

Hong Kong Youth Radicalization from the Perspective of Relative Deprivation

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to highlight the influence of relative deprivation (RD), observed amongst a number of Hongkongese youth, on the process of radicalization of Hong Kong politics. The thesis of this paper is that the political radicalization of youth, noticeable particularly in recent years (e.g. more violent protests, the growth of nativist and localist organizations and the flourishing idea of self-determination of Hong Kong), can be an effect of RD. The findings conclude that the feeling of deprivation amongst youth refers to two spheres: “political values” and “welfare values”. The former concern the expectations of democratization of the political system and the latter relate to the feeling of dismantling the economic status and cultural identity of Hongkongers. The results of this paper are based on a small-range qualitative research (focus groups, in-depth interviews) conducted in April 2014, November 2015 and September 2016 on the group of HK students, scholars, journalists, and politicians. The analysis leads to the conclusion that without real changes in the political system of Hong Kong, the level of radicalization might further increase in the coming years.

Keywords: *relative deprivation, political radicalization, contentious politics, Hong Kong politics*

1. Introduction

In recent years, one could observe more transgressive instruments of manifestation of own political ideas by the young citizens of Hong Kong. Only since 2014, the region has been the witness of events such as the so-called “Umbrella Movement”, “Fishball Revolution”, “March to the Immigration Department”, and others, including a few anti-parallel trading protests. Since 2006, the number of demonstrations has been rapidly growing (HK Police Force, 2017). Furthermore, the protests become increasingly more violent each year. The justification for the use of violence among Hongkongers is becoming more noticeable (Cantoni *et al.*, 2017: 8). Thus, the support for the nativist and localist parties and the idea of self-determination of Hong Kong can be another visible sign of the growing political radicalization of the youth.

The main thesis of this paper is that the political radicalization of young Hongkongers manifested in recent years (the youth here is understood as the citizens in the age of secondary school pupils and students) can be an effect of relative deprivation. Although the theory of relative deprivation passes through a period of criticism (due to the difficulties of empirical verifiability and lack of precise explanation of process of transition from feeling of deprivation to collective actions; Brush, 1996), the author assumes that it can be useful to highlight some aspects of the more transgressive forms of contention in Hong Kong. Furthermore, according to the author, the feeling of deprivation amongst a part of the youth refers to two spheres: “political values” and “welfare values”. The former concerns the expectations of democratization of the

political system and the latter relates to the feeling of dismantling the economic status of Hong Kong and the cultural identity of Hongkongers. In the case of political values, RD is close to the so-called “progressive deprivation” (a situation where the degree of realization of political values, e.g. democratization, noticeably diverges from the gradually increasing aspirations of “pro-democracy organizations”). Among the previously mentioned welfare values, we can observe a situation of “decremental deprivation”, a phenomenon in which expectations remain constant but the possibility of obtaining those values (capabilities) is falling (there is no possibility to meet the social and economic needs of the society and preserve own cultural identity).

Relative deprivation is thus tied to the feeling of anger and frustration (Grant *et al.*, 2015). Over the last two decades, researchers have confirmed the relationship between the feeling of anger, frustration and resentment with the engagement in protest actions. For example, Peter R. Grant *et al.* demonstrated that the stronger a negative emotional reaction of anger, frustration and resentment is, the more likely it is for the people to take part in protests.

The results of this paper are based on the qualitative research (focus groups, in-depth interviews) conducted in April 2014 (seven students of HKBU – representing Political Science studies and European studies; 4 women, 3 men; 6 students born and raised in HK, 1 student from Mainland China), November 2015 (seven students of HKBU – representing Political Science studies and European studies; 5 women, 2 men; all students born and raised in HK), and September 2016 (first focus group consisted of 9 students of HKBU – representing Political Science studies, European studies and Communication studies; 5 women, 4 men; 7 students born and raised in HK, 1 student from Mainland China, 1 student born in Vietnam; second focus group with 8 students from Department of Politics and Public Administration of HKU

– 6 women, 2 men; all born and raised in HK), as well as on a small-range quantitative research in the months of March–September 2016 on a group of 66 students representing 12 universities and educational institutions.

2. Political Radicalization of Young Hongkongers

The research on political radicalization has flourished over the recent years. To a large extent, it is concentrated on the study of violence and terrorism. In this paper, however, radicalization is understood rather through the prism of the concepts derived from the studies of “social movements” and “collective actions”. I assume that we can, and should, develop concepts regarding the situation of young people in Hong Kong not only from the domain of “social movements” but also from the “political radicalization” framework.

The political radicalization in Hong Kong can be close to the definition of Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow and Charles Tilly (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, 2004: 69) – “the expansion of collective action frames [which leads] to more extreme agendas and the adoption of more transgressive forms of contention”. The authors do not assume, therefore, that violence is a necessary feature of radicalization. In fact, this phenomenon, also referred to as “transgressive form of contention”, depends on actual forms of collective behavior (in some cases, for example, street riots can be seen as a growing radicalization of protesters but in a situation of more violent contention, minor clashes with the police do not necessarily constitute radical resistance).

In order to understand the political radicalization in Hong Kong, one can quote Ted Gurr’s. According to him, radicalization occurs when:

the group has been mobilized in pursuit of a social or political objective but has failed to make enough progress toward the objective to satisfy all activists. Some become discouraged, while others intensify their efforts, lose patience with conventional means of political action, and look for tactics that will have greater impact.

