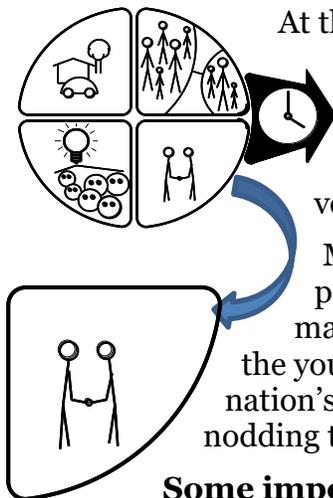


5: Model Category: Action Patterns

A Closer Look



At the beginning of the course you looked at patterns as a way of making sense of reality. This unit focuses on Action Patterns as a part of the Model. They're a major characteristic of cultures, and are “picked up” mostly by casual interaction with parents and others. They differ from society to society, and tend to change very, very slowly.

Most patterns develop as “standard” ways of solving ordinary problems of everyday life— avoiding conflict and confusion, making a living, making sure essential knowledge is passed along to the young, and so on. Some patterns are huge and complex—your nation’s economic system, for example. Others, such as shaking hands or nodding to acknowledge another person, are very simple.

Some important sub-categories—Action Patterns for:

- Work (Who does what kind of work? With whom? When? Where?)
- Exchanging goods and services (trading, buying, selling, etc.—the *economic* subsystem)
- Teaching the young. This may include both formal education (such as school) and informal learning (such as learning from other children and from watching adults)—the *socialization* subsystem
- Controlling behavior considered wrong, including mild controls (e.g. shaming or loss of privileges), moderate controls (e.g. fines), and control and punishment by police, courts, and prisons
- Making important group decisions (the *political* subsystem)
- Religious practices.

Some of these pattern categories overlap. For example, patterns for work closely relate to economic subsystems, teaching the young is part of controlling behavior, and political subsystems establish laws that also deal with wrong behavior.

This list could be very long. Other patterns are associated with greeting, marriage, birth, death, dealing with nature, establishing how time is used, and so on.

The Thonga of Mozambique

In 1498, the Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama sailed around the Cape of Good Hope and up the southeast coast of Africa. He and his crews were the first Europeans to contact the Thonga [*Tuh-HON-ga*], a cluster of tribes on the fan-shaped plain between the Save [*SAH-vay*] and Limpopo rivers in what is now southern Mozambique.

For most of the 500+ years since, many of the important patterns of action of the Thonga people changed very little. The Thonga way of life has been stable in spite of pressures from surrounding tribal groups and the influence of European rule. (Recently, there have been years of war and food shortages from drought which have brought changes.)



<https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/mozambique> (adapted)

Below: Inthanon, posted to Google Earth®



Investigation: Change in Thonga Society

Almost every society resists change in its important Action Patterns and Shared Ideas. However, societies do change, usually because of changes in Setting or Demographics. Of course, looking at change requires history, so we've included historical data for the Thonga below.¹

Work with others:

- 1: In your journal, make sketches of the Thonga Setting, and diagram the Demographic patterns, based on the background below.**
- 2: List major and minor Thonga Action Patterns. If possible, identify a reason for each pattern.**
- 3: Identify which patterns changed, and the relationships between the change and sub-categories of Setting or Demographics. If necessary, refer back to summaries of Setting (Unit 3, page 1) and Demographics (Unit 4, page 1).**

Background:

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Thonga country was a landscape of mixed forest and field. Hundreds of settlements, each isolated from others like it, had a cattle enclosure at the center, surrounded by a ring of anywhere from three to thirty or so round huts with conical thatched roofs. Each settlement was ringed by a low fence of thorn bushes to keep out witches. Many chickens and goats roamed the area.

The women worked the fields nearby, tilling using short-handled hoes with iron blades. They raised the community's main food crop of millet, as well as maize and several different vegetables. Little boys tended the settlement's herd of cattle, mostly oxen, and the men fished and hunted in and about the forests and on the plains. Each settlement was very nearly self-sufficient, although there was some contact and trade with Arab and Portuguese traders on the coast.

Each of these little settlements was occupied by a single extended family, linked by patrilineal (male line only) descent. The family consisted of a senior man and his brothers (if any), their sons, grandsons, and all their wives. The wives came from other settlements and were members of other patrilineal groups or "lineages."

Some men had two or more wives, and since each wife occupied a hut of her own with her children, the number of huts in a settlement or village tended to grow with time.

