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OPENNESS MAY NOT MEAN DEMOCRATIZATION

E-GRIEVANCE SYSTEMS IN THEIR CONSEQUENCES

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ABSTRACT:

E-government initiatives tend to come charged with expectations of improving the performance of public administrations by reducing inequalities in public service provision. The studies presented here elaborate on implications and consequences of systems to handle citizen complaints and public feedback related to the services provided to and managed for the population of different cities. Two cases from India and one from Europe have been chosen to explore what kind of consequences such systems can have in different settings. All cases are researched with a mix of qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Although such systems come wrapped within the rhetoric of universalism and more equitable access, empirical data show that, by facilitating 'participation of the fittest', they get exploited more effectively by those who are better off, already. Therefore bureaucracy tends to become more dependent on the social environment.

KEY WORDS

e-government, participation, reflexive authority, e-grievance systems

1. INTRODUCTION

E-government initiatives tend to come charged with expectations of improving the performance of public administration by increasing their accountability, therefore responsiveness, so to improve service provision to citizens. E-government is usually not only situated empirically in public administrations, but also framed theoretically in public administration research terms.

The present work takes a step back from studies which commonly aim at providing recommendations about how to achieve 'good governance' without a solid empirical basis. The cases we analyse here are focused on the actual consequences of a specific type of e-government system: "e-grievance redressal systems", specifically those mechanisms to handle complaints and public feedback related to services provided to citizens.

The state embodies the notions of territoriality and sovereignty not only in a specific geographical region (the country where it originated) that binds the territory of the state within an administrative structure that has power and authority. (Sharma and Gupta, 2006). The concept of nation has a cultural connotation in which the authority of the state finds legitimation. The state is articulated by the bureaucracy, which is traditionally expected to organize society. According to this view, the bureaucracy has the role of bridging and connecting the formal political sphere and citizens. Its main legitimation lies in the aim of rationalizing society by channelling social relations into formal procedures, based on formal rationality. Ideally, it guarantees equal and universal access to public administration, and downplays the role of tradition, and charismatic figures (Weber 1920). Innovations in the public sector have not received the same attention from researchers as the private sector. Two of the key specificities of innovation in the public sector identified by Moore and Hartley (2008) are central here: going beyond organizational boundaries, and exploiting public sector's responsibility for allocating rights and duties.

Madon and Sahay (2000) set the scene of the key issues relating information technology (IT), urbanizing processes and planning in developing countries. In terms of the role that IT are expected to play, their work assigns a pivotal role to expert information and professionals, whereas our cases are more focused on the role played by laypeople. This focus implies a shift of research attention from designers' intention to post-implementation, longitudinal views.

Moving closer to our cases, e-grievance systems rely on the assumption that citizens are in the best position to exact accountability about services due to them because they know about their own circumstances, and it is in their own interest to complain about poor service provision. So, handy reporting systems (like a webform or a toll free number) are implemented to reduce the gap between service expectations and provision. A basic point here, as it will become clear later, is that self-expressed needs (by reporting) may not represent perceived needs, nor match actual problematic situations and unequal living conditions.

Van Teeffelen and Baud (2011) analyzed an e-grievance system in an Indian city and showed how different social groups - especially low-income and middle class- negotiate differently their ways

through the public administration to influence it according to their interests. With a similar research interest, we study e-grievance redressal systems in two countries, one in the North and another in the South. Drawing on data from these diverse locations and sources we wish to show their empirical complementarity, to overcome partly the dichotomy “North/South”, which we find increasingly blurred in the contemporary world.

Our main research question about e-grievance redressal systems in context is the traditional “cui bono?” (i.e. To whose benefit?). More precisely, after the implementation of such system, who has been benefitting from them in the cases analysed?

The remainder of the article is organized as follows. After presenting a theoretical framework and our stance, we describe the methodological choices made. Then, we analyze data from two e-grievance redressal systems in the South (India) and one in the North (Netherlands). Our discussion re-frames them conceptually as state-citizens relation.

2. FRAMEWORK

E-governance is commonly understood as the deployment of information technologies for production, provision and use of government-related information with all relevant actors (other government agencies, citizens, businesses, etc). In order to frame our research problem, we start with the common assumption that openness and accessibility (of the public administration, of an information system) induce greater citizen participation. Such assumption is scrutinized here. When an e-grievance redressal system is introduced and used, two possible consequences can be anticipated: a) it supports a universality of bureaucracy a-la Weber (1920) based on formal rationality (and expert knowledge), and b) it strengthens the relation between bureaucracy and its entitled service users or residents. The former may produce what has been labelled the “iron cage” referring to the risk of excessive bureaucratization of social activities, the latter may imply uneven responsiveness to different groups of a society. These options need to be considered in detail and discussed in relation to relevant empirical data.

E-grievance redressal systems are technologies for the bureaucracy -because it is in this kind of organizations that they are implemented- but also technologies of the bureaucracy, as they extend and affect bureaucratic functioning in relation to citizens. E-grievance redressal systems are designed to increase openness, transparency and efficiency of the public administration by facilitating citizens’ feedback, thus to overcome the ‘scarcity of the state’, which is defined here (following Corbridge et al., 2005) as the absence of the state -as a resource- for those who would use it to claim rights, in a form or another.

For this study, the novelty for e-grievance redressal systems lies in aggregating and bringing people’s subjectivity together at a broader scale level. From our perspective, redressal systems provide a stance to look at the state: e-government promises citizen-oriented government, thus we can study the state through e-governance by looking at how citizens relate to it.

The role of the state is articulated along two lines:

- services provided by the bureaucracy, and
- the political legitimization of the policies

In this paper, we focus on the former because e-grievance redressal systems ‘crowdsource’ the monitoring of services. The latter, although not emphasized here, is closely related. Indeed, policy

scrutiny is enhanced by this kind of systems. Then, political legitimacy may be challenged when results do not meet population's expectations, but we do not have further data in this aspect for now.

For these reasons, two of the key specificities of innovation in the public sector, as identified by Moore and Hartley (2008), are central here:

- a) going beyond organizational boundaries (service providers' in this case), and
- b) exploiting public sector's responsibility for allocating rights and duties.

Indeed, as the cases presented in this article show, organizational boundaries of service providers do not explain people's reporting behaviours nor does the allocation of resources to respond to their complaints. Non-basic needs, which cannot be considered rights, may attract resources because of so-called 'middle-class activism', whereas underserved parts of population may not even be able to express their problems.

E-government efforts can be developed and implemented with three major motivations:

1. as management tools for intra- and inter- organizational coordination (government to government, government to business and vice versa)
2. for enhanced interaction between public administration and citizens and
3. for increasing accountability of governments.

E-grievance redressal systems relate to the second and third categories, but in unexpected ways. Therefore we considered the consequences of those systems in their actual settings of use. In order to answer our main question "Cui bono?", we kept in mind three dimensions according to which we analysed our cases:

- a) access by population (which can be broader than 'citizenry'),
- b) inclusion of particular groups of people on one hand, and exclusion of others on the other hand, and
- c) whether the e-grievance redressal systems introduced relevant channels to sustain inclusion, as promised.

