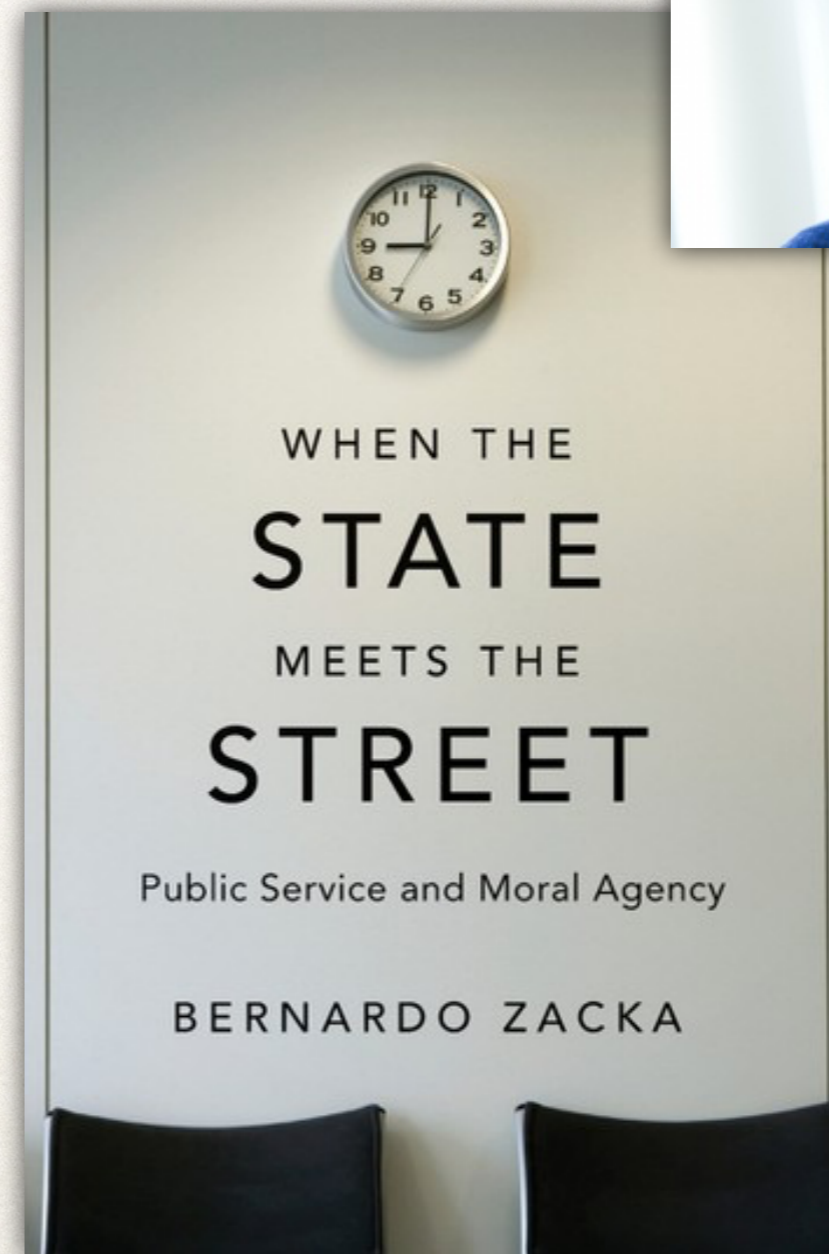
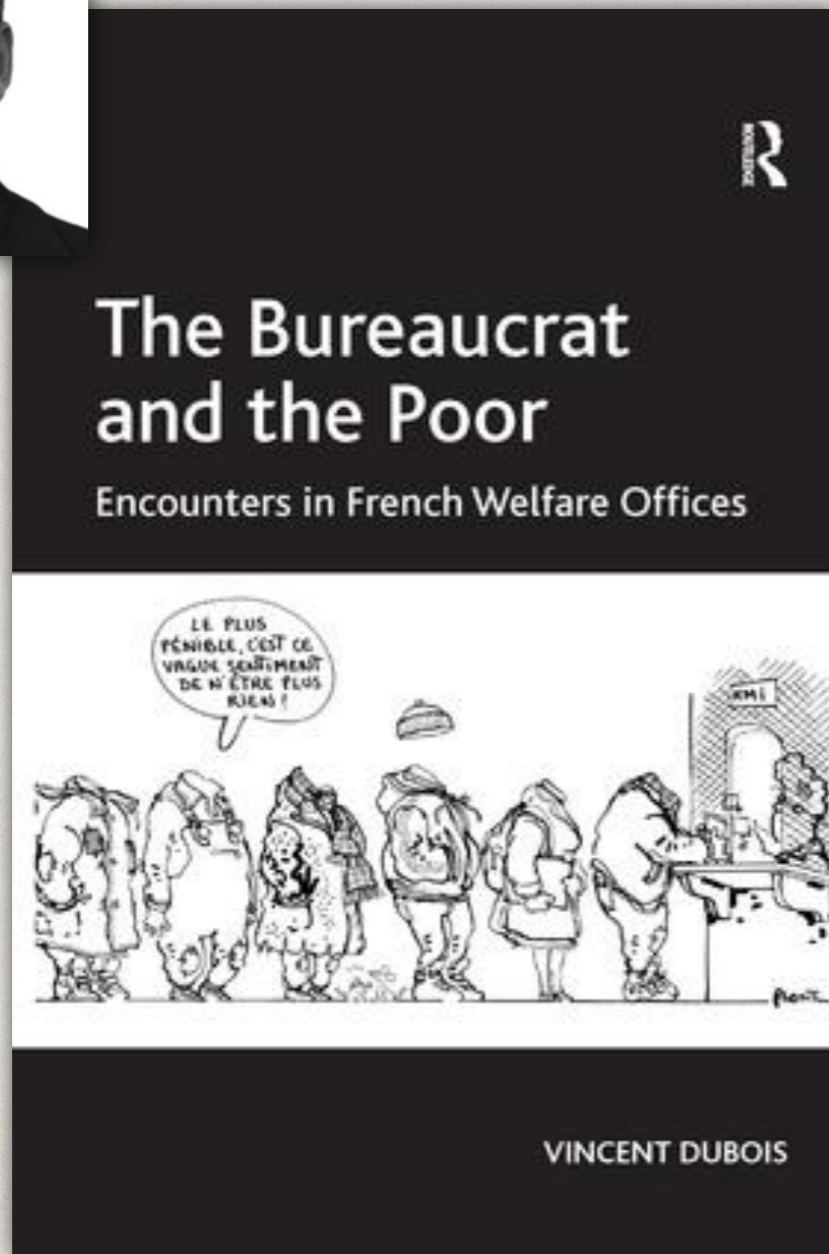
The ethnographic turn in PolR.



