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Urban ASEAN?

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“The 21st century will be urban”: since 2009 the biggest part of the world’s population concentrates in urban areas. Southeast Asia has seen significant urbanisation within the last decades, a process which took place parallelly to rapid economic development and population growth. At the same time, these developments pose important social, economic and environ-mental challenges for cities and towns across the region. The ASEAN community strives to be people-centred, economically strong, inclusive, connected and environmentally sustainable. This paper argues that these ASEAN goals have an important urban dimension. **Strengthening this urban dimension at the regional level of ASEAN would benefit the region’s cities and towns and strengthen ASEAN itself, making it more tangible for its citizens and further increasing multi-level cooperation within the region.**

Urban areas are places with a large and dense population, which have shaped and been shaped by trade, culture, innovation, densification and diversity of population and

activities throughout human history. Cities and towns today play a core role in social, demographic, economic and ecologic questions – and therefore in questions of politics. They are at the same time stages for current developments as well as their actors and drivers. It is therefore worthwhile to take a closer look at them.

How urban is ASEAN?

The region of ASEAN, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, today comprises the whole of Southeast Asia apart from East Timor. According to UN-Habitat, Southeast Asia is urbanised by about 48 percent. This means that almost half of the region’s population lives in urban areas, which is still less than the world average of an estimated 54 percent¹. At the same time, urbanisation is still continuing at rapid pace in the region and nine out of ten ASEAN countries are expected to be urbanised by more than 50 percent in 2050.

Economically, the weight of ASEAN’s cities and towns is more than substantial - as they account for about 80 percent of ASEAN’s Gross

¹<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.URB.TOTL.IN.ZS> (last accessed on 27.09.2017)

Domestic Product (GDP)². Especially for the economic development and growth of recent decades, ASEAN's urban areas have played a central role. Urbanisation and economic growth in the region have been largely coincidental and continue today. As such, between 1970 and 2013 the region's GDP grew more than ten times from 129 billion US dollar to 1.39 trillion US dollar, while urbanisation increased from only 15.4 percent in 1950³.

In terms of current social, economic and environmental questions, the urban dimension of ASEAN is crucial. Issues such as social inclusion, income disparities, informal housing and employment, infrastructure challenges, pollution as well as climate change and environmental risks are questions which Southeast Asian cities and towns face, and the ways in which cities address these issues also heavily impact the areas around them. From the regional perspective, this urban dimension can be used to further realise the targets of ASEAN and its member states.

Striving to be one community and an integrated economic zone, ASEAN comprises three important large pillars, namely the Political-Security Community, the Economic Community and the Socio-Cultural Community, which institutionalise social, economic and political relations targets within the region. A much regarded step which impacts ASEAN's urban areas and their

economic activities was the creation of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) on 31. December 2015.

In a nutshell, urban areas are places where a big part of current developments takes place inside ASEAN – and hence they are actors and places for shaping development inside ASEAN. Capacity building and support for urban areas and their development affects a great number of people very directly (ASEAN's current urban population being about 320 million) and also impacts structures for which cities act as nodes and coordinators, thus actually impacting on an even larger scale. Collaboration between cities and towns can strengthen the urban areas' capacities and deepen integration within the ASEAN region.

After having gained an idea of the urban dimension's importance for the ASEAN region, this paper is now going to sketch recent and current development inside ASEAN and the place of cities and towns in it. As an example, it will look at the city of Surabaya, Indonesia, which has undergone considerable development and mirrors growth of urban population, economic growth and social and environmental challenges which are currently faced by most Southeast Asian towns, cities and capitals, while at the same time being an example for best practices in addressing some of these challenges – also within the ASEAN framework.

In a second part, we will take a closer look at steps which have been taken by ASEAN to address targets and challenges via its urban areas - and how this has so far been

² UN-Habitat, The State of Asian Cities 2010/11 (Fukuoka: UN-Habitat, 2010)

³ ISEAS 2010: Urbanization in Southeast Asian Countries. Page 1

institutionalised. We will see that steps have been taken, especially in terms of ecological sustainability of cities, but that potential still remains for a stronger connection of the macro-regional and the local urban levels, as well as stronger city to city cooperation on the regional scale.

