

Received: 23 May 2022

Revised: 9 July 2022

Published: 10 July 2022

COMMUNITY DEMOCRACY AND THE PROMOTION OF LOCAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

The Western democracy mainstream in Thailand led to a change of governance in the year 1932. Thailand has continued to evolve politically since the shift, including political activity focused solely on urban residents. Until the 1997 Constitution of Thailand was enforced, its provisions stipulated that Thai people shall participate in political activities especially at the local level possibly for the purpose of strengthening and developing local potential to achieve self-administration of public affairs using local social capital for the benefits and efficiency, reduce external dependence, form people gathering, meetings, consultations in accordance with democratic guidelines, creating civil society in the development of local communities leading to a self-reliant community also known as “Strengthening Community” based on the concept of community democracy. The concept and process of Community Democracy have been applied by a wide range of Thai communities. Local people in the community are pioneers to initiate the activities and participate in driving the process of participation with local government organizations or organizations through meetings, consultations, and integration between people and members from outside organizations to mutually make an agreement according to Social Contract concept. Through the foresaid concept, the community shall apply it and community democratic processes to utilize social capital for maximum benefits, achieving the guidelines for effective community management.

Keywords: Community Democracy, Participation, Local Development

Citation Information: Rotprasoet, P., Dongjit, J., & Webb, P. (2022). Community Democracy and the Promotion of Local Development. *PSAKU International Journal of Interdisciplinary Research*, 11(2), 60-71. <https://doi.org/10.14456/psakuijir.2022.10>

Introduction

The democratic concept greatly influences Thai society and the current world. The democratic trend arises from various historical events that indicate the popularity of liberalism, such as the French Revolution of 1789, the defeat of the Socialist nations in World War II, etc. In addition, the democratic current was also passed on to the new generation of people by means of the purification process and educational processes as a medium which gives rise to concepts and theories about democracy creating a new generation of people who are interested in democracy and more scholars in the sciences related to democracy.

Thailand has changed the governance also known as the revolution from absolute monarchy to democracy on 24 June 1932. A group of people which was the mainstay of this change was the “People’s Party (Khana Ratsadon)”. This was the group of persons who were the new group of people educated from Western countries, living in Western countries, and found a form of governance including the rights and liberties of the people in the Western nations that they study until leading to the paradigm of thinking about a universal form of government to be accepted by many civilized countries. Moreover, as Thailand at that time encountered domestic problems in government administration, there was a group of people who were dissatisfied with the current administration and viewed that changing the form of governance will be able to solve the problems that arise as well as helping people in the country to have a better life by modifying the format and developing a political and administrative system in a democratic pattern (Tangpathomwong, 2012; Sawangwong, 2016).

After the change of government from an absolute monarchy to a democracy, Thailand is managed by a government that adheres to the highest legal principles in its administration. The law is the constitution which is considered a master plan for the administration of the country. Regarding the essence of the constitution, there is a provision for political institutes. The scope of powers and duties of each party and the rights and duties of citizenship in Thailand include the issue of freedom to participate in political activities. The current Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand 2017 is the 20th edition. Each constitution of Thailand has been important in a variety of matters. However, the one that stands out and has always been mentioned is the Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand 1997 which was called the “People’s Constitution”. One of the key points of this constitution is decentralization, which is the transfer of decision-making powers, resources and missions from the central government to the local level. The local residents were allowed to elect their own representatives to run the local councils. The issue of decentralization is something that has been discussed and developed continuously from the Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand 1997 to the Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand 2007 onwards. The main idea is that the state has to decentralize power to allow local people to be self-reliant and to make decisions in local affairs by themselves. There must be the development on the local economy and other areas thoroughly and equally throughout the country taking into account the will of the people in such province.