(Gurr, 1990: 87)

In order to analyze the political situation in Hong Kong, however, it is important to distinguish between “radicalization of opinion” and “radicalization of action”, as psychologists have underlined that “radicalization to extremist opinions is psychologically a different phenomenon from radicalization to extremist action” (McCauley and Moskaleiko, 2017: 211). Political attitudes thus do not automatically transform into actions; “becoming a terrorist was not always a natural or linear progression from being a radical” (Bartlett, Birdwell and King, 2010: 12). Furthermore, Mohammed Hafez and Creighton Mullins (2015) stress that in order to produce terrorist action four factors need to come together: grievance, networks, ideology, and enabling environment. Fathali M. Moghaddam (2005), in turn, illustrates the radicalization process in a metaphor of a six-floor narrowing staircase: the ground floor is the feeling of relative deprivation; the first floor is the search for options and solutions; the second floor is the anger and hostility against those who are perceived as responsible for the injustice; the third floor is the moral justification of terrorism; the fourth floor is recruitment to the terrorist group; and the fifth floor are terrorist actions. The transformation from radical opinions to radical actions thus starts somewhere between the third and the fourth floor. I am of the opinion that we can use this model to analyze not only terrorism but also violence. In such case, a part of the Hong Kong youth is already on the

third floor – the level of normative and utilitarian justification for violent actions.

According to McCauley and Moskalenko, on the other hand, radicalization can be illustrated as a pyramid where, at the base, are individuals who do not care about the particular political cause (*neutral*); higher, are those who believe in the cause but do not justify violence (*sympathizers*); one level up are those who justify violence (*justifiers*); and at the top are those who “feel a *personal moral obligation* to take up violence in defence of the cause”. In this “action pyramid”, at the base, there are those who do nothing for a political group or cause (*inert*); higher, there are those who are engaged in legal political actions (*activists*); one level up, there are those who have engaged in illegal actions (*radicals*); and at the top of the pyramid, are those who target civilians (*terrorists*).

When considering political radicalization in the way mentioned above, we can stress that, in Hong Kong, in recent years, the political radicalization (both of opinion and of action) and the deepening of the already existing cleavages is being observed. By 2012, mass marches on July 1 (the date of the acquisition of sovereignty over the region by the PRC) or candles in the apartment windows on June 4 on the anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre were the peaks of the social discontent. Currently, violent clashes with the police are reported. Until 2012, movements for the self-determination of the region had barely existed; now, the demand for the “city-state” conception propagated by Chin Wan’s work *Theory of the Hong Kong city-state* (Chin Wan, 2011) is becoming increasingly popular¹. Until 2014, the opposition parties had been of a more anti-establishment nature; now, they are becoming anti-system (according to Giovanni Sartori’s theory, it means that they undermine both the legitimacy of the system and the foundations supporting it).

Taking into consideration the model of McCauley and Moskaleiko, a part of the youth in Hong Kong justifies violence and is ready to take up actions in “defense of the cause”. On the action pyramid, there are some youths who can already be seen on the level of “radicals”.

Another “new” phenomenon in Hong Kong is the manifestation of signs of reluctance and even aggression towards Chinese citizens coming to Hong Kong. The Hong Kong citizens stress the differences in behavior of the Chinese mainlanders who are accused to be loud, to eat food in public transport, push themselves into queues, and relieve physiological needs in public places. Another commonly mentioned example is the lack of respect for established rules (e.g. in the workplace). Moreover, during protests, accusations are raised against immigrants from China that they raise the prices of consumer goods and reduce the availability of some public services, e.g. in the healthcare system or in the primary and secondary education.

Since September 2012, there have been regular protests against “parallel trading”² (反水貨客示威). The first protest of this kind, in the district of Sheung Shui (上水), involved more than 100 people. The subsequent protests in February and March 2015 in Tuen Mun (屯門), Sha Tin (沙田) and Yuen Long (元朗) were the most serious, with some protesters being arrested and pepper-sprayed, and batons being used by the police in order to disperse the demonstrators. The protests were organized by associations such as the Hong Kong Indigenous and Civic Passion, as well as groups organized through Facebook under the slogan “Reclaim Hong Kong, Defend The Local” (「光復香港，捍衛本土」).

Different systems of values and the concerns of Hong Kong citizens intensify tensions and conflicts. The aforementioned examples of behavior of Chinese mainlanders have repeatedly sparked off high-profile media debates. After 1997, these behaviors gave rise only to

negative comments of Hong Kong citizens; however, nowadays, organizations describing themselves as “nativist” and “local”, which have appeared in Hong Kong over the recent years, have been running very loud demonstrations against the immigration from PRC.

Furthermore, one of the most spectacular signs of radicalization is the so-called “Fishball Revolution”³ (魚蛋革命), during which more than 120 people were injured. The accompanying riots in the Mongkok (旺角) district in 2016 during the Chinese New Year holidays were sharply condemned not only by the Hong Kong government but also by the central government of the PRC. It is the most important to note that, at this point, the events of February 2016 strikingly contrast with the peaceful nature of the protests in 2014 and clearly show a progressive escalation of conflict in Hong Kong.

Another alarming sign is the feasible increase of “normative justification” of violence. During the focus group meetings organized by the author, students of Hong Kong universities were saying that the “umbrella revolution” showed that violence works. Only then, they [politicians] began to be interested in our opinion”. One student said that “violence is a tool to draw attention”.

