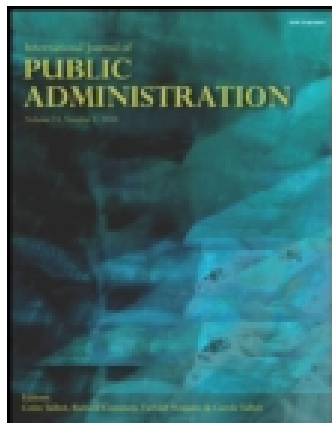


This article was downloaded by: [National Chengchi University]

On: 11 November 2014, At: 21:37

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



International Journal of Public Administration

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/lpad20>

The Management of Citizen Participation in Taiwan: A Case Study of Taipei City Government's Citizen Complaints System

Assistant Professor Don-yun Chen^a, Tong-yi Huang^a & Naiyi Hsaio^a

^a Department of Public Policy and Management, Shih Hsin University, Lane 17 Mu-Cha Road, Taipei, 116, Taiwan, ROC

Published online: 11 Dec 2006.

To cite this article: Assistant Professor Don-yun Chen, Tong-yi Huang & Naiyi Hsaio (2003) The Management of Citizen Participation in Taiwan: A Case Study of Taipei City Government's Citizen Complaints System, International Journal of Public Administration, 26:5, 525-547, DOI: [10.1081/PAD-120019234](https://doi.org/10.1081/PAD-120019234)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1081/PAD-120019234>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
Vol. 26, No. 5, pp. 525–547, 2003

The Management of Citizen Participation in Taiwan: A Case Study of Taipei City Government's Citizen Complaints System

Don-yun Chen,* Tong-yi Huang, and Naiyi Hsaio

Department of Public Policy and Management, Shih Hsin University,
Taipei, Taiwan, ROC

ABSTRACT

Citizen participation is one of the core values of democracy. Democratization means an increase in citizen participation in public affairs. However, the issue of democratization is rarely studied in the field of public administration. In this article, we use the Taipei City Government (TCG) Citizen Complaints System to illustrate some tensions relating to citizen participation in a newly democratizing country. We interviewed the TCG officials to piece together the puzzle of how the citizen complaints system works. Furthermore, we conducted a survey on how each channel and media is used by citizens to file their complaints. Then, we focused on the development of the Taipei City Mayor's e-mail box to see how the tension between participation and cost is handled by utilizing newly emerging information technology. We then evaluate these developments

*Correspondence: Don-yun Chen, Assistant Professor, Department of Public Policy and Management, Shih Hsin University, Lane 17 Mu-Cha Road, Taipei, Taiwan 116, ROC; Fax: +886 2 22363325.



in terms of publicity, accessibility, and accountability suggested by Senevirante and Cracknell (Seneviratne, M.; Cracknell, S. Consumer complaints in public sector services. *Public Admin.* **1988**, *66*, 181–193). Accordingly, we propose suggestions for improvement from these three aspects for TCG and other governments as well to establish a citizen complaints system that substantiates democracy.

Key Words: Participation; Responsiveness; Citizen Complaints System; Taipei City Government (TCG).

INTRODUCTION

Citizen participation is one of the core values of democracy. However, critics of democratic way of governing can easily raise problems concerning its practical aspect.^[2] For one part, participation is *costly* to the individual citizen as well as the government.^[3] As a result, to require citizen participation in the governing process can mean that the government is unable to act swiftly and decisively. This is because efficiency is one of the most important aspects of good governance from a popular viewpoint. Simple addition can tell us that the decision cost for a group can increase drastically as the group size increases.^[4] Even the recently popular arguments for “deliberative democracy” or “reinventing government” to strengthen democratic governance cannot ignore this practical problem.^[5] This undeniable problem creates a tension between the public’s right to participate and the government official’s role to act efficiently in the process of democratization.^[6]

For example, for the past decade, citizen participation in meaningful elections on Taiwan (Republic of China, R.O.C.) has created a truly democratic state on the small island.^[7] However, because of the rapid change, the government of Taiwan has not been able to catch up with the growing need of its citizenry to participate in the public policy process. Under increasing budgetary limitations in recent years and with increasing popular demands on quality service from the government, the bureaucrats are asked to have a customer-oriented mentality.^[8] Elected executives throughout the island have invested a lot of efforts to establish various citizen complaint procedures to ensure “customers’ satisfaction” with governmental services. As a result, the public sector on Taiwan after the democratic transition is not purely a public goods production factory anymore, but a service industry whose main goal is to figure out ways to gain customer satisfaction in order to keep their elected superior in power.

From a resource allocation viewpoint, without reliving bureaucrats’ daily operations in producing public goods, they are burdened with replying to



citizens' complaints and inquiries in a genial and efficient manner. This burden becomes a managerial problem with calculating costs and benefits of managing increased participation.^[9] As a result, government agencies are forced to find out more efficient ways to handle these time-consuming affairs.

In this article, we use the Taipei City Government (TCG) as an example to illustrate the described managerial problem in a newly democratizing country. We especially focus on the development of the Citizen Complaints System to see how this problem is handled by using traditional means as well as newly emerged information technology. Finally, we evaluate these developments by a set of criteria established by Senevirante and Cracknell and suggest reform measures for the system in the future.^[10]

THE DILEMMA OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION: A MANAGERIAL PROBLEM WITH POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS

Political scientist Robert A. Dahl defined the term "democracy" as "to be responsive to the preference of its citizens."^[11] As long as one of the major differences between democratic and non-democratic regimes is governmental responsiveness to citizen's preference, democratization will be defined as a process where a ruling system is transforming from a non-responsive to a responsive one. Generally, there are two ways to ensure governmental responsiveness to citizen in a democratic polity—passive and active ways.

Citizen Participation: Passive and Active Role in a Democratic Polity

The first way is a passive one. That is, in every democratic regime there exists a system of periodic elections intended to remove unpopular politicians. Usually, this way of participation is defined as a group of "legal acts by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions that they take."^[12] Political scientists have long been treating this method as the major channel of citizen participation.

The second way is an active one whose core is to involve the citizen in the planning, implementing, and monitoring of governmental activities.^[13] Experts from the field of public administration have long been proposing a "participatory state" or a "deliberative planning procedure" as major methods to reinvent the government's efforts of running the constitution.^[14] However,



the efforts of involving the public in the policy process are not always effective.^[15] Some have suggested that the reason behind this failure in citizen participation is the general decline of public trust or social capital in western governments.^[16] Others have questioned the lack of a concept of “citizenship” in modern public administration.^[17] King, Feltey, and Susel use interviews and focus-group discussions and find that a more dynamic role-playing relationship between administrators and citizens is needed to improve the general ineffectiveness of citizen participation.^[18]

The Costs of Participation: The Problem of “Sovereign Transactions”

One way of thinking about citizen participation is through the lens of transaction cost economics.^[19] From this viewpoint, the persuasion, learning, negotiation, decision-making or deliberative activities in the public arena can be seen as the “sovereign transactions” parallel to market transactions in the economic arena.^[20] The costs of both kinds of transactions do not equal to zero. As a result, under the principle of resources scarcity, to encourage citizen participation is by nature to increase individual as well as collective costs of running the political system. Sometimes, this encouragement might have the opposite effect and cause instability in the political system. This is one of the reasons why some political scientists, such as Berelson, think that the efficiency and stability of a political system can only be reached by a small group of able and willing elites and the majority of citizen’s non-involvement for most of the time.^[21]

Through this viewpoint, any normative proposal to encourage citizen participation should be balanced with efficient accounts of ways to minimize sovereign transactions. Otherwise, the proposal will be seen as unrealistic.^[22] From a public manager’s perspective, although promoting citizen participation is normatively desirable and politically feasible, public managers still have to take the “costs” factor into account in order to evaluate the organizational feasibility of related reform efforts to encourage citizen participation. This evaluation can be best expressed in Harlan Cleveland’s words—“how do you get everybody in on the act and still get some action?”^[23]

In this paper, we select Taipei City Government’s efforts to handle citizen complaints as an example to show public managers’ efforts to deal with increasing citizen participation in a democratizing polity. As we will see, the recurrent theme in these efforts is to create new ways to reduce “sovereign transactions” in order to cope with the increasing citizen participation after democratization in Taiwan.^[24]



DEMOCRATIZATION, PARTICIPATION, AND TAIPEI CITY GOVERNMENT'S CITIZEN COMPLAINTS SYSTEM

The 1980s was a crucial period in Taiwan's democratization. As the authoritarian state was moving from a "hard" to "soft" one,^[25] the quasi-Leninist regime dominated by the ruling Nationalist Party (Kuomintang; KMT) began to launch reform measures to overcome challenges from various external and domestic sources.^[26] In 1986, after former president Chiang Ching-kuo announced his intention to lift 37-year-old emergency decrees adopted after the KMT fled from the Mainland China in the late 1940s, Taiwan was on a one-way track of democratization whose central idea was for citizen participation in the policy making process. Although scholars still argue about the motivation behind Chiang's decision to reform,^[27] his message to open up the political arena to the public was clear. The mentioned news report had quoted a foreign observer saying that:^[28]

Chiang wants in his final years in office to bequeath some kind of stable, lasting system, and has concluded that the only way he can do this is to invite broader participation in the political process.

During the same period of time, the rise of various social movements had begun to form a participatory civil society on Taiwan. As a local scholar observed and said that:^[29]

A new kind of political culture is gradually appearing in Taiwan—a participatory one—emerging, slowing but surely, from the mobilization of its civil society in the 1980s. Taiwan's civil society is no longer a passive recipient of the state's domination.

Indeed, "the road to the openness" is the key phrase to describe Taiwan in the 1980s. During and after the democratic transition, people in Taiwan are more and more getting used to not only participate in local and nation-wide elections, but also organize and involve in community-building and other public policy related activities to express their preferences to the government. This change has created an environment for public managers to have a chance as well as a pressure to establish a democratic relationship with the general public on Taiwan. For many observers of Taiwan's fate in the process of democratic consolidation, building a meaningful and collaborative relationship with the revived civil society is the key to have a quality democratic system in the future.^[30] The road to the openness is a road of no return. The best response that government can take is to figure out ways to handle citizen



participation more effectively. To illustrate one example of the response, we introduce and review the TCGs Citizen Complaints System in the remaining of this article.^[31]

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE TAIPEI CITY GOVERNMENT'S CITIZEN COMPLAINTS SYSTEM

Taipei is the capital city of Taiwan. It is also the most modernized city and has been the political and economic center of the small island country since the late 1940s. Most importantly, the TCG always pioneers in various government reform measures, which includes efforts to redesign procedures to facilitate citizen participation.

Long before the authoritarian regime started to democratize in the late 1980s, the central government of Taiwan and the TCG has set up different channels for citizens to appeal. The TCG also set up the Commission of Administrative Appeals to review citizens' petitions and appeals when they are wronged by certain measures or actions of the TCG. Although the government expanded channels for citizen complaints, citizens in general were not satisfied with the system.^[32]

The TCG citizen complaints system, just as the complaint system of other government agencies, served as a democratic facade without much substantive meaning for years until 1994, when reform-minded Mayor Chen took office. Being the first popularly elected mayor after the Kuomintang's 27 years long dominance, Mayor Chen took two important steps to strengthen the TCGs responsiveness and effectiveness in handling citizens' complaints.

First, in 1994, shortly after Chen's electoral victory, he launched a program called the "Meeting with Citizens." Every Wednesday, Mayor Chen met with citizens to listen to their complaints or suggestions on specific city policies or administrative issues. The Mayor tried to solve the citizens' problems in the meetings. The issues that couldn't be solved by the mayor were left to relevant agencies of the TCP and were tracked down by the TCGs Commission of Research, Development, and Evaluation. This system is still under operation but with a little twist.

