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# WHERE DO LIFELONG LEARNING CITIES IN KOREA STAND? – FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF A LEARNING SOCIETY ORIENTATION

## ABSTRACT

*The learning city aims for a just learning society, emphasising the subjective participation of citizens and providing them with equal learning opportunities. The purpose of the paper is to examine, through a literature review method, whether Korea's lifelong learning cities have achieved the formation of a learning society. In Korea learning cities have led to the provision of more learning opportunities for citizens and improved the quality of education programmes. There also exists a movement for citizens to participate in the learning city project as citizen activists. However, it is not yet possible to assess that most learning cities are developed and built by citizens' engagement. Moreover, there is even a tendency for inequality to be intensified in lifelong education. Therefore, Korea's learning cities will need to further solidify their citizen-led perspective, including democratic decision-making and the free expression of opinions by citizens, in order to move toward a just learning society.*

**Keywords:** Korea's lifelong learning cities, a just learning society, educational equality, citizen-led, citizen engagement

## MESTA VSEŽIVLJENJSKEGA UČENJA V KOREJI Z VIDIKA USMERITVE V UČEČO SE DRUŽBO – POVZETEK

*Cilj učečega se mesta je pravična učeča se družba, ki poudarja sodelovanje državljanov in enake priložnosti za učenje. Namen članka je s pregledom literature ugotoviti, ali je korejskim mestom vseživljenjskega učenja uspelo oblikovati učečo se družbo. V Koreji so učeča se mesta povečala priložnosti za učenje in izboljšala kakovost izobraževalnih programov. Izoblikovalo se je tudi gibanje, ki podpira aktivno sodelovanje prebivalcev v projektu učečih se mest. Kljub temu pa še ne moremo reči, da se večina učečih se mest razvija in gradi na podlagi delovanja prebivalcev samih. Pokazala se je tudi težnja, da se neenakosti na podlagi vseživljenjskega učenja celo poglobljajo. Da bo Koreja postala prava učeča se družba, bo treba okrepite vlogo, ki jo v teh mestih igrajo prebivalci sami, to pa vključuje tudi krepitev demokratičnega odločanja in svobode izražanja.*

**Ključne besede:** korejska mesta vseživljenjskega učenja, pravična učeča se družba, enakost izobraževalnih možnosti, vodilna vloga državljanov, vključevanje državljanov

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## INTRODUCTION

In the Republic of Korea, the Lifelong Learning City Project was launched in 2001 as part of the government's lifelong education policy. Following the enactment of the Lifelong Education Act (1999), which states in Article 15 that the "government can designate and support selected municipalities, districts, and counties as Lifelong Learning Cities (LLCs)," the Ministry of Education (MOE) designated the first three cities – Gwangmyeong City, Yuseong District, and Jinan County – as LLCs. The number of LLCs has steadily increased in Korea, and as of 2019, 167 of the 226 basic local governments (municipalities, city districts, and counties) nationwide have been designated as LLCs. The MOE of the central government has designated and supported the administrative districts of the basic local governments as LLCs, regardless of the urban or rural area, and the local governments have been working to promote the lifelong learning of the residents and build a learning society.

In Korea the LLC project has been established to play a decisive role in the growth and development of lifelong education practices. The LLCs designated by the MOE, whether autonomously or not, (1) set up an administrative structure, an organisation and professional staff to plan, implement and provide services, (2) provided the opportunities so that "lifelong educators", certified experts in lifelong education practice, can make a large contribution, and (3) tried to create a learning city atmosphere by not just providing educational programmes but also by forming a learning environment including learning circles and networks with various community organisations (Han & Makino, 2013). The learning city project has effectively stimulated local governments to expand the lifelong learning<sup>1</sup> opportunities of the whole nation, improve the quality of education services, and facilitate cooperation between different institutions, such as governmental agencies, schools, public libraries, and community centres in Korea (Yang & Yorozu, 2015).