Sixty-two percent of the students surveyed by the author, in fact, agree with the statement that “in certain situations in politics, violence is acceptable”.

Political radicalization in Hong Kong can be also inextricably related to the entry into the political scene of the generation of the people who were born in the 80s (*cf.* J.Y-S. Cheng, 2014: 200, 205) and to the growth of popularity of nativist and local attitudes, as well as the development of new radical political groups, which aggregate and articulate the interests of young, frustrated citizens of the Hong Kong Administrative Region (HKSAR).

The year 2014 was an important turning point. After the “umbrella movement”, radical political movements (such as Hong Kong Indigenous or Youngspiration) began to grow on the wave of grounded discontent on the streets of Hong Kong in 2014. These groups quite often refer to the autonomy and even independence of the region.

The localist doctrine thus continues to gain increasing importance. Currently, the doctrine, in its political stream (Wai-man Lam distinguishes three types of localist organizations – groups of local communities, labor organizations and political organizations (Lam, 2016)), is represented (with a different intensity), among others, by the following organizations: Civic Passion (熱血公民), Demosistō (香港眾志), Hong Kong Autonomy Movement (香港自治運動), HK First (香港本土), Hong Kong Indigenous (本土民主前線), Hong Kong Localism Power (香港本土力量), Hong Kong National Party (香港民族黨), Hong Kong Resurgence Order (香港復興會), Neo Democrats (新民主同盟), and Youngspiration (青年新政). Most of them, however, maintain a very small range of activities.

These few abovementioned examples show that the peaceful political culture, characterizing Hong Kong until 2003, has changed significantly in the recent years. Moreover, it also needs to be stressed that, although we observe a political radicalization, the situation in Hong Kong remains within the sphere of activities generally not considered as out of the ordinary for Western societies. Comparing to the protests in Europe, the contention in Hong Kong still does not take all possible forms.

3. Relative Deprivation Theory

Since the 50s of the twentieth century, social sciences have seen a dynamical development of the idea of searching for the sources of

collective actions in the phenomenon called “relative deprivation”. Already in the studies of Alexis de Tocqueville or Karl Marx, the reader could find interpretations of the reasons of the revolution in the processes underpinning the tension between the actual state (what people have) and what people feel they deserve to achieve. However, mature methodological studies on this issue started only after World War II. The book which put the trend of research on relative deprivation on track (and inspires several researchers) was the publication *The American soldier: Adjustment during army life* (Stouffer *et al.*, 1949).

In turn, one of the first papers, currently considered as a classic, devoted to the phenomenon of relative deprivation, was the article “A formal interpretation of the theory of relative deprivation” by James A. Davis, published in 1959 in *Sociometry*. In it, Davis (1959) pointed to a number of conditions leading to relative deprivation. The main five include:

- (1) The existence of a deprived group and a group that has access to certain goods (non-deprived group).
- (2) Deprived group’s awareness of its disadvantaged position leading to a feeling of one’s own position as less desirable (underprivileged).
- (3) Random comparisons within the population.
- (4) Comparisons which lead to relative deprivation must take place between the individual and the other person belonging to the same category.
- (5) The person experiencing relative deprivation must have a feeling that the status is different from those to which it compares.

One of the most important papers in the social sciences analyzing reasons of social revolution and developing the theory of relative deprivation is the article of James Chowning Davies “Toward a theory of

revolution". The American sociologist, analyzing the contexts of revolutions, pointed out that social and political revolts occur when the long-term aspirations and financial conditions of the people suddenly start to diverge from further possibilities of progress, e.g. as a result of a sharp downturn. Here, unlike in the theory presented earlier, there is no comparison between the situations of one person to another's, but instead a comparison between the current and the previous position of the same group (Davies, 1962).

Another significant contribution to the development of the theory of relative deprivation was made by a British sociologist Walter G. Runciman. To the previous findings, he added an important prerequisite for the rise of relative deprivation. The sociologist stressed that relative deprivation occurs only when the individual thinks that it is feasible to obtain X. Thus, he separated relative deprivation from unrealistic hopes and dreams (Runciman, 1966). Runciman also contributed to the conceptualization of three types of relative deprivation⁴:

- (1) individual
- (2) egoistic
- (3) group/fraternalistic

The preconditions of relative deprivation followed by Faye Crosby (1976: 89) are:

- (1) noticing that someone else has X
- (2) the desire to have X
- (3) a sense of entitlement to have X
- (4) a feeling of the possibility of achieving X
- (5) the lack of sense of personal responsibility for not having X

Recent research on relative deprivation concentrates more on the psychological aspects of the feeling of deprivation. Heather J. Smith and Thomas F. Pettigrew (2014) proved that taking collective actions results from certain forms of relative deprivation – intragroup comparisons and comparisons of own situation with the past lead to individual effects (e.g. depression), but not collective actions. According to the researchers, only group relative deprivation leads to collective initiatives (including the support for political protests). But the key requirement for a group relative deprivation is that people see themselves as representative members of the group.

Another substantial strand of research regarded the role of the influence of social upward mobility on relative deprivation (e.g. Sayles, 1984; Zagefka *et al.*, 2013). As noted by Roxane de la Sablonnière and others (de la Sablonnière *et al.*, 2010), a significant amount of research evidence confirms that in order for the relative deprivation to accumulate, comparisons over time are more important than comparisons among groups.

