

## **SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONAL PLANNING IN A GLOBALISING WORLD**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Based on some definitions and perspectives on globalization, this paper discusses the role and significance of state planning in a rapidly changing global landscape. The questions that officials, politicians and academics might ask are: Why should governments continue to plan? What relevance has planning today in an era of globalization? What methods do you employ for planning in a fluid political and economic system? I situate my arguments with examples from Singapore and Southeast Asian states in general. My views are predicated also on the spatial organisation and human-nature concerns that are the geographers' prime variables. While planning might be viewed by other disciplines socially, economically or politically, in this paper I look at the underpinning spatial and environmental contextualisations, best conceptualised as ecoscape or "the organizational shape of a habitat, a system for life, which manifests as the configurational shape of environmental interrelations and relations" (Backhaus, 2006:xviii)

### **INTRODUCTION**

A great challenge for national leaders is to rally their populations behind global political causes. Nations need national global policies. Ultimately the most successful national states may be those whose populations engage themselves not just individually, but nationally, in global issues (Tønnesson, 2004:193)

As we enter the threshold of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, states and societies seem to be confronted with a bewildering array of changes. Globalisation and information technology is a continuing dialectical process that is likely to bring about incremental changes and mental reorientations to the homemaker, the work place and the state. Globalisation has indeed many definitions and meanings depending on the discipline and subject matter. It is defined here as "the umbrella term for the complex set of transformative processes and outcomes that dialectically, and relationally, interact with places and people" (Dicken, 2004:17). I like to emphasize two words in Dicken's globalisation definition, 'dialectical' and 'relational', which underscore some misinterpretations and misunderstandings of the term. Globalisation is not a unidirectional or irreversible process, neither is it a deterministic cause and effect correlation applied in the global-local relationship, in which the global determines the local. Information technology similarly has had a relational impact on the social, cultural, economic and political fabric of many societies. It is ironic that while we have the greatest available information, data and statistics at our disposal, we also face the greatest uncertainty and unpredictability about future trends. On the one hand, we are at a time when some societies and states have the best quality of life and standards of living that humankind has ever had at any point of its history (Bersner, 1990; Lomborg, 2001). Yet, on the other hand there still is evidence in our midst of global malnutrition, famine, illiteracy, disease, poverty and disparities of wealth between states as well as between citizens within a state (Sachs, 2005).

There seems to be two contending schools of thought with regard to globalisation and information technology on human societies. The optimists or *globophiles* perceive globalisation as a catalyst for innovation and a boost to the economic system via the free-

market system. The spread of democracy and capitalism also are seen as helping to defuse tensions between societies and strengthening civil society and human rights. The pessimists or *globophobics* view the changes as creating greater disparities of wealth providing sources of human insecurity and undermining political systems. *Globophobics* view globalisation as a form of cultural and economic imperialism - the dominance of transnational capitalism. Both schools of thought have their adherents in the region. More important, if leaders and administrators accept globalization, then they could plan to harness its benefits as well as minimize its negative impacts.

Despite the views that globalisation and information technology are leading to the demise of the nation-state (Ohmae, 1990 and 1995) the end of history (Fukuyama, 1992) and the end of geography (Graham, 1998), nothing of this nature to me is happening so dramatically in the current global landscape. Globalisation has not created a borderless world, where the nation-state has lost its sense of political legitimacy and national jurisdiction over its citizens. The nation-state (or state), will continue to remain the political unit of analysis and decision-making body in international relations. Even in economic terms, international corporations like transnational corporations (TNCs) are not fully “global” entities, because they “continue to reflect the influence of their domestic base” and the view that they are “placeless” is “nonsense unsupported by empirical evidence” (Dicken 2004:13). In Henry Yeung’s (1998) study of Hong Kong transnational corporations (TNCs), he argues that the key entrepreneurial activities of the companies are determined by ongoing relationships or *guanxi*, in their globalising economic activities. Indeed the “peculiar Chinese business systems”, governed by cultural relationships and embedded in family networks, have not been undermined in the firm’s expanding empire (Yeung, 1998:173).

The processes of globalisation might filter into the authority of governments and alter local or national political decisions, but globalisation is not an inevitable process for a country. In Southeast Asia, one can see that the extent of globalisation engaging in national affairs is determined by governments. Hence, while Singapore engages globalisation with heart and soul, Myanmar rejects it with contempt and disdain. It is thus not surprising that *Foreign Policy*, the well respected American journal, ranked Singapore the world’s most “globalised” nation based on its “high trade levels, heavy international telephone traffic, and steady stream of international travelers” (Yeoh, 2004:2435). In between these two extreme positions of Singapore and Myanmar, a host of other Southeast Asian countries, adopt global processes selectively, cautiously and prudently. While it might be more accurate to classify cities and states under ‘global’, ‘globalising’ and ‘non-global’ (Yeoh, 1999), this does not mean, that states and cities cannot exhibit multiple combinations of these three processes at the same time. In the Southeast Asian context, generally speaking, Singapore best exemplifies the global, Myanmar the ‘non-global’, while Brunei, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines are examples of ‘globalising’ states.

There is no doubt that the world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century will see a dialectical relationship between the loosening of economic relationships and the rise of conservative cultural/religious behaviour. On the one hand, we are living in what some academics call the post-Fordism age (where industrial restructuring are led to flexible modes of production) (Albrechts, 1991) and living under conditions of post-modernity (Harvey, 1989). Such a world is typified as deconstructive, anti-foundationalist, non-dualistic and pluralistic (Serap, 1997:145). On the other hand, ethnic and religious wars, especially Muslim militancy seem to be growing out of hand in a highly unstable but more conservative political landscape. Muslim fundamentalism or militancy is perceived as “the instrumental use of religion for strategic political purposes, or else as the surrender of politics to a rigidly theocratic ideology – a surrender in which reason or rational judgment

becomes a main casualty” (Dallmayr, 2002:8). Given the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in the USA, and other terrorist attacks in Madrid, Bali, Jakarta, Turkey, Egypt, southern Thailand, London, Jordan and Mumbai the global system towards openness and a borderless world seem to have been severely checked by religiously endorsed terrorist behaviour. The open global system means also greater threats of cross-national terrorism which has made states like Britain, Australia, France and Germany rethink their immigration policies. Certainly the rising tide of right wing politics in western Europe (Holland, Denmark, France) is one political outcome against a borderless global world. Indeed, one can counter-argue that the globalization of terrorism, trade and tourism has in fact consolidated national sovereignty, pride, self-interests, security concerns, territorial sensitivities and defensive responses.

## **POLITICAL IDEOLOGY, NATIONAL AGENDAS**

Sukarno’s Jakarta was imagined through the image of the ancient Wilwo Tikto, the center of the Majapahit kingdom. To this extent, Sukarno’s Jakarta was a manifestation of Indonesia in which the city, the state, and the nation came together, their imagined spaces collapsed into simultaneity (Abidin, 2002:62).