This relationship between a learning city and a learning society has been asserted from the beginning of the concept of a learning city. The modern concept of a learning city came from that of a "learning society", which the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) report, *Learning to Be: The World of Education Today and Tomorrow* (Faure et al., 1972), put forward and appealed to UNESCO Member States to re-organise their educational structures in 1972 (Osborne, Kearns, & Yang, 2013). According to the Faure report, along with another UNESCO report, *Learning: The Treasure Within* (Delors et al., 1996), the role of the regions and cities which contain immense educational potential is important for building a learning society, even if national governments also have a major role in setting the agenda and the vision. There are various educational agencies and educational programmes in the regions and cities to be provided

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1 In the paper, I use the concept of 'lifelong education' as the standpoint of an educator or an educational provider, and 'lifelong learning' as that of a learner. So, lifelong education is used to relate to participation, programme, and policy, and lifelong learning to opportunities.

to the citizens and residents, and in essence, a country is the sum of all its regions, cities, and communities (Osborne et al., 2013). Therefore, learning cities essentially aim at establishing a learning society, and terms such as “Educating Cities”, “Cities of Learning”, “Learning Communities of Place”, and so on, related to learning cities, also mean to build a learning society.

Like other countries in the world, Korea has been pursuing a learning city project to build a learning society. In the 20 years since the LLC project began in Korea, the learning city policy has greatly contributed to establishing and forming a lifelong education infrastructure and learning network in the community, to raising awareness about the importance of lifelong learning, and to providing opportunities for lifelong learning. However, few studies have discussed the outcomes and development directions of LLCs based on the ultimate purpose and intention of a learning city, which is the formation of a learning society. At present, most local governments in Korea are designated as LLCs, and it is necessary to check where Korea’s LLCs stand in the process of developing a learning society at this time.

But the ideal picture of a learning society is not clearly presented or does not objectively exist. Of course, the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) established evaluation criteria in order to encourage efforts to spread and develop learning cities around the world and to measure whether the characteristics of learning cities are being realised (UIL, 2014). In addition, Korea has been making efforts to develop evaluation indicators to evaluate the performance and support the quality improvement of LLCs. However, these evaluation criteria are limited in objectively evaluating the extent to which a learning city has reached an ideal learning society. Nevertheless, it might be possible to discuss where the current LLCs stand in Korea through the meaning of a learning city and the direction of development toward a learning society, which are contained in the definition and the evaluation index of a learning city.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to diagnose and discuss from the perspective of a learning society where Korea’s LLCs, which have been growing and developing for the last 20 years, now stand. To this end, I will look into the development of a learning society as it is included in the definition, evaluation criteria, and theoretical discussions of learning cities. To examine the position of the LLCs in Korea, I have used the literature review method. I have collected and analysed the articles and reports that discuss the outcomes and issues of Korea’s lifelong learning cities. In particular, I focus on how in the development of a learning city the citizens should be the subjects and actively build a learning society or a local learning community, rather than on the expansion and growth of individual learning opportunities and the social and economic development of an entire city, which have been frequently discussed in relation to the achievements of a learning city. Discussion will also focus on questions of social inclusion and justice realisation, which may indicate how learning cities can advance into a learning society.

## DIRECTIONS OF THE LEARNING CITY

The direction of the development of a learning city into a learning society is primarily contained in its definition. The definition of an LLC in Korea, which has been used from the beginning of the LLC project to the present, is as follows:

A lifelong learning city is the total restructuring movement of a city toward learning community development where everyone can enjoy learning at any place whenever they want, in order to enhance an individual's self-realization, social inclusion, and economic competitiveness, ultimately improving the individual's quality of life and the competitiveness of the entire city. Also, LLC refers to a community education movement by the local citizens, for the local citizens, and of the local citizens, for building a networking learning community by linking all educational resources of the community between institutions, communities, and countries. (National Institute for Lifelong Education [NILE], 2019)

The definition of an LLC implies that a city aims to develop and regenerate the entire city as well as to enhance the socioeconomic capacity of the individual, to connect all educational resources, and to be a citizen-led educational movement. In addition, UIL, which coordinates the international network of Learning Cities, defined a learning city as follows in 2017:

A learning city effectively mobilizes its resources in every sector to promote inclusive learning from basic to higher education; revitalizes learning in families and communities; facilitates learning for and in the workplace; extends the use of modern learning technologies; enhances quality and excellence in learning; and fosters a culture of learning throughout life. [...] In doing so, a learning city supports individual empowerment and social inclusion, economic development and cultural prosperity, and sustainable development. (UIL, 2019)

We can see that that within the concept of a learning city, learning is considered a solution or remedy for the individuals' and cities' problems resulting from the post-industrial risk society and neoliberal transformations of the knowledge economy (Han & Makino, 2013; Facer & Buchczyk, 2019). The LLC project in Korea was the outcome of instrumental policies by government bodies to mobilise citizens' learning that enhanced personal development, economic prosperity, and social inclusion, to develop cities or communities for living together and increasing job opportunities and economic stability, and to solve the social problems occurring in the cities in the processes of modern industrialisation (Han & Makino, 2013).

