

Public accountability in the internet age

A discussion paper on changing roles for governments and citizens

Paper prepared for Workshop 2

Avoiding, managing, and shifting blame: Accountability processes in modern day government

8th Transatlantic Dialogue (TAD) on Transitions in Governance

June 6th – 9th, 2012

Nijmegen, The Netherlands

Work in progress: please do not cite or quote at this point without prior contact with the authors.

Iris Vanhommerig MSc
Freelance researcher
BestuursKUNDIG
Mathenesserdijk 114c
NL – 3027 AK Rotterdam
iris@bestuurskundig.nl
www.bestuurskundig.nl

Dr. Philip Marcel Karre
Programme director Master Urban Management
Lecturer Public Administration
Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences
P.O. Box 1025
NL - 1000 BA Amsterdam
p.m.karre@hva.nl
karre@hybridorganizations.com
www.hybridorganizations.com
[@philipkarre](https://twitter.com/philipkarre)

Abstract

The internet has created opportunities for instant and cheap communication, including communication between government and citizens. Web 2.0 has turned this communication from a (mostly) one-way stream to an interactive experience. This low cost, accessible medium has levelled the playing field between government and citizen: everyone now has the means to organize and spread a message at their fingertips. As a result, the role of citizens in the public discourse has changed: they have become *monitorial citizens* and *armchair auditors*.

Citizens are harnessing the possibilities of web 2.0 by collecting data and collectively creating their own datasets, on anything from broken street lights to governmental corruption. Hereby, they are not passive consumers of information, but actively hold their governments to account. Under pressure from citizens to use the powers of web 2.0 to full effect, governments have started to bring more data than ever before into the public domain. Citizens can also use this open data to actively hold government to account. Accountability has become a highly dynamic process.

In this discussion paper we describe various forms of dynamic accountability, which in recent years have come to exist alongside the more traditional vertical and horizontal accountability mechanisms. We discuss their possible effects in the light of the central questions of the workshop: how do policy makers respond to the increased accountability pressures they are under? What roles do tactics such as avoiding, managing and shifting blame play in dynamic accountability? Are they still possible, or can the levelling of the playing field due to the emergence of web 2.0 be seen as an effective antidote to such practices?

1. Introduction

We are in the midst of an era of transition in systems of public administration. Several developments force governments to realign themselves with society at large. One such trend is the emergence of the internet, which has created opportunities for instant and cheap communication, including communication between government and citizens (eg., see Karré et al., 2012).

Over the last couple of years governments have tried to react to this development by employing various activities, summarized under headings such as e-government, digital government, online government or connected government (Bellamy and Taylor, 1998; Chadwick and May, 2003; Dunleavy, 2006; Nixon and Koutrakou, 2007). These include the use of the internet for political participation and engagement (eg. online consultation, e-voting) and the use of new technologies in terms of government service provision (eg. making it easier to connect with citizens as customers of public services). Also, e-government is seen as an important tool in promoting accountability and transparency, though whether it really achieves these goals remains a contested question (eg., Pina, Torres & Royo, 2010; Wong & Welch, 2004).

Recently, further technological innovations summarized under the heading of web 2.0 have turned the communication between government and citizen via the internet from a (mostly) one-way stream to an interactive experience. This low cost, accessible medium has levelled the playing field between government and citizen and also effects how the latter holds the former to account: everyone now has the means to organize and spread a message at their fingertips. As a result, the role of citizens in the public discourse has changed: they have become *monitorial citizens* (Schudson, 1998) and, in these times of Wiki Government (Noveck, 2009), *armchair auditors*.

In this essay we focus on how web 2.0 alters the way in which governments are held accountable for their actions with respects to the expenditure of public funds and the exercise of public duties. As accountability is one of the central concepts in our field and vital for the democratic legitimacy of any government (Behn, 2001; Bellamy & Palumbo, 2010; Bovens, 1998; Dubnick & Frederickson, 2011; Mulgan, 2003), the ways in which it is affected by these technological and societal transformations warrants special attention, especially as web 2.0 has the potential to give citizens a much more active role in accountability.

One of the technologies made possible by web 2.0 which effects the accountability relationship between government and citizens is the spread of Open Data (Huijboom & Van den Broek, 2011; Lathrop & Ruma, 2010). Governments amass great amounts of data in their everyday operations, which is used for internal processes such as budgeting, planning and control. Some governments and

international organizations (eg. the World Bank and the OECD) have chosen to release into the public domain a number of datasets that were previously for internal use only. Such Open Data is (ideally) copyright-free, and published in a computer readable format, so it can be reused by anyone, for example by presenting it in new ways (e.g. by drawing graphs or plotting information on maps) or by combining it with other data to reach new insights.

