Mobility, control and technology in border areas : discretion and decision-making in the information age

Dekkers, T.J.M.

2. Methods and Data

Understanding the decision-making process in a complex context such as migration control requires a rigorous and thorough empirical approach. This research aims to do so through a thorough multi-level assessment of the MSM as executed by the RNLM (see Chapter 3 for a detailed description of the MSM). Assessing the decision-making process, analyzing policy documentation and interviews with staff-level employees of the RNLM enables an understanding of the envisioned goals at an organizational level, while focus-groups and field interviews will give the street-level perspective on the same issues. These findings are then combined with observations on the MSM in practice. This combination of research methods yields a holistic view of the decision-making process and how information and information technology fits into this process. To explain this in further detail, this chapter discusses what a case study is, how mixed methods fit into this, which research methods were used and what data was gathered to answer the research questions of this dissertation.

2.1 Case studies and mixed methods

The aim of a case study is to study a phenomenon in its context in order to understand complex issues in a contemporary setting (Dooley, 2002; Rowley, 2002; Johansson, 2003), enabling a rich data collection and observing the subject concerned in its full complexity (Johansson, 2003). Case studies are therefore seen as a holistic approach to research, able to take in the wider context of the phenomenon to be studied (Mills, Durepos & Wiebe, 2010). A major benefit is that previously unknown variables or connections can be discovered that would otherwise not be discovered when using, for example, an experimental research design in a controlled setting. Case studies are therefore a useful research approach to answer *how* and *why* questions (Rowley, 2002). Although the case study may show similarities to an ethnography, where the researcher enters an environment with broad questions and interests, a case study is aimed at a specific question or questions making it a more focused research approach (Hays, 2004). Much like ethnography, case studies should be more than just a story or description (Rowley, 2002; Flyvbjerg, 2006). As an academic research approach, case studies should add to the body of knowledge by carefully analyzing and interpreting the findings. One of the ways a case study can do so is to make abstract concepts tangible (Flyvbjerg, 2006). The theoretical concepts often found in social sciences can be hard to fully grasp, as they sometimes lack references to the real world. The findings of a case study are often able to give a concrete context to abstract concepts, making them easier to understand.

While the case study is a suitable approach to understanding complex processes, an often heard criticism concerns the limitations to generalizing the findings (Rowley, 2002; Flyvbjerg, 2006). Generalizing is considered an important aspect of academic research, as it aims to establish universal rules to better understand the world around us. This is usually done by collecting data using sample sizes and characteristics that are representative for the researched population or phenomenon. A single case would not be representative enough to apply the findings to similar cases. This is an approach typical for the natural sciences (Flyvbjerg, 2006), where the goal of generalizable knowledge is much more attainable since laws of nature are consistent and predictive models can be constructed more easily. Social sciences can and perhaps should be viewed in a different perspective. Human behavior is far less predictable and consistent, making generalizations difficult. However, generalizability may not be what makes science science (Rowley, 2002). Rowley refers to the German word *Wissenschaft* - the Dutch word *wetenschap* fits just as well – as the idea of science as producing knowledge, without the need to generalize. Knowing how something works, even if it is just a single case, adds to what we know about the world around us and can therefore be considered valuable. A single case study can serve to produce this concrete, context-dependent *Wissenschaft* to gain an understanding of complex mechanisms, but directly applying the results to other cases will always require careful consideration.

A phenomenon is usually not studied just once using a single case study, however, and researchers can perform individual case studies in different contexts to learn more about specific or similar phenomena. These different case studies can be combined to create more knowledge. Flyvbjerg (2006) illustrates this idea by using experts on a particular subject as an example. Experts did not obtain their expertise using a single case or a large quantitative research design. They gathered knowledge over the years by working on different cases and gaining experience in the process. A mechanic can identify an issue with a car by relying on the knowledge he has gathered by fixing many cars for many years, just like a detective is able to solve a crime case more easily by making use of the knowledge gained through different cases over the years. The use of case studies in social science can be seen in a similar way. One case study may not be able to provide generalizable knowledge on its own, but the combined, in-depth data collected by many case studies can yield new insights that would not have been found otherwise.