¹ Anthony F. C. Wallace, *Revitalizations and Mazeways, Essays on Culture Change*, Volume 1, 2003, Lincoln and London, University of Nebraska Press, "The Thonga Miners of Mozambique: A Case of Ethnic Labor Specialization" p. 93ff (adapted)

Patterns, stage 1:

The common goal of the Thonga men was to accumulate as many wives and children as possible, and to help younger men in the lineage also acquire wives. But obtaining wives depended on cattle, for each bride had to be “paid for” with a bride price (*lobola*), typically about 15 oxen, paid to her lineage in her home village.

The cattle were not important as a source of meat. Occasionally ritually-slaughtered oxen were eaten, but the main use for the cattle was as currency that circulated among the villages, permitting marriages to occur. Each time a village gave up *lobola* cattle to validate a marriage (and the resulting children), the village receiving the cattle now had *lobola* to use for one of its unmarried sons.

Occasionally a woman married without *lobola*. She had to bring her husband to live with her mother’s lineage, most likely in the compound of her mother’s brother. The children of these “no *lobola*” marriages were rejected by the both the bride and groom’s male-line families, and became members of the mother’s lineage.

Patterns, stage 2:

Early in the nineteenth century, the Zulu to the north and east of Thonga territory unified and organized an army, drafting and training young men for battle. Zulu men also required *lobola* to obtain wives, but the army assumed responsibility for providing *lobola* for its men after their period of service. The Zulus began conquering neighboring tribes, including the Thonga. In the process Zulus stole or slaughtered almost all of the Thonga cattle. The few cattle that remained were further thinned by other conflicts that involved the Thonga, including with the Portuguese who controlled Mozambique. By 1840, very few Thonga men owned cattle.

Without oxen, Thonga men had a problem. They solved it by adopting a new form of *lobola*—the iron hoes traditionally used by the women in cultivation.

The Thonga men had quickly found a new occupation. In the Transvaal, south and inland from Thonga territory, were tribes that produced iron (and made hoes and other implements), and others that produced gold. The Thonga men became trading middlemen, bringing iron products and gold to the Arab and Portuguese traders on the coast. The Thonga traded the gold and iron products for cloth and other goods, which they re-traded inland. This was dangerous, because Thonga traders were often attacked and robbed by warriors of unfriendly tribes, but it provided enough hoes to sustain the *lobola* system from about 1840 to 1870. The hoes were referred to as “oxen,” and ten or so of them were handed over by the groom’s lineage to that of the bride in the marriage ceremony.

Patterns, stage 3:

In the late 1860s, Dutch colonists—“Boers”—began to develop diamond and gold mines in South Africa. Thonga traders were already accustomed to travel in that region, and soon gave up the dangers of trading to begin working as migrant laborers in the mines (and, to a lesser extent, in South African sugar cane fields and construction). By 1900, about 100,000 Thonga men were migrant workers. Other tribes lived closer to the mines, but far more Thonga worked there than members of any other native African group.

Thonga society had already adapted to prolonged absences of the men. Now, for *lobola*, cash was substituted for iron hoes. Inflation set in—the average bride price soon rose to the equivalent of ten British pounds, enough to buy 100 hoes, and continued to climb. A young unmarried man who went to work in the mines for a year or two was said to be “starting a cattle herd for himself,” when he was saving money to pay cash *lobola* for a bride. For a long period, almost every Thonga male worked in the mines, alternating periods of mine work with time back home. Thonga men followed this pattern for decades, and many still work in the mines.



<http://allafrica.com/view/group/main/main/id/00028772.html>



<https://www.wpf.org/countries/mozambique>

Investigation: Three Thonga Rituals

The data that follow were supplied by Dr. Charles Edward Fuller, who worked and taught among the Thonga people as a school principal, and later was the Chairman of the Department of Anthropology and Sociology at Florida Southern College.¹

Important Action Patterns followed for generations become “rituals.”

In Unit 1 you investigated the greeting ritual of Bedouin Arabs. Dr. Fuller describes the greeting ritual of the Thonga, and two other rituals. ***Discuss questions with your group, and record answers in your journal.***

- 1: *In what ways are the three Thonga rituals alike?***
- 2: *List the patterns, then organize them in a “tree” diagram.*** (More questions are on page 7.)