A note is relevant at this point: Chatterjee (2004) writes about the important distinction between citizens and population, because -not least because of unregistered migrations- those who are entitled to nominal rights tend to be a subset of the actual population affected by governments' policies. In spite of the relevance of this distinction, problematizing it properly depends on the availability of data distinguishing complaints on the base of senders' legal status.

Beside this issue, e-grievances are related to all kinds of rights, nominal, individual, social, and also non-basic. The ways rights are exercised have been a traditional matter of scrutiny in political sciences and beyond. Cornwall and Gaventa (2001) have posed their focus of attention on how these issues play out in developing contexts and introduced some key aspects to consider about deliberative governance in these settings. Later, Gaventa (2006) considered key aspects of participation and empowerment for furthering the debate on (and the agenda of) democratization, counteracting the conceptualization of citizens as consumers. His work brings us to look at social rights, which aim explicitly at the reduction of inequalities, and which require an active role from the side of public authorities (as contrasted to individual rights that defend personal sphere from state interference). Although e-grievance systems (and information technologies in general) do not re-distribute resources directly, they promise to affect the organization of society in a more inclusive way.

About the relations between information technologies, social rights and inclusion, there is a wide variety of stances from the optimists to the most critical. Rather than aligning our framework to one or

the other, we based our stance on the comparison of empirical cases we had access to. Our final aim is to propose a dispassionate view on e-governance. This is detailed more in the methodological section.

Information system designers' intentions and effects of such systems are often mismatched. Therefore, we are identifying and discussing the gaps we found starting from the citizens' view (next paragraph). Our stance resonates with Chrisman's (2005) work which argues (referring to geo-information systems) that we should not limit ourselves by looking at the impacts of technology on society, but should trace the full circle and see also how society shapes technology. Indeed, the lens adopted here proves explanatory for the cases considered both from the North and the South.

E-grievance redressal systems –potentially- increase participation and affect agenda setting. The work by McCall and Dunn (2011) introduces participation through geo-information technologies in our framework. They specifically focus on planning and explore the potentials of participatory geo-information tools in terms of principles and criteria to evaluate them. Underneath, the reader can note the authors' belief that participation increases equity and justice. However, it is not clear if it can avoid decision-makers "cherry picking" on hot topics they find convenient. In this sense, how participation is actually constrained by local contexts is an important topic that is addressed later. In any case, e-grievance redressal systems can affect agenda setting, possibly by establishing more direct links with population's needs, perhaps because of "blame avoidance" from the side of public administrations. Hood (2010) studies public administrations and explains officers' behaviours in terms of strategies to claim credits and avoid being blamed. It is possible that e-grievance systems, especially when data is made public as illustrated by Verplanke et al. (2009), change the information context within which those blame games play out. Although this approach is not considered here, it is worth to mention Brabham (2009) who is optimistic about pushing participation further by implementing crowdsourcing processes in planning.

2.1. CITIZENS' VIEW ON THE STATE

The conceptualization of the state in e-government literature is rare, even more so when developing contexts are considered, in which case an overemphasis on recommendations usually submerges analytical examination of the situation.

The actual forms and manifestations of e-grievance systems (and of the bureaucracy) necessarily interplay with the view of the state as seen by citizens. We start our framing of citizens' view on the state through e-grievance redressal systems by introducing what expectations surround and legitimize information technologies in government settings.

Bekkers and Homburg (2007) convincingly argue that e-government acted as a myth inspiring activities and mobilizing resources, and note that it managed to do so for years in spite of a weak empirical support for its progressive claims. Homburg and Georgiadou (2009) extended the argument by keeping the emphasis on myths and by looking at how the spatial data infrastructure myth transformed while travelling from North America across other continents. The performative role of myth developed in these analyses resonates with Pollitt and Hupe (2011) who examine 'magic concepts' in policy; terms like 'governance', 'accountability', 'networks' are used continuously in practice and academic research. They intend to attract people and mobilize resources sidelining dichotomies and hiding divergences. At least one of these terms is mentioned in all documents related to e-grievance redressal systems.

Another relevant term for e-grievance systems, that has acquired a 'magic concept' status, is 'participation', which is –both in the North and in the South- usually associated with inclusiveness,

transparency, accountability and empowerment. As Hoppe (2010) notes, 'participation' is pervasive in governance talk and it is assumed to improve transparency, inclusion and the acceptance of policies. He considers a rhetoric/reality gap and presents a typology to frame policy problems; the two dimensions introduced are certainty of available knowledge and closeness to agreement among norms and values at stake. According to him, professionals have a prominent role when knowledge is certain and norms agreed, whereas the policy process may become more complex in the other situations. Although we are fully aware that systems that facilitate citizens' participation may affect all range of possible problem structures, here we only consider situations when there is common agreement on norms and values at stake. We adopt this stance because the e-grievance systems that we studied were basically embedding norms and values of the public administrations behind them, prominently by providing a pre-classified set of possible complaints from which citizens could choose. We remain aware that cases in which norms and values are not agreed upon are also interesting to consider.

Madon (2009) presents and discusses illustrative cases of e-governance in the South, and shows the importance of looking at the actual consequences of such efforts rather than limiting investigations to their potentials. We clearly recognize the importance of this more balanced stance, which gives due consideration to implementation and actual effects of e-government. To do that, we rely on De' and Singh's (2011) conceptualization. They developed a four-dimensional model borrowing from Corbridge et al. (2005) the attention to the scarcity of the state, particularly acute in some territories of India, and from Hirschman's (1970) work, which has been deeply influential for decades. Hirschman (1970) argues that the combinations of possibilities of exit and voice can lead to balanced arrangements of individuals and organizations. From Hirschman, De' & Singh (2011) adapted the two key and mutually related concepts of voice and exit as the alternatives that social actors may have to influence an organization by voicing their stances or leaving it.

Our investigation on whether e-grievance systems increase democratization universally or unevenly, through participation of (part of) the population, is articulated along three of the four concepts proposed by De' and Singh (2011):

- Scarcity of presence and accessibility of the state. For marginal populations the state is hardly abundantly available. In developing country contexts citizens have to travel long distances, wait in long queues, cope with dysfunctional procedures and officers. Also in developed countries a disconnection between state and citizens has often been noted;
- Voice is about giving feedback to public administration and states. It can be done in many ways (using the media, voting, campaigning, protesting, reporting problems, asking for changes, etc.);
- Exit from participation or engagement. It refers to the withdrawal from civic activities and a re-focusing on private matters. Where exit is an easy option, or enough resources needed to participate (voice) are not available, or there is no expectation from public authorities, voice may not arise.

Theoretically, Soja (2010) relates efforts of universalization with de-spatialization, which means space is homogenized by treating citizens the same way wherever they lived. In other words, the law is supposed to be the same everywhere under a legitimate state. The dimensions above are addressed through a spatial analysis of the cases as they show the (uneven) spatial distribution of the presence of the state or, in more precise terms, the (uneven) intensity of citizens-state relations as represented by complaints. This is used as a proxy for the scarcity of the state, and people's voice.