An important role of relative deprivation in the origins of social revolts was also emphasized by the American political scientist Ted Gurr. In his book *Why men rebel*, published in 1970, Gurr pointed out that collective activities (rebellions) may take place in cases of discrepancies between the expected values (considered to be deserved by the group) and the actual situation. The scale of the relative deprivation is dependent on, among others, the depth, extent and duration of relative deprivation. Gurr stressed the key role of frustration at the outbreak of collective violence. It is the “frustration-aggression” that is the primary source of the political violence.

According to Gurr’s assumptions, relative deprivation is a necessary precondition for political violence, but outbursts take place when the

attitudes and beliefs of dissatisfied people are focused on the political objects, when there is a weakness of the institutional system, and when the opposition groups are strong enough to clash with the ruling majority. One of the most cited passages from Gurr's book is the distinction of three forms of relative deprivation:

- (1) "Decremental deprivation" – a situation when value expectations remain constant while capabilities fall.
- (2) "Aspirational deprivation" – value expectations rise while capabilities remain the same.
- (3) "Progressive deprivation" [so-called "J-curve"] – expectations and capabilities grow, but the capabilities either do not keep up or start to fall.

The second half of the 1970s saw the first unfavorable references to the theory of relative deprivation (Brush, 1996). Most of them criticized the theory as not supported by empirical research. However, researchers such as Thomas F. Pettigrew prove that the inconsistencies of RD theory can be overcome by the clarification of the theoretical antecedents and components of the concept.

Heather J. Smith *et al.* (2012) proved that different types of relative deprivation lead to different behaviors. Individual RD, which is the product of disadvantaged interpersonal and intrapersonal comparisons, results in individual-focused attitudes and behaviors. Group RD, in which people view themselves as representative group members, lead to group-focused attitudes and behavior, including the support for political protests.

Another researcher, Martijn van Zomeren *et al.* (2004), stated that the affective component of RD (feelings of dissatisfaction) is more important than the cognitive component of RD during outbreaks of

political protests (Klandermans, van der Toorn, van Stekelenburg, 2008: 994, 1008).

4. The Reasons behind Relative Deprivation in Hong Kong

The feeling of deprivation among a number of young people in Hong Kong is confirmed by author's own research and already existing data. Clearly, a higher level of dissatisfaction with the current life in Hong Kong is noticeable among people up to 39 years old (61%) (HKTP, 2014). More than 77% involved in the Umbrella Revolution were people aged 18-39 (Cheng and Yuen, 2014). At the same time, young people are closely related (organizationally and ideologically) with the radical democrats and nativist organizations in Hong Kong, which loudly contest the political system in HKSAR. Fifty-nine percent of the people declaring that the "radical democrats" represent their ideas best are individuals up to 40 years old (HKTP, 2014). It is, however, interesting regarding not only who is deprived, but what the reasons are behind the feeling of deprivation itself.

Hong Kong, in the common perception, is considered one of the best places to live in the world. Macroeconomic indicators draw a very optimistic picture of the region. In 2014, the unemployment rate was 3.2% (at the level of the natural unemployment rate); GDP per capita was at 18th position in the world amounting to USD 55,100; inflation rate was at 4.4% and the budget closed with a surplus of 0.8% of GDP. As for the entity numbering just over 7 million inhabitants (103rd position in the world), HKSAR has accumulated financial resources situating it at the top twenty of the world – measured by the M2 aggregate as the 13th place in the world. Furthermore, HKSAR is the 9th global exporter of goods and has reserves of foreign currency and gold equal to USD 328.5 billion (10th position in the world). Hong Kong is

also the world's second region in terms of accumulated foreign direct investment and in terms of activity in the form of FDI; it is situated on the 4th place among the entities of the world. Public debt amounted in Hong Kong in 2014 is only 39.5%. Thus, for many years, in terms of the ease of doing business and economic freedom, Hong Kong has occupied the highest, first place in the ranking by the Heritage Foundation for 21 years in a row, whereas on the index of the World Bank it occupies the 3rd place (as of 2015). What is more, interest rates of the central bank and the taxes are among the lowest in the world (CIA, 2016).

However, these data do not show many problems of the so-called human security (Pourzitakis, 2015). Although the abovementioned Hong Kong GDP per capita may be impressive, the median earnings (approx. HKD 15,000 per month; Census and Statistics Department, HKSAR, 2016) are at a level indicating that almost 20% of the population is living below the poverty line (*Hong Kong Poverty Situation Report 2014*). At the same time, social stratification is quickly growing, which gives rise to even more frustration. In the Gini index, Hong Kong was on the 11th place worldwide, only after the African and Latin American countries. Hong Kong economy, seen as the most liberal in the world, also took the infamous 1st place in the ranking of crony capitalism prepared by *The Economist* (2014). Furthermore, the availability of housing is one of the most serious problems in Hong Kong. It is estimated that more than 200,000 people live in the legendary "cage homes", and an even greater number of people live in very bad conditions (Census and Statistics Department, HKSAR, 2016; HKFP Lens, 2016). The median size of the "box apartments" is 4.5 m² per person (Census and Statistics Department, HKSAR, 2016). The average size of a new property in Hong Kong is also one of the lowest in the world, and amounts to 45 m², while, for example, in Britain, it is 76 m²; Japan – 95 m²; Germany – 109 m²; the United States – 201 m²; and Australia – 214 m² (Wilson,

2013). According to the *Demographia International Housing Affordability Survey: 2016*, prepared under the Urban Expansion Program of the New York University, real estate prices in Hong Kong are among the highest in the world.⁵ The ratio of median housing price to the amount of average annual gross income of a household in Hong Kong thus amounted to 17.⁶ In contrast, New Zealand was the second most expensive state after Hong Kong, with an overall result of 8.2 (*Demographia International Housing Affordability Survey: 2016*).