In order to gain a broader perspective on the urban dimension of regional policies, this paper will in a third step look at the EU and the role of cities and towns inside the region. Knowing that there are naturally differences in the way these two forms of regional cooperation are structured, founded and institutionalised, this comparison shall nevertheless be of interest.

A final remark will look at the city's inhabitants. After all, it is about people, their actions and how to coordinate them: and people as well as their actions in current ASEAN concentrate more and more in urban areas.

“Cities have played a transformative role in Southeast Asia's economic growth story”⁴

Economic growth, population growth and urbanisation went hand in hand in Southeast Asia. Since 1970, the region's population more than doubled. There has thus been a rapid increase in workforce and in demand, which has been connected to the economic growth-story but

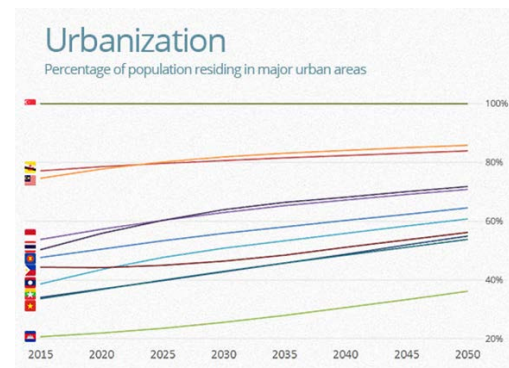
⁴ Bharat Dahiya: Southeast Asia and Sustainable Urbanization, Strategic Review: The Indonesian Journal of Leadership, Policy and World Affairs 4:4 (2014): 125–134, Page 128

also went along with social and environmental issues. These developments are still going on, as shown on the two following tables demonstrating growing total population which is increasingly urban.

Demography
Demographic growth of ASEAN countries

Population in millions	2015	2020	2030	2050
ASEAN	632	665	721	785
Brunei	0.43	0.45	0.50	0.55
Cambodia	16	17	19	23
Indonesia	256	269	293	321
Laos	7.02	7.65	8.81	10.6
Malaysia	31	33	37	42
Myanmar	54	56	59	59
Philippines	102	110	128	157
Singapore	5.62	6.05	6.58	7.06
Thailand	67	68	68	62
Vietnam	93	97	102	104

Projected further demographic growth of ASEAN countries. Credits: ASEAN up



Urbanisation prospects of ASEAN countries. Credits: ASEAN up

To make these developments concrete, let us take a look at the Indonesian city of Surabaya. Being the second most populous city of Indonesia and the regional capital of East Java Province, Surabaya is home to an estimated 3.2 million people⁵. The total metropolitan region of Surabaya, Gerbangkertosusila, however is much bigger and

⁵ IE Singapore 2016: Surabaya City Brief

had a population over 9 million in 2010⁶.

The city is situated at the north-eastern coast of the island of Java and has been a major trading port and city in Asia since the early 1900s⁷. Surabaya has a long history as an urban centre and was historically part of different kingdoms inside present-day Indonesia. In terms of its geographical situation the city reflects the ASEAN region's predominantly maritime geography which facilitates international trade. The position along major routes between east and west has always been a strategic key characteristic of Southeast Asia throughout history and continues to play this economic role. As port hubs are connected to cities, maritime trade and transport have a substantial urban component. The example of Surabaya as an important port illustrates this.

As much of Southeast Asia, Indonesia and the city of Surabaya experienced colonial rule. From the late 16th century, the Dutch East India Company was present in Asian trade and in the 18th century established itself as the major power on Java⁸. During colonial times, the city of Surabaya played the role of an important port, used especially for exporting local produces such as sugar and

tobacco⁹. In today's physical infrastructure, colonial buildings and constructions go back to this colonial past. Examples are the four railway lines which connect Eastern Java and were built under the Dutch East India Company.

The Second World War, its effects on European colonial powers and the Japanese occupation affected the whole of Southeast Asia and impacted on the city of Surabaya. The battle of Surabaya in 1945 was an important armed conflict in the complex situation between colonial control, Second World War, Japanese occupation and national independence. The Dutch recognised Indonesian Independence in 1949.

Especially in the three final decades of the 20th century, great economic, social and spatial urban shifts took place in Southeast Asia as a whole.

"Almost from week to week, familiar old buildings were being knocked down for redevelopment..."¹⁰

From the 1970s onwards, rapid transformation of Surabaya's cityscape took place; with an explosion in size, change in land use due to urban expansion, the alteration of the city's skyline, great increase in motorised traffic, population growth and increasing pressure on the urban structures. These transformations were linked to the economic shift from a strong

⁶ <https://www.unescogym.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Ashok-Das.pdf> (last accessed on 26.09.2017)

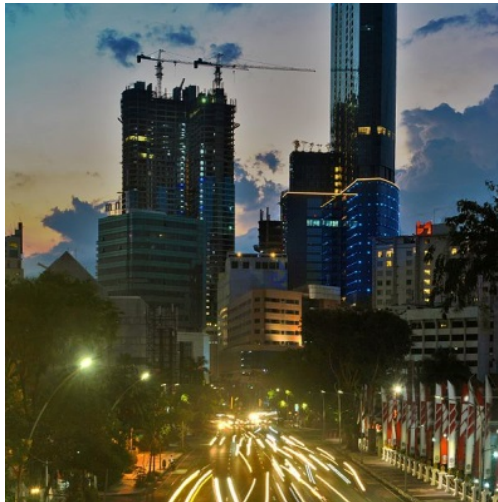
⁷ IE Singapore 2016: Surabaya City Brief

⁸ <https://www.indonesia-investments.com/culture/politics/colonial-history/item178?> (last accessed on 27.09.2017)

⁹ Howard W. Dick: Surabaya, City of Work. A Socioeconomic History, 1900-2000

¹⁰ Howard W. Dick: Surabaya, City of Work. A Socioeconomic History, 1900-2000. Page xvii

agricultural and plantation activity to an industrial economy which was increasingly oriented towards foreign markets¹¹. This economic shift was inscribed in the larger-scale change in Southeast Asian economies from primary sector dominated economies to growing manufacturing and services sectors. In this transformation, Surabaya was the second leading industrial city in Indonesia, right after greater Jakarta. The spatial dimension of these economic shifts saw very concrete changes of Surabaya's cityscape: roads being widened to adjust to traffic, old colonial city facades being torn down to make way for infrastructure and the first high-rise buildings, the construction of new shopping centres in the city's centre¹².



Traffic and Construction Activities in Surabaya, close to Plaza Tunjungan. Credits: commons.wikimedia.org

¹¹ Howard W. Dick: Surabaya, City of Work. A Socioeconomic History, 1900-2000. Pages xvii-xxiv

¹² Howard W. Dick: Surabaya, City of Work. A Socioeconomic History, 1900-2000. Pages xvii-xxiv

Urbanisation is still ongoing, challenging cities' organisation and structures

Today, urbanisation is far from finished – Southeast Asia's cities continue to grow. This accounts for great economic growth and does at the same time pose great challenges for spatial, socio-economic and environmental organisation of the urban areas. Inside the ASEAN region, there are numerous challenges with which cities see themselves confronted. These include social, economic and environmental questions.

Social: gaps in income and standard of living, informal employment and housing ("the urbanisation of poverty"), unemployment, provision of accessible healthcare and education.

Economic: great disparities within the region and competitiveness on the global scale, ongoing transition from primary to other economic sectors, interdependence with global economy and investment flows.

Environmental: emissions connected to industries and transport, waste management, environmental risks such as landslides and floods, risks connected to climate change, especially more extreme weather events as well as rising sea levels which have a particularly strong effect on the archipelagic countries of ASEAN.

Disparities within Southeast Asia are great, and this is

reflected within its urban fabric

What remains striking and characteristic about the ASEAN region is its great diversity. Disparities within the region are great. This is the case regarding economic development (GDP, for instance, is an impressive 45 times higher in Singapore than in Cambodia). The six economically most important countries of ASEAN make up for more of 95 percent of the region's GDP¹³. It is also the case regarding political systems, which range from constitutional monarchies to single party governance to Parliamentary and Presidential Republics. These disparities also exist in the current state of urbanisation in ASEAN's countries. Brunei, Malaysia and Singapore, the economically most advanced countries, have urbanisation levels of more than 65 percent – in the case of Singapore, of course 100 percent of the city state's population are urban.