Aside from riding on the tides of democratization and populism, Mayor Chen also took good advantage of new technology to facilitate the communication between the TCG and its citizens. On October 12, 1995, Mayor Chen launched an electronic mailbox called the "A-Bian Mailbox."^[33] It was the very first citizen-participation initiative in Taiwan's government agencies. The A-Bian Mailbox was first implemented in text-mode in an electronic Bulletin Board System (BBS), and was revised to a web-based edition in March 24, 1998. In November 2001, the Mayor's Box was still in operation and receiving



Management of Citizen Participation in Taiwan

531

more and more letters. Most bureau chiefs/deputy directors also have set up their own e-mail boxes for citizens to file complaints.

Before Mayor Chen stepped down in 1998, the TCG provided varieties of channels for citizens to communicate with its agencies, as will be illustrated in next section. No matter how convenient and easily accessible the system was, however, it could have been drastically altered or even abolished by another elected mayor because the system was set up according to guidelines rather than as enacted laws. Only in 1999, did the Legislative Yuan pass the Administrative Procedure Act that obligates government agencies to make operational rules to handle citizen complaints and dispatch officials to deal with them timely and properly.^[34] By this law, citizens' rights to present their appeals to the government are better protected. Government agencies are now required by law to provide citizens' complaints channels and to manage them. Inappropriate management of citizens' complaints would now be subject to more severe legal penalties. This was another step toward a more responsive government.

In sum, the TCGs citizen complaints mechanism has become more complete as a result of democratization on Taiwan. Under authoritarianism, the TCG provided channels for citizens to express complaints, but the government generally responded passively. The first party turnover involved initiatives to communicate more proactively with citizens and to be more responsive. Recently, citizens' rights to complain on governmental actions or inactions are better protected by the passage of the Administrative Procedure Act in 1999.

THE OPERATION OF THE CURRENT CITIZEN COMPLAINTS SYSTEM

Citizen Complaints Procedures

As Fig. 1 illustrates, there are a variety of ways citizens can reach the city government. For those who know the specific bureau/department that may be related to their grievance, direct contact will be made with these units or even specific officials. Citizens can make telephone calls, send letters, faxes, or e-mails to the bureau/department or the bureau chief/deputy director. They can also make their appeals in person or make appointments with the bureau chief/deputy director through other procedures.

Complainants may write letters to newspaper/magazine editors, who would forward the letter to the TCG, in addition to publishing these letters. Complainants also can reach the TCG through several channels that function as a "one stop" service, if they have no idea of which bureau/department to contact. The least costly way among these channels is probably phone calls

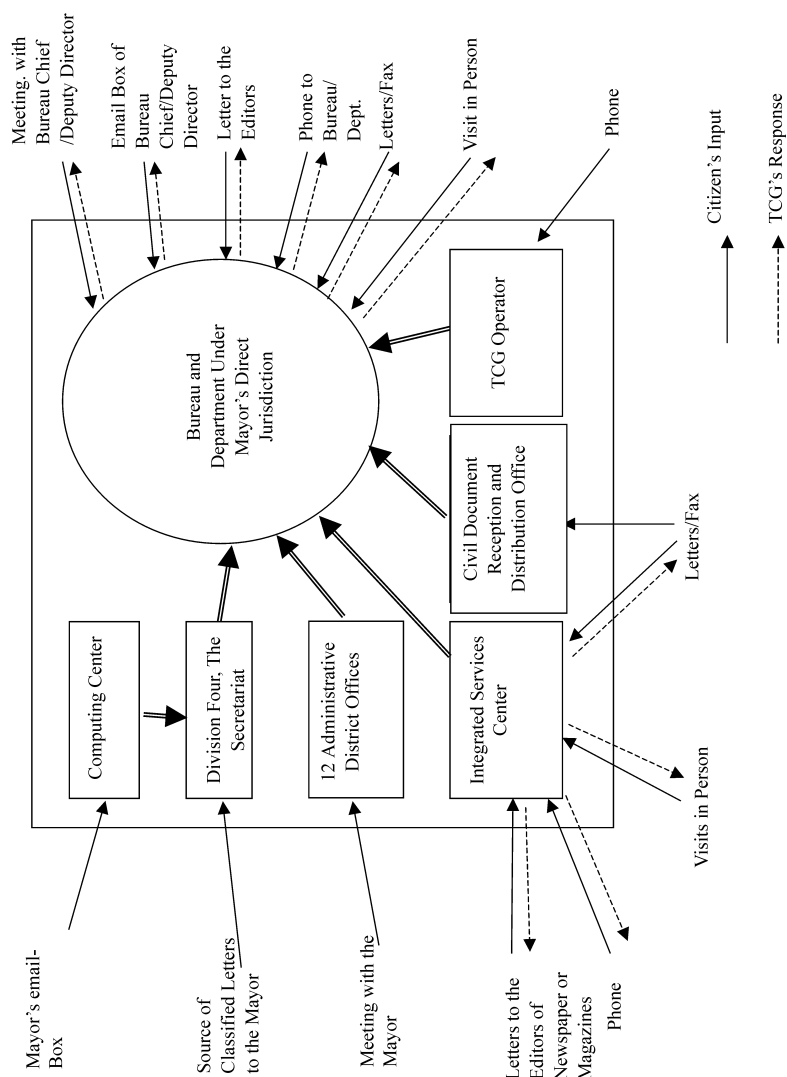


Figure 1. The Taipei City Government citizen complaints system.

**Management of Citizen Participation in Taiwan****533**

to the TCG operators who will direct the call to the relevant units. The TCG provides a separate, special number—1999,^[35] for citizens to reach the TCG, in addition to several lines that can be found through a directory service line (104) provided by the telephone company. A more official and traditional alternative is to mail or fax letters to the TCG. The advantage of this channel is that it enables complainants to attach documents or other supporting materials to make their case.

