E-Complaint, Smart City and Local Government in Indonesia:
Case Study in Surakarta City

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Abstract: In late 2013, Surakarta local government launched an online complaint handling service or e-complaint known as the Surakarta Complaint Handling Service Unit (ULAS, *Unit Layanan Aduan Surakarta*). The local government hopes that the unit can become the primary place for Surakarta citizens to submit their complaint about the city's public services. By using quantitative and qualitative content analysis, this research examines the e-complaint practical performance recorded in its website in relation to the smart city concept currently applied in Surakarta. The results showed that e-complaint practice has performed well even though it is not in its maximum usage since there are some problems which require immediate solutions.

1. INTRODUCTION

Recently in Indonesia, cities compete in transformation in order to be designated as smart cities, and Surakarta is not an exception. The increasing use of information and communication technology (ICT) is the main key in applying smart city concept (Albino et al., 2015). It is, therefore, unsurprising that the city actively launches online-based programs and applications in order to facilitate easier and faster public services to its people.

The rapid extension of ICT has brought the world into a new era unimaginable before (Ferdinand, 2000; Alkhajar, 2014). It is undeniable that the Internet age has provided "multiple opportunities for development" (Norris, 2001: 9).

A smart city is a city conducting technology-based innovation to solve their problems. One of the innovations launched by Surakarta local government is ULAS, functioning as a public complaint handling service unit which is accessible anytime and anywhere. The unit, formed in late 2013, keeps transforming for better in order to give adequate services in its field. Criticisms directed to ULAS are made to be checkpoints to improve its systems, such as system improvement aimed at integrating the service to other fields in the public services (Tempo.co, 2017).

In the government field, ULAS is included as a form of electronic government (e-government) (Curtin et al., 2003; Luthfia, 2015). E-government itself has been used by governments around the world as "a way to cheaply, efficiently, and effectively deliver services and information to their citizens" (Braaksma, 2004: 152). Observed from the smart city perspective, the unit nowadays has become an important part in embodying "Solo Smart City", in which the means itself is launched to give an easy access to the citizen in interacting with the government in submitting public complaints (Angelidou, 2015).

This research investigates the e-complaint practical performance recorded in ULAS website, as seen from data of complaints from the general public and data of government responses in relation to the smart city concept currently applied in Surakarta. The novelty of current research compared with other previous researches is that this research has connected e-complaint practice to the smart city while the previous ones have not (see Haryani et al, 2017; Wahyunengseh and Mulyanto, 2017). Nevertheless, the previous studies are advantageous to enrich this study.

2. METHODS

The research used existing data recorded in ULAS website repository. The data were those of public complaints and government responses to the complaints, available at ULAS repository, with the focus range of complaints in year 2017. These data were qualified as publicly available, meaning that the general public could easily obtain the data since they were readily available, transparent to everyone and could be accessed by anyone.

The data occupied an important position as the basis of research findings and interpretation. They were analyzed by using quantitative and qualitative content analysis (Holsti, 1969; Krippendorff, 2004; Bowen and Bowen, 2008). The data were then combined with in-depth interviews with informants who had submitted complaints through ULAS and all material containing information relevant to the research.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1 ULAS as E-Complaint

ULAS is a form of e-complaint practice from Surakarta local government. This online complaint handling service unit was launched on December 27th, 2013 and has still operated to date to contain complaints from Surakarta population. Its foundation was based on Regulation of Mayor of Surakarta (Perwali No. 25/2013). If seen from the legal perspective, the presence of ULAS is compliant with the message of several laws, such as Law No. 14/2008, Law No. 25/2009 and Law No. 23/2014.

Therefore, the existence of ULAS is surely required as a part of the responsibility that the government should stand for protecting public interests, especially in relation to public services. If the citizens feel unsatisfied or disappointed with the existing public services, they can submit their complaints to the government.

The establishment of this unit is assisted by the European Union and the Bandung Trust Advisory (B-Trust) Non-Governmental Organization. According to the mayoral regulation (Perwali No. 25/2013), ULAS is a permanent non-structural government organization unit under the auspices of Inspectorate of Surakarta City. The scope of this unit is a public complaint handling service with respect to public policy, public service, and improper misuse of authority and conduct of public officials. Through

ULAS, Surakarta residents can deliver complaints quickly and easily for 24 hours. In this e-complaint website, ULAS is "ready to respond to you for 24 hours" to all aspirations and complaints received.

In recruiting and facilitating complaints from residents, the local government of Surakarta through ULAS has prepared as many as 50 categories of complaints, starting from the category of Archives and Libraries at the top to that of the Lower-Class Citizens Care at the bottom. These categories can be said to be comprehensive to classify complaints from citizens.