In particular, the Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand 1997 states that the administrative powers are decentralized to regional and local government administration systems under Section 78 stating that “the state has to decentralize powers to the localities to be self-reliant and to make decisions in local affairs by themselves. This can develop the local economy, utilities, and public utilities throughout the local information infrastructure thoroughly and equally throughout the country as well as developing provinces that are ready to become large local administrative organizations taking into account the will of the people in such province” (Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand 1997. This stipulation can be considered as an opportunity for the state to distribute power to local government organizations for efficiency in management and in line with the increasingly changing social context. For the current Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand 2017, people are allowed to have rights and to sign names to propose laws and policies. It also stipulates that the state has a duty to engage people

in decision-making and investigating many other issues such as under Section 57 (1) that the state must conserve, restore and promote local wisdom, arts, culture, customs and good customs as well as providing public spaces for activities. The participation of people, communities and local organizations must be encouraged. According to Section 57 (2), the State must conserve, protect, maintain, restore natural resources, the environment and biodiversity by having people and the local community to take part and benefit as well (Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand 2017. From the essence that has already been defined under the Constitution, it can be considered that the government is trying to strengthen the democratic process at the level of the local community by determining the decentralization of powers to other sectors. Apart from the central government, people are also provided with the opportunities to participate in political activities at all levels.

At present, the principle of decentralization of administrative power has been combined with the intent of the constitution to facilitate the benefits of the people. Therefore, it can be considered that decentralization of administrative power is a factor that contributes to the democratic process of the community. It is consistent with the form of representative democracy that Thailand uses to represent the elected people as the leader of the community in the form of a committee. The community democracy is also regarded as the origin of the “CIVIC Community” as a platform for expressing opinions, meeting altogether or discussing between the leaders and the people to conclude the results in the form of Social Contract. It will be the mutual agreement of people in the community. The format of such meeting is available at all levels from the national level that is the largest in the country to the local level that is closest to the people. Forming a pattern of strong community requires the participation of local people and the people who participated in must be aware of their own rights and duties as the owner of the area. The cooperation is also required from government agencies or local governments in promoting the process of building democracy in the community. This may be in the form of education, dissemination of information, knowledge or practices and other integrated actions to create a fully democratic community.

In this article, the researcher attempts to address community democracy and the promotion of local development in the hope that what is presented will serve as a guideline for those interested in implementing the ideas. This leads to the development of the area for the participation of people in the local community. The people can participate in the management of their own local community as being provided in the Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand. It is the state’s intent for the development of communities to be strong in accordance with the democratic regime.

Democracy Process from Idea to Community Development

Democracy Principles

Elzioni-Halevy defined democracy as a regime in which the power of government comes from the consent of the majority of the people. This consent is manifested in the way that people obtain and exercise their power consistently, freely, and have competitive elections by their leaders. Everyone has equal rights in elections. The fundamental principle of democracy is the freedom of the people to combine freedom of speech, obtain association information and participate in political competition (Uwanno & Burikul, 2005: 7).

From the aforementioned meaning, it can be seen that politics have both broad meanings and narrow meanings, each focusing on different aspects of politics. In summary, “politics” refer to human social activities in relation to power to comply with the rules which may have mutual or conflicting interests. The same or different thinking decisions are made and can occur generally in society. In general, the political system in the world can be divided into two major systems, namely democracy and dictatorship. Here we will talk about democracy.

However, Bawornsak said that democracy is quite dynamic because it has changed over time and according to social changes. The true meaning is still widely debated. However, the key dimensions of democracy are competition, participation, and political freedom. Likewise, (Uwanno & Burikul, 2005: 12-15) has studied and explained different forms of democracy as follows:

1) Direct Democracy is the system in which the people in possession of sovereign power exercise their sovereignty for themselves or jointly exercise sovereignty with two key elements: (1) the people are the initiators whereby the initiative must be conditional upon the initiation of the process and (2) the final decision-maker is the people. The lack of one of these elements would mean that any form of political participation could not be fully democratic. The final decision by the people is the most important component of direct democracy. Direct democracy is therefore the most complete form of citizen politics as citizens are directly involved in politics by voting for their own destiny for themselves in all matters without representatives. Democracy is currently and directly used in terms of referenda, initiative, impeachment of individual representatives or the entire House (recall). However, in practice, it is not possible for a large modern state having a large number of population and having a complex social structure that allows all citizens to govern their own country. It is not possible in the reality that every citizen will be able to directly exercise their legislative, executive and judicial sovereignty with restrictions on meeting matters and meeting time.

As a result, most countries in the world that want their citizens to participate in politics have embraced democracy with representatives by allowing the people to choose their representatives to make decisions administering the country on behalf of themselves.