Citizens can also easily get access to the Internet, a similar, but less costly way, is to send an email directly to the Taipei City Mayor's e-mailbox. Once citizens direct their web browser (such as Internet Explorer or Netscape Navigator) to the address, they are instructed to fill in their e-mail addresses, the subject of their complaints, and the contents of the complaints. After the "submit" button has been pressed, an automatic e-mail response will be sent to the specified e-mail addresses. People will get confirmation of the complaints they just sent to the City. This re-confirmation design is to guarantee that the complaining citizens are using authentic e-mail addresses. A valid e-mail address also implies that the efforts of the City agencies to process the complaints will not be a waste of taxpayers' resources.

In addition to the TCG operator and the Taipei City Mayor's e-mail box, citizens can make phone calls or send letters/faxes to the Integrated Service Center which functions as a "one-stop" service for citizens to search consultancy or to file complaints. The Integrated Service Center is located near the entrance of the TCG Building and it has 24 counters to provide various services. Citizens can visit the Center in person to seek help, if they don't know where to start to make their complaints. The Center also serves as a bridge between the media and the TCG on citizen complaints handling. For example, the United Daily News provides a hot line for citizens' opinions. Those opinions/complaints toward the TCG expressed through this hot line as well as those sent to the editors of other media would be passed onto the Integrated Service Center.

Complainants may not be satisfied with contacting the bureaus/departments only and may want to reach the mayor himself. Two approaches can be taken. First, the citizen can seek to pass message through political or social networks, such as a city councilor, interest group leaders, or affiliated party officials, to the mayor's office or the mayor himself. These messages (most of them are in letters) would be passed to the Secretariat and become classified. Division Four of the Secretariat would review the case and distribute it to the related TCG unit. Second, citizens can also take advantage of the Meeting with the Mayor and file the application through the administrative district offices. But the application and review process takes at least four weeks and may not be accepted if the problem can be solved by other bureaus/departments.^[36]

The review process of meeting with the mayor is more tedious and time consuming than other procedures. One week prior to the meeting, an official



from the Commission of Research, Development, and Evaluation, the District office, and the related bureau/department would hold a meeting and integrate their responses for the Mayor's meeting with the applicant. Within four days of the meeting, the District office is then requested to submit the minutes of the meeting to the mayor for his signature after which the minutes are sent to the related bureau/department. Upon receiving the minutes, the bureau/department has to reply to the complainant and at the same time send the reply to the Commission of Research, Development, and Evaluation for further monitoring. After each season, the Commission would have a monitoring report to the Executive Meeting on City Affairs (chaired by the mayor).

Usage of Procedures and Media

Table 1 illustrates the frequency distribution of the procedures and media which citizens used to file their cases in June 2001. The total complaints numbered 12,242 cases. On average, there are 400 complaints sent to the TCG each workday. Among all the procedures listed in Table 1, Taipei City Mayor's e-mail box was the most frequently used channel by citizens. Taipei City Mayor's e-mail box, together with classified letters to the mayor's office and meeting with the mayor, are complaints aimed to reach the mayor and they account for 53% of the total in June 2001. Such results are consistent with Lin Shoei-po's findings that while hesitating to trust government agencies as a whole, complainants tend to believe that their grievance would be likely to be lessened by the heads of the government agencies.^[37] Aside from complaints directed to the ISC and the mayor, more sophisticated citizen contacted specific bureaus and departments. One third of these complaints are to the chiefs and directors and the other two-thirds are to the agencies. Altogether letters to the agencies or their heads amount to one-third of the total.

In terms of media usage, about one-third of the complainants sent e-mails to the mayor, 11% sent e-mails to bureau chiefs or deputy directors. Table 2 and Fig. 2 summarize the growing use of Taipei City Mayor's e-mail box since its inception dating back to the second quarter of 1996. It is worth noting that the number seems to stay around 8000 since the first quarter of 2000. That is, the City agencies have to respond to around 2600 e-mails a month, which has caused serious work overload.

The Taipei City Mayor's e-mail box provides a low-cost and convenient tool for citizens to voice their day-to-day problems and ask for an immediate resolution from the city agencies. Meanwhile, however, the low "entering cost" at which the city agencies are informed of citizen complaints also leads to competing use of the limited working hours of the agencies staff members. According to the previous summary, for instance, some agencies even invest more than half of their human resources to deal with citizen complaints. The



Management of Citizen Participation in Taiwan

535

Table 1. Citizen complaints procedure and media, Taipei City Government (June, 2001).

	Letter/fax		Phone	Visit in person		E-mail	Letter to newspaper	Total (monitored)	Total, % (monitored, %)
BD	1,156 (1,034)	1,236 (51)		111 (5)			82 (5)	2,585 (1,095)	21.12 (15.11)
APBD				113 (33)				113 (33)	0.92 (0.46)
EBDMX						1,290 (605)		1,290 (605)	10.54 (8.35)
EMMX						4,080 (3,879)		4,048 (3,879)	33.33 (53.54)
CL	1,169 (740)	571 (113)		94 (18)			77 (1)	1,911 (872)	15.61 (12.04)
MM				483 (32)				483 (32)	3.95 (0.44)
ISC	680 (246)	691 (243)		136 (60)			273 (180)	1,780 (729)	14.54 (10.06)
Total (monitored)	3,005 (2,020)	2,498 (407)		937 (148)		5,370 (4,484)	432 (186)	12,242 (7,245)	100 (100)
Total, % (monitored, %)	24.55 (27.88)	20.41 (5.62)		7.65 (2.04)		43.87 (61.89)	3.53 (2.57)	100 (100)	Ratio of monitored 59.18

Note: BD, Bureau/Department; APBD, Meeting with Bureau Chiefs/Deputy Director; BDBM, Bureau Chief/Deputy Directors e-mail box; TCME, Taipei City Mayor's e-mail box; CL, Classified Letters of the Mayor's office; MM, Meeting with the Mayor; ISC, Integrated Services Center.