3. METHODOLOGY

In order to get a better understanding of possible consequences of e-grievance systems in a different geographical context we have analysed three cases: Mysore, India (urban), Amsterdam, the Netherlands (urban) and Lokvani, India (rural). Apart from accounting for the North-South and urban-rural dimensions, the choice of cases is also driven by the researchers' experiences in the respective research locations. Accordingly, all cases presented here are informed by a variety of methods focusing on the consequences of e-grievance systems in actual use in different geographical settings. Data and results from quantitative and qualitative approaches have been interpreted to provide a consistent view on and across the cases.

It is important to highlight that there are substantial differences between perceived needs, self-expressed needs (voiced through an e-grievance system for instance) and 'defined needs' (although defining what this means can be quite controversial). Empirical quantitative data for this article mostly refer to needs expressed via e-grievance redressal systems. Qualitative data like interviews, observations, grey literature are used to put the interpretation of statistical data in context.

3.1. MYSORE CASE

Mysore is the second largest city in the state of Karnataka, India, and according to the Census of 2001 it has a population of 799,228. The analysis of the e-grievance redressal system is based on the list of all e-grievances submitted to Mysore municipality between August 2008 and August 2009 which contains data on complaints, in particular the submission date, type of complaint and the location of the complaint by indication of electoral ward number (EW). For the mapping of multiple deprivations spatially disaggregated databases from the Indian Census of 2001 were used to construct an index of multiple deprivations (IMD) as designed by Baud et al. (2008). In order to analyse the spatial pattern of both grievances as well as the IMD were matched to the geographical boundaries of the EW levels.

A table with a summary count of all the grievances per type aggregated at EW level was produced in SPSS and exported to a geographic information system (ArcGIS 10) to geocode the complaints using the EW number as the commonality. In that way a map containing the geographical boundaries of the different wards was attached to an attribute table containing the list of complaints. The total number of complaints per ward was standardized by estimated total population per ward. The final value per ward represents the number of complaints per 1000 inhabitants. Apart from the mapping, statistical analysis was applied to the complaints data, specifically frequency tables of types of complaints and correlations (Pearson) between complaints and IMD. Mapping the IMD followed the same procedure. First, the table was imported to ArcGIS and then geocoded using the EW boundaries. Finally, the resulting maps were visually compared, namely the map displaying the IMD and the concentration of complaints per wards.

3.2. AMSTERDAM CASE

The city of Amsterdam is the capital of the Netherlands with 780,559 inhabitants according to the municipal registration of January 1 2011. About half of the population is non-native, to a large extent of Turkish, Moroccan, Surinamese or Antillean origin; lately an increase of Western immigrants can be noticed. Despite the long history of non-Western immigrants, the integration of various ethnic groups is still a 'hot' issue on the policy agenda, both at the local as well as at the national level.

For this article we conducted a socio-spatial analysis of expressed concerns regarding public space in Amsterdam between 1 August 2008 to 31 July 2009. The database (consisting of 5885 records) provides information on the type of report, the department in charge, the date of submission, the

address of the geographical location concerned, and partly also the location of the person who has submitted the report. All records of expressed concerns have been geocoded by their address using the ArcGIS online address locator for Europe and further aggregated to the ward level to be able to compare the spatial pattern of reports with other social variables such as income and percentage of ethnic minorities. Income and population data refer to the situation per January 2009 and are extracted from the online database (statline) of the national bureau of statistics (Statistics Netherlands; CBS). The geographic boundaries refer to the administrative wards, also derived from CBS. The analysis consisted of both a spatial exploration using a geographic information system (ArcGIS 10) as well as a correlation analysis of the reported complaints (number or grievance per inhabitant) and key figures per ward referring to persons, households and housing. Wards with a low number of inhabitants have been excluded from the correlation analysis, but are taken into account in the spatial exploration.

3.3. LOKVANI CASE

Lokvani is a system for e-grievance redressal set up in the district of Sitapur in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh in India. Sitapur is a largely rural, agriculture-based district. According to the 2011 Census of India, Sitapur has a population of 474,446 (with a density of 779 inhabitants per square kilometre) where a majority of the population is engaged in agriculture. The district is acknowledged to be one of the most backward, with respect to economic development, in India, and receives special grants from the central government. Lokvani was created with a view to allowing citizens of Sitapur to access online services, download information and files from government sites, and also log complaints. Lokvani kiosks were set up within a public-private partnership framework, where independent entrepreneurs set up the kiosks for general-purpose computing needs with a special emphasis on Lokvani services. The entrepreneurs were recruited from within Sitapur district and were selected on the basis of their knowledge of computers.

The case data is based on an extensive field study that was conducted in early 2010 (for about three months). A researcher lived in a village in Sitapur and interacted extensively with the local residents, users of the kiosks, the kiosk operators, local officials and elected representatives. The researcher used an unstructured questionnaire to conduct in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. The data collection approach followed was that of the interpretive case study method. Data from Lokvani grievance website was used to determine the annual frequency of complaints between 2004 and 2011.

4. EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE

The three empirical cases we consider are presented below according to the following scheme:

1. brief description of the case,
2. relevant results, and
3. analysis.

4.1. MYSORE

The Mysore City Corporation initiated in 2008 a “Public Grievance Redressal System” to register and track public complaints via different channels (internet, email, phone and paper). The system was developed by the Bangalore based not-for-profit trust eGovernments Foundation. This foundation developed e-grievance systems for Delhi and 57 cities of Karnataka (MCC, 2011; E-Governments Foundation, 2011).

Until the system was implemented complaints were received in hard copy or via telephone. As many e-grievance redressal systems they claim to ensure “timely redressal of the complaints”. In this particular case the municipal corporation formulated the objective to produce reports to allow the identification of trends and patterns of location of problems. One expected output mentioned by MCC is the “escalation of complaints to higher authorities” (MCC, 2011). Submitted complaints are also published online in the form of reports and visualized in maps indicating the concentration of complaints at ward level.

The analysis of complaints in Mysore allows the identification and spatial distribution of different categories of complaints. Table 1 shows the frequencies of the complaints during one calendar year (August 2008-2009). The majority of the complaints are related to underground drainage blockages and street lights, together adding up to a share of 76%. Complaints related to public space nuisance such as garbage and dead animals accounts for another 11% of the cases. Other complaints related to basic services such as public toilets have a marginal representation.

<i>Type of complaint</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Underground drainage block	15294	41.8%
Street light	12443	34.0%
Garbage	2220	6.1%
Stray animals dead or alive	1779	4.9%
Water leakage	1637	4.5%
Quantity	738	2.0%
Danger	677	1.8%
Soak pit cleaning	569	1.6%
Water pollution	314	0.9%
Water quality	275	0.8%
Vacant site nuisance	173	0.5%
Park cleaning	163	0.4%
Delay in work	73	0.2%
Illegal construction	60	0.2%
Pot holes/damaged roads	43	0.1%
Illegal activity	31	0.1%
Unhygienic eateries	29	0.1%
Illegal construction	29	0.1%
Bad quality of work	20	0.1%
Tree trimming	16	0.0%
Misconduct of municipality corporation staff	13	0.0%
Document not provided by time	9	0.0%
Illegal water connection	6	0.0%
Public toilet cleaning	3	0.0%
Illegal sewage connection	3	0.0%
Licence not renewed	1	0.0%
Slow pace of work	1	0.0%

Source: Mysore MCC

Table 1: Distribution of complaints by type in Mysore (August 2008- August 2009)

A spatial analysis of the distribution of complaints per ward shows that they are not necessarily concentrated in the most deprived areas (as in Figure 1). This is particularly evident in the wards on the eastern part of Mysore where highly deprived areas have low number of reports per inhabitants. This is also statistically tested by a significantly negatively correlation of total complaints per 1000 inhabitants and the IMD financial capital ($r = -.246$).