2) Representative Democracy is a system where people elect representatives to exercise sovereignty for themselves. If it is a parliamentary system, the people will elect only members of the National Assembly who are the legislative group and members of the parliament will appoint the administration itself. In case of presidential system, people will elect both the legislature and the executive matters themselves. Representative democracy can be said as indirect democracy. However, representative democracy still has a problem in whether the representatives elected by the people will perform their duties as representatives of the people. When representatives are empowered, some may use their power in a wrong, proper and fair way. Sometimes for oneself or one's group, there are decisions that people are not aware of causing other forms of democracy to be adopted later.

3) Participatory Democracy: The concept of participatory democracy originated in Ancient Greece. In the 18th and 20th centuries, it reappeared in the West in the 1960s by Garol Patman called representative democracy which allows people to participate more in politics, governance and decision-making at different levels. It also provides opportunities for people to participate in decision-making processes, such as opening channels for people to participate in decision-making processes, for example, opening channels for people to participate in information movement and the return of the country's management by those acting on behalf of the people or the opportunity for people to share their opinions and provide information to those acting on their behalf to use in decision-making on various matters. This includes the people's participation in the investigation and removal of those who act on behalf of the people who are ineffective and incompetent in their duties or dishonestly as the case may be.

The Participatory Democracy deals with how decentralization and unequal resources affect people's lives and how they influence decisions that affect them. The Participatory Democracy means that decision-making power should not belong to a small group of people. The power should instead be allocated among people so that everyone has the opportunity to influence collective activities.

The principle or key element of participatory democracy is the participation of the people in politics and administration.

- 1) Emphasis on decentralization of decision-making powers and equal allocation of resources among people.
- 2) The decision-making power and the allocation of resources will affect people's livelihoods.
- 3) Increase protection of people's rights and liberties
- 4) Flexibility, i.e. have a work structure that is auditable, transparent and taking into account the resource needs of the participants
- 5) People's participation at both local and national levels.
- 6) People have access to information on policy and justice processes.

Sribuaiaam (2002: 15) and his team have summarized the principles or elements of participatory democracy as follows:

- 1) Encourage people to participate in politics and administration
- 2) Emphasis on decentralization of decision-making power and the allocation of resources among the people equally
- 3) The decision-making power and the allocation of resources must affect people's livelihoods.
- 4) Increase the protection of rights and liberties of the people
- 5) Flexibility, i.e. have a work structure that is auditable, transparent and taking into account the resource needs of the participants
- 6) People's participation at both local and national levels.

In conclusion, the democracy plays a role in politics and economy. It also plays a role in society as well. In social aspect, people are provided with opportunities to practice participatory skills by participating in decision-making in family institutes (family, school, workplace, etc.). People can broaden the scope of their engagement skills to participate in decision-making in social institutes until having skills to participate in politics with freedom to participate in the decisions of their daily life. The modern participatory democratic thinkers consider that the society must be truly equal in politics, economy and society.

Democracy and Political Participation

Politics and governance in a democratic system means the governance of people, by people, and for people. The meaning of politics and governance in such a democratic system is that supreme power or sovereignty is owned by people. The people use Direct Democracy. However, it cannot be practically done. Thus, it leads to the formulation of indirect democracy or representative government in which the people elect representatives to act on their behalf and those representatives have a common duty to determine the government, policies and procedures for direct implementation of the policy that the people act to govern themselves or the selection of representatives to act on their behalf. It is the most important mechanism to enable the process of political and governance in a democratic system at all levels and dimensions to be operated efficiently. However, in democratic governance, the people who own sovereign power must have qualities that favor or support democratic principles, such as keen interest in participating in democratic governance by participating in politics or seriously monitoring, controlling and monitoring the work of the state. In other words, people must have a political culture based on the view that "Political and administrative activities are a duty that everyone must take responsibility and avoid or denying them from their responsibility." The participation in politics and governance of the people is the key to strengthening representative democracy, giving people the opportunity to express their views and participate in making decisions in various matters that will affect the lives of the people. Apart from helping the decision of the project proponent or the government to be more prudent and in line with the problems and needs of people more, it also controls the administration of the government to be transparent, respond to the problems and needs of the people and be responsible or able to answer the questions of the people to promote more complete democracy (Jantaraviset & Chailertwanitkul, 2013; The Secretariat of The House of Representatives, 2018; Hilalilah, Sartika, Amin, Mone, & Hardi, 2021).