**Table 2.** Taipei City Mayor's e-mail box processed e-mails.

TCME E-mails (Time)	Type I and II	Type III	Sum	Type III Ratio, %
Q2/1996	594	133	594	22
Q3/1996	868	212	868	24
Q4/1996	1,116	227	1,116	20
Q1/1997	1,074	251	1,074	23
Q2/1997	1,534	327	1,534	21
July–August/1997	1,095	213	1,095	19
September–November/1997	1,891	642	1,891	34
December/1997–February/1998	1,492	597	1,492	40
March–May/1998	3,546	1,341	3,546	38
June–August/1998	3,706	1,505	3,706	41
September–November/1999	3,424	2,219	3,424	65
December/1998–March/1999	5,014	1,105	5,014	22
Q2/1999	6,258	1,817	6,258	29
Q3/1999	6,887	2,076	6,887	30
Q4/1999	5,867	2,212	5,867	38
Q1/2000	7,032	1,303	7,032	19
Q2/2000	8,406	827	8,406	10
Q3/2000	10,217	567	10,217	6
Q4/2000	9,342	668	9,342	7
Q1/2001	7,632	562	7,632	7
Q2/2001	10,863	1,645	10,863	15

result also indicates increasing use of the Internet among Taipei citizens. The popularity of Internet usage among Taipei citizens may be attributed to the current and former mayor's advocacy to construct a Cyber City.

Post and facsimile letters account for one quarter of all the TCG complaints media usage in June 2001. In this category, classified letters to the mayor or his office occupies more than one-third and letters to the bureau/departments are almost equal. Although written letters in post mail or facsimile are considered more formal and confidential and may be taken seriously, they count for less than half of the amount of e-mail usage. The third largest category of media usage is telephone and it covers 20% of the complainants. Among citizen complaints to the TCG by telephone, about half of them reached the bureaus and departments. However, whether these calls were directed by the hotline operator or made directly to the TCG units is unknown. The last two categories, personal visits and letters to the editors of news media to express complaints constitute 7.6% and 3.65% respectively, with Meeting with the Mayor a bit over half of the first categories.



Management of Citizen Participation in Taiwan

537

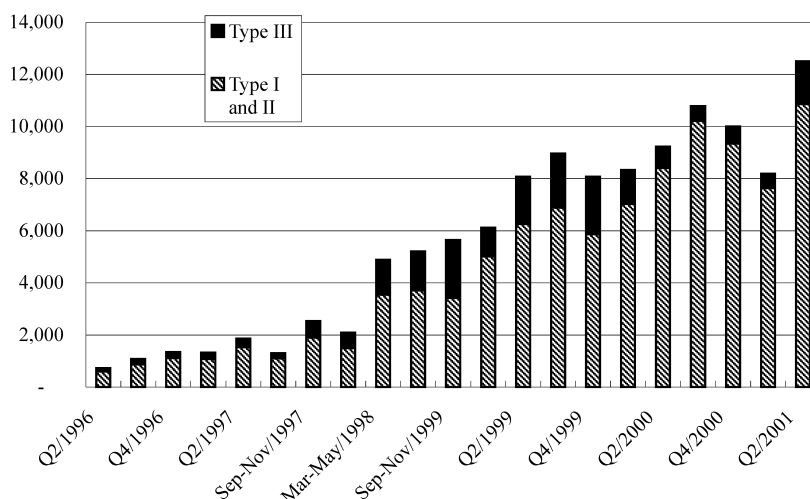


Figure 2. Taipei City Mayor's e-mail box processed e-mails.

In addition to the complaints classified by channels and media illustrated by Table 1, Table 3 demonstrates the ratio of cases under monitoring for each item. Some cases are closely monitored by the respective department head or by the Commission of Research, Development, and Evaluation. But other cases are processed through ordinary document handing procedure. Among the 15 items, complaints through the Taipei City Mayor's e-mail box has the highest ratio under monitoring, post and fax letters to bureau/department, the second, and post and fax letters to the mayor or his office in the third position. In terms of channels and media, Taipei City Mayor's e-mail box outnumbered other alternatives. Overall, about 59% of all the complaints are under monitoring.

Complaints Handling Mechanism

Since the TCG citizen complaints system has existed for almost thirty years, the TCG has developed a routine to handle citizen complaints it receives. According to our interviews with different bureaus and departments, a typical complaint would go through the following steps:

Registration and Distribution

The TCG treats all citizen complaints officially no matter whether they are input through a simple phone call, an electronic mail, or handed down to the

**Table 3.** Monitored complaints as percentage of all complaints for each procedure/media.

	Letter/fax	Phone	Visit in person	E-mail	Letter to newspaper	Total (monitored)
BD	89.4%	4.7%	4.5%		6.1%	42.4%
APPBD			29.2%			29.2%
EBDMX				46.9%		46.9%
EMMX				95.1%		
CL	63.3%	19.8%	19.1%		1.3%	45.6%
MM			6.6%			6.6%
ISC	36.2%	35.2%	44.1%		65.9%	41%
Total (monitored)	67.2%	16.3%	15.8%	83.5%	43.1%	59.2%

Note: BD, Bureau/Department; APPBD, Meeting with Bureau Chiefs/Deputy Director; BDBM, Bureau Chief/Deputy Directors e-mail box; TCME, Taipei City Mayor's e-mail box; CL, Classified Letters of the Mayor's Office; MM, Meeting with the Mayor; ISC, Integrated Services Center.

**Management of Citizen Participation in Taiwan****539**

mayor himself. Hence the first step to handle the complaints is registration. Currently there is no single integrated unit in the TCG in charge of registering all complaints. Generally speaking, the Secretariat takes charge of registering all complaints except for those sent directly to the bureaus and departments and through administrative district offices. The Computing Center, Division Four, the Integrated Services Center, and the Civil Document Reception and Distribution Office are all under the jurisdiction of the Secretariat.

Among these four units of the Secretariat, the Computing Center deals with the technical problems of the computer system to keep the records of the e-mail complaints and to receive and screen redundant e-mails. After it cleans up the redundant e-mails from a technical perspective, the Computing Center would forward all e-mails to the Division Four of the Secretariat. The Computing Center does not deal with the substantive issues of the e-mail. Upon receiving letters from the Computing Center, Division Four then registers the e-mail and distributes letters to the TCG units according to the nature of complaints. Two members of staff in the Secretariat work full-time to read all e-mails through a Web-based interface and initially assign the agencies that will be responsible for responding to the e-mails. Both of the two Secretariat staff members have been working on the dispatching duty for a long time (almost since the establishment of Taipei City Mayor's e-mail box) and hence have accumulated rich relevant knowledge.