When considering the socioeconomic indicators on other aspects of human security, one should underline the undermining of the sense of ecological safety as well. Other challenges, in the view of at least a part of the Hong Kong society, include the diminishing academic freedom and freedom of press (the huge drop in the ranking of freedom of press prepared by the organizations such as Reporters Without Borders or Freedom House is very symbolic) and PRC influence on Hong Kong's political system.

Thus, in order to assess the possible reason behind relative deprivation of the youth in Hong Kong, it is also very important to show the changes that have taken place in Hong Kong over the recent decades, which can be seen as a result of the acquisition of the sovereignty over the region by the PRC.

Furthermore, a comparison of economic growth over time shows that in the years 1978-1996, the average growth was 6.6% per year. The total increase in income of working people in those years amounted to 139% (LegCo, 2015). In the years 1997-2013, in contrast, the average economic growth was only at a level of 3.5% per annum and the increase in earnings amounted only to 14%.⁷ It must be noted that periods of various length are being compared here; nevertheless, it can certainly indicate the reason behind the different perception by the society of the situation after and before 1997.

Moreover, in 2003-2008, up to 62.9% of persons employed were not gainfully promoted. Within 10 years (1998-2008), up to 47.2% of total employed personnel were not subject to promotion in the labor structure. At the same time, in the category of workers with the lowest wage, the increase in earnings amounted only to 45.9% (LegCo, 2015).

Referring to the aforementioned housing situation of Hong Kong citizens, it is important to note that the average price of small apartments in the period 2006-2013 increased by 188%. However, the average monthly income of households, in contrast, increased only by 30% over the same period. Thus, having an own apartment becomes increasingly more distant. It should be recalled that in the 80s and the first half of the 90s, the increase in housing prices was in line with the growth in household income; in the years 1981-1996, the number of residents having their own homes increased from 40.6% to 67.1%; in 2006-2013, however, it decreased from 70.5% to 66.7% (LegCo, 2015).

Moreover, the above-mentioned difficult housing situation of some residents of Hong Kong is particularly noticeable among young people. According to the research at the City University of Hong Kong, more than 75% of people aged 18-35 live with their parents. Almost 6% of the respondents who live with both parents as well as their life partner should be added as well.⁸ According to other studies, more than half (53%) of people aged 18-29 live in municipal houses or accommodation subsidized by the government. Only a part of them owns apartments (Hong Kong Transition Project, 2014). Moreover, only 20% of young people believe that their housing situation will improve in 2-3 years (Hong Kong Council of Social Service, 2016). Housing problems are thus considered the most acute (Hong Kong Ideas Centre, 2015).

In addition to changes in the availability of housing, there have been significant changes in the population's education levels and occupational structure. In the years 1991-2011, the number of individuals with at least

secondary education more than doubled, increasing from 11.3% of individuals with such a degree in 1991 to as much as 27.3% in 2011. In the group of 15-24 year-olds, the number of people with at least secondary education increased from 13.7% to 39.3% and this increasing trend in education in this age group will only continue. However, despite the increase in education among young people, their professional position is not improving significantly. While in the years 1991-2011, the total number of people in higher positions noticeably increased (from 10.3% in 1991 to 21.1% in 2011), the professional promotion of young people (15-24 years) took place mainly in the field of lower-paid service jobs and retailers groups (from 21% in 1991 to 34% in 2011). Average monthly earnings in this group (for the 1991-2011 period) amount to HKD 9,880, while among the middle-level employees – HKD 18,250; managers – HKD 35,000; and specialists – HKD 35,900 (LegCo, 2015). Therefore, young people often occupy significantly lower-paid positions and it is not related to their lack of professional experience but rather to the difficulty of professional advancement. In addition, more than half of the people aged 20-34 earn less than the median wage in Hong Kong, and even if the data might not be alarming, it is worth to note that only 30% of these people are satisfied with the economic situation of the region (Hong Kong Council of Social Service, 2016).

Hong Kong is also characterized by low intergenerational mobility, with the social system of Hong Kong not being conducive to reducing social disparities; thus, the education system reflects social divisions and does not reduce diversity. Children from 10% of the wealthiest families in Hong Kong are 3.7 times more likely to study than children from poorer families. The descendants also largely reflect the socio-economic positions of their parents, which further indicates a low degree of vertical mobility (LegCo, 2015).

The perspective of future political change in the region is negatively assessed as well (Cheng, 2002: 6). It must be also pointed out that the feeling of alienation of young citizens is caused by the sense that the “system” has forgotten them and does not care about the burden imposed upon them. Most of the young people study and are also indebted, with 67% of the people aged 18-59 providing financial support to their parents (in the group of 18-29 year-olds, 54% provide more than 20% of their income to parents; Hong Kong Transition Project, 2014: 25). Strong competition on the labor market and low salaries are also factors contributing to the radicalization of young people’s behaviors.

