

Sensing the risk

How Citizen Sensing may transform the governance environmental risk to public health

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Anna Berti Suman is a PhD researcher at the Tilburg Institute for Law Technology and Society (TILT), Tilburg University, the Netherlands, and is part of TILT Health Cluster. Her PhD project aims at investigating what role ‘Citizen Sensing’ (bottom-up monitoring initiatives based on ICT, in general, and, in particular, on sensors) plays and should play in the current accountability frameworks for the governance of environmental risk to public health. Anna’s research thus focuses on how non-expert people take advantage of sensors and data infrastructures to visualize, monitor, report and combat risks caused by environmental factors to public health. The practice of Citizen Sensing is legitimized on the basis of three rights: the right to live in a healthy environment; the right to participation; and the right to self-determination. The ultimate aim of this research is to investigate how Citizen Sensing can complement the current models of risk governance, bringing the lay people’s contribution and their ‘situational awareness’. In order to achieve her PhD project’s aim, a number of case studies, e.g. the Schiphol Noise Monitoring case and the AiREAS Air Pollution Monitoring case, are being empirically researched, through qualitative methods (a preliminary questionnaire, in-depth interviews and web observations). The protagonists of the research are lay people engaging with forms of Citizen Sensing, as well as experts studying the practice and institutional players confronted with the practice. The case studies are analysed through a theoretical framework built on theories from legal, socio-political and STS scholarship on risk governance (Van Asselt, Ortwin and Renn; Fisher) and on the Risk Society (Bech; Giddens; Lupton), combined with theories on Epistemology and on the role of non-expert knowledge and of scientific knowledge in society (Bijker; Bal; Wynne), complemented with the analysis of theories on social and legal accountability and on participation in public health governance. The inner motivation of Anna in pursuing this research is her belief in the value of environmental protection for the sake of public and personal health, her passion for an active citizenship, and her past and ongoing volunteerism for non-governmental organizations on health and environmental related topics.

For a recent publication on this research see: *Berti Suman, A. (2018) Challenging risk governance patterns through citizen sensing: the Schiphol Airport case, International Review of Law, Computers & Technology, 32:1, 155-173, DOI: 10.1080/13600869.2018.1429186*