While the units under the Secretariat register and distribute complaints, the bureaus/departments tackle the substantive issues raised by complainants. Upon receiving complaints from citizens directly or indirectly, or person in charge would register again in the unit's record system and would go through the Commission of Research, Development, and Evaluation personnel for monitoring. After the registration procedure, the person in charge would distribute complaints to sections or divisions under its direction. The section chief would further appoint officials to deal with the substantive issues the complainant specifies.

Review and Action

According to the Guidelines to Handle Citizen Complaints, the TCG officials don't need to process a complaint without any substance.^[38] However, the TCG has to response to anonymous complaints with specific evidence. The process takes several days before the citizen complaints reach the exact official(s) in charge of the complainant's issues. However, officials are required to complete a case within 15 days and within seven days for cases under monitoring.^[39] In general, most cases can be completed within the time requested by the Monitoring System.



Within the required time limit some units, such as the Building Standards Department of the Bureau of Public Works, are unable to follow the time line. Citizens' complaints to the Bureau mostly concerned with illegal building that demands investigation on site and may involve other TCG units demands cross-departmental actions. These works are always time-consuming.

To meet the time line, officials have to deal with the cases effectively. There are many ways to gain necessary knowledge for solving problems. More than 90% of our interviewees would consult their colleagues or review similar old cases. Only 5 out of the 43 surveyed units have development manuals.

Reply and Evaluation

After the official from the specific bureau reviews the case or takes any actions, he or she has to reply to the complainant. The TCG units take three different approaches in responding to citizens. In 28 out of the 43 TCG units we surveyed, the administrators double check the content of the reply letter before it is sent. In 11 out of the 43 units, the official who deals with the substantive issues drafts and sends the reply letter directly without its being double-checked.

It occurs that a complainant receives different letters from several bureaus or departments if a subject matter involves cross-departmental coordination.^[40] Generally, a reply is sent to the complainants through the very channel and media the citizen used. For example, the TCG would use e-mail to reply to citizens who wrote to the mayor's e-mail box unless other media is needed (for example, postal mail).

The complaints handling procedure doesn't end with the reply letter to the complainant. Internally, the official who replies has to inform related units and the Commission of Research, Development, and Evaluation personnel to clear the case from the monitor system. The Commission personnel then delete the case and compile it into the monthly statistics. To better understand the complainants' appraisal of the system, one survey is attached to show how satisfied the complainants are with the system.

EVALUATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

In a study that investigated consumer complaints in a public sector service in local authorities in England, Mary Senevirante and Sarah Cracknell proposed that complaints procedure must be considered not only efficient but also fair.^[41] They must be available to the socially disadvantaged who do not know how to express their complaints or afraid to do so. In practice, the procedure must be published and must ensure that everyone should be able to

**Management of Citizen Participation in Taiwan****541**

use the procedures. Fair and accessible procedures alone do not necessarily bring about citizen satisfaction without a good management system. To have an effective management system at the operational level, Senevirante and Cracknell further suggested one specialist authority-wide officer for logging and monitoring complaints. *Publicity, accessibility, and accountability* are the criteria of evaluating a citizen complaint system.

In terms of publicity, the TCG specifies all channels and media of the complaint system in a brochure distributed to every household of Taipei City. This information is also available on the Internet. As most information about the complaint system is in written form, we suspect that citizens may still be ill-informed about the purpose and function of the whole system, because the 161-page brochure is only a massive collection of channels and media to reach certain bureaus. Although the TCG has established a serve-all telephone number “1999” in the year 2001 with a highly publicized campaign to inform the citizens of Taipei, the telephone line, according to our interviews, leads only to the general operator of the TCG. As regard to Taipei City Mayor’s e-mail box, those people who connect to the TCG official website, can easily find the Taipei City Mayor’s e-mail box to click into it.

We suggest that the TCG should do more on publicity by establishing an easy-to remember, unified, and clearly promoted citizen complaints system entry point, such as the 1–800 number of many businesses to handle customer’s complaints. The person who serves at the entry point should not simply be a general operator to connect to different bureaus, but a well-trained expert in customer relations to help a citizen to file his or her complaints and gain satisfaction from the TCG.

The second aspect is whether every citizen is able to use the procedures, i.e., the accessibility of the citizen complaint system. As discussed above, the TCG has provided different procedures and media for citizens to file complaints. Citizens are not required to express their complaints in written document supported by strong evidence. As shown above, the ratio of telephone complaints under monitoring is much lower than other media, whether the emphasis on more formal media is a critical issue that demands further studies. Also, as citizen complaints through Taipei City Mayor’s e-mail box continue to grow, this trend shows its worth as an effective citizen complaints channel because of its relatively lower cost. On the other hand, the problem of so-called “digital divide” might block some strata of our society from using this tool to connect with the TCG.^[42]

We suggest that the TCG should invest more to promote not only the existence of media or channels to file complaints, but it should educate the general public about their rights to complain and the step-by-step illustration about the procedure to file a complaint through different media and channels.



A third and equally important criterion is accountability. The TCG has set up a computerized system to monitor the processing and handling of all complaints through the Taipei City Mayor's e-mail box to ensure accountability. Also, letters to the Mayor are also closely monitored by the Commission of Research, Development, and Evaluation. Complaints from other channels and those cleared on site or on phone are also registered and recorded in written form. To prevent complaints from drifting aimlessly and ensure every single complaint is taken seriously, the Third Section of the Commission of Research, Development, and Evaluation sends the Commission personnel in each bureau/department to monitor the complaints handling process. These personnel reports to the Commission monthly and the report only summarizes a total number of complaints and records the content of each complaint. However, as we collected the June 2001 data from the TCG, we found that the data from our survey and the monthly report cannot be matched. Also, the information in written form has never been used for any analysis.