From the point of view of “political values”, a significant issue is the expectation of democratization. The democratization level in Hong Kong has changed throughout the years (although not significantly), but expectations have been rising since the 90s – faster than the capabilities. According to the in-depth interviews and the results of focus groups organized by the author in 2016, Hongkongers feel dissatisfied with the uneven influence that particular groups exert on public policies. The people with less impact on the political system perceived their position as underprivileged. Seventy-seven percent of surveyed students did not feel that they had any impact on politics, or felt that their influence on politics was very small. In many countries, those feelings exist, but in Hong Kong, the young generation feels even more deprived; thus, the pace of those changes is also important.

Interestingly, the time before the transfer of sovereignty over Hong Kong is mythologized, even by those young people for whom it is not possible to remember Hong Kong before 1997. Students believed that British Hong Kong was more responsive to the citizens’ demands than it really was. During the focus group interviews, one of the students stated that the time prior to 1997 was “somehow better” because “the government listened to the people of Hong Kong”; what is more,

“British governors, even though they were controlled by London, were responsive to the demands of Hongkongers”. As we can thus see, young people tend to compare their situation to the “Hong Kong dream” from the 80s/90s.

Another significant issue amongst the youth is the process of closing one’s identity in local components – while 34% of Hong Kong residents defined themselves as Hongkongers, in the age group 18-29, it accounts to as much as 55% respondents stating so. The “Hong Kong identity” among the youth is perceived as “international” and “pluralistic” in contrast to “Chinese” (Hong Kong Transition Project, 2014: 58-59).

Thus, the lack of influence on the political system and the growing role of mainland China in Hong Kong’s politics altogether lead to the dissatisfaction with the HKSAR government. According to the Hong Kong Transition Project, before the outbreak of the “Umbrella Revolution” in January 2014, 63% of the respondents were dissatisfied with the HKSAR government. However, among HKSAR citizens who were born in Hong Kong, this percentage increased to 71% (Hong Kong Transition Project, 2014: 80). Among the respondents aged 21-29, as much as 89% were dissatisfied (those aged 18-20 – 85%; among 30-39 year-olds – 80%).

5. The Role of RD in the Radicalization of Hongkongese Youth

Various studies have already proved that relative deprivation can drive the collective action of groups (e.g. Gurr, 1970; Smith and Pettigrew, 2014; Zagefka *et al.*, 2013). The models of collective action outbreaks show that the frustration caused by the inability to achieve goods, together with the sense of injustice, in appropriate conditions can result in contentious actions.

The reason behind the frustration among Hong Kong's students is rooted in their social position and political expectations. In the surveys on the group of Hong Kong students, almost all interviewees answered that they are strongly dissatisfied or fairly dissatisfied with the possibilities of social upward mobility in Hong Kong (73% fairly dissatisfied and strongly dissatisfied; *cf.* Chiu, 2010). Another reason for concern was the issue of housing – more than 90% of respondents were dissatisfied with housing quality (*cf.* Hong Kong Ideas Centre, 2015). Moreover, most of the students feel that the political and economic situation in Hong Kong became worse (91% of answers concerning the political situation; 56% concerning the economic situation). Finally, many of them did not believe that the situation was going to improve (77% of the surveyed students).

The existence of collective identity, grievances and emotions is essential to outbreaks of radical actions. According to research (Simon *et al.*, 1998; Stürmer and Simon, 2004), the role of collective identity in the process of the transformation of frustration seems to be crucial. Collective identity is also rooted in shared feelings of injustice. Stronger feelings of injustice, in turn, depend on how vulnerable the endangered value for a given person is. Consequently, the greater the danger for the group is, the greater the anger and the determination to participate in the protests. In the case of Hong Kong, it must be stressed that the youth expresses the feeling of strong generational identity (according to the author's own surveys, 78% students felt strong generational ties). The results from focus groups also confirmed that the students have a sense of a substantial generational gap between them and senior citizens of Hong Kong. According to the interviewed students, the interests of both groups seem not only to be separate but also opposite.

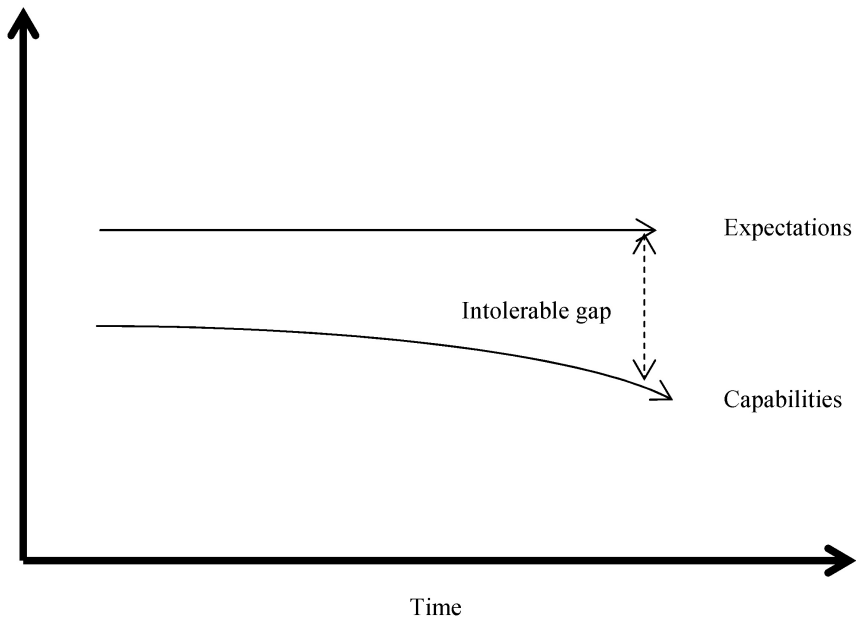
Similar findings can be observed in the social media analysis of the posts organized by the journal *Varsity* – as since the Umbrella Movement in 2014 more negative comments about the elderly have appeared on social media. The comments were also more aggressive than before (Leung and Zhang, 2016).