Meanwhile, citizens are also harnessing the possibilities of web 2.0 by collecting data and collectively creating their own datasets, on anything from broken street lights to governmental corruption. Hereby, they are not passive consumers of information, but actively hold their governments to account. As consumers of government services, they demand their money's worth, and complain if they get anything less, just as they would when using the internet to review a holiday destination. Whereas before one individual complaint might not have had much impact, when complaints are aggregated and publicized, they can uncover a structural problem.

In this discussion paper we describe several variations of such dynamic forms of accountability, which in recent years have come to exist alongside the more traditional vertical and horizontal accountability mechanisms. Citizens and government can (potentially) interact now in a more open and equal manner. While there already is quite some literature on e-government, the impact of web 2.0 and social media on accountability practices is a relatively new subject for academic research (though this research is now developing, see Vanhommerig & Van Twist, 2011 and Schillemans, Vanhommerig & Van Twist, 2012).

Our aim with this discussion paper is to provide input for a transatlantic dialogue on the practical impact of web 2.0 based accountability regimes and the questions they pose for academic research. We do this by discussing the possible effects of dynamic accountability regimes we describe in the light of the central questions of the workshop: how do policy makers respond to the increased accountability pressures they are under? What roles do tactics such as avoiding, managing and shifting blame play in dynamic accountability? Are they still possible, or can the levelling of the playing field due to the emergence of web 2.0 be seen as an effective antidote to such practices?

The outline of this paper is as follows: we first focus on the general characteristics of web 2.0 and how it has enabled individuals to act as monitorial citizens. We then describe web 2.0's implications for accountability and illustrate them by various examples of government-initiated and citizen-led dynamic accountability. We conclude with a discussion of these developments in the light of the questions discussed at the workshop.

2. Web 2.0 and the emergence of the monitorial citizen¹

In the past, before the internet age, information technologies were mostly used *within* public organizations to streamline internal processes in order to enable better management and a more efficient delivery of public services. Later, with the advent of the internet, IT was also used to interact with citizens, but mostly only to give them another way to seek information and contact public organizations. In the Netherlands, especially municipalities and executive agencies pioneered the use of websites in this manner, with the ultimate goal to personalize their public service provision (cf. Homburg & Dijkshoorn, 2011). However, this did not (at least not in any fundamental manner) alter the relationship between citizens and the state. Citizens were still mostly (passive) consumers of content provided by government and had only limited possibilities to interact with one another and with the state institutions providing the data. Information in (what has become to be known later as) the web 1.0 world still was more or less a one-way-stream.

With the switch from web 1.0 to web 2.0 this has changed and information has become two-way stream. New technologies facilitate participatory information sharing, interoperability, user-centred design, and collaboration between different users. In practice, individual citizens discuss the quality of public services via social media, interact with government and other public organizations via Twitter and gain access to governmental information on the go, via mobile applications on their smart phones, for example by checking the weather forecast based on information provided by the national meteorological institute.

This development can to some extent be seen as a renunciation (or, to be more positive, further advancement) of representative democracy, as an elaborate system of political representation at a distance, where the exchange of information takes place via formalized and institutionalized channels. The world of web 2.0 is the realm of what Schudson (1998) has termed the *monitorial citizen*, who does not participate continuously in the political process but critically follows it and becomes active when his or her own interests are at stake:

"I propose that the obligation of citizens to know enough to participate intelligently in governmental affairs should be understood as a "monitorial" obligation. Citizens can be "monitorial" rather than informed. A monitorial citizen scans (rather than reads) the informational environment in a way so that he or she may be alerted on a very wide variety of issues for a very wide variety of ends and may be mobilized around those issues in a large variety of ways." (Schudson, 1998)

¹ This section is partly based on Homburg & Karré (2011).

The monitorial citizen may look passive or inactive but isn't. He or she becomes active especially in times of crisis: *"[He / she] engages in environmental surveillance more than information-gathering. Picture parents watching small children at the community pool. They are not gathering information; they are keeping an eye on the scene. They look inactive, but they are poised for action if action is required. The monitorial citizen is not an absentee citizen but watchful, even while he or she is doing something else. Citizenship during a particular political season may be for many people much less intense than in the era of parties, but citizenship now is a year-round and day-long activity as it was only rarely in the past. In this world, monitoring is a plausible model of citizenship."* (ibid.)