The above quote by Abidin Kusno (2002), in his celebrated book, *Behind the Postcolonial: Architecture, urban space and political cultures in Indonesia*, informs us of how a political leader like Sukarno was instrumental in providing a new postcolonial ‘Indonesian’ vision and ideology for their national buildings and urban plans. The inspiration of President Sukarno’s buildings and plans for the capital, Jakarta came from the rich cultural past of Indonesian history. This demonstrates that planning in Southeast Asia is not of recent vintage. Certainly, planning cannot be said to be a western import, it was very much an ‘indigenous’ development, that was realised and implemented since the Second Century AD, with the arrival of Indianisation (Funan kingdom) in Southeast Asia.

The first planned cities of Southeast Asia were the cosmic cities (Heine-Geldern, 1942). Such cities were modeled along three conceptual themes: i) they were designed and laid out to represent the macro-cosmos, based on the four cardinal points and the centre (Heine-Geldern 1942); ii) they were based on the Indian circle and square mandala geometric representations (Wolters, 1999) -- the Sanskrit noun mandala means any circle or discoid object such as the sun or moon (Leidy, 1998:17); and iii) they also followed plans according to Hindu and Buddhist geography, the seven alternating seas/oceans with seven alternating continents/mountain ranges (Jumsai, 1997:11-15).

But unlike the planned cities of today, the cosmic cities were not driven by economic or capitalistic motives. The catalyst behind the creation and development of Indianised cosmic cities and their galactic polities (Tambiah, 1985:252-286) was religion. Hindu and Buddhist religion was the fundamental driving force behind the numerous religious temples and wats, irrigation systems, and various other buildings and facilities (libraries, hospitals, and store-houses). The modeling of cities according to the macro-cosmos, the world of gods, was intentional. The *devarajas* (god-kings) believed that such planned cities according to the geometrical pattern of the macrocosmos would bring benefits, peace and harmony to them, their kingdoms and their peoples. So powerful was this religious ideology in Southeast Asia, that hundreds of planned cities and kingdoms dotted the landscape for over 1000 years.

The plethora of planned cosmic cities underscores a cardinal point that without vision, ideology or the political software, national plans will remain incoherent, amorphous and without identity. The exercise of planning is a process that involves not so much the mere execution of a plan but rather it embodies three important components. Firstly, what is the political ideology or vision of national plans? Secondly, what is the long term vision and

future direction that national or urban plans embody? And thirdly, planning whether long or short term, provides societies a blue-print that is targeted at general development goals which is meant to improve the quality of human life of its citizens. In this sense, like the cosmic cities of the past and the planned state of Singapore at the present, all urban planning is quasi-deterministic because it is based on “control functions” and the “regulations” of urban form, location and character, conscious layouts and applied designs (Cherry, 1988).

Since the birth of Marxism and socialism in the nineteenth century, the idea and concept of planning has become almost synonymous with socialism and communism. The political ideology of planning to a large extent underscores the socialistism which continues to be translated in communist, socialist and ‘Third World’ states. Planning often has been seen by developing countries as a panacea to a wide range of their national problems and societal ills: rural development projects, agrarian development, population control, education for the masses, transport development and bringing public amenities to villages. But essentially all state plans have three components – they are thematically (i.e. agriculture, industries, transport, poor), spatially (national, province, region, city, rural) and temporally (time frame) defined.

Using Malaysia and Singapore as examples, one can see how different the goals of planning are between these two states; Malaysia is a fully fledged country that represents better developing countries in the tropical world while Singapore is a very small city-state that has fewer similar countries of its political standing. However, if we use Singapore as a representation of cities in the developing world, then her urban planning experiences have value for other city administrations to consider.

Singapore’s ruling party, the democratic socialist People’s Action Party has made planning a cornerstone of their five year political mandates. Given Singapore’s city-state status, all plans in Singapore are urban plans (see Fig. 1). In terms of the planning time

**Table 1: Singapore’s Varied National Plans**

	<i>Plans</i>		<i>Aims</i>
	<b>Master Plan 1955</b> This first Master Plan (1955) covered a period from 1953 to 1972. It was however not given official sanction until 1958. The Master Plan is subject to quinquennial review. The Master Plan is a statutory planning document.		The 1955 Master Plan had three major proposals: i) delimitation of a green belt around the city; ii) decongestion of the Central Area by one-sixth of the resident population; iii) construction of 3 new towns at Jurong, Woodlands and Yio Chu Kang. Planned population projection was 2 million by 1972.
	<b>Revised Master Plan 1965</b> Plan approved in 1966. Revision included private sector development projects. Master Plan was not extended beyond 1972 as government was relying on United Nations data for long term planning.		No real changes but it includes private sector developments
	<b>Master Plan 2003</b> Incorporates amendments to 5 planning regions (comprising 55 planning areas) -- approved by Minister for National Development on 1 December 2003.		

	<b>First Development Plan, 1961-1964</b> Outline of new development policies were sketched. Plan reviewed first three years ending 31 <sup>st</sup> December 1963.		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Provision of new jobs</li> <li>2. Promotion of economic development</li> </ol>
	<b>Concept Plan 1971:</b> First Concept Plan; used to keep pace with changing world trends and land use needs. Plan is revised once every 10 years. Concept Plan seen originally as an 'action plan' that is structurally and functionally related to a coherent whole. Meant to be less rigid than statutory Master Plans.		Plan projected population at 3.4 million by 1992. Ring pattern of the city's development was favoured.
	<b>Concept Plan 1991:</b> <i>Towards a Tropical City of Excellence</i> Plan maps out Singapore's land use and long term development for Year X.		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Sustain Singapore's economic development</li> <li>2. Upgrade housing conditions and transport systems</li> <li>3. Improve quality of life</li> <li>4. Planning for a population of 4 million</li> </ol>
	<b>Concept Plan 2001:</b> <i>Towards a Thriving World Class City in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century</i> Plan for making a dynamic, distinctive and delightful city.		To ensure Singapore's i) continued competitiveness; ii) meet the people's aspirations for the future, and iii) build a distinctive home that Singaporeans can identify with and be proud of.
	<b>Development Guide Plans (DGPs)</b> Singapore is divided into 55 planning areas. When all 55 areas are planned, it will prepare for the next Master Plan.		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Local planning for 150,000 persons</li> <li>2. Plans include town centres and sub-zones</li> </ol>
	<b>Singapore Green Plan 1993:</b> <i>Towards a Model Green City</i> Prepared and presented at the Earth Summit at Rio de Janeiro in 1992. Supplemented the Concept Plan 1991.		To become a model green city, with high standards of public health, clean air, land, water and a quiet living environment.
	<b>The Singapore Green Plan – Action Programmes (1993)</b> This Plan is to put into action by the Singapore Green Plan presented at Rio in June 1992.		Identified work groups (Ministries, Statutory Boards, private organizations) to come up with action programmes in environmental education, technology, resource conservation, clean technologies, nature conservation and noise.
	<b>Park and Water Bodies Plan</b> A 15-year plan introduced in 2002 as part of the review of Master Plan 1998 due to public feedback that greenery is valued in Singapore		To ensure our green spaces, water bodies and living environment.

