Outline of the "Unexpected" Resistance Under Hong Kong's New Socio-Political Landscape in the Digital Age

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The "New" Global Social Movements

The paper aims at acting as a headlamp reminding officials, consultancies and urban planners about the changing socio-political environment in Hong Kong under the era of digital age. The rises of localism is a dynamic and on-going battlefield. It is the reflection and reaction to the redefined identity of socio-politics. Starting from 2010s, there is an increase in political unease about social, political, and economic inequality all around the globe. The Arab Spring, the 15-M Movement in Spain, Occupy Movement began in the Wall Street and then eventually spread to every part of the world including Asia like Hong Kong. These events are considered fundamentally different from social movements in the past. Historically, social movement aims to create media events in order to pressure the decision making in representative politics. Higher mobilization in movement, the higher media exposure, and thus creating higher pressure for political actors to react and fulfill your demand. In many cases, social movement targeted in mobilizing people to join force and resist against particular issue. The "new" movements go a step further, demanding not merely a change in one specific issue, but oppose the whole *status quo* of social-political structure.

Many believes that through the disseminate of the Internet use, especially online social platforms like Twitter and Facebook, social movements of today are spread much quicker and reached much further than in the past. The new technological advancement helped particularly in communicating and mobilizing. Techno-optimist such as Coleman[1] believes the Internet opens up public scrutiny by granting access to huge amount of information which was previously unavailable to citizens which allowing the public to engage in social affairs on a more equal basis with political authorities. Furthermore, he also believes the Internet creates unmediated public space for direct engagement and gives chance for deliberation with one another. Some academics have labeled it as a "social network revolution" [ii], while some others considered this to be a misunderstanding of today's movements. In their perspective, the essence of what is new in the global movements is the "collective construction of new social relationships – creating new spaces and territories" [iii] concluded that overstating the impact of the Internet on the new collective actions or grassroots movements is simply "net delusion". The new ICTs are important, but only as tools to help. David Harvey considers the new bottom-up global movements not merely trying to debunk the myth of dominating neoliberal ideology, but also trying to bring direct and actual impact in stopping the global accumulation of wealth and letting Capital to bear the costs of "externalities" they have created. In brief summary, the "new" global social movements actively challenge the dominant neoliberal status quo through direct actions started from the grassroots and through this dynamic "open-ended social process" of horizontal-participatory democracy practice[iv], they aim to foster the possibility in establishing a fresh and free world with the new imagined communal identity.

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Public Engagement is an irresistible trend in responds with the changes

For the past 30 years, scholars in politics have demonstrated why merely electoral representation is a weak form of democracy[v]. Increasing evidence is showing the importance of public engagement in the policy process for effective governance[vi]. Public or citizen participation refers to the "organized activities and actions of citizens… to influence the policy process in its various stages of problem identification, agenda-setting, formulation, adaption, implementation and evaluation"[vii]. Illustrated at the beginning of this paper, the new global social movements are concern with the "autonomy, equality, and responsiveness to the public good" [viii]. Booher also argues that a deeper concept of democratic values is relevant to spatial planning in at least two ways. First, enhancement of the urban spaces' values; and second, the manifestation of civic engagement in spatial planning is itself an element of quality of urban spaces through the empowerment of social intelligence. In Hong Kong context, there are in general two means the government uses for public engagement practice: (1) district, statutory and advisory bodies; and (2) public consultation exercises. However, it is believed that both of them fail to show significance in policy decision-making process.

Localism in Contest: the social resistance and identity construct

Understanding the political unfairness, and considerable deception in public consultation processes after 1997, there is a growing demand for autonomy, level opportunities to social, economical, and cultural rights, and enhanced engagement in planning for the city-state's future. Richards classified online communication into two primary types: (i) synchronous discussion[ix], and (ii) asynchronous discussion. The former one represents "real-time or live communication that takes place on platforms such as instant messengers, audio chat, or video chat"; the later one represents "non-live communication that takes place over time and includes platforms such as e-mail, discussion forums, blogs, and wikis". It is also suggested that some social networks such as Facebook and Google+, and some micro-blogging such as Twitter, hold both features of synchronous and asynchronous at the same time.