Any citizen who wishes to submit a complaint must choose one of the complaint categories before submitting a complaint. The complainant will get the tracking ID number to monitor whether the complaint has been responded or not. Since it was first launched until now, e-complaint has been running for almost five years. The public certainly hopes that from time to time this e-complaint practice can get better.

3.2 E-Complaint Practice

In 2017, there were 437 complaints submitted to ULAS. 397 (91%) of them were answered, 24 complaints (5%) were unanswered, and 16 complaints (4%) were closed. The number of complaints per month and the percentage of complaints that were answered, were unanswered, and were closed is presented in Figure 1 & 2 below.
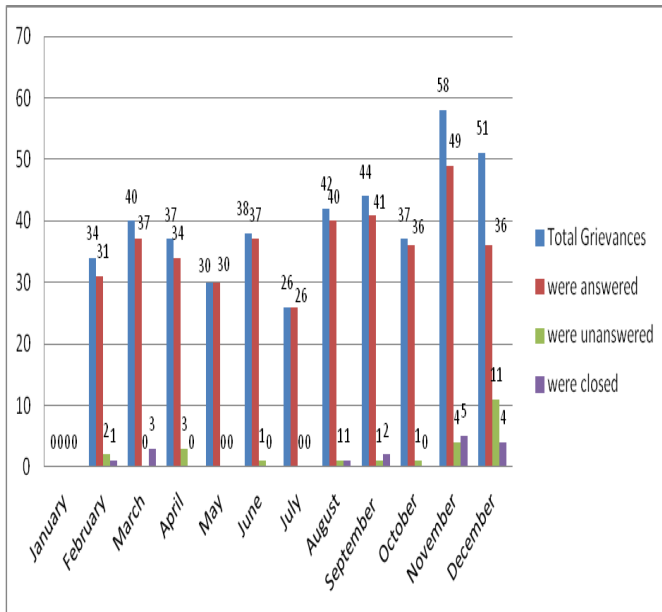
Figure 1:Citizen Complaints in 2017
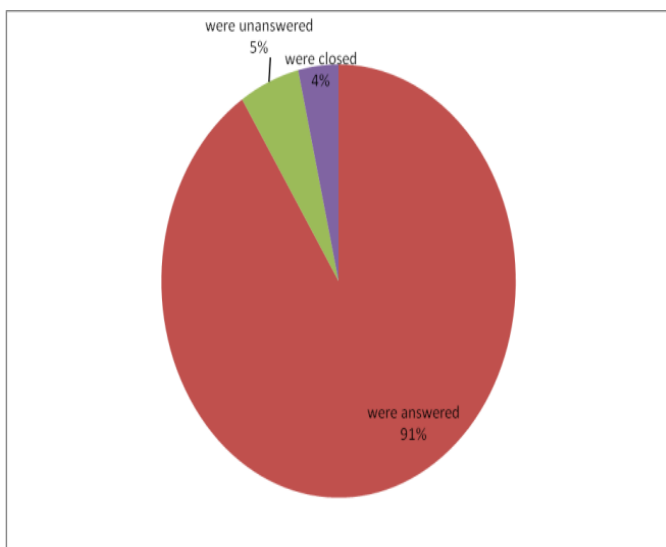Source: Provinsi Jawa Tengah (2018a)

Figure 2:Percent of the Surakarta's Government Response to Citizen Complaints in 2017

Source: Provinsi Jawa Tengah (2018a)

In term of numbers, the complaints submitted to ULAS was clearly fairly small, especially when looking at the population of the city of Surakarta, which in the First Semester of 2017 had reached 562,269 inhabitants (Provinsi Jawa Tengah, 2018b). Based on data from the Inspectorate of Surakarta, the number of complaints in 2017 was actually less than

complaints in the previous two years. In 2015 and 2016 there were 459 and 500 complaints each (Inspektorat Kota Surakarta, 2015; Tempo.co, 2017).

The data of the last three years also pointed out that the number of submitted complaints of citizens never exceeded 500 complaints per year. The number of complaints submitted to ULAS can be at least an indicator of how far Surakarta residents know and utilize ULAS to deliver complaints. This may also be an early indicator of ICT literacy from citizens. ICT literacy citizens, however, occupy a fundamental position with respect to the implementation of e-government (Ngulube, 2007). In this context, it relates to the ability of citizens to access and submit complaints through ULAS.

The data in Figure 2 indicates that the local government had a high degree of responsiveness to citizen complaints with 91 percent of complaints being answered. However, if further scrutinized, there was a local government agency (OPD) in this case, the Office of Housing, Settlement and Land Area, that never responded to incoming complaints of citizens even if there was a complaint mistakenly disposed. This indicates that the e-complaint has not fully run properly. This is clearly contrary to Surakarta Mayor Regulation (Perwali No. 8/2014) as well as the determination of this unit that promises to always be ready to respond to aspirations and complaints of citizens for 24 hours as listed on the website ULAS.

In fact, to encourage the existence of citizen participation, a good management is required, related to citizen complaints (Chen et al., 2003). One is to keep responding to complaints. For example, the system can send a confirmation to the citizens that complaints are not disposed properly due to their mistake in choosing the category of complaints.

This response is actually expected from the citizens who have tried to submit their complaints. Related to this, an informant expressed disappointment when his complaint did not get a response even though he did realize that he had mistakenly chosen the complaint category. This informant hopes that the OPD should still respond as a form of feedback. Meanwhile, it must be admitted that there are other OPDs that have responded well to the complaints of citizens.

Some OPDs have even used e-complaint to not only answer complaints but also as a means of education, confirmation, clarification and information to citizens who submit complaints, as found in the response of the Department of Public Works and Spatial Planning of the complaints of citizens dated February 22 and March 9. This is certainly a valuable capital with regard to efforts to

adapt the local government's internal organizational culture to a digital orientation (Dunleavy et al., 2006).

This condition at least also shows e-complaint has great potential to be a space of interaction and dynamic communication between citizens and local government. Based on the analysis it is seen that the ULAS not only acts as a citizen complaints handling service but also plays an important role as a means of open online consultations as well as open online inputs between citizens and the local government. In addition, ULAS is also a tool for citizens to express their appreciation to the local government and the space of expression of citizens' hopes to the local government. This is certainly good because it can promote citizen participation and government-citizen partnership to build cities and improve the quality of public services. Moreover, the magnitude of citizen participation is an important feature of good democratic life (Pateman, 1970). This is also an important capital for strengthening the dimensions of smart people and smart governance that is covered in the concept of a smart city (Giffinger et al., 2007).

It is true that the practical performance of e-complaint in Surakarta can be classified as good. However, the remaining obstacles surely become challenges need to be addressed so that the aim of this unit's foundation can be achieved. There are some obstacles still remaining, such as the citizens' confusion in choosing the category of complaints, resulting an error in disposition by ULAS administrators to the respective OPDs.

Hence, a more massive effort to socialize and educate the citizens related to the importance of the right choice of the complaints category and the utilization of ULAS in general is expected. On the other hand, to minimize non-handled complaints the ULAS administrators need to examine the complaints of citizens whether they are in accordance with the intended category, so they do not directly dispose of complaints only based on the category selected by the citizens without seeing them as they do today.

Although people selected the wrong category of the complaints, the administrators can act as a gatekeeper by knowing the contents of the complaint (Shoemaker, 2002) so that complaints can remain being disposed of correctly. The next obstacle is that not all OPDs are responsive to citizen complaints. To that end, the local government needs to conduct an evaluation and improvement to ensure that all OPDs can be responsive to citizen complaints. If it is not done, it will result in what called as pseudo e-governance (see Wahyunengseh and Mulyanto, 2017).

In addition, there are still deviations in the form of posts that are not appropriate as the advertisement suggests. Related to this, ULAS itself already has the authority so that it can immediately refuse the complaint or close the complaint because it does not meet the requirements.

Viewed from the framework of supporting the implementation of the smart city (Giffinger et al., 2007; Angelidou, 2015). In the case of Solo Smart City, certainly e-complaint has given an important contribution in the efforts to solve city problems. Through the presence of e-complaint, the local government has a chance to improve their response to the problems and needs of its citizens (Osborne and Gaebler, 1992), because after all, complaints from the citizens are valuable inputs in encouraging work productivity and improving public service quality.

4. CONCLUSIONS

ULAS does not only give an easy access to the people to submit their complaints to the local government, but also give access and valuable resources to the local government to quickly identify the problems that its citizens encounter. In other words, the local government can obtain important inputs directly from its citizens in the forms of public complaints, public needs, and public affairs through e-complaint. These data will be advantageous as a basis for the local government to develop the city and to improve public service quality.

In term of performance, the e-complaint practice in Surakarta through ULAS can be said to have worked well even though improvements still need to be done for its betterment. It is important since ULAS is one of the important components in supporting the implementation of smart city initiated in Surakarta.

Besides, efforts to put citizen participation into the mainstream in order to give thoughts, suggestions, ideas, or constructive complaints to the government through e-complaint and to familiarize the citizens in using e-complaint are central agendas for Surakarta local government.

Citizen socialization and education about ways to submit public complaints through online means should always be done in order to reach the general public as wide as possible. The general public certainly hopes that ULAS can be a dynamic citizen public forum as a means of citizen participation to sense better the place where they live, which will correlate positively to the strengthening of dimensions of Solo Smart City.

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