

BOOK

Urbanization in

# SOUTHEAST ASIA



**Urbanization  
in Southeast  
Asia: Issues  
and Impacts**

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*Urbanization in Southeast Asia: Issues and Impacts* presents the results of three regional workshops held between 2009 and 2010 initiated by the Centre for Liveable Cities and the ASEAN Studies Centre (part of the Institute of South East Asian Studies, ISEAS), both located in Singapore. The aims of the workshops were threefold. First, to explore opportunities for ASEAN countries to learn from each other by sharing information about best practices that are being developed to respond to the challenges of urbanisation at the national level. Secondly, to assess the preparedness of countries for their urban future and, finally, to recommend options on how regional cooperation could assist national and urban efforts to address urbanisation issues.

The book is organised into five main sections. First, there is an introduction that includes recommendations for promoting an increased regional focus on urbanisation, and a lengthy chapter by Yap on the challenges of promoting productive, inclusive and sustainable urbanisation in Southeast Asia, which provides a thorough analysis of contemporary

trends. The second section focuses on cities as engines of development, looking at issues that impinge on the ability and capacity of ASEAN cities to develop competitive economic positions both within the region and globally. The development of urban infrastructure and trade facilitation are seen as important requirements. Inclusive cities makes up the next section, with focus on the challenges of urban poverty, housing and rural-urban relationships. The final three sections are devoted to the effects of environmental change and governance; decentralisation and urbanisation; and the need to promote an integrated approach to urbanisation in ASEAN countries.

From my perspective the most valuable contribution of the book is that it is a pioneer effort to kick start a “regional consciousness” among policy makers and academics of the challenges of urbanisation

in the region. In this respect, individual essays that present a regional perspective are particularly valuable. These include Yap on the overview of Southeast Asian urbanisation, Chuthatip Maneepong on rural-urban and intra-urban linkages, Victor Savage's thoughtful analysis, of climate change and urbanisation, that emphasises the effect of environmental change on the urban future, and Wicaksono Sarosa and F.P. Anggriani Ariffin reviewing approaches to engaging local governments and communities in sustainable urban development in Southeast Asia.

The book concludes with some suggestions for developing an integrated approach to urbanisation, including the establishment of an ASEAN Regional Forum on Urbanisation as a regional platform for discussion of urbanisation which is combined with some

general policy recommendations on networking among researchers, municipalities, creating policy priorities on themes such as economic globalisation, decentralisation, privatisation and climate change (p8–9) which, despite the claim that they “are largely unchartered territory for cities and towns in Southeast Asia” (p9), have been the subject of much ongoing policy research. Certainly one might suggest that the question of developing socially inclusive urban places might deserve some attention.

This book is a good beginning “road map”, but the pace of urbanisation in Southeast Asia and the challenges are so demanding that policy makers need to move with speed to develop responses to the challenges of the urban future of Southeast Asia.

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