Lastly, while a single case may not offer grounds to prove a theory, it can be useful in disproving a theory (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Thinking of Karl Popper's (2005, original 1959) famous example of black and white swans, a case study can be used to check

whether a theoretical concept has roots in the empirical world. If a scientific theory holds true, it should be applicable to any relevant situation. If a case study leads to the conclusion that a theory was not able to explain something while it was expected to do so, the theory should be revised. Case studies can therefore be used to refine existing theories and add nuance and in-depth understanding.

While a case study is a fitting approach to understanding the complex context of the MSM, it is not a research method on its own. One of the major strengths of the case study 'is the ability to use all methodologies within the data-collection process and to compare within case and across case for research validity' (Dooley, 2002, 338). Case studies are therefore not averse to the mixed methods approach. Mixed methods are quite a different approach compared to traditional qualitative and quantitative research methods, which according to purists before the mid-twentieth century cannot and should not be used in tandem (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998; Denscombe, 2008; Gunasekare, 2015). Some have therefore described mixed methods as the third research paradigm (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Denscombe, 2008). Despite this distinction between research approaches and the discussion regarding which is superior, the two paradigms have eventually found a middle ground in the form of mixed methods research. As Gunasekare puts it, *'mixed methods research is, generally speaking, an approach to knowledge (theory and practice) that attempts to consider multiple viewpoints, perspectives, positions, and standpoints of qualitative and quantitative characteristics'* (2015, pp. 361). While an exact definition has yet to be agreed upon, the goal of mixed methods is to employ both qualitative and quantitative research methods in order to gain a better understanding of the research subject. By combining the two approaches, mixed methods aims to take the best of both worlds while simultaneously mitigating their respective downsides. Questions that cannot be answered using qualitative methods can be tackled in a quantitative way and vice versa (Brewer & Hunter 1989; Gunasekare, 2015) by combining multiple methods which can be used to confirm one another or triangulate the data (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). The combination of research methods also benefits the holistic approach of case studies. Combining methods helps to understand different parts of the case, or can open an alternative perspective on what was already found using other methods (Mills, Durepos & Wiebe, 2010).

2.2 Data and methods used for the current study

Considering the complexity of decision-making in the setting of the MSM, a mixed method approach was adopted to study the decision-making processes. The remainder of this section describes the different methods used in this study, why they were used and what data was collected through them.

2.2.1 Participant observation

A large portion of the data collection was based on participant observation. Participant observation is defined as 'observing and interacting with the subject of interest while actively participating in the setting as well as getting very close to research participants and gaining an intimate knowledge of their practices through intensive immersion in the field of study' (Mills, Durepos & Wiebe, 2010). As such, it is known as a method to research a phenomenon in its everyday setting (Reiss, 1971). This qualitative approach is important as quantitative studies can only go so far in explaining police behavior (Mastrofski & Parks state, 1990). A lot of police work is very dependent on contextual information, and 'an officer's moral framework, capacity for moral reasoning, observational skills, sense of judgment, and knowledge of people and places and understanding of their meaning - all shape perceived opportunities for action and choices made in any given situation' (Mastrofski & Parks, 1990). This can be hard to capture using quantitative methods. However, a well-known methodological downside to participant observation is the observer effect (Mills, Durepos & Wiebe, 2010). By merely being present, researchers may influence the behavior they are trying to observe. As a result, the observations may not show the behavior as it would normally occur. This effect can diminish over time as the researcher spends more time around the research subjects (Lui & Maitlis, 2010). In addition, triangulation through different research methods can help identify possible observer effects by comparing the results of the different methods used. Therefore, in order to fully and accurately understand the decision-making process of RNLM officers, they need to be observed over a prolonged period of time while collecting different types of data.

