



EUROPEAN POLICY BRIEF

STRENGTHENING SOUTHEAST ASIA'S RESILIENCE: THE ROLE OF CITY AND COMMUNITY INITIATIVES FOR POST-PANDEMIC RECOVERY



The COVID 19 pandemic has shown that people around the world are poorly prepared for shocks. The lockdown disrupted food supply chains, as mobility was severely restricted, and borders were closed. Vulnerable people are particularly hard hit by the crisis because they cannot afford good health care and have difficulty meeting their basic needs due to their lower income or unemployment. They are also the ones who suffer most from the effects of climate change. In Southeast Asia, four countries are among the top 10 countries in the Climate Risk Index for 1999-2018: the Philippines, Vietnam, Thailand, and Myanmar (Eckstein et. al., 2020). It is expected that the climate crisis will exceed the severe consequences of COVID-19. In this paper we zoom in on C40, a Transnational City Network (TCN) with participation from seven Southeast Asian cities, and a local community in Indonesia to show how the resilience of cities and communities facing the dual challenges of COVID-19 recovery and climate change mitigation can be strengthened through the efficient use and dissemination of knowledge.

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INTRODUCTION

The COVID 19 pandemic has highlighted the fragility of globalized value chains and the challenges of food supply. A promising model that combines recovery from the pandemic with efforts to mitigate climate change and promote equity and sustainable development is the "doughnut model". Developed by Professor Kate Raworth of Oxford University this model aims to reconcile human needs with the possibilities of the planet and to distribute resources fairly (Raworth, 2017). It is divided into an inner and an outer ring; the first is the social basis, the fulfilment of the needs of all citizens, the second represents our planetary boundaries. Climate change and ozone layer depletion are among the ten sectors of the outer ring.

The first city to apply this model and to strive for comprehensive changes as a result of COVID-19 is Amsterdam. In April 2020, "The Amsterdam City Doughnut" was published. The plan included the goal of becoming climate neutral by 2050 (Doughnut Economics Action Lab, 2020). The doughnut model is used to find solutions for the various pressing problems cities and communities face, from climate change and the dependence on fossil fuels to the affordability of housing. Like

many cities around the world, Amsterdam is a member of C40, a Transnational City Network (TCN) dedicated to combating climate change, in which seven Southeast Asian cities also participate: Jakarta, Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur, Quezon City, Singapore, Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City.

C40 was also involved in the creation of the Amsterdam City Portrait rooted in the Doughnut model. Like all major TCNs, it seeks to support and encourage cities to incorporate climate and sustainability goals into their plans for recovery from the COVID 19 pandemic. This recovery includes improving resilience to the effects of COVID-19 and climate-related disasters. In addition to city networks, community-based initiatives can provide fruitful approaches in this context.

EVIDENCE AND ANALYSIS

Transnational City Networks (TCNs)

TCNs are capable of building a more equitable future that can be transferred to cities through a specific package of measures in the areas of employment, health, gender and the environment. To facilitate ecological knowledge transfer among the members of the network different means are used, including webinars and knowledge portals (C40), political advocacy actions such as a political charter for the time after COVID-19 (e.g. UCLG – United Cities and Local Governments), and reports.

The most comprehensive integrative climate action effort to date is the C40 Mayors' Agenda for a Green and Just Recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, a report with implementation guidelines published in July 2020. In the report, the C40 Global Mayors COVID-19 Recovery Task Force emphasize their “commitment to the principles of the Global Green New Deal—to protect our environment, strengthen our economy and build a more equitable future, by cutting emissions from those sectors most responsible for the climate crisis to keep global heating below the 1.5°C goal of the Paris Agreement and by putting inclusive climate action at the heart of urban decision-making” (C40 Mayors' Agenda for a Green and Just Recovery, 2020, p. 2).

The report refers to and uses knowledge from global sources, for example, Professor Kate Raworth's work *Doughnut Economics* (2017) to emphasize the value of public services and civic leadership in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the unsustainability of the goal of endless GDP growth (C40 Mayors' Agenda for a Green and Just Recovery, 2020, p. 8).