Ritual 1:

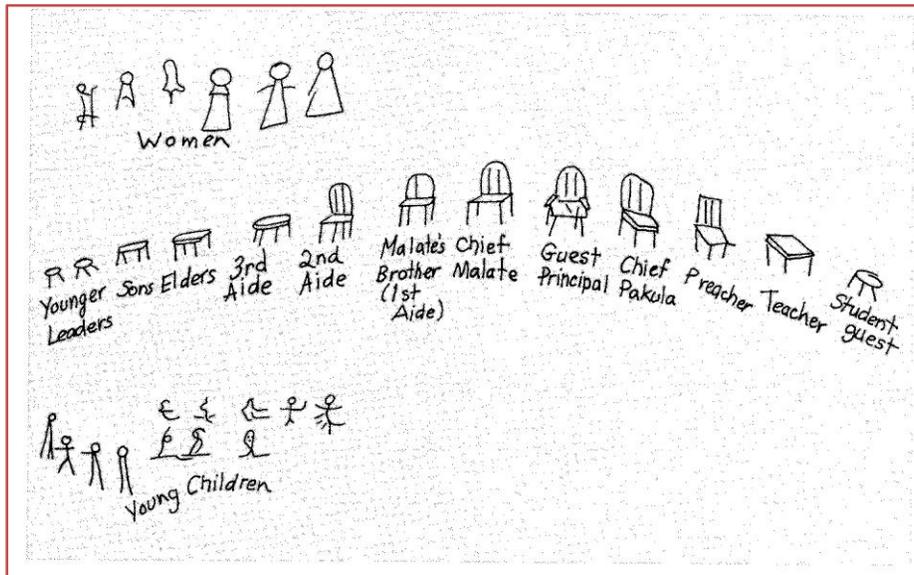
Five of us were riding donkeys: a chief named Pakule, a school teacher, a preacher, a student, and myself (a school principal). We had just passed the village where Chief Malate lived. In a hurry to get 15 miles to our destination, we called out, “*Hi hunzile,*” which means, “We have passed.” This was the polite substitute for stopping and greeting the inhabitants. But Chief Malate had seen us from a distance.

(Continued)

¹ Marion Brady and Howard L. Brady, *Idea and Action in World Cultures*, 1977, Englewood Cliffs, N.J. Prentice-Hall., pp. 172ff. (Copyright transferred to Marion Brady and Howard Brady.)

Before he had heard our words, he had spoken to a man next to him, who in turn gave orders to a youth who ran to us. The boy folded his hands under his chin respectfully as he looked from Chief Pakule to me and back, reporting, “Chief Malate asks you to come for greetings. He says he has never met the principal.”

As we dismounted, boys ran to take our donkeys and tie them where they could graze. Malate spoke quickly to his wives and others around him. Chairs and stools appeared from inside a dozen huts nearby, and by the time we reached the chief, there was a circle of seats ready. We were greeted with the clapping of hands on all sides. This was a slow, chorus-like clapping accompanying the syllables of our initial words, *xeweni*, which means “Let there be greetings,” and *xewe*, or “greetings.” Then we were seated. I made a sketch later:



An hour-long dialogue began. The host chief greeted each of us personally, from the first to the fifth guest. He spoke about such things as health, weather, and crop conditions. Each conversation lasted at least five minutes, and he often repeated what he’d said in an earlier greeting. Each greeting was accompanied by silent hand-clapping, an occasional hummed “yes,” or a sharp “no!” (*ha!*), spoken in chorus by all listeners. Sometimes the host’s aides added questions or comments. Finally came a chorus of *xewe*, which ended the formal greeting.

Pakule then said, “Father, as you know ‘to rest does not complete a journey; what finishes it is to walk.’” Malate replied, “But we have not yet sufficiently greeted each other.”

(Continued)

Then, without a word, he motioned toward our donkeys, and boys prepared them for us to mount. As we started off, grandsons of Malate brought chickens and tied them to our saddles. Chief Malate walked a few yards beside me, holding the bridle of my donkey, while his aides did the same with our companions. Then we travelers said, “*Salani kwatsi*,” (Stay well) to which our hosts replied, “*Fambani kwatsi*,” (Go nicely) as we parted.

Pakule, who was a more important chief than Malate, had called his fellow ruler *baba* (father). Malate had done the same to me, a foreigner and not a chief. As we left the country of Malate, Chief Pakule told me, “If we had passed without saying *Hi hunzile*, we would not have been welcome to pass through Malate’s country again.”

When I asked him why we stopped for the greeting, he replied, “We could have passed without stopping, since we said ‘*Hi hunzile*,’ but we made Malate happy by our visit. He and his people will be eager for us to come again.”

Our student companion recited a Thonga proverb: “It is better to be known than to be handsome.”

Below: <http://www.caritas.org.au/learn/countries/mozambique>



Ritual 2:



Chief Pakule once invited me to go with him to watch a Thonga diviner work with his patients. While we were there, a man came to the diviner and asked for help because he suffered from constant headaches. The diviner asked the patient if he hated anyone, was jealous of anyone, or held a grudge. The man denied all of these. But, while consulting his divining bones, the diviner suddenly asked his patient: “Why are you annoyed by that man?”

The patient admitted he was angry with a man who had tried to take away his wife. What the other man did was wrong—everyone knew that.

The diviner agreed that what the man had done was wrong, but added, “Now you are hating. Hate and grudge destroy us. Go get the *rulani* fruit.”

The man knew what he must do. First he picked a little yellow fruit like a mock orange. Then he went to the person he had hated. Both came before the people gathered with the diviner.

The sick man, with a little instruction from the diviner, crushed the fruit into tiny pieces between his hands. Then he threw down the fruit and pushed it into the sand until no sign of it was left. Looking at the one who had wronged him, he said, “As I have crushed this fruit and done away with it, so I have done away with my hatred. *Rulani!* (*Rulani* is the name of the fruit, but also means “peace.”)

Said the diviner: “Now the man’s headaches will end. Nothing troubles anyone as much as hatred and ill will.”

Ritual 3:

Simon, a school teacher, vacationed among the Thonga while I was there. He was a Shona from Zimbabwe, and was interested in the ideas and ways of acting of the Thonga. As he visited, Simon marveled at the hospitality showered on him by the Thonga. He told us how different it was from Shona customs, and said he would like to be transferred to teach in Thonga country. When we asked if he, on returning to Shonaland, would practice customs similar to those of the Thonga, he answered, "I wish I could, but my friends and relatives would think I was crazy."

Simon told me about an experience he just had. While visiting a Thonga village, he was awakened early one morning by the shrieks of a girl standing outside the boundary of the settlement, crying. Between sobs she screamed, "I do not want to spoil my village, or hurt my people. My family and my village must be cleansed of evil."

The girl had offended the ancestors' spirits. She knew that her wrongdoing would bring guilt on all her family and community. So she had gone very early to wash before others were up, so she wouldn't come in contact with anyone. Then she had announced her problem. Now the whole village knew that they must share in a rite to remove the guilt.

They prepared to give a sacrifice to the ancestors to tell them of the trouble. For three days the men and boys avoided contact with the women and girls, except when the women gave food to the men. A goat was sacrificed to the ancestral spirits, and they had a special dance for the spirits, with the men and women separated. Then the chief and his wife went to their hut. The next morning they came out with a medicine for the cleansing of all. Each person dipped a toe into the pot of medicine, which acted as that person's shield against guilt and evil.

Even though Simon was a foreigner, he was invited to use the medicine so he would not be affected by the guilt. When everyone had been protected with the medicine, Simon watched the chief smear the rest of the medicine around a tree. This, they explained, would be for the people who were absent at the time, and for visitors coming through the village in the near future. They could receive the guilt-removing powers by walking around the tree and looking at the cloth which marked the place. From the oldest grandfather to the youngest baby, all had a part in this cleansing.

(Questions continued from page 6.)

- 3: *What's your opinion of the ability of diviners to heal, and Thonga medicine to avoid guilt and evil?***
- 4: *On page 1 is a list of categories of patterns. Into which category does each pattern you've identified fit? (A pattern could fit more than one.) What Shared Ideas are suggested by these patterns?***
- 5: *Rituals persist because they have benefits. In your journal, describe the probable benefits of each of the three rituals to Thonga society.***

Investigation: Patterns of Conversation

Patterns that ordinarily aren't important can become important when people from two different societies meet. Consider, for example, the traditional conversational patterns followed in one part of the world:¹

In some Arab countries, the proper and polite distance for a conversation is close enough to feel the other person's breath. Also, Arab men tend to express their feelings openly and think it's important to act out emotions. Men may weep, shout, or gesture expressively. Arabs feel that a man who doesn't show emotion isn't being sincere.

Among men, the proper tone of conversation between equals is loud—a near shout. A soft tone indicates that the person speaking is weak and cannot be trusted or believed. In conversations between non-equals, however, the pattern is different. Many Arabs show respect to a sheik (or a rich foreigner) by lowering their voice and mumbling. The louder an important person speaks, the more quietly the humbler Arab tends to speak.