According to the studies, collective identity is more likely to emerge when a group of people have a common oppressor or if they share a common aversion to a person/group/situation. Research also suggests that deprived people act more aggressively when they are aware of the source of their frustration (Gurr, 1970). The results of the focus group interviews show that Hong Kong's students are not only frustrated but are aware of the reason of their frustration ("we are frustrated because we do not know how we can make our future better"; "the British had a chance to say that they are leaving the EU. We have no chance to comment on our future"; "... shops change the language to Mandarin only to welcome the Chinese from the mainland, they do not respect the Cantonese. We see that the government forces primary school students to greet on the streets the PRC, in high schools, the principals do not allow the discussion about HK independence..."; "the frustration comes from the fact that others do not understand why we fight"). Moreover, the situation of young people in Hong Kong also confirms the thesis that the frustration is growing dynamically when there is a collision of the negative perception of the future with the lack of upward mobility (Zagefka *et al.*, 2013). Only 20% of young people in Hong Kong believe that their housing situation will improve within 2-3 years (Hong Kong Council of Social Service, 2016). According to the focus groups organized by the author among Hong Kong students in November 2015 and the outcome from the questionnaires distributed in May 2016, the young people in Hong Kong are concerned about the economic future of

the region. When asked about their worries about the future of Hong Kong, they mention “poor perspectives for Hong Kong”, “economic inequalities”, “people living in poverty and people in need”. Among their personal fears, they indicate, among others, “increasing costs of living”. These observations confirm the opinion polls prepared by Hong Kong Transition Project.

Taking Bert Klanderman’s assumptions into consideration (Klandermans, 1984), and basing on the theory of mobilization extended on socio-psychological elements, one is led to the conclusion that the participation in the public activities depends on the expected costs and effects of these activities: “Feelings of relative deprivation or frustration do not necessarily evoke agreement with the goals of a movement which pretends to remedy these feelings: goals have to be perceived as instrumental to the elimination of these feelings.” The result of collective actions must be thus seen as the means to eliminating deprivation. I stressed earlier that Hong Kong students, during focus groups, underlined that they had felt that revolution is the only means that is left that is capable to draw the attention of politicians.⁹

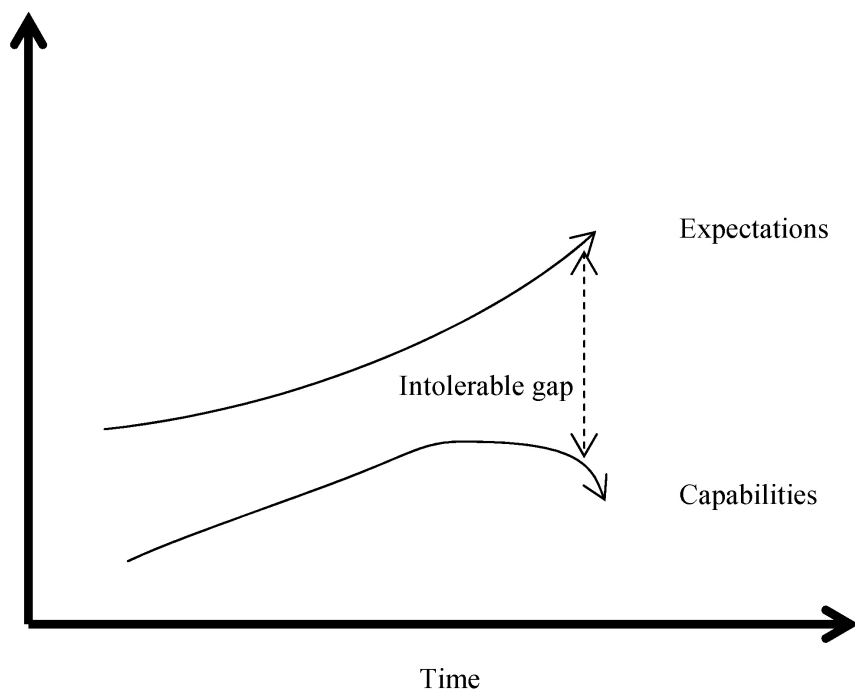
Moreover, as mentioned earlier, the classics indicate that social rebellion can occur when there appears an intolerable gap between what people want and what they receive (Davies, 1962). In Hong Kong, we can observe a situation in which the expectations of young people collide with the socio-economic situation of the region, leading to feelings of cultural insecurity (Figure 1). The youth would like to see more active public authorities. Moreover, in the World Values Survey, the respondents aged under 29 more often than older people supported the claim that “the government should take more responsibility to ensure that everyone is provided for”. The youth are also closely tied to the Hong Kong identity.

Figure 1 Decremental Relative Deprivation

Source: Author's source based on T. Gurr's assumptions.

A slightly different situation arises in the sphere of “political values”. In Hong Kong, in recent years, we can observe a movement which advocates the struggle for democratization. The recent debate on democratization additionally boosted the expectations of Hongkongers in this regard. However, those expectations were suddenly stopped by the decision of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress on August 31, 2014, which set limits for the 2017 Chief Executive election and the 2016 Legislative Council election. This decision was a direct reason to start protests by the students and to initiate the Umbrella Movement (Figure 2).