It addresses food security as one important sector into which cities should invest to build resilience and empower vulnerable communities. One best practice example from Southeast Asian cities is included, the Quezon City food security program. Here, the mayor, Josefina Belmonte, set up a food security task force to establish a more autonomous urban agriculture program with the aim of improving resilience to the effects of climate change. In addition to setting up an urban agricultural program and providing millions of food aid parcels to the urban poor, the city has ensured that fruits and vegetables find their way from local farmers to vulnerable communities in a program called Fresh Market on Wheels (C40 Mayors' Agenda for a Green and Just Recovery, 2020, p. 27). However, mayors from Southeast Asian cities were not part of the Global Mayors COVID-19 Recovery Task Force, the driving force behind this report, which is working for a green and equitable recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. This Task Force consists of mayors from New Orleans, Seattle, Montréal, Medellín, Rotterdam, Milan, Portugal, Freetown, Hong Kong, and Seoul.

C40 members, including those from Southeast Asia, receive clear signals as to how the recovery phase should be addressed. The mayors want to promote green and fair recovery through measures such as green jobs, COVID-19 resilient mass transportation systems, and building with nature. It is still too early to judge to what extent their postulates will be put into practice. However, as far as Southeast Asian cities are concerned, at least three obstacles can be pointed out:

1. capacity bottlenecks, such as the management and mobilization of public sector resources, leadership skills, etc., that could hinder the implementation of overly ambitious recovery plans.
2. a lack of synergy with national recovery plans. So far, Asian governments have made only limited choices to use “green” elements in recovery plans.

3. a lack of support to enable a real transfer of knowledge from the TNCs to a specific city. Webinars or political statements will not bring about change unless they are accompanied by technical and financial support.

Community Initiatives

COVID-19 poses great challenges not only for food security in cities but also for local communities in rural areas. In the face of the pandemic communities that were comparatively well prepared for unforeseen shocks were at an advantage. The following example reveals that reviving local knowledge about crop storage and management can strengthen a community's resilience.

Some communities in rural areas in central and northern Lombok still store their rice in a rice barn, also known as *sambi* or *lumbung*. This tradition of villagers storing a portion of their rice crops for food reserves during the food-prone season has been largely been pushed into the background by transformations of production and yield processing technology. Moreover, farmers tend to sell the grain to merchants directly after harvesting.

The decision to revitalize *sambi* was prompted by the Lombok earthquake in 2018. Pendua village, North Lombok, had experienced food scarcity in this earthquake. As a result, the food stock for residents in Pendua Village only lasted a few days, and food supply became a serious issue. In response, local residents, together with the village government of Pendua, have begun to organize a food system that is more resilient to shocks, including COVID-19.

In early 2019, the village head took the decision to revitalize the *sambi* traditional management system of food distribution, storage and consumption where part of the rice is taken for consumption for a short period of time, while another part is reserved for seed supply for the next planting season and in case of disasters or death. He thus recognizes again *sambi's* value as a food security mechanism that ensures that food is available for the community (Sukenti et. al. 2016). Another advantage of *sambi* is that people can meet food needs without being affected by market price fluctuations.

Abu, the Head of Pendua Village, said that although the risk of COVID-19 entry into the village is inevitable despite of the control of the influx of residents from outside the village, he thinks that the food stock will suffice in the next few months. He also stated that through the *sambi* price volatility at the farmer level can be avoided, and harvest prices remain stable. (Kedaulatan Pangan, 2020)