To keep pace with the development of Web 2.0, governments in both local and national levels are keen on introducing the concept of e-government into their organizations. E-government refers to government's use of technology, particularly web-based Internet applications to enhance the access to and delivery of government information and service to citizens, business partners, employees, other agencies, and government entities[x]. It is in general, believed that with the practice of e-government, government's accountability to citizens will increase, citizens will have greater access to government information, transaction activities will be more efficient and cost-effective, relationship between the government and the public will improve, and there will be improvement in democracy through easier participation[xi].

Web 2.0 and e-Government

At the beginning of the essay, we briefly introduced some foreign literature on the Internet and the new social movements. In the coming sections, we will outline the development of Web 2.0 and e-government in the current age of digital-natives, and then explain the current status of the usage of Web 2.0 by the public and Hong Kong government. In brief, what distinguish Web 2.0 from Web 1.0 is the active use of communication platforms based on the Internet such as blogs, wikis, and social networks that allows average users to transform themselves from passive receivers of

information to active producers of information[xii]. The provision of information was no longer the main purpose of the Internet; instead, communication and interaction became goals in themselves[xiii]. "The Web as platform" has long been a core principle for Web 2.0 since the first Web 2.0 conference held in October 2004[xiv]. Scholars claimed the Web 2.0 platforms helped empowering individuals in taking control of their own Internet experiences[xv].

The end of the conservative stakeholder engagement approach
As already shown, social researchers generally found the engagement process of Hong Kong government is an executive-led one, with agendas already set, and the engagement level is limited to merely inform or consult that make good examples in explaining political tokenism. In issues related to urban planning, the stakeholder engagement model is considered as a conventional one, as they only restrain stakeholders as people involved within certain geographical boundary of the site, and some conventional pressure groups. However, such conventional model is often regarded as too narrow, and not inclusive enough[xvi]. It is believed that the current public consultation practices seem to "reflect the government's intention to control the outcome of the consultation process instead of sharing power in the decision-making processes" [xvii]. Mitchell, Agle, and Wood developed a widely adopted stakeholder theory that consists of three attribute possessions: power, legitimacy, and urgency. The theory of this stakeholder typology can be presented as the following figure.

FIGURE 2
Stakeholder Typology:
One, Two, or Three Attributes Present
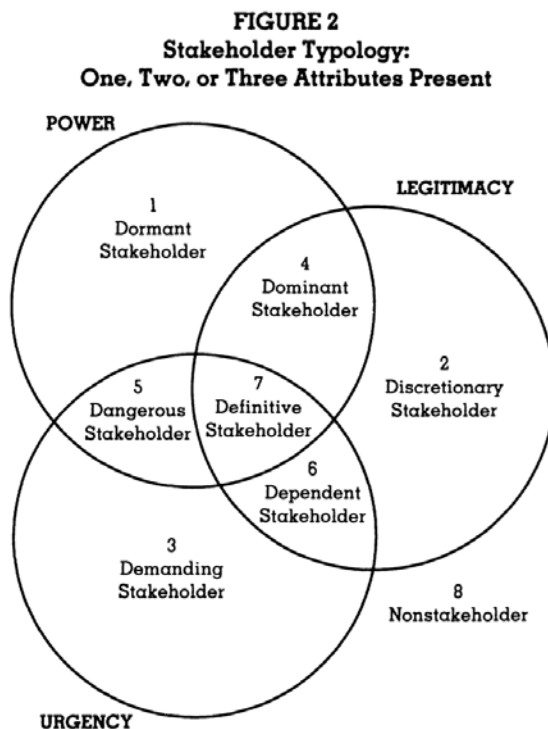
(Mitchell, Agle, and Wood 1997)

According to Mitchell, Agle, and Wood (1997), stakeholders are divided into three classes. The low salience classes (areas 1, 2, and 3) are called the "latent stakeholders" as they possess only one of the three attributes. Moderate salient stakeholders (areas 4, 5, and 6) possess two of the attributes, and are called the

"expect stakeholders". Area 7, which possess all three attributes are called the definitive stakeholders. Individuals or entities possessing none of the three attributes are considered as non-stakeholders or potential stakeholders. As shown above, latent stakeholders and expectant stakeholders are also classified into three types respectively in accord with their possession of attribute(s). The "power-legitimacy-urgency" approach is an important reminder to the Hong Kong government, which in general observed as focusing in the "legitimacy" in stakeholder-management relationship only, and not paying enough attention to incorporate stakeholder power and urgency into decision-making consideration.