The Political Participation means any action that takes place willingly, whether successful or not, whether organized or not, and whether it occurs from time to time or in succession, whether lawful means. It shall be used in order to influence the state policy or to the administration of the state or to the selection of political leaders of the government, whether at the local or at the national level for the influence of political groups in the selection. The government may be pressed to do as that citizen or that the group wants and influences policy making of the state in both local and national politics. Thus, it can be seen that political participation has two characteristics; (1) it must be voluntary and (2) it must be intended to influence the decision-making of the authorities. Political participation activities must be in accordance with the political system. The law stipulates that it can be done or may use a method that is not legal. It can be concluded that political participation is the initial process of democracy in which people become interested, cared for, and are aware of the impact of politics. It can happen if they do not pay attention or do not participate in politics at the national level and at the local community level. It may affect the development of the country in the future. If everyone is involved to help proposing the opinions or taking any action to participate in political activities at all levels, it will affect the development of the country at all levels. Therefore, it is like participating in political activities and is one of the factors contributing to democracy at the local community level.

Development of Community Democracy

The conceptual development of community democracy is the inclination of two trends of democratic development thinking (Sompong, 2012: 22).

The first trend is Democracy as a Process, starting from Direct Democracy developed to Participatory Democracy. When participation increases, people are aware of their rights in a democratic system causing more political awareness of the people. It sparked towards the idea of Community Democracy.

The second trend is Democracy as a Movement, starting from the idea of changing people's citizenship developed to the integration into a civil society movement. Later, it was developed into the concept of Community Self-Management.

These two concepts evolved in parallel and inclined towards each other as illustrated below.

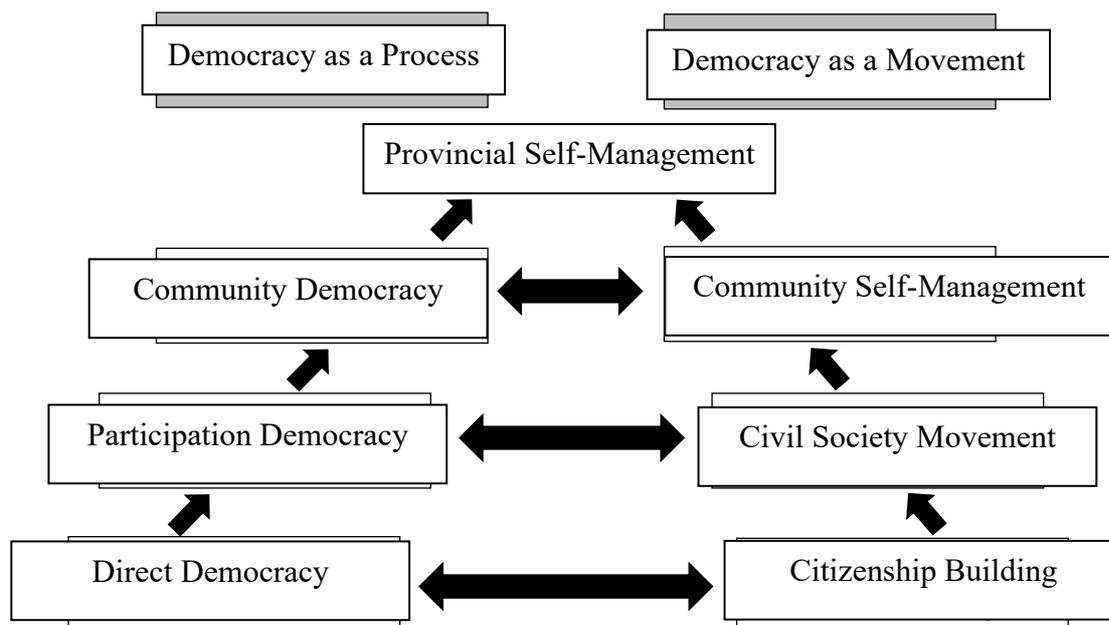


Figure 1 The flow of thought that is inclined between Democracy as a Process and Democracy as a Movement of Thailand
 Source: Sompong (2012: 23)