As this research is part of a broader project on decision-making in Dutch migration control, the initial fieldwork was carried out in collaboration with two other researchers. The researchers were present at a total of 57 MSM checks in the period October 2013 – March 2015 to observe the RNLM officers in action, resulting in around 800 hours of observation. For each of the observations at least two researchers were present. In order to get a broad perspective on how these migration controls are conducted by the RNLM in the Netherlands as a whole, multiple brigades - each responsible for a designated part of the Dutch border area - were visited for the observations. Both the number of times each brigade was visited and the total number of observation hours take into account Lui and Maitlis' (2010) idea that the observer effect may diminish over time. However, no noticeable differences were found between the first and last visit for each brigade. While the observer effect cannot be categorically ruled out, the officers did behave in a consistent manner throughout the fieldwork. Table 2.1 shows which brigades were visited and how many times.

Table 2.1: number of observations for each brigade.

Brigade	Number of observations	Percentage
Brabant-North/Limburg-North (location: Venlo)	7	12.3
Limburg-South (location: Maastricht and Heerlen)	10	17.5
Eastern Border Middle (location: Zevenaar)	12	21.1
Eastern Border North (location: Enschede and Winschoten)	13	22.8
Scheldestromen (location: Breda and Hoogerheide)	15	26.3
Total	57	100

During the MSM checks, researchers were present to observe everything that happened at the checkpoint using various methods. The first was observational data regarding the vehicles that were stopped for an MSM check. Using a fixed form (see Appendix 1), researchers took notes of characteristics of the vehicles, its occupants, the general situation and the officers' reasons for stopping the vehicle. In cases where the officer who stopped the vehicle was not available for questioning, other officers were asked what made this particular vehicle interesting for the RNLM. One vehicle was observed at a time, from the moment it was stopped at the checkpoint to the time it was allowed to leave. The completed observation form was then stored away and a new form was used for the next vehicle stopped for an MSM check. The paper forms were later used to create a digital database in SPSS. After the fieldwork period, this database contained the information on vehicle characteristics, occupant characteristics, description of the outcome of the MSM check and the officers' reasons for the selection of 330 vehicles.

In addition to the forms, a large number of field interviews were held with border patrol officers before and during the MSM checks. After the briefing, researchers joined the officers and drove to the actual location for the MSM check. Depending on the brigade and the location of the check, this drive could be from fifteen minutes to over an hour. As researchers were traveling with the officers, this time could be used to ask officers questions in informal interviews and conversations. There was ample time for such field interviews at the checkpoints as well. Depending on the situation and how busy the officers were, these could be short conversations, a reaction to what was happening at the checkpoint or more in-depth conversations. The field interviews were a good source of data, especially officers' personal views on their work as border patrol officers and general contextual information on MSM checks,

adding to the idea of thick description as posed by Geertz (1973). The field interviews were unstructured interviews without the use of a topic list, resulting in a wide range of subjects such as specific occurrences during MSM checks, the work of border patrol officers in general and – important in light of the current research – the use of information and information technology. In general, officers were very approachable for the researchers and open to questions. Part of this may be attributed to the fact that each brigade was visited multiple times, creating a sense of trust between the officers and researchers, and the briefing before each MSM check was taken as an opportunity to explain the research project and what the researchers would be doing. The aim of this explanation was for officers to become familiar with the project, to create transparency and to give officers the opportunity to ask questions.

Important aspects of the field interviews were documented in the form of field notes. In addition to the conversations, researchers would take notes of interesting situations during the fieldwork; for example, what was discussed during the briefings or interesting events during MSM checks such as arrests or vehicle searches. The combination of field conversations and observations created an extensive documentation of field notes, which were individually documented and expanded on in a more detailed manner within twenty-four hours after the observations by both researchers present at the MSM check.