	<b>Singapore Green Plan 2012</b> Government's blue print towards environmental sustainability. Plan released in 2002.		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Promote energy efficiency</li> <li>2. Promote use of clean technology</li> <li>3. Promote reuse, reduce and recycle of waste products</li> <li>4. Conserve nature</li> <li>5. Promote environmental consciousness</li> </ol>

Source: Various government publications

spans, different plans have different temporal dimensions. Like Malaysia's long term national plans for developed status (targeted at 2020), Singapore's Concept Plan has a very long time frame as well: it "maps out our vision for the next 40 to 50 years" (Urban Redevelopment Authority, 2001:10). In terms of thematic objectives, Singapore in the early planning decades had a clear modernistic intent towards economic growth and progress as expressed in this 1974 statement by the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) which states that urban planning is meant to propel Singapore towards "growth and progress, providing not only environmental improvement, but also better employment and investment opportunities" (URA Annual Report, 1974/75:7).

While Malaysia's national plans since 1970, have been aimed at the redistribution of wealth and eradication of rural poverty, Singapore's Plans over the same time period have been aimed at enhancing the national economic pie, maintaining wealth and ensuring a quality life for its citizens. The economic agenda had not changed much since the 1970s to the 1991 Concept Plan when the URA states that its plans are 'focused on sustaining economic growth and providing a good quality of life' by creating 'a tropical city of excellence' (Urban Redevelopment Authority, 2001:9).

Both Malaysia and Singapore have forward looking national plans for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Malaysia's avowed goal, set in 1991 under the Outline Perspective Plan 2 (OPP2) objective, is to make Malaysia a "fully developed nation" by 2020 (Wawasan 2020) (National Printing Department, 1991:4). This is an objective that the current Prime Minister Mr Abdullah Badawi has vowed he is committed to achieving under his 9<sup>th</sup> Malaysia Plan (2006-2010) (Reme, 2006a:35). This target is based on Malaysia's economic growth hitting seven percent annually till 2020. However, critics wonder whether meeting 'developed' status can be measured solely by achieving a high per capita income. With the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Singapore's Concept Plan 2001 mission became less economically specific but more in line with global city aspirations in this statement of creating a 'thriving world class city in the 21<sup>st</sup> century'. The Plan focused on three themes in creating this world class city – to create a city that is dynamic, distinctive and delightful (Urban Redevelopment Authority, 2001:9). Given the fact that younger Singaporeans are comparing living standards with overseas cities and are keen to emigrate, the 2001 Plan emphasized housing in the context of creating "a more livable city, one where Singaporeans can live comfortably, with a wide choice of housing locations and housing types" (Urban Redevelopment Authority, 2001:13).

Comparing the planning objectives of the two countries, one might say, that in Malaysia as elsewhere in the developing world, planning still is focused on specific issues and problems the country wants to address. In the case of Singapore, which is now a more developed country with global city status, planning is creative and innovative, to ensure the city-state is able to compete with other world cities. Hence, in developing countries,

planning can be said to be intra-national in objectives, problem-solving in focus and geared to income equity and poverty eradication. Whereas in developed cities and states, planning also may be extra-national and comparative in perspective, concerned with setting global benchmarks, and geared to maintaining a quality of living based on international standards. As a Singapore civil administrator argued: “we must learn to anticipate demands, influence developments, and meet needs in ways which are innovative and provide Singapore the competitive edge over other nations” (Lim, 1998:124).

For cities or countries in a changing global environment, planning programmes whether national or urban-planning, should serve four important functions:

- (i) Given that globalisation can accentuate landuse divisions and spatial distinctions based on competing economic sectors, planning should adjudicate competing land use requirements in a holistic manner. Planning decision process needs to rationalize the distribution of landuse based on public and private sector demands. Specifically, government leaders need to decide the right proportions of competing landuse demands for the future. Without proper planning, cities and states can be compartmentalised and divided into unequal components that might not address the current or long term needs of citizens. Planning has to be a ‘holistic’ and ‘integrated’ process both in its inputs and outcomes.
- (ii) Planning will help ensure that landuse changes are not purely a product of capitalistic demands but that social justice in urban areas is met. The last thing we need in a city is for the rich to dominate and subjugate the lower and poorer social classes of people through landuse ownership. If one accepts the reality of the political economy approach to development its entailing “distribution of power” (Adams, 2001:17), it becomes even more imperative for governments to adjudicate landuse and spatial distribution issues in dual economic systems. Unfortunately, this is easier envisioned on paper than in reality. In cities around the world, a dual economy and landuse system seems to be embedded spatially, economically and socially. One is now reminded that the dual economic system is not only a feature of the developing world (Geertz, 1963:48-49, 62-63; McGee, 1970) but also exists in first world cities like New York (see Mollenkopf and Castells, 1991; Sassen, 1991:79-101).
- (iv) Planning can ensure that future competing landuse demands and trends can be catered for. This is especially so for urban areas, which are currently the fastest growing sectors in Southeast Asia, China and India. Given that urban areas are growing rapidly, both spatially and demographically, without proper forward planning, the city infrastructure will be overtaxed if forward-looking urban plans are not put in place.
- (v) With cities and city-based regions becoming major magnets of foreign direct investments and capital accommodation modes, government authorities and national planners are instrumental in ensuring cities and urban-based regions stay economically competitive and attractive living areas. Cities are keen competitors in the globalisation of the market economy and the attraction of Foreign Direct Investments (FDIs). Urban planners must become entrepreneurial to ensure that the cities they plan can be plugged into the global economy and thus exploit the ‘global space of flows’ (Castells, 1989).

## OPERATIONALISING GLOBALISATION FOR NATIONAL PLANNING

Under the processes of globalisation, five important issues have unfolded in the region which have wide spread impact on national agendas. Though many of these national issues are not new or a product of globalisation, they have become more pronounced as a result of globalising forces. The dilemma for states is that globalisation has a twin outcome, both negative and positive impacts that are not easily separated. For example, economically, globalisation might enhance economic growth, but the downside for states is that it also could lead to growing disparities of wealth and increasing levels of poverty that require urgent attention. States have to contend on the one hand with trying to enhance their 'global' status or 'global city' image, yet ensure their national identities and national resilience is not undermined. In an increasingly inter-related world, many issues become the subject of international scrutiny and benchmarking. For states in the region, globalisation might spur economic growth but the worry is whether such growth and development is sustainable. All these issues require focused, holistic and concerted government intervention. They cannot be left to mere ad hoc political decisions and programmes. Hence my argument is that national and urban planning becomes even more acute, if macro and holistic national responses have to be devised, formulated and executed.

### Reducing income inequality and poverty eradication

As a region, Southeast Asia is a poverty stricken region with 44 percent of its 557 million people classified as poor (ie. living below US\$2 a day) in 2005 (Population Reference Bureau, 2005). The countries that are most affected by poverty are Cambodia (78 % of population), Laos (73 %), Indonesia (52%), and the Philippines (48 %) (see Table 2). Even Thailand (33%) and Vietnam (33%) also have sizable populations living in poverty

Table. 2: **Poverty Levels in Southeast Asian Countries**

	<b>Population Mid-2005 (millions)</b>	<b>% Population living below US\$2 per day</b>
<b>ASIA</b>	<b>3,2921</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>SOUTHEAST ASIA</b>	<b>557</b>	<b>44</b>
Brunei	0.4	--
Cambodia	13.3	78
East Timor	0.9	--
Indonesia	221.9	52
Laos	5.9	73
Malaysia	26.1	9
Myanmar	50.5	--
Philippines	84.8	48
Singapore	4.3	--
Thailand	65.0	33
Vietnam	83.3	33

Source: 2005 World Population Data Sheet, The Population Reference Bureau, Washington, D.C.

(Population Reference Bureau, 2005). In the first three months of 2006, poverty reached its highest levels in the Philippines, with 16.9 percent (or 2.8 million people) of people suffering from hunger according to the Social Weather Station (McIndoe, 2006:16). Are these poverty figures likely to be reduced in the future?



Let me first state that the region's personal income inequalities and disparate distributions of wealth are not a recent phenomenon. The first driver of income disparities in the region was a product of colonialism. In Indonesia, Polak estimated the income distribution in 1939 (the height of Dutch colonialism) according to per capita income received by Europeans, Chinese and Indonesian communities were based on a ratio of 61:18:1 (Golay, *et al.* 1969:117). The second major trigger of income inequality in the region unfortunately seems to be resulting from globalization. Unfortunately, there is grudging acceptance and debate that globalisation does widen disparities of wealth between developed and developing countries and between rich and poor peoples (Shanahan, 2003; Aeria, 2005). Even in a relatively poor country like Vietnam, the opening of the former planned economy to capitalism has widened income inequalities. In 2002, a person in the richest 10 per cent of the population earned an average 12.5 times more per month than a person in the poorest 10 per cent of the country; while families in the richest five per cent of the population earned an average 20 times more than the poorest five per cent (Taylor, 2004:3). The disparities of wealth between rural and urban dwellers in Vietnam are even starker. In a 1998 study, nearly 96 per cent of the poorest 20 per cent of households were found in rural areas, whereas, 63 per cent of the richest 20 per cent were in urban areas (Taylor, 2004:3).

What is even more revealing in the disparities of wealth in Southeast Asia is the control of national wealth in the hands of few families. Unlike America, where corporations control the national economy, in Southeast Asia, few families have massive influence in the national economy. For example in 1996, the top 10 families in Indonesia had control of 57.7 percent of the country's market capitalization; in the Philippines it was 52.5 percent; in Thailand, 46.2 percent and even in Singapore it was 26.6 percent (The World Bank, 2005:38) (see Fig 3). I would like to know what these percentages are in the post-1997

**Table 3: Market capitalization controlled by the top 10 families in selected countries, 1996**

<b>Country</b>	<b>%</b>
Indonesia	57.7
Philippines	52.5
Thailand	46.2
Hong Kong, China	32.1
Republic of Korea	26.8
Singapore	26.6
Malaysia	24.8
Taiwan, China	18.4
Japan	2.4

Source: *World Development Report 2006: Equity and Development*, The World Bank and Oxford University Press: Washington, p. 38

financial bloodbath in the region. These widening disparities of wealth, however, with wealth concentrated in a group of individuals, underscore David Harvey's (2006:145) recent criticisms of the neoliberalization of political economic practices that has swept across the world like "a vast tidal wave of institutional reform and discursive adjustment". He wonders whether the "neoliberal stance" are serving "particular interests" to "benefit themselves rather than, as is claimed, everyone, everywhere?" (Harvey, 2006:146).

Poverty continues to be a global concern as Jeffrey Sachs (2005) has so vividly demonstrated in countries in Latin America, Africa and Asia. There is increasing evidence to show that globalisation impacts on the urban poor by marginalising them to "informal

settlements”, displacing them due to urban redevelopment projects and forcing them to live far from the high land rents of the city centre, thus increasing their commuting time and costs (Shatkin, 2006:178-179). Closing this income inequality, eradicating poverty and helping the urban poor cannot be left to chance and market forces; it requires a concerted political effort, planned programmes, pragmatic policies, capacity-building projects, and holistic and effective administrative schemes. In Metro Manila, Gavin Shatkin (2006:181) argues that unfortunately government bureaucrats and politicians are “forgetting” the “informal settlements” of the city in their urban reforms and plans. He further states that like the Philippines, national governments in developing countries, supported by international aid agencies have undertaken administrative and political reforms based on “whole-sector” strategies which have “resulted in the abandonment of place-based poverty alleviation strategies” (Shatkin, 2006:181). This neglect for place-based poverty embedded in “informal settlements” in Metro Manila, has only increased populations in these settlements from 700,000 in 1968 (or 20% of Manila’s population), to 1.7 million in 1980 (24 %) and 4 million in 1997 (40%) (Shatkin, 2006:186).

For urban areas, urban planning has got to be geared to solving the brown issues, housing and transportation. As cities become the norm for living in the world and increasingly in Southeast Asia, governments need to focus their attention on how best to plan their large and crowded cities. Most primate Southeast Asian cities have populations in excess of 3 million, but the bulk of population lives in slum and squatter dwellings are generally unemployed or underemployed and remain relatively poor (Pornchokchai, 1992; Askew, 1994; Balisacan 1994; Asian Development Bank, 2005). There is a need to put in place a massive redevelopment system for many urban areas that will look after housing and transportation and ensure that urban citizens have adequate access to public facilities especially education and health.

Given its high levels of poverty, Cambodia has made poverty reduction a central concern of their 5-year national plan (1996-2001): “National Economic Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy” (Royal Government Of Cambodia, 1997). In Malaysia, on the other hand, while poverty is not as widespread or as serious as the other ASEAN states above, the government is focused on reducing income inequality. Given that income inequality is racially biased in Malaysia (rural *bumiputeras* are poor), the development plans over the decades have been aimed to reduce this economic inequality.

After the 1969 racial riots in Kuala Lumpur, the government set up the New Economic Policy (NEP) in 1970 to “promote growth with equity” and “national unity amongst the various races” (National Printing Department, 1991:3). The government put in place two plans to oversee the NEP objectives. This included the First Outline Perspective Plan (OPP) which covered the period from 1971 to 1990. Within the OPP time span, four five-year development plans (the Second Malaysia Plan, 1971-75; Third Malaysia Plan, 1976-1980; Fourth Malaysia Plan 1981-85; and Fifth Malaysia Plan, 1986-90) also were implemented to realize the NEP objectives (National Printing Department, 1991:3). Under Dr Mahathir’s leadership, a second Outline Perspective Plan (OPP2) was initiated to cover the period 1991 to 2000 and to realize the New Development Policy (NDP). Essentially, despite the name changes, the government policies still were directed at accelerating the “process of eradicating poverty and restructuring society so as to correct social and economic imbalances” (National Printing Department, 1991:3). The OPP2 noted however that poverty in Malaysia had declined from 49.3 per cent in 1970 to 15 per cent in 1990 (National Printing Department, 1991:9).

The above Plans demonstrate that long (20 years, 30 years) and short (5 years, 10 years) term Plans were put in place to realize the Malaysian government’s NEP and NDP objectives. Given its objectives on poverty and inequality of wealth, the OPP2 targeted three sectors for attention: the poor were said to be represented by Malay and indigenous

groups; the poorest states were Kedah, Perak, Kelantan, Terengganu, Sabah and Sarawak, and the spatially poor sector was the rural areas, though rural incomes had improved vis-à-vis urban areas (National Printing Department, 1991:9). Malaysia's National Plans thus are broad based and concerned with addressing national problems and challenges at various levels: sectoral (by economic sectors), racial-ethnic, rural, state, and regional.

Given the fact that Malaysia has pursued an affirmative action policy that is focused on uplifting the economic well being of *bumiputras* (sons of the soil -- Malays and indigenous peoples), its national policies have aimed at raising the Malay economic involvement to 30 per cent. However, by 1999 the *bumiputras* were still trailing in most economic sectors: transportation (29 per cent), construction (25.1 per cent), wholesale and retail (18.3 per cent), finance (16.8 per cent), accountancy (15.7 per cent), architecture (12.8 per cent), agriculture (12.2 per cent) and manufacturing (8.7 per cent) (Ismail Noor and Muhammad Azaham, 2000:103). Given that the ruling Malay party, United Malay National Organisation, derives its political support from the Malay community, one can see why the government's affirmative action plans will not be replaced until the Malay community becomes a sustainable economic group.

### **Globalisation and National Identity**

While in the developing world, many governments want their countries and cities to be modern, progressive and high-tech, the blind acceptance of a 'global' idiom of infrastructure and buildings can undermine the very identity of a city and community. Unfortunately, many developing countries see American and western European cities as models for their own development. In the enthusiastic rush to develop their cities in the same way, the heart, soul and identity of their own cities may be destroyed. But this dilemma is not easily resolved. Governments seem to want both architectural statements. One sees how many of the cities in the region have been building taller skyscrapers as statements of their modern outlook and national pride: Kuala Lumpur, Tokyo, Taipei, Shanghai, and Seoul. The Petronas Towers (452m, 88-storeys landmark) in Kuala Lumpur City Centre (KLCC) remains for Malaysia a symbolic statement of its "global orientation", its national showcase of "modernity" and a "world class city and nation" (Bunnell, 2004:65-68). However, such national icons and landmarks have not come cheaply. The extravagant expenditure on the Petronas Towers (RM 1.8 billion or S\$782 million), Kuala Lumpur International airport (RM9 billion or S\$4 billion) and the development of Putrajaya (RM20 billion or S\$8.7 billion) have now become the subject of intense debate between Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi's administration and the former Prime Minister, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad (Reme, 2006b:30). In Singapore, the government being mindful of how architecture can attract tourism, as in the art museum of Bilbao, Spain, has loosened its building laws and encouraged architects to construct buildings of beauty, creativity and innovation.

At the other end of the spectrum, governments and NGO groups have been trying to salvage ethnic districts and historical buildings from the 'modern' building frenzy. It is thus not surprising to hear the Chinese Minister of Culture, Mr Sun Jiazheng apologizing on 25 May 2006 for not doing more to save old buildings from demolition in Chinese cities. In his words, "some cities have unilaterally gone all out to get a brand new look and have not done enough to protect old buildings" (*The Straits Times*, 26 May 2006:10). I recall the public feedback session in Kreta Ayer, on the Singapore Tourism Board's plans to remake Chinatown as a tourist attraction. What a volatile meeting it was. The over 250-strong public audience of professionals and residents lambasted the Tourism officials that evening, by pointing out that the plans to change Chinatown with more new "Chinese" styled architectural embellishments, was a total travesty of Chinatown's heritage that is

encapsulated in its vernacular Malayan architecture of Palladian and Chinese baroque type shophouses. Elsewhere I have argued that the Chinese shophouses define Singapore's vernacular architecture and have demonstrated the many reasons for its conservation (Savage, 2001).

The relentless destruction of these buildings from the 1960s to 1980s in the pursuit of development goals has left Singapore a much poorer city of heritage and cultural traditions. Chinatown remains an eyesore today with public housing flats stuck right in the middle of its vernacular shophouse landscape. Much of its traditional retail sector has been replaced by blatant tourist-type retail shops, many of which have nothing to do with Chinese culture. Chinatown does not serve its dwindling residential community, most of which have been evicted elsewhere in Singapore. This Chinatown example underscores my point that good planning must strike a balance between new developments and conservation, between maintaining change and tradition, between moving ahead and retaining cultural heritage. We should bear in mind the wisdom of the Malay proverb 'What you cannot replace, you should never destroy'.

Historical buildings, ethnic districts and modern landmarks provide what Kevin Lynch (1977) calls the "imageability" of a city. Imageability is defined as the "quality in a physical object which gives it a high probability of evoking a strong image in any given observer" (Lynch, 1977:9) and an imageable city is an "apparent, legible and visible city", that "would seem well formed, distinct, remarkable; it would invite the eye and the ear to greater attention and participation" (Lynch, 1977:10). In circumscribed spatial areas of cities, merging the modern architectural statements with cultural heritage sites is a challenge for urban planners. For planners of the global era, urban redevelopment is the best way to ensure a compact city that expresses three levels of the urban environment for both citizens and visitors: as physical space, as subjectively experienced space, and as space containing "objectified aspects of our awareness; quasi as a bearer of messages" (Brenner, 2005:47). The Europeans, with their rich historical and cultural architectural traditions are leaders in urban redevelopment because European urban planners are mindful that their cities have to remain "viable urban environments" for their residents, as well as newly conceived cities that underscore the "changes in world economic exchange, in demographic trends", the migration within their countries, and "the effects of media and cultural development on the social acquisition of public space" that require "inevitable alterations" of the "old city" (Akbar, 2005:10).

In addition to cultural manifestations, this balance between global and local, between modern and vernacular architecture is becoming more important because of political and economic reasons. Politically, if urban areas do not reflect their ethnic districts, religious places, cultural identities and vernacular architecture, citizens will lose a sense of place attachment, their national identity, and their relationships with their cities and neighbourhoods. The conservation of familiar, culturally embedded landscapes can ensure that citizens have a sense of identity and stakeholders' interests in their own cities. Heritage buildings reflect the post-modern and post-colonial interest in indigenous culture especially in architecture which has had some positive outcomes in many developing countries. In the Philippines, for example, there is a renaissance in the *Balai* vernacular houses of ordinary Filipino communities (Hila, *et al*, 1992).

Economically, since many Southeast Asian countries place great emphasis on tourism, cities can use tourism as a means of protecting their cultural heritage. A city that enhances and retains its imageability, will be one that serves as a tourist attraction. Imageable cities are said to be cities of a "beautiful environment" which translates to "meaning or expressiveness, sensuous delight, rhythm, stimulus, choice" (Lynch, 1977:10). In Southeast Asia, cities like Hanoi, Luang Prabang, Yangon, Chiangmai, Mandalay, Yogyakarta, Taiping, Hue, Melaka and Hoian have maintained their old world charm and

imageability. These cities should maintain their colonial and vernacular architectural buildings and preserve their traditional ambience. There is also nothing to be ashamed of the colonial past because it should be viewed as part of the heritage of many Southeast Asian societies. Indeed Melaka's major tourist attraction lies in its colonial heritage, the cultural landscape of Portuguese and Dutch buildings, its diversity of ethnic-western blended foodstuffs, and its living communities of Portuguese Eurasians, who still speak 16<sup>th</sup> century Portuguese.