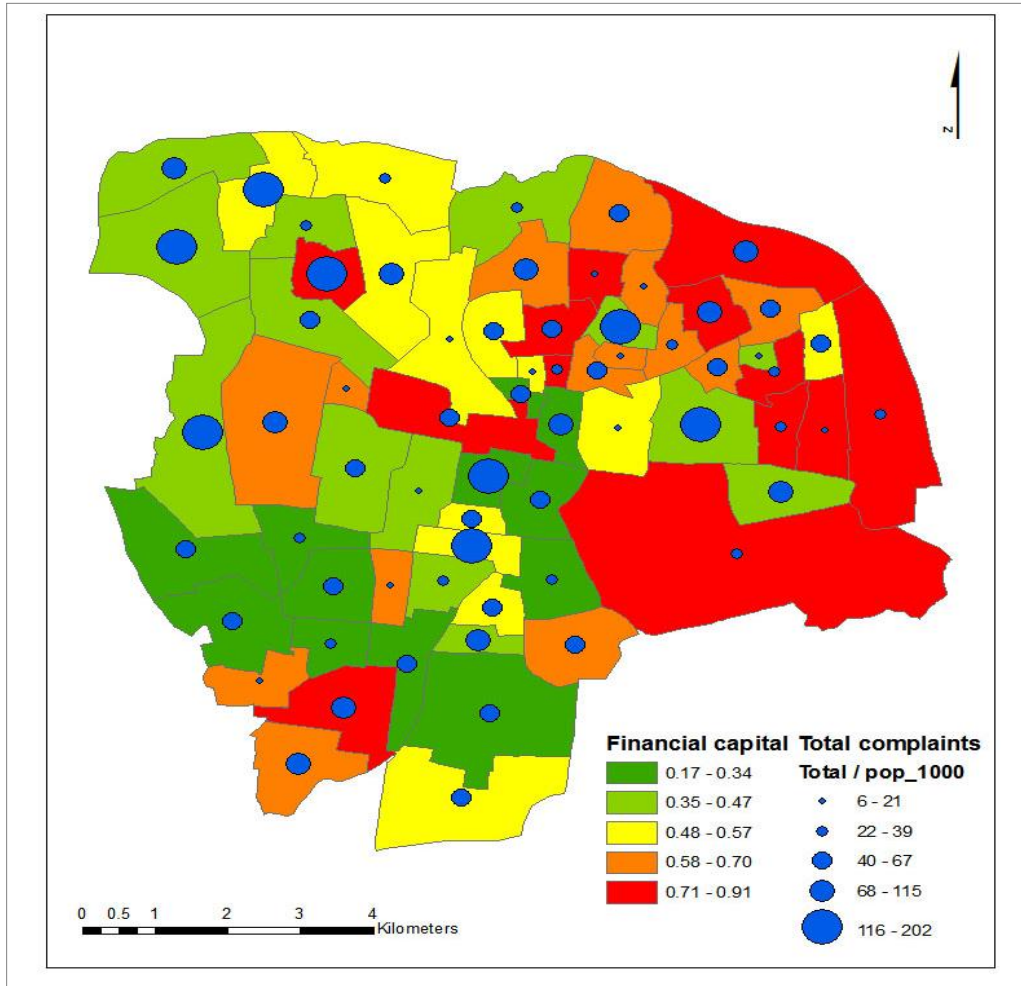


Figure 1: Overlay of number of complaints per 1000 inhabitants per ward (graduated blue dots) and Index of Multiple Deprivation (graduated colours). Note: High values in IMD indicate a high multiple deprivation index (financial capital)

If we take the case of a basic need such as water and analyse the related complaints such as quantity and quality we observe that they tend to concentrate in less deprived areas (as in Figure 2). Water quantity and quality are significantly negatively correlated with the IMD financial capital ($r = -.324$, and $-.306$ respectively). These correlations indicate that areas which are better off (less deprived) most probably have a higher concentration of these water needs related grievances.

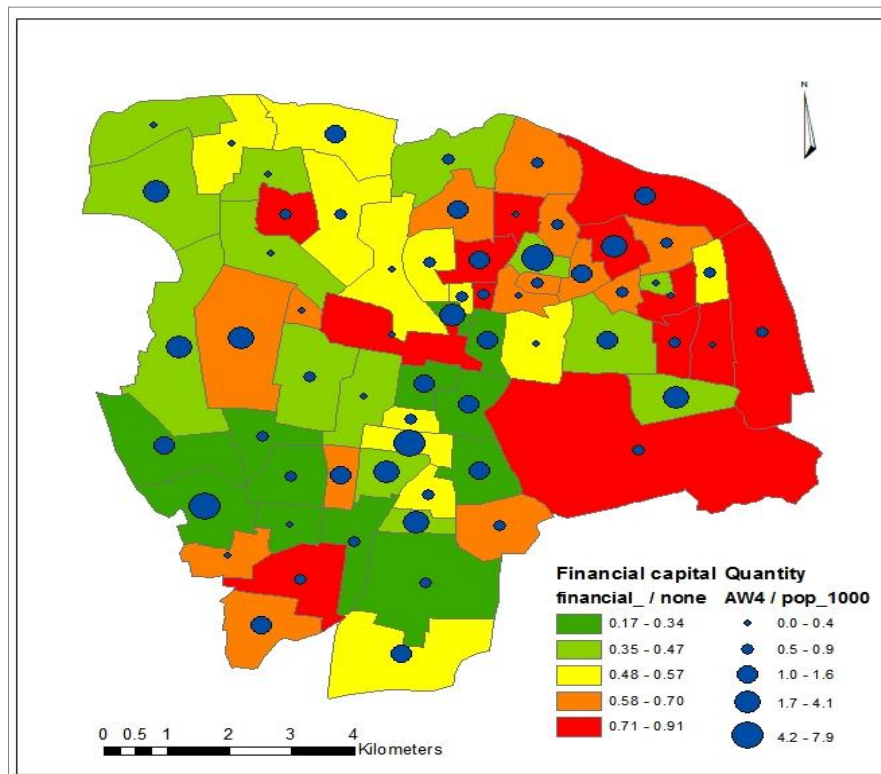


Figure 2: Overlay of number of water quantity complaints per 1000 inhabitants per ward (graduated blue dots) and Index of Multiple Deprivation (graduated colours). Note: High values in IMD indicate a high multiple deprivation index (financial capital)

Other complaints probably associated with the discomfort of the middle class tend also to be concentrated in less deprived areas. Categories such as danger, unhygienic eateries, garbage and public space are significantly negatively correlated with the IMD ($r = -.326, -.296, -.261$ and $-.318$ respectively).