Most populated cities in ASEAN in 2015.
Credits: ASEAN up

¹³ <https://aseanup.com/asean-infographics-population-market-economy/> (last accessed on 13. September 2017)

Looking at the region's urban fabric it can be discerned that primate cities continue to grow; however there is "significant activity among the secondary cities and smaller towns"¹⁴. The examples for this are numerous. Surabaya is an interesting example of a very important second city in Indonesia, which – as we have seen - has an ancient history, is marked by Southeast Asia's partly maritime geography, underwent a colonial past and has experienced population growth as well as industrial and economic growth in the last decades. In the face of current social, economic and environmental urban challenges, Surabaya remains an interesting case, as it can be taken as an example of best practices in urban governance and planning.

Best practices

Mayor Tri Rismaharini has been in office since 2010 and led the city of Surabaya to win numerous recognitions and awards. She has herself been awarded with different prizes¹⁵.

As such, the city of Surabaya enhanced, among others, measures regarding education, participation, digitalisation, attraction of investment and environmental policy such as creating more green spaces and improving solid waste management. In the case of the latter, the project for waste management took place in

¹⁴ Myo Thant: Regional Cooperation and the Changing Landscape of Southeast Asia. In: ASEAN... page 154

¹⁵ IE Singapore 2016: Surabaya City Brief. Page 5

the framework of an ASEAN programme.

In 1967, ASEAN stepped on stage

The regional Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was formally established through the Bangkok Declaration in 1967. This means that ASEAN has existed while much of the above discussed socio-economic and spatial urban shifts were going on. What was the place of ASEAN with regard to urbanisation and politics on the local urban level?

Much of ASEAN's influence on urban areas in the first place was indirect. The peace and stability brought about by dialogue and cooperation inside ASEAN, which grew to include the whole of Southeast Asia apart from East Timor, cannot be underestimated in its importance for supporting economic growth. Trade facilitation within the region played an important role also for the Southeast Asian cities. At the same time, the region's cities and the growth they produce were important for further success of ASEAN. As cooperation deepened more, more regional initiatives were set up which address the region's cities more and more directly.

“Physical, institutional and people-to-people linkages between member states and the rest of the world are keys to the AEC's economic expansion, productivity growth, resilience

to external shocks, and reduced development gap.”¹⁶

Managing the continuing urbanisation in Southeast Asia is a task governments see themselves faced with. There is a need to ensure that economic and urban growth do not come at the expense of overcrowding, growing inequalities in income and living standards, or environmental degradation. Urban development and planning are one key to addressing the current social, environmental and economic issues. Addressing these issues from the ASEAN scale through urban areas can support and facilitate the efforts of local and national governments, while contributing to more collaboration and deeper integration within the region.

Key areas are capacity building programmes, investment for example into infrastructure, frameworks e.g. for environmental sustainability, the provision of platforms for city-to-city collaboration and exchange. Education and cultural exchange can also play a part in enhancing cooperation and development among and within cities. Facilitating mobility, exchange, trade and communication within the region, as envisioned by the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), the ASEAN Political Security Community and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural

¹⁶ Kiyoshi Kobayashi, Khairuddin Abdul Rashid, Masahiko Furuichi, William P. Anderson (Hrsg): Economic Integration and Regional Development: The ASEAN Economic Community. Routledge Studies in modern world economy, 2017. Page 6

Community also supports deepening intra-regional exchange and facilitates cooperation at the urban level.

How does ASEAN address urbanisation and urban development?

In 2012, the ISEAS report “Urbanization in Southeast Asia. Issues and Impacts” stated that the ASEAN cooperation on Environmentally Sustainable Cities (ESC) was the only body that is directly addressing the topic of urban development at the ASEAN level¹⁷. Established at the end of 2015, the ASEAN communities envisage points such as human development which are clearly affected by urbanisation.

As of now however, the institutionalisation of a direct addressing of urban development inside ASEAN remains limited. At the same time there are different platforms, programmes and initiatives in place, creating a complex landscape of opportunities for exchange, collaboration, capacity building, funding and the like for cities inside ASEAN – many programmes of which are not directly created and coordinated by ASEAN but do nevertheless contribute to fostering urban dialogue and actions within the region.

