

Book Review

The State of Asian Cities 2010/11

Urban Management for an Urbanized Asia

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Asian cities are seen growing at an unprecedented pace, with their total population expected to increase by more than 700 million in the span of the next 15 years. Many of the region's cities have today become leading centers of international trade and hubs for regional and international connections besides developing as vibrant centers of education, culture and innovation. And the trend will continue. Already Asian urban areas account for more than 80 % of the region's GDP.

Reflecting on this rapid development Noeleen Heyzer, Under-Secretary of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of ESCAP (The United Nations Commission for Asia and the Pacific) in her preface to the first state of Asian cities report, however, warns city administrators against complacency or euphoria. Pointing at the immediate challenges posed by the global increase of population disparities accompanying city growth, and the even graver dangers of environmental disasters caused by global warming, she exhorts all sectors of urban society to rise to the task. 50 % of Asia Pacific urban populations live in low lying coastal zones or plains exposed to flooding that can wipe out years of development and poverty eradication in a matter of days.

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Complementing this warning Joan Clos I Matheu, the Under- Secretary- General and Executive Director of the United Nations Human Settlements Program (UN HABITAT) in his introduction points to the fact that one half of the world's urban populations live in Asia, but so do the majority of the world's slum dwellers, in spite of the fact that the region has managed to improve the lives of an estimated 172 million slum dwellers between the years 2000 and 2010.

Within the span of 270 pages this report on Asian urban development, the first of its kind, is no less than a treasure chest of information, statistics, good practices and recommendation, aiming at reclaiming our cities as sustainable and inclusive livable cities for all. As an example one chapter deals with preventive measures recommended for the Bangkok area to avoid flooding: "Climate Change Adaptation. A "fluid" alternative for Bangkok." The fact that this recommendation was published before the disaster that struck Thailand and its capital in 2011 should give food for reflection and action. "What is needed is a restoration of the canal network and hydrological matrix based on scientific monitoring and networked technologies...The "fluid" alternative calls for bottom-up approach for the sake of participatory, sustainable development."

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