Web 2.0 now gives citizens new opportunities to play their monitorial role described by Schudson, with the effect that *"the reality of online deliberation, whether judged in terms of its quantity, its quality, or its impact on political behavior and policy outcomes, is far from removed from the ideals set out in the 1990s"* (Chadwick, 2009:14). In the following paragraphs we will describe these new ways of interaction, by following the definition of Web 2.0 by O'Reilly, who first coined the term in 2003. He defines web 2.0 as *"a platform for political discourse; the collective intelligence emergent from political web use; the importance of data over particular software and hardware applications; perpetual experimentalism in the public domain; the creation of small-scale forms of political engagement through consumerism; the propagation of political content over multiple applications; and rich user experiences on political websites"*. (O'Reilly, 2005 cited in Chadwick & Howard, 2009, p. 4)

Web 2.0 as a platform for political discourse

A first characteristic of web 2.0 is that it enables monitorial citizens (especially in times of crisis when they see their values and interests threatened) to quickly and easily interact with one another, with politicians and government officials, ie. by starting a political discussion on forums, through blogs and on social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook. It also helps them to continuously monitor politics and the world at large, by making it easier for them to scan their informational environment, as politicians, public officials and organizations use the very same media to account for their actions.

Web 2.0 as the collective intelligence emergent from political web use

A second characteristic of web 2.0 is that it enables internet users to collaborate, often in interactive ways of information sharing. Perhaps the best known example for this is the internet encyclopaedia *Wikipedia* (Lih, 2009; Reagle, 2010), whose 21 million articles (in 285 languages) have been written collectively by volunteers all around the world.

A second manifestation of this use of the internet, is the emergence of various forms of *citizen journalism*, in which private individuals play an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing, and disseminating news and information. (Bowman & Willis, 2003; Allan & Thorson, 2009; Rosenbury & St. John, 2010). By doing so citizens can play a role in toppling authoritative regimes (as happened during the recent *Arab Spring*) or in denouncing corrupt practices in the business community (see the role the *Occupy-movement* played in the discussions about the negative societal effects of capitalism). The attempts of citizen journalisms can also cross the line of legality and severely embarrass governments (just think of the international commotion that ensued due to the website *WikiLeaks* publishing top-secret diplomatic cables of the US government).

Web 2.0 as the importance of data over particular software and hardware applications and as perpetual experimentalism in the public domain

In the world of Web 2.0 it has become much easier to generate and disseminate data. Some even proclaim that we live in the age of Big Data: *“There is a lot more data, all the time, growing at 50 percent a year, or more than doubling every two years, estimates IDC, a technology research firm. It’s not just more streams of data, but entirely new ones. For example, there are now countless digital sensors worldwide in industrial equipment, automobiles, electrical meters and shipping crates. They can measure and communicate location, movement, vibration, temperature, humidity, even chemical changes in the air. Link these communicating sensors to computing intelligence and you see the rise of what is called the Internet of Things or the Industrial Internet.”* (“The Age of Big Data”, 2012)

The *Big Data* trend is also fuelled by improved access to information, as in the age of (what US President Obama proclaimed as) *Open Government*, government data on a range of issues has been steadily migrating onto the Web as *Open Data* (Huijboom & Van den Broek, 2011; Lathrop & Ruma, 2010). The hope behind this strategy is, that through processes of crowd sourcing (Surowiecki, 2005; Howe, 2006) this data will be used to generate insights and services government could not have produced on its own, due to financial, technical or other limitations.

The perpetual state of experimentalism in the public domain, which is another characteristic of Web 2.0, can be said to derive from the idea that by making Open Data available to the public and by crowd sourcing policy development and delivery tasks to individual citizens and societal groups. As more or less everyone can participate in the development of new websites, services and apps, those are never finished but a constant work in progress.

Web 2.0 as the creation of small-scale forms of political engagement through consumerism

By addressing the individual not only as a monitory citizen but also as a critical consumer, web 2.0 also gives him or her the opportunity for (small-scale) forms of political engagement. For example, Meijer and Homburg (2008) describe how several environmental regulatory agencies in Denmark, the UK and the Netherlands use various apps to keep citizens informed about the results of their inspections, eg, by making information about food hygiene in shops and restaurants or information about the release of hazardous substances public. These practices of *naming and shaming* enable citizens to come to better decisions were to shop and dine and to avoid companies that do not stick to the rules. Another development is that citizens are enabled through apps on their mobile phones to report malpractice and by doing so play an active part in naming and shaming as regulatory strategies.

Web 2.0 as the propagation of political content over multiple applications and rich user experiences on political websites

The Internet in general and social media especially have developed into vital communication platforms, via which politicians try to get their message across to potential voters. This trend has perhaps become apparent most strikingly during the U.S. primaries and presidential campaign of 2004, when candidates made extensive use of blogs for the first time. Subsequent elections in the United States in 2006 and 2008 showed a drastic increase of political messages on social networking sites like *Facebook* and *MySpace*, but also a flood of reactions from supporters and opponents via the same online media. Also video-sharing websites like *YouTube* have become popular channels for the distribution of political messages, not only for politicians from existing political parties but also for new comers and societal pressure groups. One recent example for this is the impact of the 2012 *Stop Kony*-campaign, which (via a Youtube clip that was watched by over 86 million viewers) campaigned for the arrest of Ugandan indicted war criminal and International Criminal Court fugitive Joseph Kony.