Democracy as a process is an analysis of developments from the use of the term democracy only since 1932 to become two types of democracy; Representative Democracy which is a process for people to choose representatives to exercise power for themselves and Direct Democracy which is a process where people who own sovereign power are able to exercise that sovereignty for themselves or jointly. There are two key components; 1) people are the participants in the process and 2) people are the final decision-makers. Therefore, direct democracy is the most complete form of civil politics because citizens are political participants, for example, a referendum decides future actions, proposing of a draft law, etc. Driving in such process requires people who feel that they have sovereignty and able to exercise that sovereignty.

The situation in Thailand after the promulgation of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand 1997 has therefore awakened the citizenship trend of the people to be aware of their responsibility for the future decisions of themselves and the nation. During that period, there was an awakening in both academics and democratic developers to create citizenship in Thai society with the hope that the unification of citizens will be a movement that drives the direct democracy movement. When more emphasis is placed on the idea of direct democracy, it is like supporting participatory democracy which is a democracy in the form of representatives giving people the opportunity to participate in politics and governance and more decisions. It is not just choosing from scratch but it also includes participation in decision-making processes such as the perception of information movement in development activities, public policy formulation at both national and local levels. The Participation Democracy is decentralization and unequal access to resources which affects the lives and livelihoods of people throughout the country.

For engaging people to participate in political and administrative activities with the decentralization of decision-making powers and the allocation of political and administrative resources between people equally, the decision-making power and the allocation of resources will affect the lives of people. There is an increase in the protection of rights and freedoms of

people as well as having verifiable working structure being transparent and taking into account the needs of the participants and participatory processes at both local and national levels.

According to the concept, participation democratic processes can be driven by the duty of non-individual citizens. It is the combination of various people who see the common problems and have a common sense to unite to help one another, express their opinions, and find solutions to solve problems altogether as well as having a sense of responsibility for the future of the local community or their own country. There is a feeling of concern and commitment that oneself as a co-citizen of society should develop and grow in which direction. What the state should do or should not do. Therefore, we have gathered with a sense of citizenship in order to jointly determine our own and society's destiny expressed in the form of public policy united to form a New Social Movement called "Civil Society".

In Thailand after 2002, the concept of civil society development has spread widely, with various groups and organizations driving public activities at both national and local levels. It is established as the civil society to exercise the right to participate in political and governance and the administration of affairs. There are movements at both national and local levels on issues such as opposing unfair policies, inspection of state power. This includes the preparation of public policy proposals at the General Assembly of various organizations, etc. Movement is based on the concept of participation democracy. It is an issue-oriented civil society movement to push for public policy formulation at the national level and spread it at the provincial level rather than the lower local level. Most of the networked movements were those of the urban middle class and the intellectuals. There were instances when lower-level people from the local community joined the coalition to empower the movement.

While the development of participation democracy has movements at the national and provincial levels, at the local community level, there is no movement based on such ideas concretely. People in the local community participated in politics only by electing executives and local council members. After the election, local administration remains in the jurisdiction of the local administrators. People are less involved and not keen to get involved even though there is a right to be certified. This situation has led to a spark among members of the Progressive Political Development Council. Presented ideas to the Coordinating and Promotion of Citizen Politics of the Political Development Council with the idea that the role of the Political Development Council since 2008-2009 was to promote civic politics from the lower levels in villages and sub-districts first. It can be seen that the process should be improved to drive the community to unite as a civil society together. Driving the development of democracy by using participatory democratic processes involves the community in presenting problems, needs, or policy proposals for solving their own community problems. This is proposed to the local administrative organization and related government sectors to be given as a plan or policy for local development. This process requires the participation of the community in the administration of local affairs, known as "Community Democracy" and has started as a pilot project in 3 sub-districts since fiscal year 2010.