According to these definitions, LLCs are regional regeneration projects based on vitalising lifelong learning at the local level. In other words, the LLC project is to build a city as an ideal learning society that seeks to simultaneously pursue the purpose of citizens' learning activities and the revitalisation of the city (Han, 2009). Learning cities/regions

are supposed to play a key role in the building of local capacities for lifelong learning. According to these definitions, a learning city means the educational movement to promote lifelong learning in both respects, as a personal outcome, that is to support the development of skills and competences needed to adapt to new circumstances and to motivate citizens to become lifelong learners, and as a collective good, that is to cultivate shared values and support the development of social capital, social inclusion, and the competitiveness of the entire city (Preisinger-Kleine, 2013).

This definition, however, implies other notable goals besides those of personal and urban growth. One is that a learning city involves the concept of learning and education that prioritises social cohesion and social justice, and the other is to emphasise that a learning city should build a learning society through the citizens' empowerment and engagement as subjects of learning and education.

### **A Learning City that Prioritises Educational Equality and Social Justice**

A learning city aims to achieve social justice that addresses educational inequality. It seeks to provide equal learning opportunities to all citizens regardless of economic, social, and educational background. And if it previously hadn't done so, it will provide more learning opportunities. In this way, the learning city will be able to overcome educational inequalities and achieve social justice. In Korea, one of the goals of the LLC project was also to increase social inclusion by having marginalised people participate in adult learning and community activities (Han & Makino, 2013). For this purpose, the central or local government tried to expand lifelong learning opportunities for marginalised people by supporting literacy education programmes or customised programmes for vulnerable groups, centred on the learning cities.

UIL also suggests that a learning city enables people of all ages from diverse socio-economic and cultural backgrounds to benefit from inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities (UIL, 2019). To support equity and inclusion, for example, the following practices for learning cities are suggested: enabling vulnerable groups who are not in formal schooling or training to acquire literacy and other basic/vocational skills; enabling migrant workers to obtain professional qualifications; providing career guidance, particularly for women, to encourage them to pursue higher qualifications; providing reading opportunities for all, especially people with disabilities, older adults, and preschool children through mobile libraries; establishing schemes that mobilise trained volunteers to encourage residents at risk of isolation to participate in cultural activities, workshops, physical activities, etc.

Therefore, one of the goals pursued in LLCs is to guarantee learning rights by providing learning opportunities to everyone fairly so that no one is left out of learning. In particular, the LLCs aim to achieve their goal by utilising various educational contents and methods such as literacy education, online education, career education, and cultural education to foster social participation capacity, and by respecting the human rights that all citizens should enjoy. Learning cities seek to reorganise their educational structures

and environment so that all agencies become providers of education and all citizens are engaged in learning, taking full advantage of the opportunities provided by the learning society (Osborne et al., 2013).

In particular, Han and Makino (2013) argue that learning cities in Asia underline the problems of social conditions and identities, cultural discontent, and conflicts within the cities, as well as various intergenerational and gender tensions. The LLC movement believes that it can contribute to achieving the sustainable development of cities by providing lifelong learning opportunities and social integration for those who are marginalised by education, culture, region, gender, and generation (Choi, 2015).

However, learning cities wanted to provide lifelong education services and to restructure their educational environment in order to overcome their geographical, cultural, and educational limitations, as well as to become economically stable and develop the region through job creation and growth of skill and knowledge. The vision for a learning city engages not only with social inclusion and equality and with the more emancipatory goals of critical adult education traditions, but with the preparation of citizens for economic competition (Facer & Buchczyk, 2019). The concept and direction of the learning city, therefore, implies a tension between managerial paradigms that privilege particular forms of desirable learning toward economic goals and a concept of learning and education that prioritises social justice and social cohesion and recognises sometimes conflicting grass-roots agendas (Facer & Buchczyk, 2019).

### **Building a Learning Society and Learning Cities through Citizen Engagement**

Another intention inherent in the definition of a learning city is that citizens should become subjects in the building of learning societies and local learning communities. The definition of LLCs in Korea involves the meaning that learning cities help all citizens to express their potential through learning “anytime, anywhere”, and that a learning society should be formed “by citizens”, that is, by citizens’ participation and initiative. In other words, the LLC project can be an education movement that creates a learning society and a learning community led by citizens. Beyond the passive involvement of learners in the learning framework or field established by existing local governments, the city should be gradually transformed into a citizen-led lifelong learning city based on learners’ initiative and active participation. When citizens who are suppliers and beneficiaries of lifelong education play a leading role in the operation of LLCs, LLCs will be activated and their vitality can be guaranteed (Lee, 2008).