3. Web 2.0 and accountability

3.1 Dynamic accountability

Web 2.0 also generates new possibilities for accountability, by making it a much more dynamic and reciprocal process and helping citizens to play the role of armchair auditors. In traditional public administration, accountability is based on a hierarchical relationship between a principal and an

agent. The former has outsourced the provision of services to the latter, who has to account for whether the principal's goals were met and for which costs. With New Public Management and New Public Governance, this *vertical* form of accountability has been complemented by *horizontal* accountability, as public organizations now also have to give account of their actions to parties with which they do not have a direct hierarchical relationship, such as citizens, the media and other societal stakeholders and partners.

With the advent of web 2.0 a next form of accountability is emerging next to the other two, which can be seen as *dynamic accountability* (cf. Cels, Van Twist, De Jong & Karré, 2010). This type of accountability instruments is not static and fixed in the shape they were initially designed; by releasing accountability data to the public, it can be taken up and released in different shapes and thus become dynamic. In the following sections, we describe how this process takes place in practice. We first look at government-led initiatives, followed by citizen-led accountability.

3.2 Government-led initiatives

3.2.1 Real-time accountability

As described earlier, the internet, and in particular the interactive power that comes with Web 2.0, is a quick and cheap method of contacting large groups of people. Most government organizations have used the internet to communicate to the public via their own websites for years, but more and more organizations now also consider it important to create a presence on sites like Facebook and twitter. Unlike the organization's own site, such social media websites already have large numbers of users and are therefore familiar territory to many citizens. This also enables interaction: citizens can post comments and pose questions.

Many governmental organisations see social media and their own (web 2.0 enabled) websites as an ideal tool to show the public what they do, and thus showcase how crucial and indispensable their role is. For example, many police forces use twitter. The Greater Manchester police even organised a twitter day in 2010 ("Greater Manchester Police - crime prevention, safety, police jobs," 2010, "Police in 24-hour Twitter project," 2010) during which they tweeted about every single call out, however trivial, for a whole day. This initiative came at a time when the British government deliberated over large cuts, including to the police budget. The Manchester Police's twitter day gave the police force an opportunity to demonstrate all that is part of a day's police work, beyond measurable performance, in the hope of starting a debate about the limitations of traditional performance management systems, which only focus on measurable outputs which have been defined ex ante.

Although citizens have the opportunity to respond, this type of communication is still a mostly one-way stream of information. There is some interaction, but it does not change the original data stream. However, web 2.0 does offer the tools to create something new from accountability data, as in the case of open data.

3.2.2. Synergy through interaction

When in 1980 the fictional Jim Hacker became the new Minister of Administrative Affairs in the legendary British sitcom *Yes Minister*, his first goal was to improve transparency and fulfil the promises made in his election manifesto *Open Government* (also the title of this first episode). As usual for a comedy show, nothing much comes of these plans. Sir Arnold, the Cabinet Secretary, puts it smartly as, “[Open Government] is a contradiction in terms: you can be open—or you can have government”, and adds that, “If people don’t know what you’re doing, they don’t know what you’re doing wrong” (“Open Government,” 1980).

When 29 years later, Barack Obama was sworn in as president of the United States, he made a similar promise to Jim Hacker’s. Obama’s first act in office was to issue an executive order entitled *Open Government*, which has been more successful than Hacker’s plans. Again, the goal was to account for government actions and spending in a more transparent way. The first large scale project as part of *Open Government* was Recovery.gov, a website that details how billions of dollars worth of economic stimulus money is spent (Cels et al., 2010).

The data on Recovery.gov is published in a way that is machine readable, and can therefore be reused by anyone with basic computer skills. In this, Recovery.gov is part of a larger trend of Open Data, which has governments and other organisations releasing data that before may have been for internal use only, and publishing these data sets online in a way they can be reused. Governments of English-speaking countries have been at the forefront of this trend, according to some because that is also where most Open Data advocates are from (“Data and transparency,” 2010). Influential transparency activists the Sunlight Foundation in their name refer to a famous remark of Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis: “sunlight is the best disinfectant”, which in US politics has become a popular phrase to link transparency and fighting mismanagement and corruption (Brandeis, 2009; Sunlight Foundation, n.d.).