Figure 2 Progressive Relative Deprivation



Source: Author's source based on T. Gurr's assumptions.

At the same time, the abovementioned decision is part of a general atmosphere of doubt in the government's efforts to maintain high standards of living and preserve the political identity of Hong Kong. The diminishing of Hong Kong's unique economic position after 1997 is leading the citizens to an extremely negative perception of the future of the region. It should be also noted that many of them express strong concerns about Beijing's interference in Hong Kong's politics and the role of mainland immigrants.

6. Conclusions – The Prospect of Radicalization

RD theory can help to explain the rise of political radicalization in Hong Kong, understood as a more transgressive instrument of contention. The last fifteen years have brought economic uncertainty to Hong Kong, especially noticeable by its youth. Young citizens have also been left with an unrealized promise of democratization of the region, particularly visible against the backdrop of Beijing's increasing influence. Hongkongers also might feel that their local identity is also under threat.

It can be thus also assumed that the radicalization will continue. No tangible actions leading to the de-escalation of tension are being undertaken by the authorities of the HKSAR. At the same time, the nativist and localist organizations radicalize their actions – in May 2016, Civic Passion announced the organization of summer camps for young people aged 14-17, during which they would have lectures concerning the doctrine of localism, as well as “fitness training and survival skills”.¹⁰ The camps are a response to “the government education system” which is “trying to brainwash students to be obedient to the Communist Party”. The leader of Civic Passion reassured that this is not an attempt to build a paramilitary group; however, such initiatives show that the gap between the political groups continues to grow.

Among the generation of millennials (born in the 80s and 90s), the Democratic Party's appeals on the need for progressive democratic reforms were seen as counterproductive; today, however, the change is expected here and now. The students, during focus groups, emphasized that the strategy of traditional pro-democratic politicians did not work.

Unluckily, the hypothesis that Hong Kong's political situation can evolve in the direction of some form of *détente* is not supported by other facts. First of all, in the opinion of the dissatisfied people, the values considered as basic are at stake. At the same time, in their perception,

achieving the goal of democratization of the electoral law was already quite close (and the proximity of the goal is considered to be one of the factors of frustration in the event of a failure to achieve the objectives). What is more, it should also be added that the level of legitimacy of power in Hong Kong has declined (studies show that the more effective the political system in solving problems was in the past, the greater are the social expectations towards the future, and the more likely it is that the dissatisfied citizens will feel justified, both normatively and practically, to resort to political violence in order to shift attention to unresolved issues) (Gurr, 1970: 182)¹¹.

Notes

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1. 39.2% of the youth aged 15-24 would like to see Hong Kong as an independent state, according to Stephan Ortmann (“The development of the Hong Kong identity and the rise of localist movements”, IPSA World Congress 2016). Author’s research on Hong Kong students supports that number.

2. Parallel trading refers to the situation when Mainlanders, using a multiple entry visa, import to Mainland China goods from Hong Kong. This process causes shortages of household goods and rise of prices in Hong Kong.
3. Civil unrest that took place in the Mongkok district during the night of 8 February 2016. Young people for few hours confronted with police. The protesters set fire to several trash bins, threw objects into policemen. Police used batons and pepper spray. 90 policemen and 130 protesters were wounded, 61 people were arrested. Reason to protest was the government's crackdown on unlicensed street hawkers during the Chinese New Year holidays.
4. Runciman distinguishes egoistic and fraternalistic relative deprivation (Runciman, 1966). M.L. Sayles's third type is called "individual" (Sayles, 1984).
5. The study focused on 378 real estate markets in 8 highly developed countries and Hong Kong.
6. According to other data quoted by the newspaper *Apple Daily* (蘋果日報), it takes an average of about 14 years for a working couple to save enough money to buy a 40 m² apartment. See: <http://hk.apple.nextmedia.com/news/art/20141126/18948413>, on: 01.02.2016.
7. According to other data in 2001-2011, there was even a decline in median earnings by 2.9%. See: P.Y.A. Chow, *The Umbrella Movement: The bigger picture behind and its broader imaginations*, Cultural Studies@Lingnan, 47, <http://commons.ln.edu.hk/mcsln/vol47/iss1/4/>, on: 01.02.2016.
8. Although it should also be noted that virtually all respondents were unhappy with living with their parents (Yip and Forest, 2014).
9. What can also be interesting is that protesters during Umbrella Movement followed the strategy of Sunflower Movement in Taiwan. We also know that there were contacts between both movements (Ng, 2016).

10. “Pro-independence Hong Kong radicals start recruiting youth corps for ‘military’ summer camp” (reported by Ng Kang-chung), *South China Morning Post*, 4 May 2016. Available at: <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/article/1941399/pro-independence-hong-kong-radicals-start-recruiting-youth-corps> (accessed 1 September 2016).
11. Hong Kong has a long tradition of a high level of government effectiveness – according to the Worldwide Governance Indicators 2014, the score of Hong Kong (98.08) was one of the highest in the world. The problem is intensified if the government effectively solves the problem but most of the resources are directed to selected groups. The excluded are more likely to use force, because they are seeking to increase their share in the distributed goods (in Hong Kong, traditionally, the focus of public authorities’ actions is aimed at big business; young people often point out that the government, in their opinion, only takes care of “the big fish”).

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