Act out a conversation between two traditional Arabic men: a shopkeeper and someone who thinks the shopkeeper's prices are too high. How does acting out this conversation make you feel?

Act out a conversation between an Arabic man and a rich foreign male, neither of whom understands the other's patterns. How might each feel about the other after the conversation?

Record your observations and conclusions in your journal.



<http://tribune.com.pk/story/745015/saudi-men-banned-from-marrying-pakistani-women/>

¹Edward T. Hall and William Foote Whyte, "Intercultural Communication: A Guide for Men of Action" (*Human Organization*, Vol., 19, No. 1, 1960, pp. 5-12), p. 5, available at http://spiritualityandculture.com/uploads/Intercultural_Communication_by_Hall.pdf.

Investigation: Local Government

Government is all about patterns—standardized ways of solving many of the problems that occur when people live and work in the same general area.

- 1: From a local phone or other directory, find the listing of departments and officials for the local government that's most important to you—probably that of your town or city.**
- 2: From that directory, make your own list of the various departments and functions within the local government.**
- 3: If you don't know what a department or official does, find out. For each major department or official, write a brief paragraph describing the Action Patterns and their purposes. Identify possible problems being solved. If possible, illustrate each main pattern with photographs and/or diagrams.**
- 4: Organize the information you've collected to show systemic relationships.**
- 5: Identify problems you think should be solved by local government, but aren't—or are solved inadequately.**



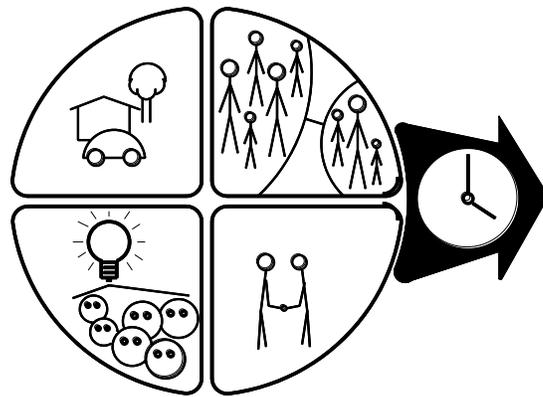
Investigation: Possible Pattern Changes in Your Target Area

What do you think might be little-noticed but important long-term changes in your society of each of the following pattern changes in formal schooling?

Discuss these possibilities with others, and (in your journal) hypothesize about possible effects.

- Segregation by gender
- Classes of fifteen students each, all ages mixed
- Parents rotating weekly as teachers
- All classes held in auditoriums, with about 200 people in each class
- Home schooling of most young people, with groups of families combining to share facilities and responsibilities
- All schooling done via computer—no textbooks, no teachers, just people monitoring your computer use to make sure you were working.





For Teacher/Mentor:

The concept of pattern was introduced in Unit 1, but is investigated in more depth in this unit. Action Patterns, writ large, become such things as political and economic systems. As we say on page 1 of this unit, these are actually subsystems of the larger system formed by the whole society, because underlying them in powerful ways are the society's Shared Ideas and assumptions.

For example, the economic systems of most developed countries rely on the principle of investment, which only makes sense if the society believes the future is important and likely to be better than the present. Political systems based on democratic government rely on the assumption that, in the long run, citizens are knowledgeable and altruistic enough to make decisions that will benefit their society. These are extremely important patterns and relationships.

As we noted before, dealing with Setting, Action Patterns or any other Model component in isolation is of little use. This unit relates Setting, Action Patterns, and Shared Ideas.

Note: We've used data from eastern African societies in two successive units. From a "coverage of cultures" standpoint this may seem to be insufficient diversity, but we're not concerned with conveying soon-forgotten specific information about particular societies. The focus is instead on conceptual understanding—in this case, developing learners' abilities to identify patterns and their interrelationships with the other Model elements.

Investigation: Change in Thonga Society

Elements of Demographics and Setting are described in the first, "background" data box, intimately tied to Action Patterns. The nature of Thonga society's Setting—many small isolated settlements—had survival benefits. This pattern spread the agriculture widely: if soil fertility was exhausted, gardens could be moved short distances without relocating villages. Dispersal of settlements also avoided over-hunting of an area and depletion of wild game. On the other hand, village size and isolation left them largely defenseless against outside aggression, so maintaining good relationships with surrounding people was a necessity. It worked well until the Zulus attacked (change stage 2).