The US government publishes public data streams on data.gov, which has inspired similar websites in the UK (data.gov.uk, since November 2010), Canada (data.gov.ca, since March 2011), Australia (data.gov.au, since March 2011), and a large number lower authorities. The Dutch government launched its portal, data.overheid.nl, in September 2011, but in comparison to the aforementioned sites, the

collection of data sets is still rather limited (though growing), poorly organized and includes few data that were not available to the public before. In contrast, the UK Government's site includes monthly records of all expenditure over £ 25,000, and lists the complete details of all government contracts that represent a value of that sum or more. It also lists the earnings of top officials, extensive (performance) data relating to individual schools—including the number of pupils who receive free school lunches (ie, children from low income families), and the pupils' native language (ie, ethnic background)— and hospitals (ranging from detailed expenditures, to number of deaths and the quality of meals and buildings), and crime statistics from police departments (such as the number of ASBOs—Anti-Social Behaviour Orders, which ban troublemakers from certain areas).

Each government sits on a treasure trove of information that, until recently, was for internal government use only. Releasing some of this data can create innovative applications and surprising new insights. By releasing data in a fixed, machine readable format, anyone can reuse the data, either on its own or combined with other data streams. These data streams can form the basis of new websites and apps, which use government data in novel ways ("Apps," 2011). For now, programmers have focussed on the more practical data sets. For example, there is a smartphone app for Londoners to show how many municipal rental are available at each stand, and a cleverly named ASBORometer app (Jeff Gilfelt, 2010) that shows the density of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) on a map, which can be seen as a measure for how safe and social a neighbourhood is. Thanks to the data from the Dutch municipality of Rotterdam, an app was developed to show which bridges are open or are due to open, so drivers can choose an alternative route ("Bridgie | Rotterdam Open Data," 2011).

By publishing public accountability data in this way, innovative new applications can be created. One example of this is the Sunlight Foundation's Clearspending website, which analyses inhowfar the US federal government meets its own promises on consistency, completeness and timeliness of spending data on USASpending.gov by checking it against other government data sources (Sunlight Foundation, 2012). Another example is Subsidyscope.org, an initiative of the Pew Charitable Trusts, an NGO aimed at improving public policy, informing the public and stimulating civic life (Pew Charitable Trusts, 2012), which compiles government data to create an overview of federal subsidies per economic sector, and show the cost of these subsidies for average households.

3.3 Citizen-led accountability

Web 2.0 has given ordinary citizens the chance to unite, and together hold the government to account. Thanks to the internet in general, but specifically social media, citizens can share and

aggregate information more cheaply and easily than ever before. Before long, such information and communication powers were the exclusive domain of large and wealthy organizations (Howe, 2006, 2008). At the same time citizens have become more vocal and put higher demands on government (illustrated by the names of some of the website set up to aid armchair auditors, eg. *TheyWorkForYou.com* in Britain). Any dissatisfaction is easily shared with the world via social media.

This has meant that government and the traditional media are no longer in sole control of its message. Vietnam is often referred to as the first televised war, which had a profound impact on the support back home. The current war on terror, fought out in Iraq and Afghanistan, is the first war posted directly on social media by the soldiers themselves. On sites like YouTube, thoroughly researched reports from journalists bound by their professional ethics appear on equal footing with reports from citizen journalists, but also those of pranksters and hoaxers. For viewers, it's often difficult to assess the credibility or relative weight of reports, to distinguish fact from fiction, and the bigger picture from incidents. Thus governments find it increasingly difficult to control the message spread about their activities, as citizen journalists are generally not subject to editorial scrutiny and cannot be held to journalistic standards when they publish a video that isn't quite what it appears to be, or post a story that twists the truth.

Besides the well-known social media sites such as YouTube, Facebook and twitter, information is also uploaded and shared on sites especially created for citizens to report on their government's performance. At the municipality of Rotterdam's Cityportal ("cityportal rotterdam," 2010), citizens can report complains such as broken street lights or litter. Rather than this being a closed form of communication between the individual citizen and the municipal government, everyone can see these complaints. Because the complaints are plotted on a map, fellow citizens can quickly see what's going on in his or her own neighbourhood — and whether an issue is incidental or endemic. For each complaint there is information on when it was first reported, whether or not something was done, and if not, what is causing the delay. Hence the site is not just useful for the citizens of Rotterdam who want to see their street lights fixed, but also for the municipal government itself, as it provides it with an opportunity to demonstrate to citizens all the issues it has fixed that otherwise would often go unnoticed.