As a result, we suggest that the Commission of Research, Development, and Evaluation should set up a website to let the Commission personnel in various departments to file their monthly reports through the internet. It is by no means a cheaper way to enhance accountability of the system. We also suggest that certain variable should be added to the monthly report, such as the media and channel of the complaint used in this research for the purpose of a better analysis of the pattern and behavior of citizen complaints. Also, to use website to collect complaint data can allow us to do the job so-called "data-mining" in citizen relationship management to assemble useful knowledge to help the TCG to dig out recurrent problem in the daily operation.

CONCLUSION

Democratization means a regime is transforming from a non-responsive to a responsive one. Citizens in a democratizing polity will begin to expect bureaucrats to be responsive to their requests and demands. However, difficulties arise when citizens expect too much responsiveness. From the transaction cost economics perspective, one of the difficulties might be that it is too costly to run the nation when there is "too much" participation. Excessive participation might paralyze the administrative capacity of the regime. Obviously, elected politicians will not take steps to hinder participation's transaction costs to the civil servant if such steps would impede their reelection. As a result, the bureaucracy must continuously search for more efficient way to handle increasing requests and demands from the public. This



Management of Citizen Participation in Taiwan

543

tension forms a managerial problem with political implications in a democratizing polity.

After examining the TCGs system of handling citizen complaints, we found that e-mail has become the most popular media to file complaints. On average, the TCG has to process about 2600 e-mail complaints each month. The monitoring system of the Taipei City Mayor's e-mail box is the most established one compared with those of other media and channels. The reason behind this development is the increased presence of the internet era in Taiwanese society. We can see that the Internet is a valuable tool for both citizen and the civil servants to reduce the sovereign transaction costs of participation.

In the end, after we evaluated the citizen complaints system of the TCG from three criteria: publicity, accessibility, and accountability, we suggest following three reform measures to improve the TCGs citizen complaints system:

1. The TCG should do more on publicity by establishing an easy-to-remember, unified, and clearly promoted citizen complaints system entry point, such as the 1-800 number of many businesses to handle customer's complaints.
2. The TCG should invest more to promote not only the existence of certain media or channels to file complaints, but it should also educate the general public about their rights to complain.
3. The TCGs Commission of Research, Development, and Evaluation should set up a website to let the Commission personnel in various departments file their monthly reports on the net to reduce the cost of monitoring.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Don-yun Chen, Tong-yi Huang, and Naiyi Hsaio are Assistant Professors at the Department of Public Policy and Management, Shih Hsin University, Taipei, Taiwan, R.O.C. Authors would like to acknowledge the research grant from the Taipei City Government's Commission of Research, Development, and Evaluation.

REFERENCES

1. Seneviratne, M.; Cracknell, S. Consumer complaints in public sector services. *Public Admin.* **1988**, *66*, 181-193.



2. One important practical aspect of participation, which will not be discussed in this paper, is the problem of citizen competence. For related works please check an edited volume by Elkin, S.L., Soltan, K.E., Eds. *Citizen Competence and Democratic Institutions*; The Pennsylvania State University Press: University Park, Pennsylvania, USA, 1999; 1–20.
3. Costly participation to the individual citizen can be best described by Anthony Downs' famous theory of "rational ignorance." It declares that the information cost to participate is high for any individual. As a result, the individual will weight the benefit and cost of information gathering while in public arena. Usually the individual will prefer to keep ignorant on public issues for financial reasons. See Downs, A. *An Economic Theory of Democracy*; Harper & Row: New York, USA, 1957; 207–278.
4. See Dahl, R.A. *On Democracy*; Yale University Press: New Haven, USA, 1999; p.107, Table 1.
5. See Barber, B. *Strong Democracy: Participatory Politics for a New Age*; University of California Press: Berkeley, USA, 1984; Dryzek, J.S. *Deliberative Democracy and Beyond: Liberals, Critics, Contestations*; Oxford University Press: Oxford, England, 2000; Osborne, D.; Gaebler, T. *Reinventing Government: How the Entrepreneurial Spirit Transforming the Public Sector*; A Plume Book: New York, USA, 1992; Osborne, D.; Plastrik, P. *Banishing Bureaucracy: The Five Strategies for Reinventing Government*; A Plume Book: New York, USA, 1997.
6. See Simonsen, W.; Robbins, M.D. *Citizen Participation in Resource Allocation*; Westview Press: Boulder, USA, 2000; 1–20. They have categorized the tension into three general parts: politics vs. administration; expertise vs. access and representation vs. participation.
7. Please see Tien, Hung-Mao, Yui-Sang Tsang, S., Eds. *Democratization in Taiwan: Implications for China*; Palgrave Macmillan, USA, 1999; Wu, J.J. *Taiwan's Democratization: Forces Behind the New Momentum*; Oxford University Press: Oxford England, 1995; 33–71.
8. Kuo, Yu-Ying. New public management in Taiwan: Government reinvention. *Learning from International Public Management Reform*; Jones, L.R., Guthrie, J., Steane, P., Eds.; JAI: New York, USA, 11B, 337–351.
9. See Benjamin, C. Participation Revisited: A Managerial Perspective, Monographs No.6 from the Center for Democracy and Governance, US Agency for International Development, 2000. <http://ipc.msi-inc.com/IPCdocs/Mn-6-ms.pdf> (accessed January 2002).
10. See endnote 2.
11. Dahl, R.A. *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition*; Yale University Press: New Haven, USA, 1971; 2. pp.