The field notes were analyzed using the Atlas-ti software to code excerpts and quotations relevant to the research. The field notes of the researchers were combined into one file, or hermeneutic unit. Before coding the contents of the field notes a list of codes was created that responded to the underlying themes of the research, for example *use of information, Amigo-boras* or *goals of the MSM*. The list of codes was not fixed but could be adapted when new dimension or factors were found requiring new codes. The analysis therefore did not take a grounded theory approach, but was more akin to the constant comparative method proposed by Glaser (1965): a basic analytical framework was created before starting the analysis which was refined whenever necessary. After all the field notes had been coded, a document was produced listing all the coded fragments of text and quotations for each code giving a structured overview of all the relevant data for each theme. By comparing all the coded text within a single code, the researcher can see, for example, if there is consensus on a topic or perceptions vary and, if so, how and why they vary. This allows for the understanding of each of the relevant themes in the research and to transform that understanding into theory.

2.2.2 Focus groups

The focus group as a research tool has a history in many fields and disciplines, ranging from market research to political parties, and has entered the mainstream of social science methods as well (Finch & Lewis, 2013; Krueger & Casey, 2014; Carey & Asbury, 2016). The idea of focus groups is to take small groups of individuals to discuss specific topics. Participants are asked questions in order to find out their opinions or feelings regarding the discussed subject as a form of self-disclosure (Krueger & Casey, 2014). Group interaction plays an important part in this. Focus groups should not be seen as efficient in-depth interviews where the interviewer can ask multiple respondents the same question in a single session (Finch & Lewis, 2013). What makes the focus group a distinct research method is the ability of participants to respond to and reflect on each other's remarks and explanations. The role of the interviewer is limited to asking questions, keeping the conversation on topic and including all participants in the conversation (Krueger & Casey, 2014), and is in this sense more limited compared to the one-on-one interview. During the focus group session, statements can refined and nuanced through discussion between the participants, and the researcher can get a sense of whether there is consensus on a topic or whether opinions vary within the group, which may add to a better understanding of the topic. It is important to realize that focus groups are aimed at the perspectives of the participants and contain a significant element of subjectivity. However, the participants' experiences and opinions can yield valuable qualitative data when trying to gain an understanding of decision-making processes, especially in combination with other types of data such as observations and quantitative data.

The goal of the focus groups in this case study was to reflect on the first results of the observations and to gather more in-depth data on specific topics by discussing what researchers had observed during MSM checks as well as noteworthy comments or statements made by officers. Officers were asked to give their perspectives on the observations and the interpretations of the researchers. This way researchers could get in-depth feedback and additional information on the topics discussed, leading to a better understanding of the observations and an assessment of the extent to which there was consensus among border patrol officers regarding the discussed topics. A topic list (see Appendix 2) was used to keep the sessions on subject and to maintain a comparable structure between different groups.

The focus groups were held with RNLM officers in the period October 2014 – January 2015 at each location visited for the observations. For each brigade at least one focus group was held with a total of thirteen focus groups, resulting in over twenty-five hours of conversation. The number of officers present ranged from eight to ten.

The officers participating in the focus groups were not selected by the researchers but by the RNLM. The RNLM was asked to assemble a group consisting of officers of different ages, genders, ranks and positions within the RNLM to allow for multiple perspectives on the issues discussed during the focus groups. To make sure all the attending officers participated in the discussion, the researchers actively involved each one of them, for example by directing a question to an officer or asking officers who had not voiced their opinions as to what their thoughts on the topic were. Each session was recorded and later transcribed and anonymized. For brigades that were visited multiple times, researchers made sure different officers were present during the first and second focus group. The transcripts were analyzed in Atlas-ti using the same method as described in section 2.2.1.