The British site FixMyStreet.com and its Dutch version VerbeterDeBuurt.nl, have just about the same functionality as the Rotterdam Cityportal, but with an important twist: these are not government run sites where citizens can lodge complaints, but private initiatives. These sites collect ideas and complaints from citizens, and pass these on to local governments. Also these sites offer local governments an opportunity to advertise to their citizens just how much they get done. At the same

time, these sites try to create peer pressure by offering comparisons between local governments on things like the speed with which complaints are dealt with and the number of unanswered complaints.

Vocal citizens use crowd sourcing for more than just complaints about relatively mundane issues such as broken street lights. The open source application Ushahidi (“Ushahidi: Open Source Crowdsourcing Tools,” 2010), developed by Kenian lawyer and blogger Ory Okolloh (Okolloh, 2009; Schumpeter, 2010) to catalogue incidents relating to the chaotic Kenian elections of 2007, can be used to report all sorts of (crisis) situations. Within half an hour, a website can be created where eye witnesses can report what’s happening on the ground via text message or email. These reports are plotted on a map in real time, so it becomes instantly clear where problem areas lie. This has proven to be especially useful in areas where traditional media face barriers, whether that is because of government failure, dangerous situations or simply because incidents occur in remote, inaccessible areas. The system can be used to catalogue and map all sorts of issues, from food shortages to voter intimidation. Besides the violent Kenian elections of 2007, during the past few years Ushahidi has been used in during the widespread floods in Australia and Pakistan, earthquakes in Japan, Haiti and Chilli, and elections in India and Sudan (Meier, 2009; Meier & Brodock, 2008; Okolloh, 2009; Schumpeter, 2010; “Ushahidi: Open Source Crowdsourcing Tools,” 2010).

Like FixMyStreet.com, Ushahidi can be used to aggregate complains and lodge these with the responsible governmental organisation, but also to hold a failing government to account and run a naming and shaming campaign to force change. Another website with similar goals is I Paid A Bribe (IPAB), an Indian anti-corruption website by Janaagraha (“people power”), which aims to expose the price of corruption (Janaagraha, 2011; Mukti Jain Campion, 2011; The World Bank, 2011). Everyone in India can report when they have had to pay a bribe for simple things like reporting the birth of a child or applying for a passport or visa. Besides filing an ‘I paid a bribe’ report, it’s also possible to post ‘I didn’t pay a bribe’ stories, about the situations that ensued as a result of refusing to pay a bribe. Finally, there’s the ‘I didn’t have to pay a bribe’ category, to give voice to the pleasant surprise of meeting an incorrupt official.

Although the amounts involved with these bribes are—by Western standards—relatively modest, ranging from a few hundred to a few thousand rupees (a thousand rupees equals about 15 euros or 20 US dollars), in less than two years the site has gathered over 16,000 reports totalling a sum of 450 million rupees. Similar websites have been set up in Uganda, Kenya, Pakistan, Bangladesh and China (“Chinese copy Janaagraha model,” 2011).

4. Conclusions and discussion

In the 50s and 60s, television radically changed the way governments communicated with their citizens. The internet is having a similar game-changing impact today. Technological innovations summarized as Web 2.0 facilitate participatory information sharing, interoperability, user-centred design, and collaboration between different users. By doing so, web 2.0 enables citizens to play a monitorial role in our democracy and to act as armchair auditors, that hold government to account online. Just as they would when using the internet to review a holiday destination, citizens as consumers of government services demand their money's worth, and complain if they get anything less. They also use the internet to act as monitorial citizens, to denounce corrupt practices and organize communal protest and action. Because of the possibilities that Web 2.0 gives, accountability has become a dynamic activity, in which both government and citizens collect, shape and interpret data.

Governments are thus losing sole control of that data. But at the same time, they also willingly give up control by publishing data sets that were previously for internal use only as Open Data. The exact motivations behind such moves are unclear and require (and deserve!) further research. Transparency is a much used buzzword, and although there is no reason to doubt political leaders' admirable attempts to create greater levels of transparency, the cynics (or as they call themselves: *realists*) amongst us cannot help but wonder if there are perhaps also ulterior motives.

Providing a counterbalance to the flood of incident reports from citizens is one possible motive. Generally speaking, governments are still the sole source of structured, nationwide data, whereas data collected by citizens is still mostly incidental. Being able to provide an overall (positive) view against scattered (negative) incident reporting can still provide a powerful picture (eg, 'overall, it isn't all as bad as that').

Much of this data is produced by lower levels of government: eg, by individual schools and hospitals rather than education or health ministries at the national level. Publishing detailed performance data can therefore also be seen as an attempt to shift blame from the central policy making organizations to the decentralized frontline of public service providers. By being able to pinpoint failing schools, the blame is transferred from those responsible for education in general, to a specific handful of schools. After all, the same data set clearly shows that other schools subject to the same education policy perform fine, so the fault can't be in the policy, but must lie with those poorly performing schools. National politicians look good for being transparent, all the while costing them very little in political

capital: the price is paid at the lower level. No wonder then that this type of transparency has become increasingly popular.