A direct ASEAN programme focusing on urbanisation, the ASEAN ESC Model Cities Programme was

¹⁷ Soerakoesoemah and Thuzar: promoting an integrated approach to urbanization in ASEAN countries. In: Urbanization in Southeast Asia. Issues and impacts. ISEAS 2012, page 362

launched in 2011 and focuses on the environmental regard on urbanisation. It includes regional activities and capacity-building programmes, such as clean water or waste management. Additionally, the ESC Award Programme promotes cities with best practices for clean, green, liveable and sustainable cities. Surabaya won the award in 2011, after implementing successful waste management programmes.

This July 2017 the third ASEAN Mayors Forum took place. The forum explored various perspectives regarding fostering urban and local government’s cooperation. At the end the “Taguig Action Agenda: Local Governments for a Stronger ASEAN” was adopted, emphasising the importance and potential of a stronger urban and local dimension in ASEAN. The first forum of this kind took place in 2010 in Surabaya¹⁸.

Other fora for city cooperation, such as the “United Cities and local Governments Asia Pacific” (UCLG ASPAC) or the Asia Pacific Cities Summit and Mayors’ forum” (initiated by Brisbane city council) also affect ASEAN cities but do not do so from the level of ASEAN.

There are diverse other programmes and initiatives for inter-urban cooperation in place, which impact Southeast Asia but are not established on the level of ASEAN. Twinning programmes for cities are set up for example by the Asian

¹⁸ http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_23237-1442-2-30.pdf?170726075327 (accessed on 22 September 2017)

Development Bank (ADB) for utility capacity building¹⁹. Some national programmes, such as the Philippine Sisterhood Programme (started in 1981) are also in place, but do not seem to make full use of the potentials of twinning programmes, especially not inside the ASEAN region²⁰. An interesting programme is the Japan Council for international Relations (CLAIR) which aims at fostering international relations by local cooperation. There is a regional office of CLAIR in Singapore, which focusses on relationships between Japanese local communities and communities in the ASEAN countries and India. This is another example of how programmes from outside of ASEAN influence the region.

The ASEAN city state of Singapore puts a strong emphasis on urban development and planning, also highlighting this topic at the international level. As such, the biennial World Cities Summit is an event jointly organised by the Singaporean Centre for Liveable Cities and the Singaporean Urban Development Authority. It is a platform for leaders from government and industry and includes the Lee Kuan Yew World City Prize as well as the annual

World Cities Summit Mayors Forum²¹.

Is there potential for more institutionalised addressing of urban issues inside ASEAN?

The competences of the ASEAN Secretary General comprise the ability “to initiate, advise, coordinate and implement ASEAN activities” and to “develop and provide the regional perspective on subjects and issues before ASEAN”²². Soerakoesoemah and Thuzar argue this effectively means that there is “a window for ASEAN to consider urbanisation issues as part of the regional cooperation agenda”²³.

In sum, we can see that there are different initiatives and programmes in place which impact “urban ASEAN”. However, thus far the challenges faced inside the region’s urban areas - especially in socioeconomic regards - are not fully addressed by ASEAN bodies. At the same time, ASEAN is in the process of deepening integration and inner-regional cooperation, and the ASEAN frameworks would be in line with new initiatives regarding the ongoing urbanisation and the socioeconomic challenges that go with it.

¹⁹ <https://www.adb.org/publications/power-two-boosting-performance-through-twinning> (accessed on 15 September 2017)

²⁰ <http://www.dlsu.edu.ph/conferences/dlsu-research-congress-proceedings/2017/SEP/SEP-II-009.pdf> (accessed on 15 September 2017)

²¹ <http://www.worldcitiessummit.com.sg/about-us> (last accessed on 16.09.2017)

²² Protocol 1992, cited according to Soerakoesoemah et al 2012

²³ Rony Soerakoesoemah and Moe Thuzar: Promoting an Integrated Approach to Urbanization in ASEAN Countries. In: Urbanization in Southeast Asia. Issues and Impacts. ISEAS 2012, page 362

What benefits would a stronger ASEAN programme for urban cooperation have?