2.2.3 In-depth interviews

In addition to the focus groups, with their emphasis on group conversations and interaction, in-depth interviews with individual respondents were held as well. The interview is the most common of qualitative research methods and is used to gain an understanding of how respondents perceive the world around them (King and Horrocks, 2010). As stated by Miller and Glassner, *'research cannot provide the mirror reflection of the social world that positivists strive for, but it can provide access to the meanings people attribute to their experiences and social worlds'* (2016, pp. 53). Interviews can therefore be used to gain a better understanding of how individuals see the world around them and how they respond to it. This is especially interesting in the case of policy-makers and other high level decision-makers, as their views could also impact the policies and decisions they make. Their views, to a certain extent, in turn create new social realities by shaping migration control practices, for example. How policy-makers perceive migration control and the MSM in particular is therefore important to understand the actions at the street level. The observations and focus groups were able to generate an elaborate image of the perspectives from a street-level point of view. However, as this thesis aims to place street-level decisions in a broader organizational context, the perspectives from a policy level are just as important. The data from the in-depth interviews enable a better understanding of the results from the fieldwork and help determine whether there are any differences between views found on the street level versus the policy level, and to what extent policy decision-making might explain decisions made at the street level. As these interviews took place after the fieldwork, the observations and focus groups could be used as reference or to give further context to relevant questions. In order to inhibit socially acceptable answers, the interviewees were reassured that all information would be processed anonymously and that any quotes or information would not be traceable to an individual. The researchers also emphasized that the perspectives and opinions of the respondents were valued and respected, and the respondents were encouraged to reflect on the issues and questions from their own point of view as well as from an organizational point of view.

Two rounds of semi-structured interviews were held. The first round was in the period August 2015 – November 2015, in which a total of eighteen interviews were conducted. For these conversations a topic list (see Appendix 3) was used containing various topics relating to the MSM and migration control in a broader sense, with added topics for the specific expertise of the respondent. Unlike the focus groups, the respondents of the interviews were for the most part not border patrol officers involved with the MSM at a street level, but instead were team leaders, brigade commanders, RNLM staff members, policy makers and administrators employed by the RNLM and the Ministry of Justice and Security. As interviewing is best done in a setting familiar to the respondent (Evers, 2013), the interviews were held at a location suggested by the respondent, which was mostly the location where the person in question was employed. On average the interviews took an hour and a half to two hours, with a total of 21.5 hours of conversation. A second round of interviews was held in the period February 2017 – June 2017. Six interviews were held with a total of eight respondents, resulting in six and a half hours of conversation. Again a topic list was used, but this time the topics were less wide-ranging and concentrated on the topic of the MSM in relation to information technology (see Appendix 4). The respondents included staff-level employees of the RNLM, policy-makers of the Ministry of Justice and Security, and individuals involved in the development of information technology used during MSM checks. For both rounds of interviews it should be noted that the majority of respondents were provided by the RNLM. The researchers had asked to interview individuals holding specific positions, but as the contact information of the individuals in those positions was not directly available, the pool of interviewees had to rely on the RNLM to provide access to the right individuals. The transcripts were analyzed in Atlas-ti using the same method as described in section 2.2.1.

2.2.4 Discourse analysis

A discourse analysis can take many forms, varying from a detailed linguistic analysis of individual words to a broader social science approach of the meaning of texts surrounding a specific topic (Tannen, Hamilton & Schiffrin, 2001; Wetherell, Taylor & Yates, 2001; Fairclough, 2003). For some, the term discourse even goes beyond language alone and instead constitutes '*a broad conglomeration of linguistic and nonlinguistic social practices and ideological assumptions*' (Tannen, Hamilton & Schiffrin, 2001, pp. 1). A discourse analysis can therefore be applied to many different types of text and other forms of language such as newspaper articles, television

programs and policy documentation. For that reason, a precise definition of what a discourse analysis is and how it should be conducted is difficult to find (Koemans, 2011). Despite the lack of a clear definition, the literature shows that a discourse analysis is aimed at gaining a better understanding of a phenomenon by studying how it is perceived, constructed or depicted. By studying the way a social issue is talked or written about, it becomes possible to determine what the issue is and why it is perceived as an issue. An important aspect of a discourse analysis is therefore not to analyze the language itself but the way it gives meaning to something.