The guidelines, which UIL developed in consultation with international experts, also show the actionable recommendation such as making sure that learning is accessible to all citizens and to create a coordinated structure involving all stakeholders (UIL, 2015). Stakeholders in a learning city involve all organisations and citizens, and a learning city should be structured so that all stakeholders have clearly defined roles and responsibilities in designing and implementing the learning city plan.

In addition, we can find out the direction of the learning city which leads to citizens' engagement in a list of criteria that consist of three areas: the wider benefits of building a learning city, the major building blocks of a learning city, and the fundamental conditions for building a learning city (UIL, 2014). There are a total of 12 areas of focus and 42 key features of learning cities. We can find some among the areas of focus and the key features mean that a learning city should be built by the citizens' empowerment and engagement (UIL, 2014).

The learning city's intention that citizens should engage and lead by themselves can be found in the case of Gwangmyeong City in Korea. Gwangmyeong City became the first declared LLC in Korea in March 1999. This was an attempt to overcome the limitations of Gwangmyeong as a satellite city of Seoul (such as lack of settlement consciousness and educational conditions) and to improve citizens' participation in lifelong education and educational conditions. In this process, however, the willingness and participation of not only the Gwangmyeong City government but also local activists and civic groups played a big role. The citizens' strong desire for the development of cities through lifelong education acted strongly, and the citizens took the initiative to declare the LLC.

Learning cities that seek to build a learning society cannot be planned and implemented only with the involvement and practice of administrative agencies or experts, but by the voices of citizens, by their engagement and self-government capacity (Choi, 2015).

## **SOCIAL JUSTICE AND CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT IN A LEARNING CITY**

Social justice and citizen engagement, which are the intentions and strategies of the learning city, are not separate from each other but closely related. Learning cities or learning societies in which educational inequalities are alleviated and all citizens can be guaranteed equal educational opportunities can only be built with the participation of empowered citizens.

This is in line with the new perspective of lifelong education towards a learning society. Kim (2015) argued that lifelong education not only meant the expansion of education targets, time and place, but also took a new perspective to call for a change in the subject of education. In other words, it is a shift from the point of view where it is taken for granted that the instructor takes the initiative of education, to the point of view that it is more valuable that the learner is actively involved in the education, subjectively judges, selects, and demands. Rather than that educators (educational authorities, schools, teachers, etc.) have all the powers of education and learning, educators and learners interact with each other through dialogue and compromise, and in practise make learners the subject of education (Kim, 2015). Based on this lifelong education perspective, the learning city should be formed by the citizen, who is the learner and the subject, to form a learning society. In the end, it can be called the formation of a learner-centred learning society, and Kim (2015) called it the "democracy of education".

Specifically, Welton (2005) explains that "The Just Learning Society" can be realised when the sovereignty of education and learning is in the hands of citizens. "Learning"



does not necessarily mean something good because inequalities still exist in the learning society and gaps in the information society. Emphasis is placed on empowerment and democracy in society, corporations and organisations for learning societies, but it is only a “lip-service” (Welton, 2005). It is impossible to think about a just learning society apart from the power, greed, and privilege of those who hoard the goods and skew the learning processes in the service of the money-code (Welton, 2005). Thus, a just learning society can be created by raising the awareness of all citizens on social issues that cause injustice and by free citizens’ participation and decision-making. Citizens’ empowerment and participation in decision-making processes can build the just learning society or social equality and justice. Borkowska and Osborne (2018) also emphasise the importance of facilitating more fully active citizenship, social inclusion, and learning opportunities for all in order to change urban areas innovatively and to develop smart learning cities.

However, citizens’ empowerment, engagement, democratic decision-making, or communication skills do not develop on their own. Existing systems can distort the development of communication and practical wisdom. Adult educators must awaken to the actual way the learning dynamics within civil society work. First, civil society can be a fundamental training ground for adults to unfold and express their capacities as authentic speakers and decision makers. So adult educators are trying to shape the structures that permit human beings to express their many-sided potentials in civil society (Welton, 2005). In addition, the communicative infrastructure of the institution, association or interaction must be consciously designed to foster knowledgeable, not ignorance, in a co-operative spirit.