Obviously if one is building a city from scratch, such as the case of Putrajaya and Cyberjaya in Peninsular Malaysia, then planners have a free hand to decide the nature of their urban designs and plans. But like planned growth poles in a forested-plantation area, the fruits of Dr Mahathir's vision of creating beacons for Malaysia's 2020 developed status ambitions, is likely to remain hypothetical, if the labour and industries continue to shy away from these beautiful urban planned landscapes. The twin cities, in a way have dichotomized the dialectical contestations in all developing countries between tradition and modernisation; Putrajaya (the name of its first Prime Minister) a new capital, with vernacular building forms reflect the 'truly Asian' Malaysian society in a tropical landscape, while Cyberjaya (named after information technology), epitomises the hi-tech, global, modern, and future outlook of Malaysia and symbolises the "Malaysia *boleh*" ethos. In some ways, both cities express the twin goals of Malaysia's ruling elite: Putrajaya represents *Bangsa Malaysia* (Malaysian nationality) while Cyberjaya is Malaysia's *Wawasan 2020* symbol. However as Tim Bunnell (2004:3) argues the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) (involving the twin cities of Putrajaya and Cyberjaya) is a "paradigmatic global shift" to a new "techno-economic era" in which the modern 'West' has expanded into a "'non-Western' periphery". In many cities and countries, unfortunately, development of modern new buildings and cultural landscapes seems to have overshadowed the value of 'conserving' and 'preserving' ethnic landscapes, historical buildings and cultural environments.

All the above examples seem simple enough because they reflect retaining or conserving physical landscape properties. But with Southeast Asian states faced with plural and diverse cultural communities, holding these disparate ethnic and religious groups under one national umbrella seems a major challenge for any government. Will Indonesians continue to accept Sukarno's *Pancasila* as their national credo? Similarly, are Malaysians united in national spirit by their *Rukunegara* and Mahathir's *Bangsa Malaysia's* vision? Certainly the former Malaysian Prime Minister's declaration of Malaysia being an "Islamic state" on 29 September 2001 contradicts his *Bangsa Malaysia's* concept of a "full and fair partnership" irrespective of race (Cheah, 2005:93). One wonders to what extent Singapore's supposed racial harmony is held together by its strong economic prosperity than by a genuine respect and good feelings between its varied ethnic and religious groups. The Singapore government's recipe for racial harmony is its concerted planned political process in which racial tensions and religious undercurrents are seldom left to chance and random factors. Given the fragile inter-ethnic and inter-religious relationships in these societies, the cleavages that globalisation might open up between communities is real and worrying. Accepting the fractured political schisms is one important aspect of the recognition of the national problem, but if governments fail to put in place, policies, plans and programmes to bring about racial harmony and religious respect, then national identity will remain an 'imagined community'.

### **Global environments: sustaining development**

One increasing spoiler in this 'home' conditioning is environmental issues. Recently, there have been repeated media reports, that one factor dissuading foreign skilled and

'knowledge' workers from Hong Kong, is the high air pollution levels in the city (Pesek, 20006:S14). Bangkok, Manila, Kuala Lumpur and Jakarta have similar environmental problems. Given the strong relationships between air pollution and ill health (Japan Environmental Council, 2000:10), governments should be taking environmental issues more seriously. As urban living will become the norm of living for the majority of Southeast Asia's population by 2060, it is imperative that governments focus their attention on sustainable-environment urban development plans and programmes.

Globalisation adds a double edged dimension to environmental problems in the region. On the one hand, one must accept that more than global trade, goods and services, environmental 'goods' do not observe political boundaries. The 1997-98 haze in the region is a classic case of a transboundary environmental problem affecting many countries beyond their control. If countries and transnational corporations (TNCs) are environmentally irresponsible, no amount of planning can safeguard national environmental quality. On the other hand, good national environmental practices and corporate environmental responsibility can enhance environmental 'common-pool' resources (CPRs) (air, fresh water, forests, marine resources), for the benefit of communities within and between states.

Singapore in this regard is a pioneer in taking into consideration environmental issues (both green and brown issues) in a Green Plan (see Fig. 1). However, in evaluating Singapore's Green Plan, there are both positive and negative issues. On the positive side, Singapore has done an excellent job in containing its brown issues (sewerage, waste disposal, littering, pollution). However on the green biodiversity aspects, there is still much that needs to be done. The government still refuses to make Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) compulsory for any new developments. The extent of air pollution still is not very satisfactory, especially given the impact of oil refineries in the island state. And biodiversity preservation is still not up to International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) benchmarks. By right Singapore should have 10 percent of its total area set aside for green and nature areas, but it has only five percent set aside.

Given that state and urban planning authorities are implementing plans that underscore sustainable development and sustainable urban development programmes, it is vital that governments and private organisations carry out Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA) as an integral part of their planning activities. Despite the fact that EIAs are conducted regularly in a 150 countries since its inception in the US in 1969, the Singapore authorities still continue to be politically sensitive and administratively dogmatic in using EIAs for any public planning process. The general view that EIAs are costly and time consuming, are views that are not true. Generally, most EIAs only account for one per cent of the total project cost and certainly, with the right professionals, can be completed within months. In many Asian countries, EIAs have not been effective because governments have not institutionalised the system and recognised its importance.

Singapore's faith in state and urban planning compared to any other country lies specifically because of its limited space. There is a chorus of statements of political leaders that underscore environmental determinist views about Singapore's limited space, its absence of natural resources and finite land (Savage, 2004). In Singapore, planning is one way the government feels it has command over the state's limited land resources. But this limited space belies the control the government has over land in Singapore. With its very strict land laws, the Singapore government has over a 40 year period, doubled its land ownership to over 80 percent by 1992 (Perry, et al, 1997:166). In this case Singapore is unique, state goals and planning objectives have overridden other private property rights and interests.

With good housing, all the other brown issues are looked after as well such as modern sewerage/sanitation systems, piped clean water, modern refuse systems and essentially

clean living home environments. A good home environment also ensures good public hygiene and personal health. In his book, *The Skeptical Environmentalist*, Lomborg (2001) showed that the major problem of cities in the developing world, is not outdoor but indoor pollution. Citizens in many Third World cities use firewood, charcoal, cow dung and other flammable materials for cooking and heating purposes, all of which create soot, air pollution and particles that are inhaled by residents, hence there is a high incidence of lung related diseases in many Third World cities.

### **Global cities, cosmopolitan communities**

If national governments in Southeast Asia now see their capitals as ‘world’ and ‘global cities’ (Kelly & McGee, 2003:271-272), it would mean catering not only to a resident local population but also servicing a foreign resident population. Planners need to focus on cities given that the United Nations predicts that 60 percent of global population will live in cities by 2030 (*The Straits Times*, 2004:11). On the one hand, global cities are said to be defined by their cosmopolitan populations, which at one level defines a resident multi-cultural population that is urbane, cultured, sophisticated, familiar with global lifestyles, and international in outlook (Yeoh, 2004:2434-2435). On the other hand, global cosmopolitan cities are said to welcome highly skilled professional and educated foreign migrants, ‘knowledge workers’, students, academics and businessmen (see Smith and Favell, 2006). Singapore’s Ministry of Manpower launched Manpower 21 in 1999 to make Singapore a “talent capital” which among other objectives was aimed at attracting international talent. A city that is unable to retain its highly mobile ‘foreign skilled’ labour force will obviously undermine its economic attractiveness and cosmopolitan outlook. The global city has to be able to entice people of varied cultures, religions and traditions, to feel safe and secure in their adopted home. Well established global cities, thus are able to meet demands of varied cultural and religious persuasions in terms of places of worship, foods, entertainment and educational facilities. Singapore’s ability to retain its large contingent of nearly one million foreign workers (nearly 25 percent of the city-state’s total population) is partly predicated on its ability to maintain a family environment. Singapore also embarked on enhancing its arts (museums, concert halls, exhibitions) and entertainment sectors to retain its ‘intelligent’ mobile population.

One barometer of Singapore’s ability to maintain its foreign ‘intelligent’ population is the number of foreign schools (18 schools) catering to its large foreign population: American, Australian, Canadian, French, German, Hollandse, Japanese, and Swiss schools besides several international schools. A growing issue of concern for foreign skilled workers in their overseas residential attachments has to do with the quality of the urban environment. Singapore also has embarked on making the city-state a ‘global schoolhouse’ for foreign students. Numerous international education agencies and foreign universities have set up off shore campuses in Singapore. Providing a conducive ‘home’ environment for foreign workers and students is thus a living reality.

### **The globalisation of democracies and civil society**

Since the breaking up of the Soviet Union, it would seem that capitalism and liberalism (democracy) have become the new ‘isms’ for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Democratic government certainly has become the stated political order in the global jigsaw of states. This new wave of democracy has been translated into global civil society expressions such as mass protests. At the major state-centric institutional meetings such as the 1999 World Trade Organisation’s ministerial meeting in Seattle, 25,000 protestors stormed the venue and in the G8’s 2001 Genoa Summit, 250,000 protestors greeted the political leaders. These

events demonstrate that civil society is operating not only at the national but now at global levels in efforts to effect policy changes (Kirtan and Hajnal, 2006).

In Southeast Asia, former authoritarian or totalitarian political regimes, based on military juntas have given way to democratic political systems. We see this in Indonesia, Cambodia, Thailand, and the Philippines; even in Vietnam, capitalism reigns freely and there is a loosening of the central government's political grip. Throughout the region, except Myanmar, a democratic wave is sweeping the political landscape. Francis Loh and Joakim Öjendal's (2005) book, *Southeast Asian Responses to Globalization* has provided a comprehensive overview and analysis of the deepening democratic process in the region. In Indonesia and Malaysia, there have been strong political calls for "*reformasi*", with Indonesia having a definite '*reformasi* period' (May 1998 to present) (Aris, *et al*, 2005), in the Philippines and Thailand, one hears repeatedly 'people power', Cambodia is drunk on capitalism and party politics, and Vietnam is practicing its form of political openness through *doi moi* (renovation reforms) (Beresford & Tran, 2004:4). Though ideologically diverse, the *reformasi* movements in Indonesia and Malaysia have been aimed at eradicating 'corruption, cronyism and nepotism' (Khoo, 2005:99).

Societies in the region that have been used to a top down, public sector-led planning process now need to readjust, rethink and remake their whole planning agendas. Today, successful planning requires public participation, grassroots feedback, private sector inputs and non-government organisations involvement. A top down planning system is incompatible with democratic type political systems, market reforms and a capitalistic economy. Furthermore, countries in the developing world cannot avoid private sector participation especially when multi-national corporations represent 51 percent of the biggest economies in the world today (Cloghesy, 2006:361).

Given the Marxist ideological embedding, the idea of planning, as such is antithetical to liberalism and liberal democratic systems such as the United States. Liberal politicians and political administrations dislike the idea of top down planning systems and prefer to rely on approved markets and *laissez faire* decision making processes. Does this make planning unacceptable to the democratic political systems in the region? The American sociologist, Joseph Tamney (1971), over 35 years ago, however was skeptical whether there was a trade-off between planning and the loss of freedom that is a central value in liberal democracies.

Perhaps for somewhat different reasons, all countries are moving in the direction of greater planning, or more self-determination, and of making dreams come true. It is important to remember that planning is not the same as the loss of freedom. In fact, societies can plan to maximize freedom. Planning and freedom are not necessarily opposed (Tamney, 1971:11).

Given the above statement by Tamney (1971), the rise of capitalism, liberalism and democracy globally since the 1990s should not be a reason for the demise of state planning traditions. Yet, there seems to be less interest in planning and certainly perhaps less trust in its ability to deliver the state's political, economic, social and environmental goods. Part of the disillusionment with planning lies in the politics of developing countries rather than in the planning exercise itself. Indeed planning in the lesser developed countries is the opium of the masses. Much often is promised in state plans during election campaigns but little is successfully executed in reality. Notwithstanding the political rhetoric, given the rapid pace at which changes are taking place, planning objectives and programmes need to be modified to meet new objectives if they are to stay relevant. Hence, over the decades since World War II, planners have moved from decision makers to managers and now they have become entrepreneurs (Serap, 1997:144).



In Singapore, there has been a quantum change in government planning policies. From the 1960s up to the mid 1980s, planning was always a top down process and there were often howls of disapproval in the way roads were changed, nature areas eliminated, neighbourhoods modified, rivers canalized, hills flattened, beaches reclaimed and buildings destroyed. The changes were so dramatic that Rodolphe De Koninck (1992:9) mapped the “revolution of territory”, arguing that Singaporeans are “surprisingly docile” and have allowed the government authorities to turn the island state into an “effervescent laboratory of economic, social and environmental innovation”. Since the mid 1980s, Singaporeans were becoming less docile. The Nature Society of Singapore (NSS) became one of the major critics and pressure groups of the government’s environmental programmes and plans. They put out their own Master Plan for the Conservation of Nature to challenge the government’s Green Plan (Briffett, 1990). In addition, the NSS published the *Red Data Book* on threatened plants and animals in Singapore (Ng and Wee, 1994) and produced an EIA report on the government’s (Public Utilities Board) proposed golf course in Lower Peirce reservoir to show why the proposed golf course should not be built (Nature Society, Singapore, 1992). The EIA was very effective and the government shelved its plans to build the golf course.

In Singapore, we have seen how the government has accepted that planning has got to move with the times. With active voices of civil society emerging, the government and the planning agencies have relented considerably to bring citizen and private sector participation into the planning process. The result is that one sees a much greater degree of creativity in the plans of satellite towns and flats. With globalization and greater demands by civil society, the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) has made great strides to ensure that professionals and the public can engage at all times in the planning process. Top down planning has given way to more decentralized developments and plans as enshrined in the Development Guide Plans (DGP). In dividing the country into 55 planning zones, the government has solicited participation in two spheres: (a) it brought local residents and interest groups into the various planning zones to articulate their interest, participation and criticisms in the planning process: and (b) as a tour de force from the traditional government architects that used to plan and build various satellite towns, the government now has farmed out the planning process and the building of DGP zones and satellite towns to private architects and planners. In a globalised, democratic, *laissez faire* capitalistic world, state planning will be more effective if the processes and practices are more transparent, realistic and flexible, and which includes both active public and private sector participation.