4.2. AMSTERDAM

Amsterdam has a long tradition in the collection of statistical information; data collection reaches back till the end of the 19th century. In the last decade the city has invested a lot of resources in the development of electronic tools to communicate (spatial) information concerning the state of the city of Amsterdam with respect to different dimensions. Examples are the publication of neighbourhood statistics at the website of the research and statistics office, the city monitor of Amsterdam (Pfeffer et al. under review) which visualizes spatial concentration of urban phenomena through time based on complete enumerations of population, households and housing, or Stadstat which represents spatial patterns of the state or perception of certain urban issues like public space or safety, based on administrative and survey data. With the increasing focus on citizen participation in urban management, the municipality has created an interface called “Melding Openbare Ruimte” (MOR) where citizens can report problems regarding public space. After the report of an expressed concern has been submitted by a citizen, either online or by phone, it is directly forwarded to the department in charge. Depending on the type of report, the response time will be 2 or more days. All reports are also published online on a Google map to visualize the geographical locations for which reports have been made. It should be noted that the application is available only in Dutch.

The major problem reported by citizens is related to garbage (see Table 2). This involves bulky garbage (grofvuil) which is normally picked up by the municipality if an appointment has been made, litter, jammed garbage containers and garbage bins or if garbage has not been picked up. The other issues about which frequent complaints are made concern roads and traffic; other unclassified complaints; pavement, street furniture and green space; green areas and water; nuisance (also with respect to environmental problems) and maintenance of public space. The categories overlap and garbage related problems are also mentioned in the other main categories. The overlap in categories suggests that similar problems are framed differently by citizens.

<i>Type of Complaint</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Garbage	2522	42.9%
Roads and traffic, street furniture	860	14.6%
Other	415	7.1%
Pavement, street furniture, green space	409	7.0%
Green and water	325	5.5%
Any type of nuisance	305	5.2%
Maintenance of public space	239	4.1%
Street, roads, squares	147	2.5%
Cleaning of streets	84	1.4%
Sidewalks and streets	68	1.2%
Sum of other minor categories	511	8.6%

Source: MOR Amsterdam

Table 2: Frequency table of type of complaints regarding public space

The analysis of the spatial pattern of e-grievances in Amsterdam shows a few wards with a very high number of reports per 1000 inhabitants (more than 100 per 1000 inhabitants). However, these are industrial areas (as in Figure 3 shaded in light grey) with a low number of inhabitants (and therefore a high relative number per inhabitant). Furthermore, there are four residential wards with a relatively high number of reports per inhabitant (more than 30 per 1000 inhabitants). These are the wards Burgwallen-Nieuwe Zijde, De Kolenkit, Erasmuspark and Landlust. About 25% of all reports refer to these wards. The first ward is located in the city centre, and the type of reports are very diverse, while the main problem in the other three wards, all located in the West of the city in the Bos and Lommer district, is the bulky garbage pick-up. From the reports it is not clear, whether it is a malfunctioning of the department in charge or whether residents are putting large pieces of garbage on the street without making an appointment before.

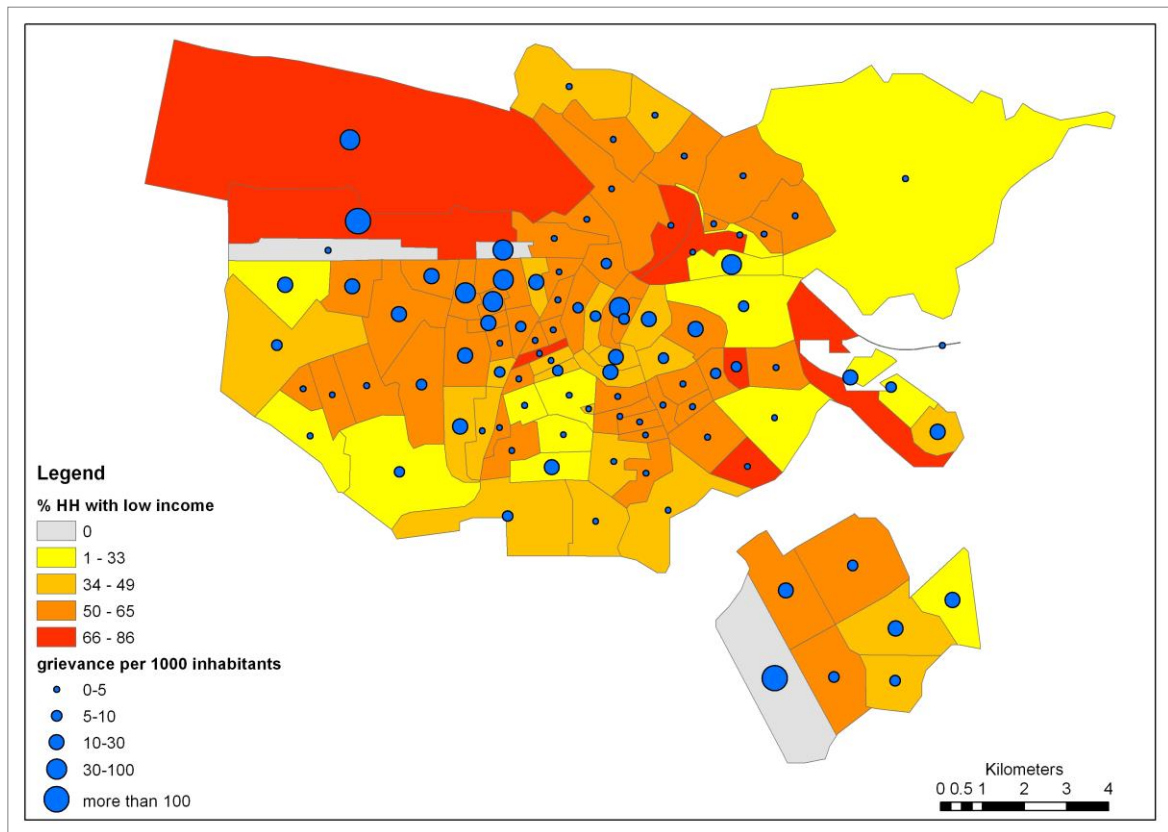


Figure 3: Number of grievances per 1000 inhabitants per ward (graduated blue dots) compared to percentage of low income households per ward (data refer to 2008-2009 and 2009 respectively). (Source: MOR Amsterdam and CBS).

These three wards are also low-income wards with a high percentage of Turkish residents. Accordingly, the only significant correlation found between the relative number of reports and all key figures is with the percentage of non-Western residents, and in particular Turkish residents (0.365, at the 0.01 level; as in Figure 4). There is no correlation between the degree of poverty or affluence and the reporting behaviour because there are both poor and rich wards with relatively high and low numbers or reports. There are two other interesting findings. First, there are hardly reports in the north of Amsterdam; only for one street (Zuiderzeeweg) in an industrial area as can be seen on the larger blue dot in Figure 3. It could be that this district did not yet support the reporting system in the period to which the data refer, and therefore citizens did not have the opportunity to make a report. Secondly, there are also quite many reports in the Bijlmermeer, in the South-East of Amsterdam.