For ASEAN, deepening inner-regional cooperation on the urban level could increase the association's visibility to its citizens, bringing programmes directly to the local urban level. Moreover, a stronger urban focus could directly affect standards of living for many of its citizens and help the region to attain its goals in terms of social, economic and environmental development.

For ASEAN's cities, deepening inner-regional cooperation on the urban level could support them in building stronger capacities. As such, sharing of experiences and best practices between cities and towns can be used to strategically develop services (such as water and energy supply or public transport) and specialised programmes regarding infrastructure, education or social inclusion can support cities in responding to current challenges. The ESC Programme shows that on the environmental level, such initiatives already achieve substantial results. Urban programmes directed by ASEAN can thus impact on citizens living and working within the region's urban areas. These advantages also have the potential to "trickle through" to their surrounding rural areas, using the urban areas as starting points.

A sideways glance at the European Union

Direct comparison between the European Union (EU) and ASEAN is naturally limited, as the EU's

supranational components allow for different actions than the more intergovernmental structures of ASEAN. Nevertheless, a short sideways glance towards urban policy in the EU shall be of interest at this point.

In the EU, programmes focusing on urban areas play an important role for European Cohesion Policy, the regional policy of the union. The EU has an urban agenda and the European Commission engages in initiatives on urban issues. Databases like the Urban Data Platform are provided by the EU. Europe also offers several funds for the development of its urban areas, as well as investment and implementation advice. Within the 2014-2020 period, European Cohesion Policy has placed cities and towns in a special focus²⁴. Financed by the European Regional development fund (ERDF), the Urban Development Network is responsible for realising actions based on Sustainable Urban Development strategies within this period²⁵.

Urban EU programmes involve different initiatives such as Urban Innovative Actions (UIA), an EU initiative supporting European cities and towns with resources to tackle urban issues by implementing unconventional, new solutions²⁶.

²⁴http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/themes/urban-development/network/ (last accessed on 19.09.2017)

²⁵http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/themes/urban-development/network/ (last accessed on 26.09.2017)

²⁶ <http://www.uia-initiative.eu/en/about-us/what-urban-innovative-actions>

City-to-city cooperation is strong within the EU. There is a deep network of twinned cities, enhancing direct exchange and collaboration between municipalities. Also, there are different fora connected to EU, such as the platform Eurocities. As a network of major European cities, Eurocities was founded in 1986 by the mayors of Barcelona, Birmingham, Frankfurt, Lyon, Milan and Rotterdam. The network comprises different thematic forums and works together with the EU institutions.

However, urban cooperation also exceeds the scale of the Union. The European Covenant of Mayors (CoM), launched in 2008 with a special focus on environmental sustainability, extended to also include Eastern Europe, the Southern Mediterranean, Sub-Saharan Africa and went global in 2017 as the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy. CoM thus became not only a tool for inner EU cooperation and cohesion, but also for the EU's neighbourhood policy and global multi-level dialogue, also connecting European cities with Southeast Asian partners.

Closing the circle

"I hope that Surabaya can be a comfortable city to live in – not a city with ambitious tendencies. With a comfortable atmosphere, Surabaya will be healthier, both physically and mentally."²⁷ This hope was expressed by Surabaya's mayor Tri Rismaharini in an

²⁷<http://www.indonesiadesign.com/culture/smart-city-smart-leader/> (last accessed on 26.09.2017)

interview in November 2016. It brings the question of cities and urban planning back to those whom it is for, that is the people. For urban citizens and for those affected by the *rayonnement urbain*.

Throughout this research, it could be seen that for realising the aspirations of ASEAN to be a people-centred, inclusive, economically strong and well connected community, directly addressing the urban areas from the ASEAN level has great potential. There are already various initiatives which do affect the urban areas inside the region, and ASEAN programmes, as the ESC Programme, do have tangible impact. The sideways glance at urban programmes in the EU showed that in this case the urban dimension is directly used for stronger regional cohesion.

The city of Surabaya was an example which guided us through this investigation into "urban ASEAN". Ongoing development within the region is very strongly connected to cities and towns. In order to shape development, addressing this local urban perspective is key. Regional and local-urban visions, planning and structures can be strengthened when both levels are connected. The structural dimension however must never lose focus on the people. Thus, to end with Shakespeare, we may finish by asking:

"What is the city but the people?"

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *Coriolanus*