Towards Libraries as Paradise
-A Thai Experience of Library Transformation-

Vilas Wuwongse

Computer Science and Information Management
School of Advanced Technologies
Asian Institute of Technology

Outline

- Introduction
- Thai Knowledge Park
- Non-Formal Education Commission
- Conclusions

Introduction

"I have always imagined that Paradise will be a kind of library."

Jorge Luis Borges

(Argentinean poet, 1899–1986)

Introduction

- Following are excerpts from some of the speeches made by Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra in various occasions:

  - "How are we going to prepare ourselves for life in the modern world, which today is going to be a society that depends mainly on knowledge, or what is called a *knowledge-based society*?" (3 April 2002)

  - "In the present world, we need people who may or may not obtain a formal educational degree, but who love to learn and to continue to develop themselves for all their lives. I wish to see the Thai society as a society that builds up the atmosphere that is conducive to learning for all the Thai people." (19 March 2003)

Introduction

- "At the moment, I would like to build a library that is alive and breathing. It will be a place that keeps up with the rapid changes. It will contain good and up-to-date books with continual rotation. I don't want to see a library that is dead from the day of its inception." (26 August 2001)

- These ideas and desire of the Prime Minister have led to the establishment of and the transformation of old-styled libraries into modern libraries.

Thai Knowledge Park

- Aiming at the creation of *a lively library, which embraces continuous changes, with good and up-to-date books: a library that will never die*, the Thai government has established Thai Knowledge Park (TKpark).

- TKpark's main objective is to instill the good habit and love of reading and life-long learning into Thai people.

- Through a number of brainstorming sessions with the networks and communities of both youths and adults, TKpark has realized that the good habit and love of reading and learning can be inspired by lively, amusing activities of multi-art and culture, each of which should appropriately tailored to the interest of its target groups.

Thai Knowledge Park

- TKpark opened the first prototype of its new-styled libraries at a conveniently located department store in Bangkok in January 2005.

- Currently the prototype consists of 5 sections: Living Library, Open Square, Mini Theater, Virtual Reality Room and Music Room.

Thai Knowledge Park

- *Living Library* is a library with books, information and a wide range of multi-media materials.

- *Open Square* allows people to creatively exchange knowledge and experiences through a large variety of activities as well as to make experiments and express themselves, in order to discover their own talents, personal interests and needs.

- *Mini Theater* shows valuable and award-winning Thai films.

Thai Knowledge Park

- *Virtual Reality Room* is equipped with state-of-the-art virtual reality (VR) facilities: high-power servers, a high-speed network, high-quality displays as well as HMD (Head Mounted Display), VR gloves, head tracking devices and other related gadgets.

- *Music Room* provides music-on-demand services with a collection of Thai pop music. In addition to the terminals in the music corner, all PCs in the park are equipped with headphones and can serve as terminals for the on-demand services. Musical bands are from time to time invited to perform live at the park.

Non-Formal Education Commission (ONFEC)

- ONFEC's main responsibilities cover 3 areas: organization of non-formal education, rendering support and cooperation to the formal schooling system and organization and promotion of informal education.

- The third responsibility deals with lifelong education which aims at providing people with up-to-date knowledge and information necessary for earning their living, improving their quality of life, and adapting themselves to the rapidly changing society.

- The lifelong education is carried out by means of various sources: public libraries, village reading centers, community learning centers, science centers, as well as educational radio and television programs.

Non-Formal Education Commission (ONFEC)

- At present, there are 850 public libraries under the supervision of ONFEC all over the country.

- They can be classified into 3 sizes: large-sized public libraries consisting of provincial public library; middle-sized public libraries or Chalermrajgumaree Public Libraries; and small-sized public libraries comprising district and sub-district public libraries which extend the network of provincial public libraries to district areas

Non-Formal Education Commission (ONFEC)

- These public libraries provide library and information resources, instill reading habits into rural people, as well as disseminate cultural information and heritage.

- However, these public libraries have not functioned as expected. Many of them look gloomy and are unattractive. They seem to welcome only serious people.

- Moreover, they are mostly located at part of governmental offices or isolated buildings on government-owned or public-donated lands.

Non-Formal Education Commission (ONFEC)

- ONFEC therefore plans to transform these libraries into living ones and turn them into centers for: information and knowledge; community learning; community activities; community learning networks; and lifelong learning.

- ONFEC is aware that It is very important to improve public libraries in terms of their efficiency, liveliness as well as their ability and flexibility to respond to the learning needs of the population.

Non-Formal Education Commission (ONFEC)

- ONFEC has devised three types of mobile libraries: mobile public, mobile floating and mobile volunteer libraries.

- A mobile public library provides educational activities with ready-made learning package of videotapes, computers, as well as various exhibits.

  - The services are concentrated on specific groups, such as people in congested areas, the disadvantaged, and impoverished people missing formal education and lacking in sources of knowledge and educational services.

Non-Formal Education Commission (ONFEC)

- A mobile floating library provides an expansion of reading and learning to people living along the river and canals in order to create the awareness of clean waterways and conservation of natural environment.

- A mobile volunteer library focuses on target groups who live in remote areas and have difficulties in accessing the library. Volunteers will bring bags of books to the community. These volunteers will collect the statistics of service reviewers and will change the materials and books monthly.

CONCLUSIONS

- This short presentation has described two attempts of the Thai government toward the creation of a new breed of libraries: one is a new establishment and the other a transformation.

- Both share the same goal, i.e., they want a library to be a living place, to be a paradise.

- It remains to be seen whether the Thai government can achieve its goal: to create libraries as public paradise.