Editorial
Building Partnerships for Change – ASEAN and the Urban Challenge

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"Cities should be places where interaction and participation of citizens enable them to meet their own needs and aspirations, and those of the larger community and allowing future generations to meet theirs." I was reminded of the ambitious aims for urban development set forth by the Brundtland Report "Our Common Future" more than a quarter of a century ago when I participated at a meeting at the Singapore National University arranged by the International Forum of Urbanism and the Centre for Sustainable Asian Cities. In the four years that have since passed, the expected effects of an unbridled urbanization in the South East Asian envisioned at that conference have become a reality in cities across the region.

A negative feature of urbanism worldwide has been the unimpeded growth of volatile mega-regions with increasing economic inequality and ethnic polarization fueling incidents of urban violence and leading to an obsession with security and surveillance, gated and guarded compounds ranging from administrative complexes in the city center to the "privatopias" of the western suburbs, shut out from the most glaring examples of social inequality – the favelas and urban slums.

On the eve of the implementation of the ASEAN union it seems imperative to

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ask: Is this an urban state of affairs that we will have to accept in the name of "development"? What will happen if the process is left to run its own course unbridled?

In December 1997 the leaders of the ASEAN nations met to charter a course for a stronger union with a vision for a "Partnership in Dynamic Development" and a "Community of Caring Societies" to be realized by the year 2020. At the later Bali Summit in 2003 (Concord II) this vision became the base for defining three pillars for the establishment of an ASEAN partnership: A political-security community, an economic community and a socio-cultural community. Finally at the 12th summit in 2007 agreement was reached (the Cebu Declaration) to hasten the integration process, with the aim of establishing the union by 2015. This paved the way for the signing of a legally binding ASEAN charter that entered into force on December 15, 2008.

However in none of these documents one will find a critical analysis of how the ASEAN Union will be prepared to meet the real challenges and problems of a developmental model based on values that benefit the private over the public sector and corporate profit over serving peoples' actual needs. The history of recent global and regional economic and environmental crises including the ongoing crises of the EU shows that a system that is not based on promoting the general well-being of the population at large and, not least, ecological sustainability will not work.

There is time for a wake up call and such calls are already resounding throughout our planet. It is a call for building partnerships for change. Realizing the looming risks for the rapidly growing urban regions world wide urban culture researchers have risen to the occasion. New urban studies programs are initiated at academic institutions world wide. The Interuniversity Center of Dubrovnik serving 169 member universities and other academic institutions world wide has opened its doors to host annual conferences bringing together urban culture researchers and activists with the goal of exploring and acknowledging the problems. A multidisciplinary approach is needed to energize a collective response. Government and corporate leaders, armed with the information thus provided, are already leading out in a movement for change. It is our hope that the JUCR and the URP in years to come will continue to generate a free flow of information for the benefit and support of communities in the whole region and the urban world at large.