To explore the heart of the state means **to penetrate the ordinary functioning of public institutions**, to present what the agents do when working for it and to consider the values and affects underlying the policies and practices



The ethnographic turn - examples



Research project at the Czech Ministry of Transport

Title: Measures for Developing Ethical Culture in Czech Civil Service

Duration: June 2018 – December 2021

Team: Petr Urban, Alice Koubová, Juraj Hvorecký

Funder: Technology Agency of the Czech Republic

Application guarantor: Ministry of Transport

The project's aims and approach

The project's main aims:

1. to describe the **ethical environment** of the ministry and identify current obstacles and challenges in developing its ethical culture
2. to propose **suitable measures** for creating and developing a higher standard of ethical culture at the ministry
3. to provide **guidelines for implementation** both for the ministry and other Czech civil service institutions

The project's general approach:

combining **philosophical reflection** with **hands-on, empirically grounded investigation**

The project's methods

1. **Survey** - aiming at an objective, broad and statistically solid description of the current ethical culture at the ministry
2. **Focus groups** - identifying the main ethical challenges, conflicts and silent agreements, better understanding the relational network at the ministry
3. **Individual interviews** - gaining insight in the perspectives of individual officials (depending on the respective function, role and position at the ministry)

1. Pitfalls of top-down initiatives

- ❖ Top-down ethical initiatives, however well intended, may encounter a **hostile reception** from the majority of the subordinates (e.g. a proposal of the Ethics Committee at the ministry)
- ❖ Top-down ethical initiatives are often not seen as bringing in anything positive for employees, but instead perceived as **yet another burden of requirements** on their shoulders

2. Individual employees are interested in a change of culture

- ❖ This negative view of top-down initiatives is to be contrasted with the **interest of individual employees** to discuss ethical issues, to improve institutional culture and to become better civil servants
- ❖ Individual civil servants do perceive the need for a change and would be interested in initiating changes themselves, **if their initiative was met with a positive acknowledgment**

3. The precondition of trust

- ❖ Civil servants need to be assured that their **well-intended appeals will be heard and acted upon**
- ❖ Civil servants would not only want to see **an affirmative stance** from management, but also **just punishment for trespasses** of the middle and higher-level officials

[an interesting difference between Finnish and Czech survey results with regard to the latter point]

4. Widening the notion of ethics

- ❖ The term *ethics* has certain **negative connotations** among civil servants [meaning control and surveillance] and may cause some panic when imposed out-of-blue
- ❖ Civil servants should come to understand that things that they consider essential to a decent and modern working environment (such as quality working conditions, good communication, conflict prevention etc.) are **part and parcel of civil service ethics**

5. Building an ethical infrastructure

- ❖ Recruiting and promoting the officials with respect to their **communicative and listening skills**
- ❖ Encouraging **participation and inclusion** at the workplace
- ❖ Providing **personnel training** for skilled ethical knowledge
- ❖ Assigning **responsibility for ethics work**
- ❖ **Example set by management** through its own conduct

6. Engaging stakeholders

- ❖ Lack of political initiatives, combined with a lack of engagement from the general public and a low interest of journalists and NGOs, creates a **lethargic atmosphere to the entire process of building an ethical culture in civil service**
- ❖ An effective (though lengthy) way to move forward leads through a **gradual coalition fostering sustained pressure from various stakeholders** (civil servants, unions, NGOs, media, the public)

Thank you!

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