For us as students of public administration, the developments described in this paper pose some interesting questions, which warrant further research (and will hopefully stimulate a transatlantic dialogue):

- Do web 2.0 and the emergence of armchair auditors fundamentally alter the accountability relationship between government and citizens or is it a passing fad?
- Is there a danger of a digital divide, where accountability information via the internet is mostly consumed by the digerati?
- Which changes in culture and in the machinery of government are needed to accommodate new accountability regimes and instruments?
- What are transparency's and openness's dark sides and how to deal with them?
- What does it mean for the status of civil servants as experts that more or less everyone can collect and interpret data now?
- What to think in this context of Chadwick's statement (2009) that the impact of new technologies on public administration tends to be overestimated in the short and to be underestimated in the long term?

Bibliography

Allan, S. & Thorson, E. (eds.) (2009). *Citizen Journalism. Global Perspectives*. New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing.

Apps. (2011). *data.gov.uk*. Retrieved June 17, 2011, from <http://data.gov.uk/apps>

Behn, R. D. (2001). *Rethinking democratic accountability*. Brookings Institution Press.

Bellamy and Taylor (1998). *Governing in the Information Age*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Bellamy, R., & Palumbo, A. (2010). *Political Accountability*. Ashgate.

Bovens, M. (1998). *The Quest for Responsibility: Accountability and Citizenship in Complex Organisations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bowman, S. & Willis, C. (2003). *We Media. How Audiences are Shaping the Future of News and Information*. Reston, VA: The Media Center at the American Press Institute.

Brandeis, D. L. (2009). *Other people's money: and how the bankers use it*. Martino Pub.

Bridgie | Rotterdam Open Data. (2011, January 10). *Rotterdam Open Data*. Retrieved June 17, 2011, from <http://www.rotterdamopendata.org/2011/01/bridgie/>

- Cels, S., van Twist, M., de Jong, J., & Karré, P. M. (2010). Recovery.Gov: een experiment in dynamische verantwoording. *Bestuurskunde*, 19(2010-1), 38-48.
- Chadwick, A. and C. May (2003). Interaction Between States and Citizens in the Age of the Internet: e-government in the US, Britain and EU. *Governance*, 16(2), 271-300.
- Chadwick, A. (2009). Web 2.0: New Challenges for the Study of E-Democracy in an Era of Informational Excuberance. *I/S: A Journal of Law and Policy for the Information Society*. 5(1). Pp. 9-42.
- Chadwick, A. & Howard, P.N. (Eds.) (2009). *Routledge Handbook of Internet Politics*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Chinese copy Janaagraha model. (2011, July 14). *The Economic Times / Times of India*. Bangalore. Retrieved from <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics/nation/chinese-copy-janaagraha-model/articleshow/8847257.cms>
- cityportal rotterdam. (2010). *Cityportal Rotterdam: Meldingen Op Kaart*. Retrieved October 31, 2010, from <http://appl.gw.rotterdam.nl/msb.meldingenformulier/MeldingenOpKaart.aspx>
- Data and transparency: Of governments and geeks. (2010, February 4). *The Economist*. Retrieved from <http://www.economist.com/node/15469415>
- Dubnick, M.J. & Frederickson, H.G. (eds.) (2011). *Accountable Governance. Problems and Promises*. Armonk NY: M.E. Sharpe.
- Dunleavy, P. (2006). *Digital era governance: IT corporations, the state, and E-government*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Greater Manchester Police - crime prevention, safety, police jobs. (2010). Retrieved October 31, 2010, from <http://www.gmp.police.uk/>
- Homburg, V.M.F. & Dijkshoorn, A.J.D. (2011). Diffusion of Personalized E-Government Services Among Dutch Municipalities: An Empirical Investigation and Explanation. *International Journal of Electronic Government Research*, 7(3), 21-37.
- Homburg, V.M.F. & Karré, P.M. (2011). De bestuurlijke gevolgen van web 2.0. *Bestuurskunde*, 20(3), 6-13.
- Howe, J. (2006). The rise of crowdsourcing. *Wired magazine*, 14(6), 1-4.
- Howe, J. (2008). *Crowdsourcing: why the power of the crowd is driving the future of business* (1st ed.). New York: Crown Business.
- Huijboom, N. & Broek, T. Van den (2011). Open data: an international comparison of strategies. *European Journal of ePractice*, 12(March/April), 1-13.
- Janaagraha. (2011). *I PAID A BRIBE*. Retrieved June 16, 2011, from <http://www.ipaidabribe.com/>
- Jeff Gilfelt. (2010, February 7). *Guest Post: How I built ASBORometer*. *data.gov.uk*. Retrieved June 17, 2011, from <http://data.gov.uk/blog/guest-post-how-i-built-asborometer-jeff-gilfelt>
- Karré, P.M., Steen, M. van der & Twist, M.J.W. van (2011): 'Steering societal resilience - An empirical exploration of trends and challenges in government-citizen collaboration', in Groeneveld, S. & S. van

der Walle (eds.): *New steering concepts in public management* (pp. 57-70), Research in Public Policy Analysis and Management series, vol. 21, Emerald, Bingley.