Second, adult educators should not only form democratic decision-making structures of civil society but also foster and promote active citizenship and citizen engagement skills. Adult educators need to practice the maximal conception of citizenship education to raise people’s critical awareness of injustice and work towards developing a more equal and just society (Moir & Crowther, 2017). Even if the city developed a number of democratic systems, infrastructures, and technological interventions (e.g. smartphone apps and other digital platforms) for citizen participation, the frame in itself does not facilitate active citizenship and public engagement. Borkowska and Osborne (2018) argue that it happens only if learning permeates the helices. There are needs to be supported through the provision of learning opportunities, to be a focus on learning that pervades everyday life, and to focus on issues of social justice and cohesion, and challenges for social inequality as well. In addition, citizens need to enter the public space where they can then recognise their commonality with others and individuate themselves. Citizens can only develop and exercise practical wisdom through deliberation within the context of particular problems and action situations (Welton, 2005). Democratic agency is not the agency of an isolated individual considered outside of any social context, but is rather the exercise of this power in free association with the agency of others.

After all, in order to realise a citizen-led learning society and a “just learning society” that learning cities pursue, democratic development that encourages the free opinions of citizens and their participation in democratic decision-making should be the basis.



The learning city must play a role in developing competent citizens. The core factors in the building of learning cities have been issues concerning social justice and cohesion, and the ability of individuals to participate in decision-making processes (Borkowska & Osborne, 2018).

## ARE ALL CITIZENS LEARNING WHAT THEY NEED IN THE LEARNING CITIES IN KOREA?

### The expansion of learning opportunities provision and of participation in lifelong education

Since the beginning of the LLC project in Korea, more than two thirds of basic local governments (municipalities, city districts, and rural counties) have been designated as LLCs, which have provided citizens with various types of lifelong learning opportunities and enhanced education, then expanded their participation in lifelong education programmes. Through the provision of community centres, educational spaces, and educational programmes, people are motivated to make use of the ample resources of these centres in their spare time, thereby helping to foster a learning culture (Yang & Yorozu, 2015). The learning opportunities of citizens have been expanded by local governments providing lifelong education programmes that are either free or inexpensive, rather than through direct financial aid.

In detail, the participation rate of lifelong learning among Korean adults (ages 25–64) has increased steadily from 2007 to the present, as shown in table 1 (MOE & KEDI [Korean Educational Development Institute], 2018). It increased from 29.8% in 2007 to 35.6% in 2012 and 42.8% in 2018. This is because the interest in lifelong education has increased as most basic local governments have been committed to providing lifelong education services for residents and have been designated as LLCs (MOE & NILE, 2018). In other words, it is based on the lifelong education projects and programmes actively conducted in the learning city.

Table 1: Lifelong Education Participation Rate in Korean Adults (2007–2018)

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Total	29.8	26.4	28.0	30.5	32.4	35.6	30.2	36.8	40.6	35.7	35.8	42.8
Formal education	5.7	4.1	4.3	3.9	4.2	3.5	3.8	3.1	3.5	2.8	2.2	2.7
Non-formal education	26.4	23.9	25.3	28.2	30.1	33.1	28.0	35.2	39.1	34.2	34.6	41.8

Source: MOE & KEDI, 2018, p. 28.

In particular, the learning city has contributed greatly to the expansion of residents' participation in lifelong education and the vitalisation of local lifelong education by operating a variety of curriculum and supporting learning circles' activities. An immediate consequence of the learning city policy was the increase in adult education programme provision through public institutions like lifelong learning centres, libraries, and art centres. In their survey, Ko et al. (2008) confirmed that learners' participation rates and time spent at adult education programmes were higher in the participating cities than other cities. Shin and Jun (2017) inferred that the LLC has achieved the expansion of lifelong learning opportunities for community residents based on the result that residents' participation in formal and non-formal education in LLCs was statistically significantly higher ( $p < .05$ ) than in non-LLCs. Therefore, LLCs have contributed greatly to increasing the participation rate of Korean adults in lifelong education.