For this research project, the discourse includes the Dutch parliamentary debate as can be found in policy documents regarding the MSM and the broader context of immigration control. Analyzing these documents serves to gain a better understanding of policy makers' perceptions regarding immigration control and the MSM, of what the intended goals of the MSM are, of the reasoning behind those goals and how they are to be achieved. By distinguishing different periods in time, possible changes in the discourse on the MSM can be identified, using a total of 451 documents. For a full description of the methods of the discourse analysis, see section 4.3.

2.2.5 Secondary quantitative data

In addition to the qualitative data of the observations, focus groups and interviews, the RNLM provided quantitative data to the researcher. This secondary data originated from two information systems used by the RNLM to register data regarding the outcomes of MSM checks: the Foreign Nationals Basic System (FNBS) and the Basic Booking System (BBS).[1] The data from both systems stem from the period January 2011 – August 2015. It is important to note two aspects regarding these data. First, both databases only contain information on vehicles and persons related to an actual offense and contain no data on vehicles and individuals that were checked and let go without incident. This is in contrast to the data collected during the fieldwork by the researchers, as this contains information on vehicles and persons for which no offenses were found and were cleared. Second, the data were collected by the RNLM and not the researchers involved with this project, making it difficult to assess the quality of the data collection as well as what data was registered in the databases.

It is important to understand the differences between the two databases. The FNBS is used to register anything related to the Dutch Aliens Act encountered during MSM checks. In other words, the FNBS is migration law related and contains information on various aspects on encounters with foreign nationals. For instance, there is a description of the type of case, such as the detainment of an alien for identification or an order to leave the Netherlands. Second, the time, location and brigade involved in the particular case are available, as well as a limited set of characteristics of the foreign national in question: gender, age and nationality. Lastly, more contextual information is registered such as the type of personal identification document that the foreign national presented and, if applicable, the vehicle(s) involved with the case.

While the FNBS is aimed at migration law, the BBS is aimed at criminal law. Although MSM checks are primarily aimed at enforcing migration law, officers can encounter various forms of criminal offences during MSM checks (see section 3.1.2 for more on this). Data regarding these criminal offences is registered in the BBS system. The information in the available dataset is similar to that of the FNBS: type of case, time, date, location and brigade. The gender, age and nationality of the individuals involved with the criminal case are part of the data set, as well as any contextual information such as the vehicle used by the individuals.

For each of the databases, a separate data set is created. Although the data are similar, the architecture of the databases makes them incompatible and creating a single data set was not possible. Before starting the analysis of both sets, a selection process was used to ensure all information not relevant to this research project was filtered out of the data set. The first step was to make sure that all cases contained in the data were cases encountered on the highways by RNLM officers. MSM checks are conducted on highways as well as in trains and at airports (for more on this see paragraph 3.1). As this research project concentrates on MSM checks performed on highways, all cases related to checks outside of that context were filtered out of the data set. The second step was to remove any double entries in the data. It happens that a single case generates multiple entries in FNBS or BBS; for example when a vehicle stopped for an MSM check contains four irregular immigrants, then the same vehicle would have four entries in the same system. This can distort the data when analyzing the vehicle characteristics, making the conclusions inaccurate. Double entries for the same case were therefore removed from the data sets.

The data in these two data sets were used in two chapters in this dissertation. The numbers discussed in section 3.3, for example the number of MSM checks each year of the number of vehicles stopped, were derived from the two data sets. The data were also used to supplement the observation forms used by the researchers to take notes of the characteristics of individuals and vehicles stopped for MSM checks. Chapter 5 discusses the profiling practices of RNLM officers using both the observation forms and the secondary quantitative data.

