



Schools in Rural Areas and Gross National Happiness: Endogenous Actions of Small Communities in Japan and Sweden

M. Kiwako Okuma-Nyström

Researcher, Ph.D.

Institute of International Education

Department of Education

Stockholm University

SE-106 91 Stockholm, Sweden

E-mail: okuma@mbox.su.se



Objectives of the Presentation

- To problematize educational issues in rural areas
- To conceptualize GNH from the perspectives of endogenous development and civil society in wider sense than NGO
- To present cases of rural communities in Japan and Sweden



Background

- Increasing intrusion of neo-liberalism and the market principle into the field of education
- Emphasis on efficiency
- Closures of small-scale rural schools in sparsely populated areas
- Transfer of children to another school (may or may not be close to the community)



Problems of School Closure

- People often lose the center of the community
- Families with school-age children would not move into such a community without a school
- No sustainable population increase
- Start of a gradual death of the community
- **This is against people's wellbeing!**



Conceptualizing GNH (1)

- “Big Happiness” and “Small Happiness” :
happiness/ideal that the state pursues and happiness/ideal that the individual pursues
- “Big Happiness” and “Small Happiness” may or may not be identical
- Sometimes “Big Happiness” sacrifices “Small Happiness”



Conceptualizing GNH (2)

- Basic foundations for wellbeing of people are linked to certainty, stability, and sustainability (e.g. strategic pillars established in Bhutan)
- Sustainable development is linked to endogenous development
- Endogenous development: (1) is against centralized development; (2) rejects materialization of human being; and (3) is self-rehabilitation embedded in the local community



Conceptualizing GNH (3)

- Power of civil society (communal collectivities, associative collectivities, and communitarian social ties) and endogenous development
- “Humanware”: people’s lifestyles and actions through which people realize their passion





Community K in Town T, Niigata Prefecture in Japan

- Belongs to *Town T*

1995	2003	2004	2005
2,802	2,326	2,285	2,195

- In low mountainous area in Niigata Prefecture
- Traditionally based on rice production in small-scale rice fields combined with seasonal works in urban areas in the winter



Community K in Town T, Niigata Prefecture in Japan

- 125 households (116 households have actual residents)
- Approximately 320 persons
- 65 and above: about 48 percent
- Communal collectivities based on quasi-primary ties
- 1871-today: *K* Primary School in the community
- Up to 1972: one lower secondary school in the community



***K* Primary School**

- 14 students in 2008 (3 are from *Community I*)
- 13 students in 2009
- Education in tight collaboration with the community people
- Around 2000, discussions of merging ***K*** Primary School with ***O*** Primary School without any consultation with the students, parents, and the community people



***K* Primary School**

- Protest to the school closure from the then chair person of PTA and other parents
- Should the school be closed, parents would build a school on the ground of the *Shinto* shrine in the community and hire teachers
- ***K* Primary School** was defended by the parents and the community people, but continuous threat of closure



***K* Primary School**

- School is the center of the community
- As long as there are students commuting from Community I, the school should be defended for them
- Protest may be seen as a rejection of materialization of human being (materialization of the students)



http://www.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http://www.map-of-sweden.co.uk/images/sweden-political-map.jpg&imgrefurl=http://www.map-of-sweden.co.uk/large-political-sweden-map.htm&h=1000&w=760&sz=200&tbnid=aBP3M7YAAEMJ:&tbnh=149&tbnw=113&prev=/images%3Fq%3Dmap%2Bof%2BSweden&sa=X&oi=image_result&resnum=2&ct=image&cd=1



Village D in Dalarna County, Sweden

- Historically based on small-scale forestry
- Affected by depopulation as forestry declined
- 25 km to the closest population center *Village I*
- Population in 2005 was 62



Village D in Dalarna County, Sweden

- 1970s: threat of the school closure in the village started
- August 10, 1983: municipality closed down the school (only 11 days before the school start for the new school year)
- August 11: parents were informed about the school closure; students should be sent to the school in *Village I*



Village D in Dalarna County, Sweden

- 1983-1989: parents' school boycott
- Teaching children at home
- Various support (volunteer teachers, financial support, books from authors, teaching materials, etc.)
- 1989: First "independent school" in Sweden (public funding, non-public management)
- "Humanware" affected "hardware" and "software" of the state education system



http://www.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http://www.map-of-sweden.co.uk/images/sweden-political-map.jpg&imgrefurl=http://www.map-of-sweden.co.uk/large-political-sweden-map.htm&h=1000&w=760&sz=200&tbnid=aBP3M7YAAEMJ:&tbnh=149&tbnw=113&prev=/images%3Fq%3Dmap%2Bof%2BSweden&sa=X&oi=image_result&resnum=2&ct=image&cd=1



Village L in Värmland County, Sweden

- Population in 2007 was 667
- Active “Village Development” group:

Act step by step in a proactive manner

Not to react after something worrying has happened

- Pre-primary to grade 6 (45 students)
- Pre-primary, grades 1-3, grades 4-6



Village L in Värmland County, Sweden

- Repeated threat of the school closure
- “A village without school cannot attract families with children, or cannot keep the youths who want to establish themselves in the village and form a family”
- In case of a school closure, the Village Development Group will take over the school and run it as an independent school