However, the learning cities have made efforts not only to purely expand the quantity of their educational provision, but also to enhance the quality of education (Han & Makino, 2013; Yang & Yorozu, 2015). First, learning cities set up an administrative structure, an organisation and professional staff to plan, implement and provide services. Second, in so doing, lifelong educators, certified experts in lifelong learning practice, made a large contribution. The quality of teachers and educators has an important bearing on the quality of lifelong learning. At least one lifelong educator has been assigned to each LLC, and lifelong educators took on the important role of developing the public policies and lifelong educational programmes of the city. Third, learning cities tried to create a learning city atmosphere by nurturing a whole city environment where provision and participation are organically interconnected across the entire social ecosystem of learning, including learning circles and networks, interlinked with various civil society organisations, even though they did not always lead to actual change. Fourth, the learning cities have been encouraged to open and operate lifelong education programmes for marginalised groups, including foreign immigrants, illiterate people, and people with low incomes and levels of schooling. Last, they have tried to move away from teacher-centred approaches that focus on conveying knowledge and towards learner-centred approaches that emphasise learning for personal development, active citizenship, employability, and social inclusion, according to the perspective of lifelong education.

In addition, the efforts of learning cities for the quantitative and qualitative growth of lifelong learning have contributed to improving outcome recognition and satisfaction. According to Park's research (2009), the residents of lifelong learning cities have higher levels of satisfaction than expected when it comes to the cost, physical environment, educational goals, relationships, instructor qualities, and support environment factors of lifelong education services.

Therefore, the LLC that has been promoted in Korea for the past 20 years has greatly contributed to the formation of a learning society by expanding the learning opportunities and participation of local residents and developing the social and educational environment of the city.

### **Resolving remaining lifelong educational inequality**

Despite the expansion of lifelong education participation opportunities and the quality improvement through LLCs, Korea still shows differences in lifelong learning opportunities by class. Education alienation and inequality of education participation opportunities are occurring, and furthermore, regional lifelong education tends to emphasise individuality rather than community in the flow of neoliberalism. In addition, there has been criticism that as the national goal-oriented policy was developed, regional lifelong education was used as an artificial means to implement the policy, and that the learning city is still insufficient when it comes to forming a learning community that is closely related to the lives of local residents and centred around voluntary participation (Oh, 2018; Youn et al., 2013).

Above all, the provision of lifelong learning opportunities has in fact been distributed unequally according to age, schooling, income, jobs, and regions: younger generations participate more; college graduates participate more than those with less education; high-income earners learn more than low-income earners; urban dwellers have more opportunities than rural residents. It may be true that in Korea lifelong learning chances are not distributed evenly, and this pattern sometimes causes various side-effects, even though not enough evidence is available to show whether the learning city programme has improved this situation (Han & Makino, 2013).

This gap in participation in lifelong education may not be independent of the overall polarisation of Korean society. Korea has been suffering from two economic crises (the 1997 IMF crisis and the 2008 financial crisis), and the slow growth in the economy and the continued polarisation of income are intensifying. In addition, a stable job decline has undermined the mechanism for easing polarisation, and expectations for a rise in class are falling. On the other hand, civic engagement has been growing recently, and the demand for the democratic values of fairness, justice and equality is increasing. Despite this situation, learning opportunities are being provided more unequally. Social integration due to income and regional polarisation and lifelong learning support in line with the growth of civil society are needed. In particular, considering that the provision of lifelong learning opportunities is one of the most necessary policy tools for resolving polarisation, the gap in the rate of participation in lifelong education is a very urgent task for us to solve.

Therefore, it is important to build a learning society in which none of the local residents are alienated through the LLC project from the perspective of learner-centred lifelong education (Oh, 2007). In other words, when LLC projects become activities from below, not from above, all citizens will be able to enjoy the required learning equally. In addition, a learning city where all citizens participate and are involved can be formed in the process where learning is centred on the issues of community life, not separated from everyday life, and local residents learn and solve various local problems together in everyday life. In the end, this is connected with the concept of a learning society which empowered citizens positively participate in and build together.

## **ARE THE LEARNING CITIES IN KOREA BUILT BY EMPOWERED CITIZENS?**

In Korea, LLCs advocate a learning community movement “by the local citizens, for the local citizens, and of the local citizens” (NILE, 2019). This does not only mean that residents can expand their participation in lifelong education or get a ‘good’ education, but also includes the meaning of education that leads individuals and communities to actively and energetically change their areas through learning. Thus, the key to the formation of a learning city is the subjective engagement of citizens and local organisations (Yang, 2007).

### **Movements to build a learning city with citizen engagement**

Citizen engagement in democratic civil society can be regarded as active and voluntary participation that can strengthen the autonomous capacity of individual citizens and reflect their views in government and local policy and administration, not as passive participation. Therefore, citizen participation means that citizens can express their own opinions in the agenda of various policies and administrations, such as individual problems, community problems, or important decision-making for the development of individuals and communities (Lee, 2007). Citizen participation can be achieved through personal learning experiences, community learning, volunteer work experiences, citizenship education, and empowerment. By talking and learning with others, and thinking about and solving our problems and local issues together, citizens make changes both internally and externally, and then transition to civic engagement.