1 In Dutch, respectively *Vreemdelingen Basis Systeem* (VBS) en *Bedrijfsprocessen Systeem* (BPS).

2.3 Ethics of the research

Ethical considerations are increasingly recognized as an important aspect of doing research (Mills, Durepos & Wiebe, 2010; Miller, Birch, Mauthner & Jessop, 2012). Ethics in research can be defined as 'the moral deliberation, choice and accountability on the part of the researchers throughout the research process (Edwards & Mauthner, 2012, pp 14). As stated by Mills, Durepos and Wiebe (2010), ethics of research includes many factors, but these can be categorized into several themes: (1) Do not harm participants; (2) Maintain their privacy; (3) Bring them available benefit; (4) Inform them about the research; (5) Involve them only voluntarily; (6) Ensure research of good quality; (7) Be honest with data and reporting. In all these respects, the present study has adhered to the Netherlands Code of Conduct for Scientific Practice (VSNU, 2018).

The topics discussed with RNLM officers and other respondents during the fieldwork, focus groups and interviews included sensitive topics and thus required explicit explanation and careful processing of the data. All respondents were informed that everything that would be discussed during the observations, focus groups and interviews would not be traceable to an individual and that anonymity was guaranteed. An important aspect to emphasize in this regard was that the research was an independent research project initiated and designed by the researchers, and not commissioned by the RNLM. Before starting with observations, focus groups and interviews, the researchers made sure to introduce themselves and the research project, including the goals and methods. Any questions that officers had would be answered before collecting any data. All officers participated in the research on their own volition and no officers or other respondents were involved against their will. Several measures were taken to make sure the research results would be balanced. First, after the first several months of fieldwork, the researchers decided to implement a break in March 2014. This month was used to analyze the first results of the fieldwork but also to make sure that researchers were keeping an independent mind about the research subject, and not becoming too immersed in the world of the RNLM officers. The reverse was also done: after the first stages of analyses and theoretical reflections, focus groups with border patrol officers were organized to (among other things) reflect on the results and to obtain the perspective of the RNLM officers.

A remark should be made about the openness of the RNLM during the research project. Although law enforcement organizations and it seems especially border patrol organizations are difficult to gain access to for research purposes, after the initial agreements were signed, the RNLM was helpful and willing to assist with any issues encountered by the researchers. During the fieldwork, both the officers and staff members were open in their communication, willing to discuss any topic that was encountered.

The current research is part of a larger research project on decision-making in Dutch migration control, for which an advisory committee was assembled. The committee consisted of professors of Leiden University, a policy maker of the RNLM and a policy maker of the Ministry of Justice and Security. The role of the advisory committee was to reflect on the research from their point of view, discipline or profession. It is important to stress that the committee did not have a final say in the content of the research. The only exception to this was when sensitive operational information, which could negatively impact the operations of the RNLM and the MSM specifically, was discussed in the research. In such cases, the RNLM requested that the information be removed.

The research results of the larger research project were published in Van der Woude, Brouwer and Dekkers (2016). Although this dissertation to a large extent makes use of the same data and discusses similar topics, it is based on original analyses by the author not discussed in the 2016 publication. Parts in this dissertation that are comparable - such as the description of MSM checks in Chapter 2, profiling practices or the use of information technology during MSM checks - were written by the author in the 2016 publication as well. In addition, the author took part in every stage of the data collection. The author was present during all the observations of MSM checks, took part in both rounds of interviews and was present during all focus groups. The field notes of the observations of the researchers, the transcripts of interviews and transcripts of focus groups were allocated to separate hermeneutic units for each research method. As the qualitative data was analyzed by three researchers, before starting the analysis a coding scheme was designed focusing on the main themes and goals of the research. This scheme was used for all parts of the qualitative data for the 2016 publication. The researchers used adapted coding schemes and analyses techniques for the individual academic publications. As the data contained sensitive information, digital information was stored on encrypted USB sticks to which only the researchers had access. The physical observation forms were stored in a locked cabinet that was also only accessible to the researchers.

2.4 Concluding remarks

The research methods discussed allow for an in-depth understanding of the MSM case study. Analyzing the political, organizational and operational levels of the MSM enables not only an understanding of the actions of the RNLM officers in the field, but

also of the broader context in which they operate. As Chapters 4 through 8 have been published as articles in academic journals, each chapter will discuss the relevant data and methods used for that particular part of the research.

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