Lathrop, D. & Ruma, L. (2010). *Open Government. Collaboration, Transparency and Participation in Practice*. Sebastopol, CA.: O'Reilly Media.

Lih, A. (2009). *The Wikipedia revolution: how a bunch of nobodies created the world's greatest encyclopedia*. New York NY.: Hyperion.

Meier, P. P. (2009). *Ushahidi: From Croud sourcing to Crowdfeeding*. Blog in: iRevolution, March.

Meier, P. P., & Brodock, K. (2008). *Crisis Mapping Kenya's Election Violence: Comparing Mainstream News, Citizen Journalism and Ushahidi*. Harvard Humanitarian Initiative.

Mukti Jain Campion. (2011, June 5). *Bribery in India: A website for whistleblowers*. BBC News. Retrieved June 6, 2011, from <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-13616123>

Mulgan, R. G. (2003). *Holding power to account: accountability in modern democracies*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Nixon, P & Koutrakou, V. (eds) (2007). *E-Government in Europe*. London: Routledge.

Noveck, B.S. (2009). *Wiki Government. Hoe Technology Can Make Government Better, Democracy Stronger and Citizens More Powerful*. Washington DC.: Brookings Institution.

Okolloh, O. (2009). *Ushahidi, or 'testimony': Web 2.0 tools for crowdsourcing crisis information*. Participatory Learning and Action, 59(1), 65-70.

Open Government. (1980, February 25). *Yes, Minister*. BBC.

Pew Charitable Trusts (2012). *Subsidyscope*. Retrieved May 26, 2012, from <http://subsidyscope.org/>.

Pina, V., Torres, L. & Royo, S. (2010). Is e-Government leading to more accountable and transparent local government? An overall view. *Financial Accountability & Management*, 26(1), 3-20.

Police in 24-hour Twitter project. (2010, October 15). BBC. Retrieved from <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-manchester-11537806>

Reage, J.M. (2010). *Good Faith Collaboration: The Culture of Wikipedia*. Cambridge MA.: MIT Press.

Rosenberry, J. & St. John III, Burton (eds.) (2009). *Public Journalism 2.0: The Promise and Reality of a Citizen-engaged Press*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Schillemans, T., Vanhommerig, I., & van Twist, M. (2012). Innovations in Accountability. Learning through Interactive, Dynamic and Citizen-Initiated Forms of Accountability. *Public Performance Management Review*, accepted for publication.

Schudson, M. (1998). *Changing Concepts of Democracy*. Retrieved from <http://web.mit.edu/comm-forum/papers/schudson.html>

Schumpeter. (2010, September 23). Schumpeter: The wiki way. *The Economist*. Retrieved from <http://www.economist.com/node/17091709>

Sunlight Foundation. (2009, May 26). *Brandeis And The History Of Transparency*. Retrieved June 19, 2011, from <http://sunlightfoundation.com/blog/2009/05/26/brandeis-and-the-history-of-transparency/>

Sunlight Foundation (2012). *Clearspending*. Retrieved May 26, 2012, from <http://sunlightfoundation.com/clearspending>.

The Age of Big Data (2012, February 11). *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/12/sunday-review/big-datas-impact-in-the-world.html>.

The World Bank. (2011, January 12). *I Paid A Bribe | Exploring the interactions among public opinion, governance, and the public sphere. Communication for Governance & Accountability Program (CommGAP)*. Retrieved June 16, 2011, from <http://blogs.worldbank.org/publicsphere/i-paid-bribe>

Ushahidi: Open Source Crowdsourcing Tools. (2010). . Retrieved October 31, 2010, from <http://www.usahidi.com/>

Vanhommerig, I., & van Twist, M. (2011). *Innovation in accountability: Content, form and symbolism of new accountability arrangements. Workshop Researching Accountability*. Presented at the Public Matters, Utrecht University School of Governance.

Wong, W. & Welch, E. (2004). Does E-Government Promote Accountability? A Comparative Analysis of Website Openness and Government Accountability. *Governance*, 17(2), 275-297.