Later in 2012, a call for decentralization to local communities was sparked as a policy proposal at the Thailand Reform Assembly organized by the Fair Thai Social Reform Office with a proposal for the government to decentralize power for local people to manage themselves at both the sub-district and provincial levels. The power is decentralized from the central government to act as operators and supervise the local people. This group of thinkers created a new discourse called "Self-management province" which is driven by civil society movements at the provincial level. This idea has been integrated with the concept of community democracy under the concept that when the process of developing participatory democracy at the district level has moved to a certain level, people have learned their rights to participate in local affairs management to express the presence and exercising their own power in accordance with the democratic regime with the King as Head of State. Therefore, the People Empowerment should

be strengthened by upgrading from the mechanism to create a civil society mechanism at the provincial level to drive it to become a self-management province.

From the foregoing, it can be seen that democracy is not only representative democracy but it also has direct democracy. The people can use their powers directly, such as entering the name of the law, referendums, etc. In addition, direct democracy also develops the concept and the process towards participation democracy in which people have the right to participate in the administration of state affairs, such as in proposing policies planning for economic, social and political development, including examining the use of state power. In the past, most of the operations were carried out only at the national level. Until the end of 2010, the trend of civil political development began to increase. This development requires the concept of direct democracy and participation democratic processes to promote the community from the lower level or local communities to use their own power to manage problems and develop their own local communities. This process is called “Community Democracy”. The development of the democratic trend mentioned above can be summarized as shown in Figure 2.

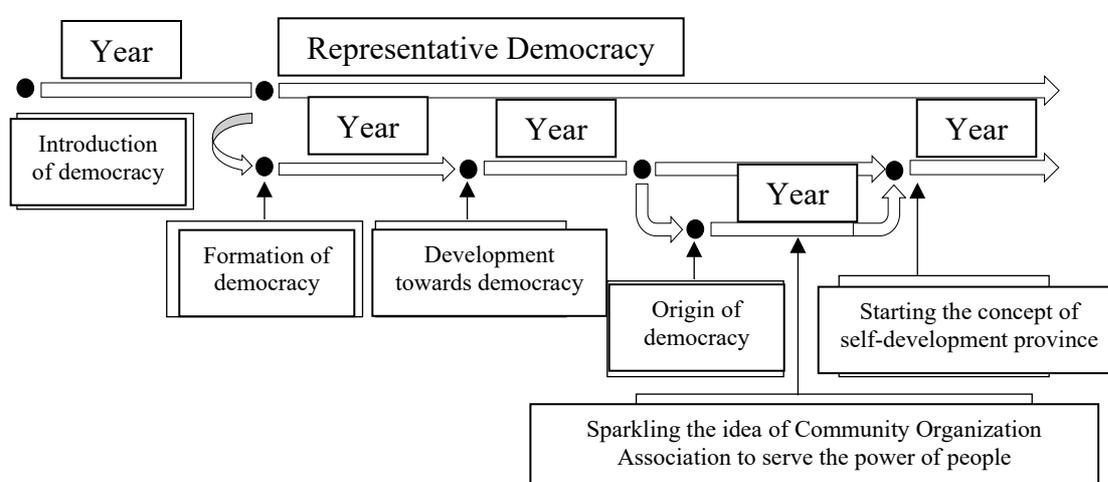


Figure 2 The timeline of development from democratic concept to community democratic concept

Source: Sompong (2012: 23)

In summary, the community democracy is a form of participation democracy with a focus on community operation to exercise the right to participate in the administration of local affairs with the local administrative organization and the government sector. It includes the problem solving and development in various areas operated by the community itself. Under the concept of self-management community, this process is to lead people to express their citizenship to exercise their own power while empowering others to do so through the process of driving communities at all levels.

Community Democratic Process

The community democracy is a form of participation democracy with a focus on community action to exercise the right to participate in the administration of local affairs with local administrative organizations and government sectors. This includes the problem solving and development activities in various fields operated by the community under the self-management community concept. It is to lead people to express their citizenship to use their own powers along with delegating powers to other government agencies or organizations to act on their behalf by adopting the concept of community democracy as a discourse of democracy to apply to practice. There are 4 steps in the process as follows:

1st step: Gathering problems and needs of people in the area.

2nd step: Process of bringing the problem and people's needs to be policies and development plans for local government organizations and related agencies.

3rd step: Community development by local communities and communities to undertake projects in which the people in the area are ready and able to operate on their own.

