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The Trend and Development of Learning Cities in Korea

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Abstract — Koreans today take great pride in their cities attaining the status of learning cities. As of 2007, 76 cities were designated as learning cities by the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development. Learning cities are largely government funded initiatives aimed at improving the well-being of the people through economic progress. This paper traces the development of learning cities in Korea against the background of the global movement to promote lifelong learning and considers the following questions. What makes a city a learning city? How is a learning city defined in terms of its administrative functions and what impact do these have on public perception? How can learning cities be made sustainable? What is it in Korean culture that fosters the development of learning cities? What learning needs/training needs are being created by learning cities?

(Revised on 18 January, 2008)

1. Introduction

The current school education system has failed to check and correct itself. With the speedy development of information and technology, school has lost its dominant position as a learning venue and become just one education channel. With social changes, the education system has changed from school education to a lifelong learning experience. Therefore, we are heading for a network-centered life-long learning society where teaching and learning anywhere and anytime become a natural part of our daily lives.

For a lifelong learning society cities need easy access to education at places where they spend the most time. This should be provided within physical boundaries where people feel comfortable psychologically. This is because where people live and work is different thanks to urbanization. In addition, it is because the living environment has changed thanks to the advance of transportation and telecommunications. To establish

lifelong learning in cities requires measures to divide the functions and roles of lifelong education institutions via networking and to ensure that local citizens recognize and have access to those institutions.

At the heart of the lifelong learning city project lie local citizens. Thus the aim of project is decided based on the needs and wants of citizens and the project is implemented with their active participation. This means that the success of the project depends on the citizens. Thereby, a successful project can be seen as a process to explore the needs and wants of the local residents.

When it comes to the lifelong learning city project in Korea, as of 2006, a total of 57 cities had been designated as pilot cities by the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development and they carried out various activities since 2001. In the early stage, they benchmarked projects from industrialized nations that had established lifelong learning cities. However, given that the local self-governing institutions suffered a lack of awareness and citizens were not actively involved, the

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central government implemented an awareness campaign. Thus, at present, unless a city is designated as a lifelong learning one, heads of the local community are blamed for their lack of ability and the city is stigmatized as a backwater. This is why the project is very popular.

However, as significant as quantity growth, quality growth well reflecting the needs and wants of locals is important for a successful and sustainable project. In this respect, I take stock of the 6 year-old lifelong learning project of Korea and suggest principles that should be followed.

2. The Meaning and Structure of Lifelong Learning Cities

Learning is an important factor in deciding the comparative advantages of national, regional and city economies as well as individual success. OECD members promote regional development and innovation by establishing regional learning communities. In this regard, learning city projects and learning region campaigns are carried out as a response to the knowledge-based economy. The term “learning city/region” is used for cities, towns and communities, regardless of the size of the region. It can be a region composed of a few cities or any specific region. To be sure, it can be a region comprising a few administrative regions and beyond national boundaries. In Korea, lifelong learning is established by city, ‘Gun’(smaller than a city unit) and ‘Gu’(smaller than Gun) units with autonomy. This is because the lifelong learning project is promoted centered on general administrative affairs. First, I analyze the meaning and function of the learning city and suggest factors to be included.

2.1 The Meaning and Development Process of Learning Cities

The learning city can be defined as a city utilizing human, physical, and financial resources to realize the potential of all citizens under the assumption that learning lies at the core of personal wellbeing, stability and the prosperity of society. Therefore, the learning city means sharing of educational resources among institutions, local communities, and other nations (Longworth, 2000). In other words, the learning city is one that recognizes and takes advantage of learning for better regional integration, revitalization and economic development. In addition,

the lifelong learning city is a well-positioned community that provides learning for all citizens. With this aim, restructuring of the comprehensive education system is under way in order to overhaul the school-oriented and poorly-organized education system.

The learning city project is good for raising regional learning level, productivity, innovation and the economy (OECD, 2000). The learning city is a cooperative region for stockholders to initiate common solutions for shared problems and satisfy the learning desire of the residents, with economic vitality and social integration of the region in mind (EU, 2001).