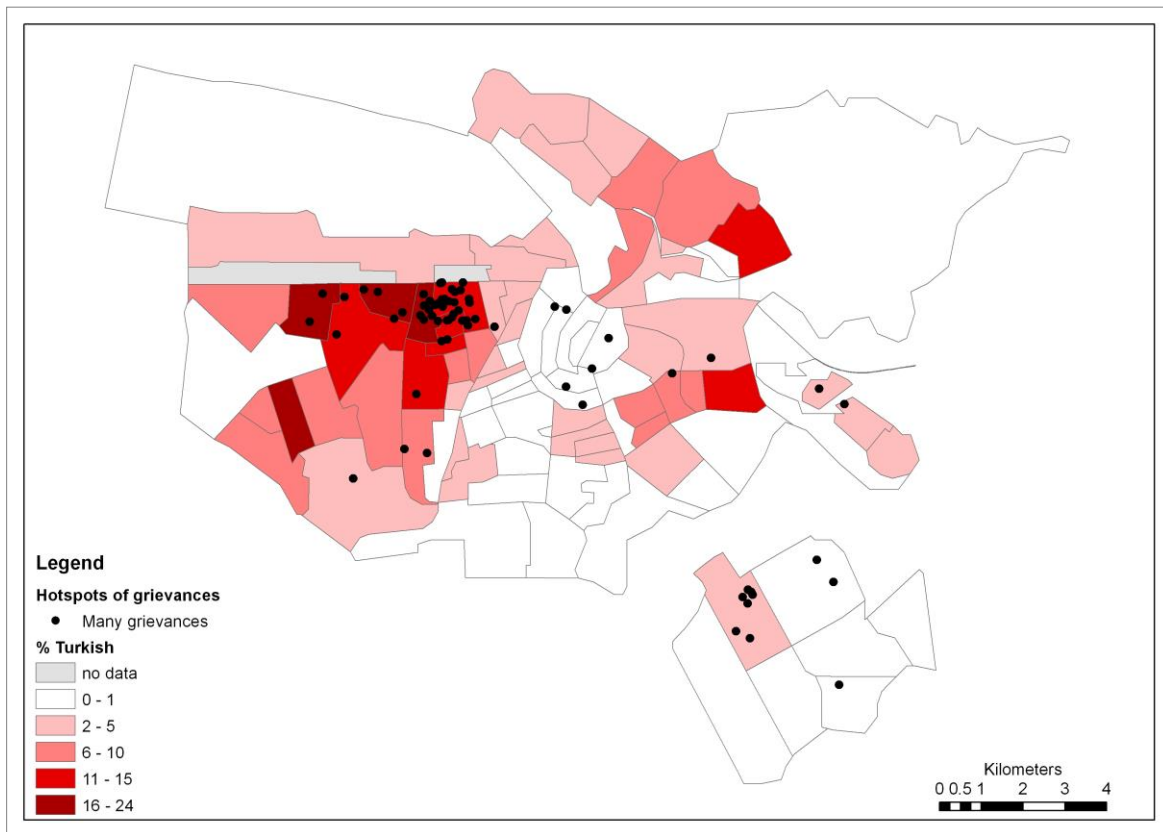


Figure 4: Hotspots of grievances (i.e. streets with a considerable high count; black dots) compared to percentage of Turkish residents (data refer to 2008-2009 and 2009 respectively). (Source: MOR Amsterdam and CBS).

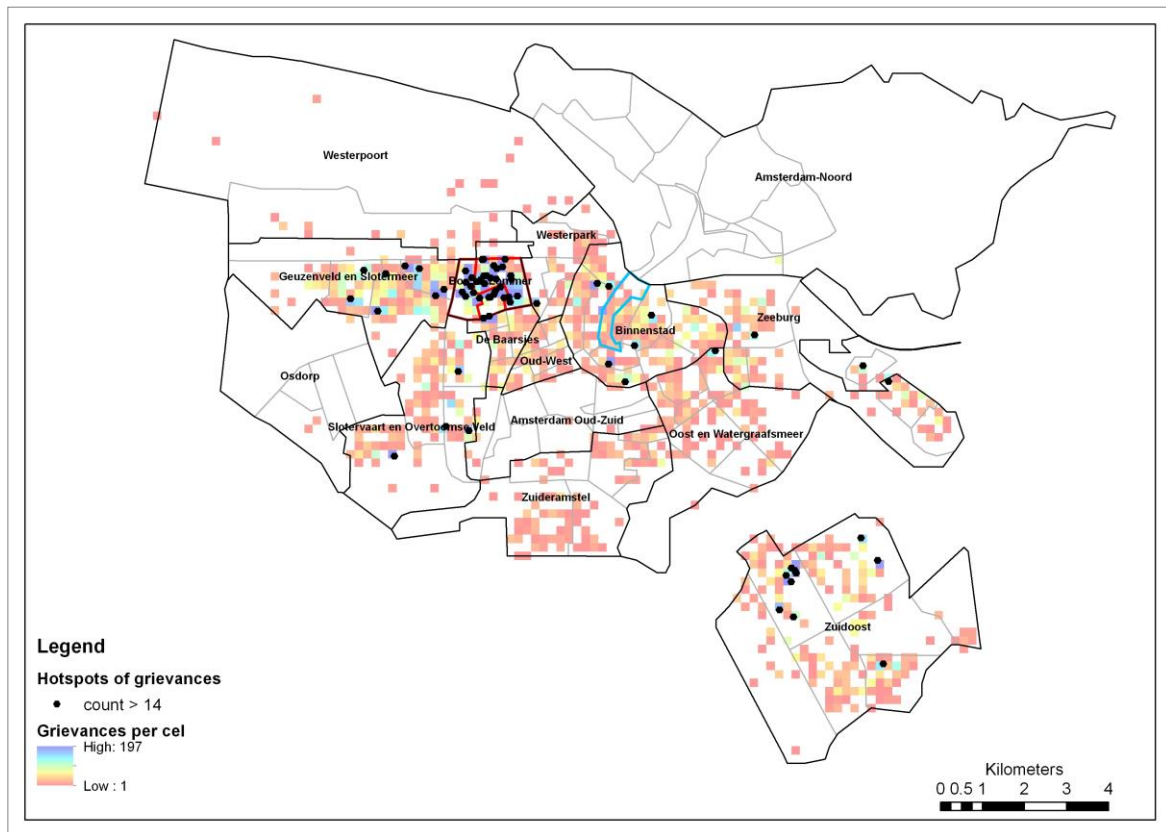


Figure 5: Hotspots of grievances (black dots; count per street is considerable high, ie > 14) and number of reports per grid cell (200x200m); data refer to 2008-2009 (Source: MOR Amsterdam).

Figure 5 shows the spatial distribution of reports per grid cell of 200 by 200 meters and the concentration of reports in certain streets (streets with more than 14 reports; based on the mean plus 2 standard deviations of all reports), represented as black dots. The figure clearly shows the clustering of grievances in particular wards, compared to the many areas with just a few locations or those which are completely blank.

The high number of reports, also pronounced in the density and hotspot map of Figure 4 and Figure 5, in the poorer neighbourhoods in the West and in the South East of Amsterdam suggests that especially these neighbourhoods have problems with public space, and specifically with garbage pick-up. More qualitative research needs to be done on the ground to get a better understanding of this. From the existing quantitative data we do not know how successful these residents are in obtaining a redress and a solution of the complaint.