4th step: Community development follow-up possibly having a committee set up to monitor, examine and evaluate the implementation of projects undertaken by the people in the area together with the local government or other organizations in their own area

Regarding the procedure for this work, people will be the initiators. The people must have qualifications such as being a citizen of the community. They know the duty and their own rights especially the right to participate in the administration of local affairs. They must be a citizen who is actively exercising citizenship in order to express citizenship as an active person. Therefore, processes conducted by the community or community organization council must adhere to the principle of community-initiated participation and bring the public sector to join as partners of the community democratic process.

In this regard, in applying the concept of community democracy to use in the management of the community, multiple components are required. It is not just the participation of the people or the consciousness of democracy alone. We need to take into account social capital of the area where the concept of community democracy is also managed. Part of this article aims to present the topic of applying the concept of community democracy to implement the administration of community drives in each area (Sompong, 2012: 68).

Thinbangtiao (2016) has proposed a guideline for community democracy development that community democracy development should start from turning back to study the cultural background of the community that still remains traces. The democratic value content is the foundation for the development of community democracy and community democracy restoration. There will be differences in the historical context, community, economy, politics, or being an emerging community but wanting to develop democratic communities. Community democratic development guidelines must be applied as their own approach. Since each community is different, it is not possible to apply the lessons, experiences or models of all other communities. In experiencing each community, knowledge must be synthesized from research and then applied and developed as model of their own community. Klangduen et al. (2017: 211) have suggested that the development of community democracy should adopt a developed democratic way of life development used in the community for the development of a democratic way of life that will affect daily life and live a good life in accordance with the democratic system. The community should apply the democratic way of life development model to enhance knowledge and understanding of the community on various occasions such as village meetings. There should be periodic training for good and continuous results.

In summary, the process of community democracy is the process of collecting problems that arise in the community for a solution to that problem through consultation in the community. People in the community help to come up with ideas to solve problems. Once there was a solution to the problem, it was initiated by allowing the community to take part in the problem solving process from the first step until the assessment process project or model for solving that problem can be successful. It is appropriate to use that format or we should find another way to fix the problem. These can be called community democratic processes through participation of the people in solving real problems that occur in the community.

Benefits of Democracy from Public Engagement

1) More quality decisions because of the process of meeting or consult to find a way to develop a project or policy to solve the problem. Many times, the people participation has led to a good approach to solving that problem.

2) The speed operation comes with low budget. Even though the meeting and consultation will take many people and can take many steps, if it is a form of problem solving that does not come

from consultation, it may bring problems from arguing or disputes. Some problems may lead to the litigation stage which is a long term problem causing severe damage.

3) The unity can be built in the group (community) because the creation of agreements, consultation, and meeting will bring about a bond of people in the community in exchanging the opinion with one another. It can reduce potential conflicts to help relieving problems that may arise and bring unity.

4) The problems can be solved more easily and it can be implemented because it arises from the decision-making process from a large number of people to create a sense of belonging. Therefore, when applying that method to solve problems, it will be easier to implement because people want their community to be able to solve problems that arise successfully.

5) The violence that may arise from confrontation can be avoided because there is an opportunity for everyone to express their opinions in helping to solve problems that arise, reduce conflict and opposing opinions.

6) The fairness and credibility can be created because the solution to problems in the community is a process where everyone in the community thinks altogether to help one another make decisions in solving problems. The credibility and fairness will arise when making decisions on various matters.

7) The Paranoia can be reduced with the good attitude towards government agencies because government agencies have participated in helping to consult and helping to find a solution to the problem. This will make the community view the government agencies in a better way.

8) It is the development of civil society, community development, resulting in strong communities that can be self-reliant. For public participation, it make people aware and understand the decision-making process. People will know and understanding the democratic process leading to decision-making to solve problems in their own communities effectively.

Conclusion

Gathering of people in the community is for the purpose in clearly shared ideology for people to learn to solve problems and manage various activities to achieve objectives under the cost-effective resources. Various actions of the community will focus on the social capital that exists in community development in order to achieve concrete community development and efficiency. Although some communities still do not understand the principles of community democracy, doing so is to use the principle of community democracy and principles of participation of community members. It can be seen from the present, there are many communities that carry out the solving activities of community problems and manage the knowledge of the community to develop themselves towards the process of strengthening the community to be more sustainable.

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Data Availability Statement: The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

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