

Towards an Inclusive and Sustainable Knowledge Society for Everyone:

Development of a National Policy for Public Libraries in Taiwan

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

As the UNESCO (2005) definition of knowledge society highlights the important roles of libraries, public libraries have devoted to building a knowledge society that helps cultivate people's ability to identify, use, and transform information into knowledge. Among the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) proposed by the United Nations in 2015, equity, inclusion, and sustainability have been emphasized, balancing global and local public good. It is important for public libraries to incorporate these concepts into the knowledge society. Developing national public library policies helps guide the direction of professional development and quality services as a whole. However, such national policies are currently not available in Taiwan. With an ultimate goal to propose a national policy for public libraries in Taiwan, this study aims to develop strategic focus areas through a two-stage practice-based approach of interpretive policy analysis.

The first stage was to review public library policies from seven countries—including the United States, Finland, Denmark, New Zealand, Singapore, Japan, and Korea—and interview city and county public library directors. While the review of policies helped identified critical areas drawing much attention worldwide, the interviews with frontline library leaders helped reveal the current state of local libraries and identify potential solutions to major issues nationwide. In order to properly develop a policy based on experiences from other countries, the interviews focused on library directors' experiences and thoughts regarding the roles of local public libraries and the difficulties libraries encountered when providing innovation services, as well as the future prospects of public libraries. With the SDGs in mind, the second stage was to conduct expert interviews with national library directors and scholars to refine the strategic areas of focus and formulate the public library policy. During the interview, a card-sorting approach was used to further identify how strategic focus areas may help achieve the SDGs.

This poster presents findings from the first stage, where interpretive policy analysis was used to consolidate policies from the aforementioned seven countries and to analyze the ten interviews—among the 22 local government divisions. Based on the practical and managerial experiences of the interviewees, preliminary findings defined the role of public libraries as sustainable living rooms and studios, offering everyone a friendly learning environment and a meeting place. However, major issues public libraries in Taiwan have faced include insufficient and unstable funding and support for maintenance and staffing, resulting less inclusive services to certain populations. In order to fulfill the role and overcome these problems, seven strategic areas of focus were proposed, including: (1) connection and collaboration, (2) inclusion and innovation, (3) exchange and experience, (4) expertise and engagement, (5) learning and literacy, (6) data and digitalization, and (7) heritage and horizons. Specific strategies were also proposed to be used for developing the national policy. This approach of developing national policy for public libraries may serve as a framework in wider contexts and is worthy of further discussion.