The e-grievance system of the municipality of Amsterdam serves two purposes. On the one hand it gives citizens the opportunity to express and voice their concerns regarding the public space of particular locations; and on the other hand it serves as an internal management system to respond to reported complaints in a more efficient and timely manner. From the analysis it is clear that self-expressed problems are concentrated in a few areas, both in absolute and relative terms; the problems are mainly related to garbage, and it seems that it is mainly a problem in poorer wards and industrial areas, because the type of reports in the city centre were rather diverse and not only related to garbage.

4.3. LOKVANI

Since its launch in 2004, Lokvani centres soon gained prominence more for the facilities they provided for registering grievances with the district government than for the other e-governance services they had. People found that with the help of the kiosk operator they could file a complaint or a request, easily and with a cost of Rs 15 (30ca, Eurocents). This was significantly different than the earlier, manual, method of filing complaints that required going to a government office, finding the correct official, waiting in queues, and having to either be disappointed or be forced to pay a bribe.

The design of the Lokvani system is such that the information request or complaint is submitted to the Lokvani office, from where it is routed to the relevant department or section. The Lokvani office is under the management of the District Magistrate (DM) who is the highest ranking official in Sitapur. Each request is processed by the office to determine where it has to be forwarded and how much time has to be allocated for the processing. Once a request is filed, the user is provided with a ticket with a request number on it, which can be used to monitor the progress of the complaint. The system is used by the DM's office to monitor the resolution process, and by the user to verify how far the request has progressed.

The initial response to Lokvani was enthusiastic. Residents of Sitapur found that not only could they register their complaint or request, but also that some action was invariably taken. The table below shows the number of complaints filed in Lokvani each financial year since inception.

<i>Financial Year</i>	<i>Total Complaints</i>
2004-2005	11697
2005-2006	45860
2006-2007	30527
2007-2008	24701
2008-2009	20466
2009-2010	15442
2010-2011	11264

Source: Lokvani website

Table 3: Number of complaints filed in in Lokvani.

There was a wide variety of complaints filed in the Lokvani system, ranging from farming and land-related complaints to personal ones. The table below shows the various categories of complaints. This categorisation is based on a sample of records in the database.

Category	Description
Farming-Related	Problem with tenant cultivation; dispute over tenancy agreement; problem with government land use; problems in dealing with a government office for obtaining a loan, seeds, fertilizers etc.
Money-Related	Dispute in collecting wages; dispute over money-lending; problem with government official (instance of corruption)
Land Related	Dispute over construction rights; dispute over encroachment of farm boundary
Neighbour	Problem with a neighbour, intimidation, harassment
Personal Injury	Complaint of personal injury or theft

Other	Dowry related; consumer dispute; matrimonial problem; family dispute over property
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Table 4: Categorisation of complaints

Through its design, Lokvani was intended to make government more accessible - it was to allow citizens from any part of the district to directly write to the DM, without the need to visit any office or approach any intermediary. Lokvani was present in the immediate spatial vicinity of any citizen of Sitapur and for a small fee (Rs 15) could enable access to the highest official.

The existing modes of access to redress for citizens of Sitapur, at the time Lokvani was introduced, was through three means - 1) by directly visiting the DM at his office at the district headquarter; 2) by contacting and placing the issue before a local village council; and 3) by taking the matter to a court in the district. The first mode of access was scarce - it involved waiting in long queues as the DM would only provide two hours in a day to meet citizens; people would have to travel to the district headquarters, which, for some, could be quite far; and for some it would involve going through intermediaries, some of whom could ask for bribes. Another, problem people faced was of not knowing which department to appeal to for their request, a problem that arose from the complex arrangement of functions within the district that is opaque to most. The second mode of access was an easier option for many, as they could more easily reach out to the local village councils. However, this had two drawbacks - the council could not rule on many matters, given its limited jurisdiction; and strong caste and community-based divisions reduced access to those not belonging to the dominant community of the council. Those belonging to non-dominant castes would find it hard to convince the village council constituted of members of the dominant caste in situations involving conflict between members of these caste groups. The third mode of access was the last option, as it involved a long-drawn out and expensive process of litigation.

Through its design, Lokvani supported the first mode of access. Through a kiosk, people could directly send a request to the DM's office and were assured that it would be read and processed. Respondents in the field study were convinced that if they filed a Lokvani complaint or request, it would certainly obtain some response from the authorities. An unusual feature of Lokvani was that it allowed people to file police complaints as well. When citizens visited police stations to file a complaint, it was often the case that the police denied them the opportunity to file or refused to hear them. In such situations, Lokvani enabled the citizens to file a complaint through Lokvani that was then directed by the DM's office to the relevant police station and they were forced to take some action. This further reduced the scarcity of the state.

With Lokvani, voice was significantly enabled. This was reported by many citizens, particularly by those at the margins - women and non-dominant castes. They affirmed that Lokvani did indeed permit them and facilitated them to exercise their voice. Some complained or informed about issues concerning themselves, whereas other informed in a public-spirited manner (about issues that did not concern them directly but were about issues in their neighbourhood). This voice was heard at the DM's office, a ticket was issued to each respondent, and was re-directed to those departments or officials whose concern it was. After this point, there were few guarantees of redress. Many marginal respondents reported that although their voice was heard, it did not lead to any significant response by the state in changing things or of taking actions to improve conditions. This lack of subsequent action

by the state led to a decline in the usage of Lokvani after the initial response and surge in usage (see Table above).

Lokvani enabled many citizens of Sitapur to exit their earlier forms of engagement with the state, and re-establish a new engagement. For example, one citizen from the sub-district of Biswan had filed a complaint about land encroachment with the DM about ten years ago but had received no adequate response. When Lokvani was introduced, he withdrew his earlier complaint and filed again through Lokvani. This case gained much prominence, as many newspapers and broadcast media wrote about his plight and how Lokvani helped him re-file his complaint. There are many such examples of exit from an earlier form of engagement to one that is through Lokvani. That Lokvani ensured a time frame for a response was attractive to the citizens (also in line with van Teeffelen and Baud 2011). However, even in such cases the state was not able to redress the matter adequately. Citizens finally began to exit the engagement with Lokvani too.

5. DISCUSSION

Traditionally, bureaucracy is assigned the role of connecting the formal political sphere and citizenry. Its legitimation lies in the aim of rationalizing society by channelling social relations in formal procedures, based on formal rationality. Ideally, it guarantees equal and universal access to public administration, and downplays the role of tradition, and charismatic figures according to Weber (1920). Our data shows that this is not the case. The analyses of e-governance systems presented above show a much richer picture of the situations than the more traditional and narrower views focused on e-readiness, requirements analysis, impact measurements, and similar reductionist approaches. Therefore, our question: "Cui bono?"

In Hirschman's (1970) view, the role of 'voice' is to enable citizens to convey their views to the state, or to another agency. When the state responds to the issues raised, or is perceived to respond, voice is strengthened and encouraged. If the state does not respond, citizens either exit their engagement, as became apparent in the Lokvani case.