The learning city movement in Korea formed by citizen participation can be seen in the case of “citizen activists” who operate in the learning cities under various names. Recently, there has been a movement to cultivate citizen activists and utilise them in the field of lifelong education. In other words, the cultivation of “intermediate activists” has begun in earnest due to policy needs such as the participation of residents to expand the base of lifelong learning, the need for intermediate activists in the lifelong education field, and the social demand for strengthening their ability to practice (Ji, 2015). Also, in 2013, the national policy to establish and operate town “happiness learning centres” was promoted to ensure learning was accessible locally, and many LLCs have trained and arranged for “lifelong learning managers”, citizen activists who work at the happiness learning centres. Of course, not all LLCs in Korea are fostering citizen activists or encouraging their participation in city governance. However, the citizen activists who are residents living in the region, are interested in the community they live in, and work for the purpose of forming a learning community for the residents, can be said to be a form of citizen-led learning city practice.

Citizen activists such as lifelong learning managers participate in all decision-making processes in the lifelong education project, including the process of planning, designing, operating, and evaluating projects. Running a learning city by working with citizen activists is already a matter of realising a citizen-led learning society. For example, in

Seocheon-gun, Chungcheongnam-do, lifelong learning managers have participated in the process of promoting lifelong education programmes in the region through monthly meetings (Shin, 2019). In addition, they experienced high effectiveness and satisfaction when the programmes in each village were carried out based on the participation of the residents. When the residents experienced mastership in the process of village work, they became more active and subjective, and organic relationships formed among the members of the community that worked together. Through this process, lifelong learning managers, who were general residents, established their identity as local lifelong education activists, established values through their understanding of diversity and experiences of reflection through on-site activities, recognised and practiced the necessity of realising a resident-led learning society, and became “acting citizens” (Shin, 2019).

In addition, Kim and Park (2013) found that the area of responsibility of the citizen activists increased as their activity period increased by one year, and in this process they grew into a subject of expansive learning. In other words, instead of acting according to the general needs and directions of local governments, they actively participated in a lifelong education policy or project from its planning stages, and their role changed in the form of consultation and cooperation with local governments. As a result, citizen activists are growing into “subjective learners” at the individual level, gaining expertise as “education mediators” who support the growth of residents at the organisational level, and forming their identity as “citizens” at the local level (Ji, 2015).

Moreover, a “learning village project” has been developed in LLCs (Yang, 2015). It is called the “learning village movement”, and some typical examples are Siheung City’s “village school”, Eunpyeong-gu’s “hidden coriander”, Suwon City’s “everyone school”, and Daedeok-gu’s “learning village” (Yang, 2018). Siheung City village school was a learning village movement that started with lifelong learning. The project and activities evolved through an organic and continuous relationship between the citizens who built the learning villages in Siheung City, the civic organisations related to lifelong education, and the administration (Yang, 2015). The village school was attended by people ranging from children to the elderly, and the residents became instructors who taught the children. The residents were being made the subjects of village development through continuous learning and practice (Yang, 2018).

Recently, the subjective activities of the residents have been changing the region. For instance, residents have become the educational subjects, for example, in small library movements, joint childcare, learning circles, and “Ma-Eul” (it means village) education communities, expanding the regional educational influence (Yang, 2018). In particular, the Ma-Eul education community movement is spreading in Korea. Schools that had only been interested in their own educational activities are turning to villages and cooperating with local communities to form educational communities. The practice of the Ma-Eul education community should be based on the participation of the various agencies, such as schools, school districts, municipalities, community members, community groups, and students. The subjects participating in the Ma-Eul education community

have the right and the responsibility to participate in the important decision-making processes related to the planning, operation, and evaluation of the Ma-Eul education community. The Ma-Eul education community movement is the practice of creating a small unit of a learning society with the active participation of village members or empowered citizens.

### **The limits of learning cities still being practiced in a top-down way**

As discussed above, there are recent movements in Korea to nurture residents as citizen activists and develop learning communities led by the residents. However, despite these changes and developments, Korea's LLC project is still led by local governments, mainly through the planning and budget support of the central government or local governments, rather than driven by the citizens' voluntary and independent participation. In relation to the central and local governments, broadly speaking, LLCs in Korea have been centrally designed and locally implemented (Han & Makino, 2013).