The learning city is a networked learning society aiming for city prosperity, social integration and sustainability. The relation between learning and regional development can develop based on the fact that the driving forces of regional competitiveness and growth are knowledge and innovation, which come from learning. Simply put, first, learning boosts economic prosperity and employment of a city. Second, it provides equal opportunities, social integration and vitality. Third, it protects and improves the city environment for the sustainability of region and beyond. Fourth, it contributes to better city administration and empowerment of the region.

In 1991, the first meeting for the education city was held in Barcelona, Spain. This is considered the origin of promotion of the lifelong city. The meeting involved 47 global city representatives who shared educational experiences and discussed the roles and responsibilities of cities in local education. The OECD meeting in Gothenburg, Sweden, in 1992 served as a huge inspiration. Since then, the concept of and meetings about lifelong cities have spread around the world. The European Conference on Lifelong Learning Cities at Southampton from June 20 ~ 23, 1998 defined the ‘lifelong city’ as a vision of a lifelong learning project, policymaker for economic development, recognizer of the learning demand of citizens, awardee for learning performance and motivator for learning. Thereafter, The International Association of Educating Cities, with 26 nations and 175 cities, was established in 2000. The leaders of Europe, especially, ambitiously aimed to create the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world by 2010 and declared that lifelong learning would help Europe to achieve the goal at Lisbon in March 2000 (European Commission, 2000).

The OECD discussed the lifelong city from the perspective of regional innovation and development. On

the other hand, the EU discussed it as part of lifelong education. The EU selected lifelong education as a basic principle of education/job training while implementing various initiatives for promoting such education. To put the principle into practice, the EU has promoted the The R3L (Regional Networks for Lifelong Learning) project supporting a network of 17 designated areas for lifelong education since 2002. The R3L project is applied in 120 areas in Europe. It also serves as a follow-up to “Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality” project in 2001.

The British learning city, a pioneer in the area, is a city that meets the demand for learning by its residents through partnership between relevant institutions in the form of the city, town or community. In 1995, 8 British cities established a Learning Communities Network or LCN and it expanded to 32 cities in 2005.

The Australian learning city is also dubbed a learning community and each city has a different goal as a learning community. The Australian learning city aims to equip members of the community with the necessary capacity for the lifelong learning society, as a flexible community to cultivate its own future (Adult Learning Australia Inc., 2000). The trend of the lifelong city began when the city of Wodonga in Victoria state was declared the first learning city. In 2005, 40 learning cities were in place nationwide.

In Japan, most local governments do their best to establish learning cities/communities while making it a policy to promote lifelong education. In other words, local governments integrate the lifelong learning concept into local administration as a regional revitalization strategy. Thus, the Japanese lifelong learning city project has been implemented as part of the policy for lifelong education promotion. In particular, the lifelong learning city project is promoted as a project to vitalize lifelong learning by city/town/community units.

The lifelong learning city project provides diverse education about culture, the environment and self-governing to women, the elderly, and youths. In this regard, the efficiency and effectiveness of its administration and budget are kept in mind. The lifelong learning city is very positive for local education, productivity, innovation and economy in the knowledge-based economy. It is also well recognized as a major agenda promoted by administrators and politicians.

2.2 Factors in Lifelong Learning Cities

The lifelong learning city is a dynamic system to aid education of the citizens by integrating all resources for human learning. The lifelong city project is efficient and effective when all supporting factors of learning are operated systematically.

The lifelong learning city project aims to create new network by checking city systems for education. Therefore, the project should be run systematically. This is because the projects in which the factors of various learning city systems are involved should be carried out in an organic and cooperative way. Simply put, it is because each independent factor such as project promotion, participation encouragement and learning aid is implemented organically rather than injected randomly.

The core of the learning city consists of the integration of two pillars: human capital and social capital. It is a project to promote integration of social capital for regional innovation and human resource development or HRD. Social capital contributes to integrating the community by boosting trust, networks, and communication in society, while human resource development at the personal level helps to enhance economic competitiveness through cultivating individuals' abilities (OECD, 2001a).

The process of capital accumulation has become all the more important as the learning economy based on human and social capital derived from learning become a core resource for economic improvement. Organizational learning is a form of learning that takes place when the current knowledge is transferred or new information is created within the same organization. Its own 'mutual action' contributes to creating social capital.

3. Process and Performance of Lifelong Cities

Recently lifelong learning has become a major policy established and promoted by region in Korea. It started when the city of Changwon established rules of management for a lifelong education center and supported the operation of the education center for society by private organization in 1994. Since then, the city of Gwangmyeong declared a lifelong learning city for residents to enjoy its rich culture via learning and coexistence with nature in March 1999. This was the beginning of the lifelong learning city. The declaration of Gwangmyeong influenced the lifelong learning city project of the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development. Since 2001, the ministry has selected and

aided self-governing communities that desire to become learning cities yearly by creating policies to establish such cities for local revitalization.

3.1 The Process of Lifelong Learning Cities

Learning is an important factor in deciding the comparative advantages of national, regional and city economies as well as the success of an individual. OECD members promote regional development and innovation by establishing regional learning communities.

The participatory government is deeply committed to exploring examples of regional innovation system and promoting their methods in various ways. Each ministry strives to initiate its own projects such as local autonomy, local balanced development, regional innovation systems, the council for regional innovation and nurturing of local colleges. For example, the Ministry of Finance and Economy pursues projects to create culture and history communities, the Ministry of Government Affairs and Home Affairs projects create information-intensive communities, the Ministry of Science and Technology projects to create science and culture communities, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry projects with hands-on experience of agricultural, and the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development is dedicated to improving public features by expanding lifelong learning cities.

Learning is at the core of the regional revitalization policy. This is because local innovation is only possible when people change and people can change through learning. Enhanced autonomy, independence and enhanced innovation capacity are often cited as ways to trigger dynamic growth in all areas. However, true innovation without learning is hard to expect. In this respect, the campaign to create learning cities is a regional innovation strategy for the knowledge-based society.

The Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development picked the city of Gwangmyeong, Jinan Gun, and Yuseong Gu as lifelong learning regions in 2001, the cities of Jeju, Bucheon, Busan and Haeundae Gu in Busan in 2002, and Jeju, Yeonsu Gu in Incheon, Geochang Gun in Kyungnam, Suncheon in 2003. The number of cities increased to 33 by 2005, and rose to 57 by adding 27 new areas including Seoul's Yeongdeungpo Gu, Busan Yeonje Gu, Nam Gu, Gwangju Dong-Gwangsan Gu, Ulsan's Ulju Gun and Kwangwon Hwacheon Gun in the city of Samcheok.

Given that many communities are eager to become learning cities, the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development picked Seosan, Incheon's Nam Gu and Gwangju's Gwangsan Gu as potential learning regions in 2005. It plans to designate them as learning regions after one year by establishing lifelong learning systems via consulting. The interest of local communities in local education has grown dramatically year by year so that the competition is quite intense.

The Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development plans to create 100 learning cities by 2008 as substantial results appear such as the boosted attention to learning and increasing in investment. It also plans to improve the quality of learning cities by evaluating the satisfaction levels of the residents of each area (the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2006).

The lifelong learning city project can be divided into its budget, human resources, organization, rules, establishment of the information infrastructure and operation of the information infrastructure.

First, for lifelong education, each community has a different budget. The budget is determined by the leaders of the community and the financial size. Generally, a large community has a larger share budget as do the cities of Bucheon, Gwangmyeong, Jeonju, Changwon and Yeonsu Gu, wherever smaller communities have budgetary limitations. Communities with similar populations and budget capacities may have different budgets according to the conceptions of the leaders.

Second, each community has a different level of human resources. These communities can be divided into those designed to be lifelong learning centers and those undertaking projects. For examples, Gwangmyeong's lifelong learning center and Geumsan Gun's "darakwon" or learning center have a large pools of labor, and Incheon's city changed its center for local self-ruling has changed into a center for self-learning and hired experts for lifelong education.

Third, most cities have one or two committees, i.e., advisory and decision-making groups for the project. Each committee promotes the lifelong education project by acquiring opinions from residents and experts under the name of the lifelong education promotion committee or lifelong education progress committee.

Fourth, lifelong education rules were established to ensure the continuity of the project. Most cities established rules involving promotion of the project, building and operation of lifelong education centers, and

lifelong education itself. Details vary according to the community given that the situation and conditions for learning are different in each community.

Fifth is the information infrastructure establishment. Most cities have homepages. Twenty-two cities have a more organized information infrastructure than a homepage. Funds for the information infrastructure are divided among 7 cities and managed.

As described above, most cities budget for project, designate workers to administrative bodies and centers, create committees, and establish rules. However, each community has a quite different level in these matters.

3.2 The Performance of Lifelong Learning Cities

In the 6 years since the project was implemented, the changes described below have occurred. Local communities are more interconnected via the lifelong learning city project. Gwangmyeng, Jeju, Icheon, Bucheon and Geonhang Gun have the most dynamic network businesses. The promotion of the network project has more to do with the social atmosphere of each city than the promotion period. Bucheon, Suncheon and Gwangmyeng excel at special training to boost the expertise of those in charge.

The most popular programs are related to culture and leisure. The next most common programs are citizenship education, job training, Korean language courses for adults, courses for accreditation, and online learning. However, some cities do not have any job training, Korean language courses for adult, accreditation, or online learning.

The analysis of performance of the project is as follows with respect to quality improvement, economic growth, humane resources development and social integration.

Many events contribute to the results and benchmark them in the form of presentations, seminars, forums and learning festivals. The choices of Gwangmyeng, Jeonju, Changwon and Yeonsu Gu hold many learning events and Gwangmyeng, Yeonsu Gu, Jeonju and Changwon hold many seminars (Byen, Jong Im., et. al., 2005).

First of all, the increase in lifelong education facilities and study groups of each city indicate improved quality of life. Since 2001, Andong and Icheon have shown the biggest increases in the number of facilities. Jeju, Changwon and Gwanak Gu have shown the biggest increases in the number of lifelong education programs. As for study groups, Gwangmyeng, Bucheon, Suncheon,

Jeonju, Chilgok Gun and Gwanak Gu have been very active.

Second, economic contributions of learning projects can be measured through programs for opening businesses, commercialization of learning results, and commercialization of learning programs. Mokpo, Jeonju, Changwon and Gwanak Gu top the list in program numbers for opening new businesses. Jeju, Jeonju, Changwon and Chilgok Gun stand out in the commercialization of learning results. Jeonju and Chilgok Gun are very good in commercialization of learning programs. Therefore, cities can be found that contribute to the regional economy by commercializing learning results and learning programs as well.

Third, the level of human resource development from the project can be measured by the nurturing of local leaders, number of volunteers and voluntary organizations for lifelong learning. Gwangmyeng, Haeundae Gu, Suncheon, Geochang Gun, Yeonsu Gu and Chilgok Gun have many programs to foster the development of local leaders. Jeju, Jeonju, Geumsan and Gwanak Gu have many volunteers for lifelong learning, though the numbers of volunteers are quite different according to the community. Suncheon, Jeonju and Gwanak Gu are among the best locales for voluntary organization for lifelong learning. Though there are regional differences, this shows that the project for the lifelong learning city is involved in HRD projects.

Fourth, social integration through the project can be measured by programs for boosting citizenship, those for the underprivileged, and those for boosting a sense of belonging in the community. Gwangmyeng, Suncheon, Jeju, Geochang Gun, Mokpo, Icheon and Jeonju carry out programs for promoting citizenship. Gwangmyeng, Suncheon, Yeonsu Gu, Jeonju, Chilgok Gun and Gwanak Gu conduct programs for the underprivileged, and Gwangmyeng, Haeundae Gu, Seogwipo, Suncheon, Jeju and Jeonju have programs for boosting a sense of belonging in the community.

4. Tasks for Lifelong Learning Cities

Lifelong learning is a process to provide opportunities for anyone to get education anytime, anywhere, and to establish a system for this. Thereby, no one should be isolated in the process and those in educational institutions should also establish a foundation for further education. The project is not only a national project but

also one for securing citizens' survival.

