When Web 2.0 meets PPGIS: 
Mapping as everyday practice through the digital self and digital mass?

Wen Lin
University of Wisconsin-La Crosse
Geography and Earth Science Department

Abstract:
There has been a growing body of work examining the development of volunteered geographic information (VGI) and associated social and political implications (Goodchild 2007; Sui 2008; Crampton 2009; Elwood 2010). In particular, notable attention has been given to examining the intersections between public participation GIS and VGI (Miller 2006; Tulloch 2008; Boulton 2010). VGI can provide a new form of participatory mapping by engaging with a broader audience of lay persons through crowd-sourcing, greater user-friendliness and less space and time constraints. Moreover, the wider accessibility of spatial imagery and spatial data through VGI platforms (e.g., Google Earth and Google Maps) provides important forms of visual politics (Elwood forthcoming). On the other hand, VGI may constitute new forms of exclusion and inequality (Williams 2007; Zook and Graham 2007; Parks 2009).

While these studies provide important insights into the power relations and spatial knowledge production through data generation and representation with VGI, I argue that more research is needed to further investigate in what ways these new geospatial technologies have constituted the actor’s self identity and the politics of citizen participation. The emergence of VGI, along with other Web 2.0 technologies, seems to facilitate the increasingly individualized, and yet dynamically coordinated and organized spaces of civic engagement, participation and activism. An example includes various crisis mapping efforts. Meanwhile, researchers in critical GIS have attempted to conceptualize how geospatial technologies and data constitute bodies, identities, and social relations (Elwood 2010), reflecting on new dimensions of the subjectivities and social relations, such as the data-borg (Schuurman 2004), geo-coded citizen (Wilson 2009), and digital self (Dodge and Kitchin 2007).

As such, drawing upon PPGIS studies, critical GIS research and critical social theory such as Mark Poster’s (1990; 2006) work on the “mode of information,” I propose to examine the mutual and complex relationships between subject formation and geospatial technology development and their implications for spaces and politics of citizen participation in a variety of contexts. In particular, what kinds of political bonds and political mobilization have been produced and inscribed in the new human-machine interfaces manifested through VGI practices? In what ways the hybrid and mobile digital self and the cyberspace mutually constitute each other through everyday mapping as well as mapactivism? I seek to address these above questions through a case study of three VGI projects and their evolution over time in China.

Works cited:


