Learning process for creating community identity

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Abstract. Creating community identity needs a learning process to assist community to identify, recognize, build acceptance and cultivate awareness in identity. The purpose of this study was to develop the draft of a learning process to create community identity. The study employed a qualitative research method through literature review. The result shows that the community learning process must empower all parties concerned and empowerment should be based on the social capital of the community. A draft of the learning process involved in the creation of community identity includes four main steps: i) plan consists of target community selection, community identity vision creation and operational planning for creation of community identity, ii) action consists of community survey, social capital analysis, community identity identification, creating and operating activities to supplement community identity, and setting development goals and actions based on community identity, iii) practical observation, iv) reflection consists of evaluation and reflection, and public presentation.

Keywords: learning process; community identity; community empowerment; social capital

1 Introduction

The concept of “people-centred development” is considered an instrument to improve the quality of life in the Eleventh National Economic and Social Development Plan, B.E. 2555 – 2559 (A.D. 2012 – 2016). The Eleventh plan also places increased emphasis on the local community as it is a key locus for management and participation in developing a strategy for human development in the effort to achieve a sustainable, lifelong learning society. The guidelines of this development strategy include strengthening the local community to

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increase its resilience and seeking to shape community identity to strengthen its learning processes. Local wisdom should be preserved and, when necessary, revived. Community institutions should participate to create understanding in order to live together peacefully in a multi-cultural society. Moreover, the strategy places emphasis on supporting a participatory approach to developing the community based on the principle of self-reliance in accordance with the goals of protecting natural resources, local community lifestyle, culture, and environment [10]. It is believed that these procedures can contribute to social cohesion in Thai society and reduce the negative influences of modernization and conflict so that Thai families may raise the younger generation to recognize Thai values and identity.

Identity is not self-created or automatically formed by itself within people or things, but it has been gradually developed [6]. The individual self-concept can exist if he or she assume the role of the others. One's self-concept is experienced indirectly, from the particular standpoint of the individual members of the same social group. It follows therefore, that development of a self-concept entails an individual learning process. Community identity is characteristically the collective identity that indicates the particularity and distinguishing features of the community. It is important to individuals, groups and community as the driving force that can create pride, self-respect, unity, a sense of belonging, and social responsibility which leads to participation in community activities. The creation, performance, and maintenance of the collective identity is also a learning process to create meaning and value through social interaction toward the awareness and recognition of their own salient characteristics [17].

The literature review shows only the few related studies on community identity in Thailand most of which emphasize cultural and ethnic identity. Thus, the number of studies on community identity is limited. A few organizations focus on and promote community identity although in these cases, it is determined by a national plan. In addition, there is still a lack of suitable learning processes to assist communities to identify, recognize, and cultivate self-awareness as well as build mutual acceptance for their own identities. However, there are instances of communities which create community identity using learning processes which have led to procedures the community could use to solve various issues in the areas of livelihood, quality of life, resource management, and community linkage [9].

2 Objective

The purpose of this study was to develop a draft of a learning process to create community identity.

3 Methodology

The study employed a qualitative research method derived from literature reviews. It used four concepts: community learning process, community identity, social capital, and community empowerment as the basic framework to develop a learning process which is congruent with the context of communities in Thai society. The data was analysed and synthesized by content analysis to develop a draft of a learning process to create community identity.

The four areas of content were used to develop a draft of a learning process as follows:

3.1 Community learning process

The key aspects of Thai community learning processes are comprised of six components as follows : 1) group processes; 2) learning based on the community's way of life and real issues; 3) practical learning; 4) learning based on history, religion, culture and traditions of the community; 5) network learning processes; and 6) learning about differences and diversity within the community [1, 7, 8, 12, 13, 18, 20 and 21].

3.2 Community identity identification process

The community identity identification process involves individuals, groups and organizations in the community in processes comprised of five stages as follows: 1) community study; 2) identification of the distinctive characteristics of the community; 3) determination of community identity; 4) creation of activities to share community identity; 5) creation of community development goals based on community identity [4, 2, 3 and 22].