Self-reliant food systems can be of great importance in Corona times—and beyond. Reviving traditional knowledge about crop management is one way how communities can become more resilient to shocks, including disasters caused by climate change.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Recovery from the pandemic is widely seen as an opportunity to step up efforts to mitigate climate change, promote equity and sustainable development. This is why the European Union wants to promote green recovery in Europe and beyond. The EU should consider closer cooperation with non-state actors, such as TCNs and local communities, to facilitate knowledge transfer and exchange with developing countries. They have effective communication and knowledge channels that can complement ideas from outside. These EU efforts could build on the Commission's strategy paper (European Commission, 2013) but the needs of green recovery may require an updated and more specific strategy.
2. Southeast Asian cities and communities deserve attention as knowledge producers, able to share their solutions with peers around the world. In cooperation with TCNs, UN agencies and NGOs, the European Union can seek to identify valuable local initiatives that contribute to a green recovery model. Later, they can be transferred to other places in developing

- countries to strengthen the resilience of cities and communities. Economic and social commonalities can promote successful knowledge transfer and implementation.
3. The COVID-19 crisis has serious consequences for food security. Food transport was often not possible, and particularly vulnerable communities did not have sufficient access to food. Solutions to strengthen resilience to disasters, including those caused by climate change, should take local knowledge and traditional practices of local communities into account.

RESEARCH PARAMETERS

Competing Regional Integrations in Southeast Asia (CRISEA) is an interdisciplinary research project that studies multiple forces affecting regional integration in Southeast Asia and the challenges they present to the peoples of Southeast Asia and its regional institutional framework, ASEAN.

CRISEA innovates by encouraging ‘macro-micro’ dialogue between disciplines: global level analyses in international relations and political economy alongside socio-cultural insights from the grassroots methodologies of social sciences and the humanities.

Coordinated by the Ecole française d’Extrême-Orient (EFEO) with its unique network of ten field centres in Southeast Asia, the project brings together researchers from seven European and six Southeast Asian institutions, with three objectives:

1. Research on regional integration

Multiple internal and external forces drive regional integration in Southeast Asia and compete for resources and legitimacy. CRISEA has identified five ‘arenas of competition’ for the interplay of these forces, investigated in the project’s five research Work Packages. It further aims to assess the extent to which they call into question the centrality of ASEAN’s regional model.

2. Policy relevance

CRISEA reaches beyond academia to engage in public debate and impact on practitioners in government and non-government spheres. By establishing mechanisms for dialogue with targeted audiences of policymakers, stakeholders and the public, the project furthers European science diplomacy in Southeast Asia and promotes evidence-based policymaking.

3. Networking and capacity-building

CRISEA reinforces the European Research Area (ERA) in the field of Asian Studies through coordinated EU-ASEAN academic exchange and network development. It connects major research hubs with emerging expertise across Europe and Southeast Asia. CRISEA also promotes participation of younger generation academics in all its activities, notably policy dialogues.

PROJECT IDENTITY

PROJECT NAME	Competing Integrations in Southeast Asia (CRISEA)
COORDINATOR	Andrew Hardy, EFEO, Paris, France, hardyv25@yahoo.com.
CONSORTIUM	Ecole française d’Extrême-Orient – EFEO – Paris, France University of Hamburg – UHAM – Hamburg, Germany University of Naples l’Orientale – UNO – Naples, Italy Institute of Social and Political Sciences – ISCSP - Lisbon, Portugal University of Lodz - UL – Lodz, Poland University of Oslo – UiO – Oslo, Norway University of Cambridge – Cam – Cambridge, UK Chiang Mai University – CMU – Chiang Mai, Thailand

The Centre for Strategic and International Studies - CSIS – Jakarta, Indonesia
Ateneo de Manila University – ADMU – Quezon City, Philippines
University of Malaya – UM – Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Vietnamese Academy of Social Sciences – VASS – Hanoi, Vietnam
The University of Mandalay – MU – Mandalay, Myanmar

FUNDING SCHEME

H2020 Framework Programme for Research and Innovation of the European Union – Research Innovation Action (RIA) – Europe in a changing world, Engaging together globally

DURATION

November 2017 – February 2021 (40 months).

BUDGET

EU contribution: €2,500,000.00

WEBSITE

www.crisea.eu

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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FURTHER READING

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