New communication technology and social resistance in Hong Kong
A recent exploratory study on how a "Facebook sharing network" helps construct a countervailing power during the course of the Hong Kong Umbrella Movement finds that, posts sharing between Facebook pages do help in the empowerment of emerging civil society in the venue of policy debate, particularly the "new" civic associations played key role in the movement; however, many other traditional political players were found marginalized in the network and could not establish a strong connectivity with the civil society[xviii]. Scholar found that through posts sharing, Facebook has been found to be instrumental for information dissemination and mobilization in the Occupy Wall Street movement[xix]. Since the population of daily Facebook user consists almost half of Hong Kong population, we cannot underestimate the power of information spread through the channel. Of course, as several scholars have pointed out, because contents published on the Internet are in general unfiltered, this puts greater demand on the users to evaluate the quality of the material themselves. Vitak examined the relationship between Facebook users' political activity on the site and their offline political participation, and found the former one a predictor of the later one[xx]. If the government and planners who work in the consultancy are willing to engage more on the Facebook activities among the new civic association and new online media, they should at least be able to understand the real concerns of the public; particularly the concerns from the younger generation on policy planning.

Through this paper, it's intended to bring up questions to administrators such as whether they have a good grab of the evolved social-political landscape? Do they know about the priorities of different stakeholders? How do they assess the validity of current methods in city planning and new policy implementation? If the old methods are not working, what should they do? Good governance cannot be achieved without a genuine stakeholder engagement. Without proper understanding of your stakeholders would result in counterfeit communication with extraterrestrial language. Before we jump into solving conflicts among parties with different interests, it is important for us to make sure we have a decent understanding of these interests and their rationale.

What is Next?
Public engagement and e-Government as illustrated are both irresistible trends. However, after numerous of political conflicting events, the trust between the public and the government hit a new low. According to the latest HKUPOP's poll (March 2016) on people's trust to the Hong Kong government, 44.3% replied they are either "Quite Distrust" or "Very Distrust"; the figures are significantly higher than the 7.1% 10 years ago (April 2006). To relax the tension between the two, the step-in of an "independent counselor" could be helpful. Professional bodies and civil scholars

could contribute their expertise in engaging public participation through all stages in planning and policy making with advanced utilization of ICTs. By "independent", we mean an agent that act merely according to one's professional knowledge and manner, be faithful to evidences and reason, and do not change one's professional judgment when pressured by economic, institutional, or other sort of threats.

The government should utilize all professional assistants possible in reaching the goal of "improving the quality of life of citizens" (Digital 21 Strategy 2008). Bureaucratic practices, such as centralization and formalization, almost always have negative effect in constraining creative expression [xxi]. In order to promote wider and deeper stakeholders engagement in the public domain, the help from innovative ICTs is necessary. Bureaucratic government practices could act as obstacles to ICT innovations. This is one reason why research and development, even for government's own use, are often outsourced.

Furthermore, from controversial implementation of various policies in the past, we highly suspect the government lack expertise in engaging stakeholders' engagement in earlier stages of project. Experts in the area could contribute in formulating general framework and guidelines in supporting the public engagement process. If our goal is truly to improve the well being of everyone in the society, proper stakeholder engagement practices should lead us out of the current perceived "zero-sum" game. A good stakeholder engagement always empower the participants through delegating power and let them feel they have words in the project decision-making. Under the new socio-political landscape of Hong Kong, it is important to absorb the "community rebuilding localists" through open and horizontal engagement process; otherwise, we are afraid this camp of localists will be pushed to the radical localist camp and eventually lead to more violence, and heavily destruction in public welfares, as well as Hong Kong's economy.

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