First and most evident aspect is that the state -as seen through e-grievance systems- is 'unevenly scarce' in the sense that those who are willing and able to voice their needs through such systems obtain an over-representation of their own interests. Exit, the other dimension of the relation between citizens and state that we intended to consider, does not appear directly from the data, but its magnitude can be inferred from the huge mismatch between perceived and defined needs on one side, and their 'digital footprint' on the other. Indeed, a large part of low-income citizens do not put their reliance on e-grievance systems and, if they complain, they prefer to do that face to face. A similar situation is reported by Van Teeffelen and Baud (2011, p.180)

5.1. PARTICIPATION OF THE FITTEST

As referred above, Moore and Hartley (2008) highlighted two characteristics of innovation in the public sector:

- a) its responsibility for rights and duties and
- b) its overflow of organizational boundaries.

The cases analyzed here corroborate the relevance of both: the former because of uneven pressures on public organizations, the latter because the dynamics manifested by e-grievances cannot be reduced to interplay of formal organizations.

Our results from mixed qualitative and quantitative methodologies convey a consistent message of a drift in use of such systems from what they were intended to achieve. Although e-grievance systems are designed and legitimized for fostering inclusion, so far our studies show that the consequences in their actual use are quite divergent from expectations.

The results of the analyses conducted show non-universality of the bureaucracy. Referring back to the three dimensions we referred to in our framework, we can see that:

- a) access of population is quite uneven in all cases, although the inequality lines may be marked by different social aspects,
- b) middle class shows its ability to leverage more from those systems by using them to exercise more pressure on service providers,
- c) in spite of the above, e-grievance redressal systems did not prove to be inadequate channels to sustain inclusion. Rather they showed that some groups are more likely to exploit them to their advantage. So, adequacy is not an inherent property of these technological artefacts but of their interaction with context.

In other words, this technology of the state works more for those already ‘in the know’, having both explicit and tacit knowledge, and those included. Thus, rather than universal institutionalization of formal rationality, these technologies tend to foster continuous negotiation between services providers and better-off citizens. We call this *the participation of the fittest*.

Going more into the details, data from the considered localities suggest that there are more complaints about non-basic services from already served areas than from deprived areas. This is particularly relevant in the case the same social group can leverage from voice and exit (by paying for services provided privately for example).

So, also assuming that all complaints are dealt with by public administrations with the same diligence (as all officers maintained), it is manifest that public administration’s behaviours are increasingly affected by social conditions rather than informed by formal rationality and universal service provision. Because of this reason, public service providers drift towards the behaviours of reflexive organizations. This shift revealed empirically has theoretical relevance: bureaucracy is assigned the function of bridging formal political sphere and citizenry by channelling societal issues into administrative protocols. Its normative legitimation lies in rationalizing society by means of formal procedures that treat everyone equally. In spite of this theoretical formalization from the beginning of the Twentieth century, several decades later, different rationalities continue to exist and proliferate. From this stance we discuss the consequences of different forms of knowledge use on public service provision.

With e-grievance, as much as with similar systems, lay people are included in the data production chain. Therefore data inscribe their views, which undergo a tacit legitimation by becoming basis for public administration action. The point here is exactly this tacit legitimation of lay knowledge, which undermines expert universal knowledge, supposedly informing -and legitimizing- bureaucracy activities. So, rather than universal institutionalization of formal rationality, those systems tend to foster continuous negotiation between services providers and better-off citizens. This implies that social rights realization does not seem really facilitated by e-grievance systems. Rather, those systems can be, and actually are, used by better off citizens to fulfil non-basic needs.

As e-grievance redressal systems enhance responsiveness of public administrations, the latter see an increase of their dependency on the actual social environment in which they operate. Those systems

mediate and foster a relatively large-scale negotiation process between citizens and state, therefore providing a good example of new organizational forms comprising public and private actors. Still, it needs to be investigated further if this kind of systems affects issue acknowledgement only, or if it can also influence agenda setting. In any case, the trend is that different rationalities continue to exist and proliferate. Hoogenboom and Ossewaarde (2005) argue that a relation between state and citizens that was legitimized by a 'legal-rational authority' cannot be taken for granted in 'late modernity', which characterized by different and competing rationalities and the rise of reflexive organizations. Our cases go on this same direction.

5.2. HEGEMONY

More and more, especially since the failures of markets in recent years, the state is argued to have a crucial regulatory role to play to prevent the social fabric from drifting towards unequal development. But what kind of state should carry out regulatory action? A universalist one? On what kind of knowledge can and should it rely upon? We do not have final answers to these questions, but we propose a different starting point to searching for answers: beyond analyzing stakeholders; it is important to identify how some groups can achieve a hegemonic position, and how they are likely to maintain it.

The studies presented here share a common shift of focus from principles and expectations to consequences of e-governance systems. The simple question that we iterate is: To whose benefit?

Relying on Baud and Nainan's (2008) notion of 'negotiated spaces' and Van Teeffelen and Baud's (2011) 'invited spaces', we do not see a remarkable increase of opportunities for novel spaces for excluded groups. Rather, our analysis seems to confirm that hegemonic classes are capable of appropriating new technological developments to make them their own political tools. We refer to the term 'hegemony' here because it turned out to be relevant after the analysis and discussion of our data. As the following definition shows, hegemony is well suited to explain how social groups and technologies get entangled, therefore how subaltern groups' needs remain overlooked.

"Hegemony is the form of political leadership based on the skilful mix of force and consent. The consent of those being led is secured through a variety of material, discursive, and institutional apparatuses through which the worldview of the ruling class is rendered universal and common sense. Hegemony refers both to the political and economic practice used to obtain dominance, as well as to the outcome of such a process, or, to the particular historic condition of class supremacy achieved through a balance of coercion and consent." (Nicolini: 2008)

Hegemony moves us beyond a more consolidated stakeholders' analysis by framing power issues in a wider social context characterized by distinct forces and interests. Also, it allows us to note that - although there is no individual and identifiable actor or group taking the lead in shaping these systems- there are clear trends in the systems' drift in use away from design intentions and legitimizing expectations of inclusiveness. Thus, we point to the concrete risk of the participation of the fittest, based on the capacity to exploit local knowledge, that may fragment society and increase inequalities. It is relevant to note that widening gaps can be identified at the city level across cases, but the trend is similar in the North and in the South.

6. FINAL REMARKS

The results of this article offer a crisp critique of the usual assumption that equal development and inclusion follows from e-governance initiatives. The social analysis of e-governance, including

possible policy shifts for contextual constraints and opportunities, show the shortcomings of determinist views on information technology. The relevance of these technologies for public service provision depends on people's technical and organizational capabilities. Indeed, public administrations drift towards reflexive organizations that are more and more influenced by their actual environments, with the concrete drift of becoming particularistic rather than universalistic. So, if artefacts have politics (Winner 1986) and politics have artefacts (Joerges 1999), also people seem to have (technological) artefacts, especially the hegemonic groups.

More on the side of practical relevance, it is important to note that monitoring service provision through citizens' complaints can allow policy makers to differentiate between lack of provision of services (for which people may complain) and lack of access (people are not likely to complain about something not needed). This can be exploited in future application of the Index of Multiple Deprivations (Baud et al., 2008) for urban management.

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