The business of "patrilineal" settlements may be a bit confusing to learners. What might help is to have them identify all the members of their family back a couple of generations, (or a simulated family with men and women in each generation) and apply the principle: the men stay in the village, and get their wives from unrelated lineage villages. Once females reach marriage age, they're married to men from unrelated lineages from other villages, and then live in their husband's village.

If learners bring it up, the gender-related division of labor in Thonga society may be an interesting subject for discussion. The Thonga pattern was common to many east African societies, which loaded women with a great deal of work. This discussion may help learners recognize their own values and biases related to gender-related division of work.

Change over time is, of course, the fifth main category of the Model, which we'll deal with in more detail later. The point of this investigation is that some patterns are intensely important, in this case the patrilineal/patrilocal nature of the society, coupled with finding wives from outside the lineage. Maintaining this primary pattern at all costs meant that new supporting patterns had to be developed.

One additional question to ask to give additional insight: ***Based on the data, what would have happened if the Thonga had not found a lobola substitute for the cattle?*** If they followed the “no-lobola” pattern that already existed, the patrilineal/patrilocal nature of the society would have changed to matrilineal/matrilocal. As far as anthropologists know, this switch has never happened anywhere in any society.

In some areas, the Thonga now live in larger settlements than suggested by the historical data. If the classroom has access to the Internet and Google Earth®, entering the “Search” coordinates **22 32 20 S 34 15 E** and zooming in shows an area in Inhambane Province (apparently part of a village called Mucambe) with many hut compounds in fairly close proximity, all linked with footpaths.

Investigation: Three Thonga Rituals

Sixteenth century crews and passengers on Portuguese ships wrecked on the southeast coast of Africa generally reported hostility, deception, and attacks by the native Africans they encountered. However, those stranded in Thonga country, or who survived long enough to reach it, consistently reported hospitality and good treatment. That element of Thonga character persisted over the next centuries.

The benefits of maintaining good relationships between people are, or should be, obvious—stable living generally free of the fear of conflict with neighbors. The nature of Thonga society—small isolated settlements—made this a necessity. All three of the rituals suggest aspects of shared Thonga character related to maintaining friendly relationships within and beyond the immediate group.

The second and third ritual are also related to social control—avoidance of deviant behavior that could endanger the society. Dr. Fuller (1907-1980), who supplied this data, didn't explain what the girl had done to offend the ancestral spirits in ritual 3, but her misdeed can probably be inferred from the background information given in the previous investigation. Because each small settlement was patrilineal, all the unmarried young in the settlement would be considered close kin, and sexual contact within the group would be forbidden. Based on the seriousness of her offense, we're guessing that she violated this rule.

The power of ancestral spirits, traditional diviners, and magical folk medicine may seem irrational to some learners, but have been deeply functional in maintaining Thonga society. These Action Patterns and Shared Ideas have persisted to the present among these people, in spite of some access to western medicine and religion. The Catholic Church has been active in Mozambique for hundreds of years, and more recently other Christian groups have attracted

followers, but many or most of the people who are Christian believers continue to accept the importance of ancestral spirits and diviners.

Investigation: Patterns of Conversation

This activity is a change of pace, and a chance for some budding actors to “do their thing” in front of the class. It was included in the earlier World Cultures textbook, and frequently resulted in successful and memorable simulations of cross-cultural patterns.

Investigation: Local Government

This activity could involve learners in significant data gathering from local agencies. Identifying the extent of the responsibilities of the local government can be an eye-opener for some learners, identifying streets, traffic lights, streetlights, sidewalks, bridges, drainage, water supply, sewage disposal, building code enforcement, fire protection, police protection, courts, growth management, public transportation, tax collection, parks and recreation, perhaps schools and health services, administration and more. Organizing all this information can occupy work teams for days. Done with adequate detail, this can be a powerful civics lesson.

Ideally, this would be extended to identifying the number of employees in each department, budgets, anticipated changes in any part of the local government’s responsibility, along with (as we suggested) problems that need attention. There’s no limit to the possible extensions, such as finding out how the water and sewer systems work, how this local government compares with others in the region, how the planning department functions, etc.

Investigation: Possible Pattern Changes in Your Target Area

An exercise in hypothesizing. We’ve chosen a minimal RHRN exercise because of the scope of the local government investigation learners are doing.

(HLB) February 2017