

Open Data as Government Actions: Policy or Politics?

A Track Proposal for DGO 2017

Boyi Li
Kyung Ryul Park

In recent decade, opening up government data and encouraging public engagement with/via data becomes an influential idea in multiple fields of public management innovation, digital economy, and international development (Janssen et al. 2012; Catlaw and Sandberg 2012; Zuiderwijk and Janssen 2014). A growing body of literature is being focused on the potential benefits for, and motivations of, governments to adopt the practice of open data in various countries as well as international organizations (Janssen et al. 2012). Most list the main benefits by making clear reference to the universal socio-political values (such as transparency, collaboration, and participation) (OGP 2011). It has almost been assumed that open government data is one of the rare political agendas whose principle objectives reached wide-range consensus, leaving only the technical details of how-to-do largely undecided.

In this track, we aim to challenge this assumption by proposing to examine open data initiatives in two distinctive conceptual lens: policy and politics. The policy lens aims to analyze how the ideas of open data has been interpreted by policy-makers and other stakeholders, and translated into instruments of various policy genres (economic, social, industrial, public service etc.). The policy lens highlights the instrumental purposes of open data and attempts to link means (digitization, open platforms, codes of best practice) with ends (transparency, anti-corruption, bureaucratic efficiency, for instance), though such means-ends relationship proves to be rather casual and improvisation-based (Burstein 1991; May et al 2006; Mazzucato 2011). In contrast, the politics lens of open data is mainly concerned with the power relations between state, society, and business (Burawoy 2012; Bates 1975; Fairclough 1992). It guides researchers to reflect the whole agenda of open data in its relations to the role of state

in the fast-shifting landscape of digital economy or information society. We argue that current literature on open data adoption and implementation in government sectors should pay more attention to this policy-politics divide, which implicates possibilities of meaningful “engaged scholarship” (Van de Ven 2007; Evans 1995) in the emerging field of open government research.

With an emphasis on the diversity of open data adoption and usage cases in various countries, for examples the city governments in China, the central governments of UK and Indonesia, we attempt to examine the government actions as making sense of and implementing open data practice in socioeconomic and political context. By government actions, we mean both macro-level institutional designs and the micro-level collaboration and competition between actors of distinctive behavior agency. We will lay bare how actions of government actors of both countries, in complex relations to their relative institutional context, can be analyzed as either policy framework or politics framework. For example, the Chinese city government has strong tendency to associate open data with entrepreneurship and industrial innovation policy, and that the local policy-makers secured huge support from the venture capital market had not only strengthened this policy framing, but also effectively granted the venture capitalists the power to shape future policies. This observation leads to the paradigm of theorizing open data in China as part of the “entrepreneurial state” thesis in political economy literature (Duckett 1996; Mazzucato 2011; Evans 1995).

From the politics perspective, it becomes clear to us that there is a power imbalance between capital markets (VCs) and city governments, as the latter become the subordinate actor to collect data of public ownership (not to mention the privacy concerns) and consciously used these data to support the profiting purposes of private firms. Policy framing of open data in China has given rise to a distinctive game of local politics, which further shaped the development of policy-framing. In this track, it will be possible to suggest that while policy principles may be consistent with the local government actor’s actual intentions of open data practice, there is generally little

awareness of how the politics of open data can have a huge impact on the actual outcome of the initiatives. Hence, we aim to achieve better understandings of how open data policy was drafted, interpreted, and implemented in the context of the local politics of a specific country, and explore the possibility of theoretical generalization without losing the merit of contextual diversity.

We invite papers on the following kinds of topics and questions, but not limited to:

1. Open data as innovation and entrepreneurship policy
2. Best practice of open data in governments and its relations to political structures.
3. Open data, servitization, and bureaucratic reforms
4. Critical discourse analysis and content analysis of open data policy documents
5. Open data for low-income developing countries and policy-thinking of international development organizations.
6. The institutional designs of agency to facilitate government-business collaboration
7. Open data initiatives in relation to data protection regulations and legislations
8. The ideological debates of open data as neoliberalism or developmental state, or the third way?
9. The impact of politics on open data: interest groups, social movement, emerging identities (gender, environmentalism) etc.
10. Critical approach to the concept of open data and the theoretical links between open data, open government, and its socioeconomic outcomes.

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Short Bio

Dr. Boyi Li

b.li@exeter.ac.uk

Boyi is a lecturer in management at the University of Exeter. He received a PhD (information systems) from the London School of Economics and bachelor's degree from Renmin University of China. His research projects aim to understand the roles of the state in Chinese digital economy, in particular how open data and open government practices have been shaped in Chinese context. What characterizes all his research efforts is the use of social theories, in particular the theories of political economy, to study how the practices of digital innovation and organizational change can be explained by contextual institutions and local knowledge. His related research projects include business ecosystems, data-driven business for development purposes, and the transformation of Chinese rural space in digital economy. Boyi is co-editing a special issue of the journal *Asian Business & Management* on "Business Ecosystem in Asian Context: The Challenges of Social Embeddedness".

Kyung Ryul Park

K.Park5@lse.ac.uk

Kyung R. Park is a PhD candidate in Management Department at London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). Kyung's research is primarily concerned with questions of knowledge and power in open data ecosystems. His empirical research explores the role of open data and information systems in aid governance in developing countries. He used to work as Open Aid Specialist at the World Bank where he co-authored three World Bank publications regarding the issue of digital government. He is currently serving as a member of advisory committee to the open data policy in Ministry of Interior in Korea, and has extensive experiences on development policy and projects with International Vaccine Institute (IVI), UN World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) and Innovation for Poverty Action (IPA). He worked in Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, India, Indonesia, Cambodia and the United States. He holds a Master's degree in Public Policy from Harvard University, B.S. in Chemical and Biological Engineering, and B.A. in International Relations from Seoul National University (SNU) in Korea.