Chapter 5

Egypt’s Knowledge-Based Development: Opportunities, Challenges, and Future Possibilities

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ABSTRACT

This chapter discusses both the dominant theoretical paradigms that appear within Egypt’s ICT policies since the early nineteenth century along with the practical steps of implementation of those policies in reality that may/may not depict such theoretical paradigms. Following a qualitative approach (using SWOT analysis, FGDs, and in-depth interviews), this chapter compares between the mission, vision, and goals of different ICT policies and their application in reality within four cases of the Egyptian KPs, which are the City of Scientific Research and Technological Applications in Burg Al-Arab, Bibliotheca Alexandrina “BA”, Smart Village in Giza “SV”, and finally Information Technology Institute “ITI”. The main question is: What are the opportunities and challenges that Egypt faces in its endeavor to transform each of the national economy into a knowledge-based economy, the Egyptian citizens into knowledge citizens, the cities into knowledge cities, and the whole Egyptian society into a knowledge society?

BACKGROUND

Global Milestone Forums and Local Knowledge-Based Initiatives

Globally, the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) was held in four phases. The first phase took place in Geneva, hosted by the Government of Switzerland from 10 to 12 December 2003, the second phase took place in Tunis, hosted by the Government of Tunisia from 16 to 18 November 2005, the third phase was in New York City in the United States 15-16 December 2015, and finally the WSIS fourth phase returned to Geneva early this year (12-16 June 2017). Since its first phase, WSIS has been held annually with several interim preparatory meetings each year. The main idea behind WSIS started...
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from The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs-2000) to establish the foundations for an Information Society for all people, reflecting the myriad different interests at stake; in order to “develop” our human communities. However, in order to develop within the Information Societies, economies should go beyond the traditional definition of development using the tangible assets and the natural limited resources, and instead begin generating intangible assets in terms of knowledge creation and investment in human capital. Considering the case of Egypt, the question here is: Does the Egyptian government follow this global trend regarding achieving “Knowledge-Based Development” within Egyptian society? To answer this question, two steps must be followed; first, examination of different knowledge-based public policies and strategies. Second, examination of whether, and how, these policies have been implemented in reality.

Locally, since the early Nineteenth Egypt showed a commitment to the global development discourse where new Knowledge-Based Urban Development policies (KBUD) were issued and new projects of Knowledge Precincts (KPs) were initiated. Since the beginning of the 1990s, Egypt has launched a series of Knowledge-Based Development strategies. The milestone steps of the Egyptian KBUD policies started with Egypt’s National Vision for Information Society (2000-2005); then Egypt’s ICT National Strategy 2007-2010; followed by Egypt’s ICT National Strategy 2012-2017 (The Egyptian Digital Society in Knowledge Economy). Recently, during the last Economic Development Conference (EEDC) “Egypt The Future”, Sharm El-Sheikh, 13-15th March 2015, the economic development strategy for the country was announced with a general aim of transforming Egypt into a knowledge-based society while fostering a knowledge-based economy through the launch of seven new KPs, one of which was declared to be the first Egyptian knowledge city known as The Capital Cairo (Egypt’s 2030 Vision for Sustainable Development, 2016). However, many studies have shown that the process of creating a knowledge society cannot be considered as easy or fast, because it requires genuine support from all social agents including local government, citizens, civil society, and universities (Parry and Deog-Song 2007; Alraouf 2008; UNECA 2009; UNESCO 2016). Within this frame, KPs have been endorsed as the engines of KBD policies for cities that choose knowledge production as a key goal in their development strategy (Yigitcanlar 2008).

Figure 1. Knowledge-based global milestones initiatives (source: the researcher)
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