3.3 Social capital

Social capital refers to things that exist in the community and that can be used in community management. It is divided into six categories: 1) human capital referring to the potential members of the community including: residents, community leaders, elders and their local wisdom; 2) commitment to social capital refers to the social relationships that are formed in the community that cause people to gather into a group as a community including: rules, norms, kindness, love, loyalty, generosity, and trust; 3) natural capital referring to various types of natural resources of the environment in the community such as water, soil, forest, wildlife, plants; 4) cultural capital classified into two types: abstract culture and concrete culture; 5) financial capital referring to assets in the community both in terms of money and capital in various forms; 6) basic capital or man-made capital built to facilitate the fundamentals.

3.4 Community empowerment

The community empowerment process within the Thai context is comprised of seven stages as follows: 1) community study; 2) mutual planning and decision making; 3) promoting leadership and developing focus on the process to create confidence, self-esteem, to develop the essential knowledge and skills to work in groups, and to create awareness of how to effectively use power; 4) Promoting participatory learning; 5) building internal and external networks and cooperation systems; 6) ongoing operations 7) evaluation and reflection [5, 11, 14, 15, 19 and 23].

4 Result

The study found that a draft of the learning process to create community identity will use participatory action research (PAR) comprising four main steps:

- One: plan 1) target community selection, 2) community identity vision creation and 3) operational planning for creation of community identity.
- Two: action 1) Community survey, 2) social capital analysis, 3) community identity identification, 4) creating and operating activities to supplement community identity, and 5) setting development goals and actions based on community identity.
- Three: observation: practical observation.

• Four: reflection 1) evaluation and reflection, and 2) public presentation.

Each sub-step will contain four categories for action research including plan, action, observation, and reflection as the main steps. A draft of the learning process to create community identity is shown in Figure 1.

This is only the first draft of a learning process to create community identity. Field research will depend on real communities and real situations. The process can be adapted and improved for each situation.

Fig. 1. Draft of the learning process to create community identity.

5 Discussion

The results show that the community learning process must empower people, groups, and organizations in the community and community empowerment should be based on the social capital of the community. An effective and sustainable community learning process must empower people, groups and organizations to create community knowledge, skill, confidence and awareness of their own power and also enable them to use their wisdom in the community development process. In addition, the community empowerment process should be based on the social capital that exists in communities [13].

Community study is very important and essential to the learning process to strengthen community identity. It is seen that community study is the first step in the community

empowerment process. It corresponds to the process of identity identification which places importance on community study as well.

The data gathered from careful community study will allow understanding of the situation within the community, environment, and local patterns of life including the assessment of community potential. This will lead to an effective learning process design based on the history, religion, culture and traditions of the community.

Accurate community data will enable the identification of social capital in the community. The effective analysis and identification of community capital will impact on the learning process in two dimensions: 1) the community empowerment process based on the real potential community capital; 2) the potential community capital which can provide help for the community to reflect on the distinctive community identity.

Reflection is also an important process in the PAR; it should comprise both self and group reflection as part of the critical evaluation process to review and amend the plan for the next action cycle.

6 Conclusion

Community identities are important as the driving forces to create pride, self-respect, unity, sense of belonging, and social responsibility for people, groups and organizations in community. The promotion of community identity creation requires a learning process using community empowerment based on social capital. The learning process must involve and empower all parties concerned: individuals, groups and organizations, and it should focus on the process of self-identification, not a process imposed by outsiders. A draft of the learning process and design to create community identity is the result of merging involved concepts comprising four main steps: plan, action, observation and reflection. It is anticipated that these developmental processes will contribute to a participatory approach to the identification of real values and community identity.

Remark

This article is a part of “Development of a learning process using social capital- based community empowerment for creating community identity” research.

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