

Chapter 13

The Scenario of a Learning Society Model toward Promoting a Positive Paradigm Shift for Communities

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ABSTRACT

This study uses a prospective qualitative approach. The Ethnographic Delphi Futures Research (EDFR) technique is used to propose a learning society model. The data include a review of peer-reviewed literature, a field study visit and observation of five best practices communities in Thailand, in-depth interviews to gain experts' perspectives, mini-Delphi techniques questionnaires, focus group discussions, and model evaluation. Qualitative data were transcribed and analyzed using content-analysis. Policy makers, practitioners from public and private agencies, educational personnel, and community leaders were among the 42 individuals involved in the data collection effort. Results revealed essential elements for development of a learning society including, principles, developmental processes, strategies, and key success factors to enhance a positive paradigm shift for communities. It is anticipated that the findings will (1) add meaningful information and practical guidelines for developing a learning society, (2) contribute to ensuring the quality of citizen participation and ensure balanced and sustainable development of communities and societies, and (3) serve as a basis for further research.

INTRODUCTION

Today's world may be characterized as the dawn of the new millennium of the learning society, where knowledge is a society's most valuable asset, a country's primary source of power (Knight, 1995)

and one which needs to be efficiently and effectively managed. A society thrives and survives on the foundation laid by its wealth of knowledge. Previous research (Sibmuenpiam, 2003; Sangsri, 2005; Knight, 1995; Malone & Yohe, 2002; Carrillo, 2002, 2004; Choi, 2003; Ergazakis et al., 2004; Lantz & Brage, 2006; Casey, 2006) clearly

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indicated that issues of knowledge play a major role in development of communities, cities, societies, and nations. As knowledge is gained through learning, the current development initiative is geared toward transforming the society into a learning society (Office of the Education Council, 2008) which is defined as one engaged in a sustainable development strategy that promotes the unending learning of individuals –the smallest unit of the society (Holden & Connelly, 2004). At the heart of the learning society is the commitment of all members to a set of values and the system of lifelong learning, and sharing knowledge with its members and others on a regular lifelong basis that enhances the opportunity of all community members to develop their full capacity of knowledge, skills, and attitude. In such a society education is interwoven with the social, political, and economic (Senesh, 1991).

The increasingly intense competition among the international community in all regards include the Constitution of the Royal Kingdom of Thailand 2007 (B.E. 2550), the Tenth National Economic and Social Development Plan 2007-2011 (B.E. 2550-2554), the National Education Act 1999 (B.E. 2542) and its amendment the National Education Act Amendment (Issue 2) 2002 (B.E. 2545), and the Non-Formal Education and Informal Education Act 2008 (B.E. 2551). All of these carry stipulations concerning lifelong learning, educational enhancement and global competitiveness with the aim of developing the society toward sustainable happiness. It also emphasizes the balance among all aspects: economy, society, natural resources and environment; and, transforming the Thai people into knowledge citizens and knowledge workers (Dulayakasem, 2005). This leads to an appropriate development of manpower and a learning society for sustainable development.

Thailand is in transition from a rural to an urban society. As a result of the compartmentalized development of urban and rural areas, there is imbalance in the development of rural com-

munities. The society is plagued with several obstacles to lifelong learning. For instance, there is an unequal opportunity to access: knowledge and learning resources, infrastructure, exclusive public services, economic background, and information technology system. Computer networks used for the transfer of knowledge do not cover all parts of the country. There remain a great number of Thai people who are not appropriately educated and are without means to pursue knowledge (Pongpaiboon, 2007). Although it is true that the national development strategies have provided a foundation on which Thailand can become a learning society, private and public agencies (e.g., Knowledge Management Institute, Thailand Productivity Institute, Office of Non-Formal Education and Informal Education Promotion) at the policy and implementation levels, as well as the communities, are actively and successfully pursuing study of the concept to establish measures for transforming the Thai society into a learning society. Their shared missions are to achieve tangible results. Several communities have been officially recognized as model learning societies by the Office of the Education Council (2008) for their successful implementation.

The studies of Sibmuenpiam (2003), and Sangsri (2005) revealed that Thai public and private agencies remain without an appropriate learning society model that is developed from the synthesis of knowledge appropriate to the social contexts and aimed at achieving an actual positive paradigm shift for communities in a structured and procedural manner. Similarly, those studies from foreign countries (Longworth & Osborne, 2010; Cisco, 2010; Su, 2007; Laszlo & Laszlo, 2007; Lantz & Brage, 2006; Casey, 2006; Faris, 1998, 2006; UNESCO, 2005; Longworth, 2006; Carrillo, 2004; Faris & Peterson, 2000; Keating & Hertzman 1999; Yarnit, 1998) showed that there is a growing interest of the knowledge cities and societies but the field still lacks a consensus regarding description or clarification, appropriate conceptual and methodological frameworks.

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