

Seasia 2017 Conference – Unity in Diversity

Bangkok December 2017

Kjell Skylstad⁺ Editor in Chief

A Report from the Seasia 2017 Conference Unity in Diversity held at Chulalongkorn University, December 16 - 17, 2017

Is there an Asian way to social progress and cultural continuity? Is there a road ahead for achieving the ASEAN unity and development goals envisioned in the organizations charter? Are there spaces where civil society can and must have a decisive impact on molding their societies futures?

On the background of individual presentations, workshops, panels and discussions involving more than 400 researchers, other academics, administrators, public servants and activists from the Southeast Asian region and beyond there seemed to be one resounding answer: YES

Another just as unanimous answer to the question of how to achieve a more just and democratic society across the diverse political landscapes of the region could be summed in just one common development goal: PARTNERSHIP FOR PARTICIPATION

The Consortium for Southeast Asia Studies in Asia in defending its choice of adding a second title to the general theme: Transgressive Southeast Asia in the program notes reflects on the intellectual desire to break boundaries and voicing their concern states “To remain relevant in the equally rapidly transforming world of the globalized areas, we must refuse to remain obedient to the old boundaries of the past” One could easily add boundaries of the present And yet both the proceedings and the outcome of the conference confirm the way unity can be achieved through a quest for common goals and a sharing of common achievements

⁺ Dr. Kjell Skylstad, Professor Emeritus, University of Oslo, Department of Musicology, Norway.

This definitely came to the fore in the discussions about the development of democratic societies in the region. Agreeing that a confrontational attitude could do more harm than good there was however a strong common resolve to work toward broad public engagement in democratizing ASEAN

It is time for governments all over SEA to replace lip service to democracy and human rights with enabling the active participation of civil society to replace the current practice by many administrations of offering consultations alone. Increased recognition of the creation of public value outside the central government should strengthen the process toward collaborative governance and the development of participatory democracy.

As with many international conferences the voices of the humanistic and arts disciplines are only seldom heard, in spite of the efforts of the organizers to present the arts and music treasures of the host country to the international audience as brilliantly as was the case at this conference. Practice has shown that the process of democratization needs a creative component to succeed, based on the experience that art education has been proven to play a key role in developing active and participatory citizenship

With the theme of Education for Creative and Responsive Citizenship on the main agenda of the Urban Research Plaza Forum held at our Chulalongkorn University campus on March 7 - 8, of this year the arranging Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts intended to do its part in actively responding to the questions asked at one of the most important conferences held in the history of the ASEAN partnership of nations. Our readers are kindly referred to an additional report and conference papers in this volume and the Urban Research Plaza's Forum.