First, the project for the lifelong learning city should be promoted as part of local community campaigns. Its establishment in local communities started with a campaign to boost a sense of belonging and affection for the community. Ultimately, it helps citizens to solve their own problems and create social capital. A variety of projects for regional competitiveness are implemented by each ministry. Nevertheless, enhancing regional competitiveness is impossible without the resident's interest and involvement. In other words, the project contributes to enhancing participation of citizens by connection with learning residents. The learning city is a regional innovation strategy for residents and the administration to win together by enhancing the capacity for self-rule via learning. Social integration requires interest in the well-being of others, care, consideration, and respect. The lifelong learning city campaign contributes to integration by providing lifelong learning opportunities to those underprivileged educationally, culturally, regionally, by gender, or by generation. Therefore, the center for self-rule under the local office should function as a channel to provide self-ruling education by doubling as a learning center. However, the center for self-rule led by Ministry of Government Affairs and Home Affairs fails to serve as a center for self-rule when it fails to align learning of citizens with the capacity for self-rule.

Last, citizens should be nurtured as local leaders through lifelong education relating to regional innovation utilizing RHD. As part of the learning city project, a leadership system should be established and opportunities should be given to ensure that citizens can actively involve themselves in the project. Then, they will get the change to be major voice in the project and as regional leaders, residents should come up with systems and strategies to pioneer regional innovation. Corporate competitiveness should be also enhanced via HRD with regional innovation strategies to upgrade economic competitiveness. This can be done by boosting the learning partnership system between corporations and communities, and the possibility of employment via the HRD of citizens. Therefore, workers' continuous education and local partnership should go hand in hand so that corporate competitiveness will be greater. Unfortunately, the Ministry of Labor and the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development are uncooperative so that there is little relevance between lifelong education and jobs, failing to securing

competitiveness.

The central government and local governments are also important as doers of projects. Currently, the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development is in charge of the project for the lifelong learning city. However, there are many overlapping areas with other central agencies. Thus, the cooperation between agencies should be strengthened for implementing the project. This is because the lifelong learning city project involves various projects of central agencies and those implementing these projects are under the aegis of the central agencies.

Additionally, legal and systematic institutions should be in place in order to implement the project stably and continuously. Thus, the budget for the project should be secured. Currently, the lifelong city project is part of lifelong education under the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, but without a legal and systematic foundation. It is necessary to change the lifelong education articles to include the project for the lifelong city and the project for lifelong learning subjects, project for lifelong learning festival and project for lifelong learning promotion.

The policy direction for the project for the lifelong learning city focuses on the spread of cities. However, in the future, it must also pay due attention to improvement of the quality of the learning city. In this regard, it is required to take stock of cities for additional aid, implement consulting businesses and select and promote projects for priority investment. It will also be necessary to take administrative action such as nullifying the position of the lifelong city when designated cities fail to promote the project.

5. Suggestions

When it comes to learning for citizens, each community has different access to learning and contents and the levels of learning also vary. Currently, the Korean learning infrastructure fails to meet the demands of citizens and cookie-cutter education material is provided by the lifelong education institutions. Worse yet, institutions shamelessly copy educational programs from each other. Therefore, the contents and levels of education programs are similar among institutions so that each institution lacks unique features. In these circumstances, without transfer of learning and seamless learning, this kind of condition cannot lead to more

productive learning. To be sure, living and learning circumstances are different given that convenient facilities, cultural institutions and lifelong learning institutions are not equally distributed.

The road to the learning city is expected to be bumpy. Thus an awareness campaign should be implemented to involve all members of society, culture and networks for members going hand in hand should be established, and an administrative system should be put in place to capture the hearts and minds of citizens. Only when these three conditions are satisfied, the learning city can take root.

Adult education can be effective when it is aligned with welfare and work. During the learning period, a social safety net should be provided as part of a welfare policy in order to eliminate barriers to learning. During the working period, a system to save time and money and create tools for future learning should be put in place. An advanced welfare society uses learning as a connection between welfare and work and “LearnFare” functions as a basic principle to sustain society.

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