12. Verba, S.; Nie, N.H.; Jae-on Kim. *Participation and Political Equality: A Seven-Nation Comparison*; University of Chicago Press: Chicago, USA, 1978; 1 pp.
13. See Seargeant, J.; Steele, J. *Consulting the Public: Guidelines and Good Practice*; Policy Studies Institute: London, England, 1998; Thomas, J.C. *Public Participation in Public Decisions*; Jossey-Bass Publishers: San Francisco, USA, 1995; Whitaker, G.P. Coproduction: Citizen participation in service delivery. *Public Admin. Rev.* **1980**, *40* (3), 240–246.
14. Peters, B.G. *The Future of Governing: Four Emerging Models*; University Press of Kansas: Lawrence, USA, 1996; 47–71; Foster, J.F. *The Deliberative Practitioner: Encouraging Participatory Planning Process*; MIT Press: Cambridge, USA, 1999.
15. Crosby, N.; Kelly, J.M.; Schaefer, P. Citizen panels: A new approach to citizen participation. *Public Admin. Rev.* **1986**, *46*, 170–178; Parsons, G.A. Defining the public interest: Citizen participation in metropolitan and state policy making. *National Civic Review* **1990**, *79*, 118–131.
16. Pharr, S.J., Putnam, R.D., Eds. *Disaffected Democracies: What's Troubling the Trilateral Countries?* Princeton University Press: Princeton, USA, 2000; Putnam, R.D. Bowling alone: America's declining social capital. *J. Democr.* **1995**, *6*, 65–78.
17. Cooper, T.L. *An Ethic of Citizenship for Public Administration*; Prentice-Hall: Englewood Cliffs, USA, 1991.
18. King, C.S.; Feltey, K.M.; Susel, B.O. The question of participation: Toward authentic public participation in public administration. *Public Admin. Rev.* **1998**, *58* (4), 317–326.
19. For the idea of transaction costs, see Coase, R. The nature of the firm. *Economica* **1937**, *4*, 386–405.
20. Williamson, O.E. Public and private bureaucracies: a transaction cost economics perspective. *J. Law Econ. Organ.* **1999**, *15* (1), 306–342.
21. Berelson, B.R. Democratic theory and democratic practice. In *Voting*; Berelson, B.R., Lazarsfeld, P.F., McPhee, W.N., Eds.; University of Chicago Press: Chicago, USA, 1954.
22. That is, the constraint on participation is one of *economy*. See Dryzek, J. *Deliberative Economy and Discursive Legitimacy*. Paper presented at the Conference on Deliberating about Deliberative Democracy, University of Texas, Austin, 2000.
23. See Cleveland, H. How do you get everybody in on the act and still get some action? *Public Management* **1975**, June, 3–6.
24. The effort to handle citizen complaints have an analogy with the so-called “customer relationship management” (CRM) which focuses on finding



- out more efficient way to manage customer complaints in the area of business administration. More and more public managers are utilized CRM to help them to deal with anxious citizens. See Epstein, J. *Public Services: Working for the Customer*; European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions: Luxembourg, 1990; Barton, A. Good complaint resolution = good government. *Public Management* **1997**, May, 14–17; McClendon, B. Complaint-free customer service. *Public Management* **1997**, March, 21–23.
25. See Winckler, E. Institutionalization and participation in Taiwan: from hard to soft authoritarianism? *Chain Quarterly* **1984**, 99, 481–499.
 26. Cheng, Tun-jen. Democratizing the quasi-Leninist regime in Taiwan. *World Polit.* **1989**, 41 (3), 471–499.
 27. Nathan, A.J.; Ho, J.V.S. Chiang Ching-Kuo's decision for political reform. *Chiang Ching-Kuo's Leadership in the Development of the Republic of China on Taiwan*; Leng, S.C. Ed.; University Press of America: New York, USA, 1993; 31–102.
 28. See The Washington Post, 8 October 1986, A18.
 29. Hsaio, Hsin-Huang, M. Emerging social movements and the rise of a demanding civil society in Taiwan. *Aust. J. Chinese Aff.* **1990**, 24, 163–179.
 30. See Shiau, Chyuan-jenq. Civil society and democratization. *Democratization in Taiwan: Implications for China*; Tien, H., Tsang, S.Y., Eds.; Palgrave Macmillan: USA, 1999.
 31. We select the TCG as our case because the TCG has been the pioneer on the citizen complaints procedure and management. In this study, we conducted interviews with fifteen officials of seven relevant TCG units in May 2001. We further conducted a survey of the 43 bureaus/departments under the direct jurisdiction of the Mayor. All 43 surveyed agencies answered the questionnaire.
 32. See Lin, Sheoi-po. The cognition, evaluation, and trust of complainants towards complaints system. *Chinese Political Science Review* **1981**, 9, December, 297–351 (in Chinese). Similar studies by Du Bao-zhang and Guo Dong-yao also demonstrate that citizens are either ignorant of the complaints system or have negative attitudes toward the system. See Du, Bao-zhang. *Study on Managing Peoples' Complaints*; Research Report for Taiwan Provincial Government, 1986 (in Chinese) and Guo, Dong-yao. *Analysis on People's Complaint Cases*; Research Report, Taiwan Provincial Government, 1979 (in Chinese).
 33. "A-Bian" is the nickname of Mayor Chen, the current president of Taiwan. See the following section for details about the development of the "A-Bian Mailbox."
 34. The Legislative Yuan is the National Parliament of Taiwan.



Management of Citizen Participation in Taiwan

547

35. Rather than dialing an eight-digit number, the special number is shortened to 4 digit for easy memorization. In pronunciation, it connotes lucky meaning for Mayor Ma that is “long live Ying-jiu.”
36. Applicants are required to fill a form specifying the reason for meeting four weeks before the designated meeting date. The District office would fax the form to the related bureau/department that would review the form and reply to the office.
37. See endnote 2 for reference.
38. The Guidelines is an administrative order issued by the TCG according to the Administrative Procedure Act of 1999.
39. According to the Guidelines for Managing Citizen’s complaints for TCG and Agencies under its jurisdiction, the citizen complaint cases handed by the mayor, vice mayor, bureau chief or deputy director, and the Commission of Research, Development, and Evaluation should be classified as under monitoring.
40. The TCG is now designing a system to cope with this problem.
41. See endnote 2 for reference.
42. See Norris, P. *Digital Divide? Civic Engagement, Information Poverty, and the Internet Worldwide*; Cambridge University Press: New York, USA, 2001.