First of all, it is argued that the LLC policy undertaken in Korea is led by the state and administration because the value of efficiency and development is being affected (Yi, Park, Park, & Lee, 2011). The designation, evaluation, and support of LLCs are carried out by the national organisation, and the evaluation criteria are more uniform rather than reflecting the specificity of a particular region. In addition, each local government is pursuing an LLC in order to achieve the policy goal of regional development and to enhance the capacity of local residents. Local governments organise budgets and systems, and plan various projects to meet the national criteria. In this context, Yi and Hwang (2016) criticise Korea's LLC policy as a "product" created through a standardised mass production system that blends the central government's national policy with the needs of regional development. Indeed, in most local governments administrators and lifelong education specialists mainly design and plan for their LLC projects themselves rather than actively involve local residents and reflect their opinions.

Ko (2007) argued that four learning cities in Korea had a communication structure that flowed from top to bottom and did not reflect the learning needs of local residents. He found that because the residents' learning needs were not reflected in the learning city, learning opportunities were not diversified, focused more on quantitative growth, and projects focused on specific areas. As a result, these LLC projects have a strong character of developing a region through the lifelong learning of residents, rather than forming a learning society for the residents. The learning cities did not faithfully reflect the principle of democracy as a basic principle of lifelong education (Ko, 2007).

Kim and Park (2018) also argued that in Korean lifelong education, building a learning society serves as a tool and an instrumental feature of policy goals such as regional economic development and job creation, rather than serving educational purposes. Therefore, the importance of the LLC project as a means of regional development cannot be completely excluded, but the justification that the LLC needs to be led by the residents and the educational purpose of forming a learning society will need to be strengthened.

The development of LLCs is not possible if it is only in the hands of administrators, experts, and lifelong educators. Local residents should be able to participate in the LLC project independently, and the residents' affection and vitality should be used (Yang, 2007). In other words, citizens should participate not as objects of education but as subjects of learning and project implementation, and their opinions should be reflected in the visions, goals, and plans of learning cities (Hong & Kim, 2013). However, most of the LLC projects are still formed in a top-down manner. In order for Korea's LLCs to move in the direction in which all citizens participate as subjects, it is necessary to establish a partnership system in which the current modes of citizen participation can be further activated. The voluntary participation of the residents and the support of the administration should be further developed into a learning city where all educational subjects, resources, and information of the region can be connected and cooperate. Of course, the needs and opinions of the residents are so diverse that different directions can be pursued or confronted. Coordinating conflict and carrying out projects that reflect various needs may require more time and effort, and it may not be possible to achieve their goals effectively. However, in order for a lifelong learning city to successfully build a learning society, local resident-led, active participation of citizens in a true sense must be ensured.

## **SUMMARY AND SUGGESTIONS**

The paper examined the current position of Korea's LLCs from the standpoint of building a just learning society led by subjective citizens. We can see that the LLCs show both the possibilities and the limits to creating a just learning society formed by citizen engagement. In terms of the development of the LLCs, the quantity and quality of lifelong learning opportunities has been expanded and strengthened. However, there is a tendency of intensifying inequality rather than progressing towards a just learning society where learning opportunities are provided equally to all citizens. Moreover, most of the LLCs were still planned and implemented lifelong education policies and projects in a top-down manner, rather than with a bottom-up approach based on the active participation of the residents.

Despite these limits, there are possibilities for Korea's LLCs to develop into a just learning society. Recently, movements and activities where residents independently participate in their LLC projects as citizen activists and form their village as a learning community are beginning to be activated. In the future Korea's LLCs will need to further solidify the citizen-led perspective, to promote the participation of democratic decision-making and the free expression of citizens' opinions, and to activate citizenship education. To achieve these aims, the practice of citizenship education needs to move beyond the framework of knowledge education and emphasise not only knowledge but also civic values, attitudes, and learning participatory skills through daily practice (Park, 2018). In this process, lifelong educators will be required to have expertise as practitioners of citizenship education, and to design education programmes in which residents can recognise local problems and participate in problem solving.



This study analysed the position of Korea's LLCs on the road towards becoming a learning society, but it has limitations that could not be evaluated based on objective factors or indicators for reaching a just learning society. In the future, further research will be needed, such as studies on rational criteria for evaluating a citizen-led just learning society, empirical studies based on these criteria, and practices that influence the development to a just learning society.

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