Even in the more conceptual and long term plan, like the Concept Plan 2001, the government once again has decentralised the process and engaged public and private sector participation at all levels. The whole public exercise took one-year with active ‘public consultation’. This translated into ‘focus group’ involvement, ideas from the public solicited through letters and e-mails, a public forum for comments and feedback, a public exhibition for further feedback and a ‘public dialogue’ to discuss issues (URA, 2001:53).

In an economic context, Thailand’s planned economic programme of ‘One Tambon, One Product’ (OTOP) has created a great deal of economic decentralisation as well as specialisation for its various *tambons* (district) to compete economically not only within the country but globally as well. The government thus has encouraged greater grassroots entrepreneurship and small business development in rural areas to excel and compete in a wider open market.

The criticisms against top-down decision making and planning are not only an outcome of the democratic wave arising currently from globalization and information technology. In his book, *Collapse*, Jared Diamond (2006) using a “comparative method” of analyzing

both past civilizations and societies and contemporary states and communities, has demonstrated why small societies like Tikopia (Pacific islands) and hundreds of societies in the New Guinean islands have survived for thousands of years while civilizations (Anasazi; Maya) have risen and fallen within that time span. What is the secret to the successful sustainability of these societies? Diamond's (2006:277) answer is that these societies have practiced a "bottom-up approach to environmental management". Such societies have been sustainable because "courageous, active citizens" practice "bottom-up management" (Diamond, 2006:306). Such societies have "long-term stakes" and don't react to purely "short-term goals" (Diamond, 2006:306). But in a globalizing world, it does not mean that all decisions have to be democratized and liberalized, and that freedom should be championed wittingly and unquestioned. There are also good examples that Diamond (2006) illustrates where societies (Tokugawa period) have succeeded with top down systems of management. Harvey (2006:146) on the other hand questions the US propaganda war of promoting freedom in Iraq and around the world as myopic. The question is that for all societies, freedom should be responsibly managed and absolute freedom will lead to anarchy without direction, purpose and goals for societies to attain.

### **GLOBALISING SYSTEMS: WHAT RELEVANCE IN PLANNING?**

The citizen shifts his place of residence more frequently today than ever before, from area to area, from city to city. Good imageability in his environment would allow him to feel quickly at home in new surroundings. Gradual organization through long experience can less and less be relied upon (Lynch, 1977:111).

I settled for a clean and green Singapore. One arm of my strategy was to make Singapore into an oasis in Southeast Asia, for if we had First World standards then businessmen and tourists would make us a base for their business and tours of the region. The physical infrastructure was easier to improve than the rough and ready ways of the people (Lee Kuan Yew, 2000:199-200).

I would say that the impact of globalisation, information technology and the knowledge based economy (KBE) has placed new challenges into the tradition of state and urban planning for many countries. In Singapore, the government has decided to take information technology as part of the national system by the horns. At the opening of the Infocomm Media Business Exchange on 20 June 2006, Minister Lee Boon Yang unveiled Singapore's ambitious IT masterplan (iN2015) to turn Singapore into an "Intelligent Nation", a total wired and wireless nation by 2015 (Siew, 2006:1). The IT Plan is economically ambitious: it expects to create 80,000 new jobs, double the value of the industry from S\$13 billion to S\$26 billion and raise infocomm export revenue from S\$22 billion to S\$60 billion by 2015 (Siew, 2006:1). The broadband penetration (at speeds of over 1Gbps) into 90 percent of Singapore homes under the IT Plan is meant also to ensure better connections with the elderly and less-privileged people with disabilities. Despite these goals, information technology has other implications.

Firstly, through information technology, mass entertainment, popular culture and travel, many societies have enhanced expectations of the quality of living standards. Unfortunately growing expectations are never easily met. But such expectations raise national benchmarks and put pressure on governments to deliver political, economic, social, cultural and environmental goods. Secondly, the bewildering speed of changes taking place around us has made long term planning a less viable project. It is difficult to see in five years time what the nature of the global economy is going to be. Indeed, when I talked about Singapore's 10-year plan at a conference in Kobe, Japan, an English professor ridiculed me about how Singapore could have any successful long term plans.

His underlining message was that the pace of change taking place made long term planning almost irrelevant. Yet in Singapore, the government has not relented in its planning tradition. Singapore is one of the most planned city-states in the world (Savage, 1998). Everything from population growth to education, from the economy to health facilities, from computerisation to the arts scene, from environmental issues to housing, is all covered by various state plans (Savage, 1998).

Thirdly, the breaking down of political, economic and even cultural borders as a result of IT and globalisation, has confronted governments with the dilemma of striking the right balance between the global and local, between cosmopolitan versus national culture, between universal and vernacular landscapes, between modern and traditional social processes and between international and ethnic identities. In Asia, where countries are developing economically rapidly, where societies have rising expectations, and where many communities are becoming *nouveau riche*, planning becomes an important way to ensure that 'change' can be 'managed' in an efficient, effective, systematic and comprehensive manner. If not, the gains made economically might be wiped out by the social, cultural and environmental losses.

Given that there are many changes taking place around us economically, politically, culturally and socially, planning for any country has to remain flexible and nimble. Unfortunately, few countries can take advantage of quick changes within their planning process. As a small country Singapore has been able to ensure that its plans are "nimble" enough to absorb changes in a dynamic economic and political environment (Savage and Pow, 2001:104). Over the last five years, one sees how Singapore has diversified its economy to include oil refining, a petrol-chemical industry, a knowledge-based economy, an Asian centre for finance and banking, wafer fabrication plants, a global schoolhouse and biotechnology. The city-state has been developing its thriving tourist industry with the inclusion of the gaming industry in its Integrated Resort development, while maintaining its air and sea hub status. It also has gone full steam to develop a renaissance city for the arts (Savage, 2000). All these policy objectives require a coordination of various Ministries to achieve the desired goals.

Like all countries in the region, the aftermath of the 1997 crisis followed by the September 2001 terrorists attacks in the US, have left the global economic and political security landscape in an unpredictable state of affairs. Does long term planning have relevance in a world that is governed by a borderless economic landscape? Despite Ohmae's (1990) *Borderless World*, I am a firm believer that the political entity of 'nation' states will remain the fundamental building blocks of a global economic and political system. Countries and cities remain brand names for the products they produce, the tourist attractions they create, the quality of environments they administer and the economic climate they provide for investments.

Globalisation creates three processes that affect countries, communities and cities worldwide. Firstly globalisation enhances the competition amongst states, cities and societies the world over. All of a sudden, we find numerous statistics ranking countries and cities along various indices. Hence countries and cities, whether they want to or not end up being measured and benchmarked according to cost of living, savings, inflation rates, growth rates, rents, poverty, health and living standards. Governments thus become increasingly concerned about such benchmarks especially if they reflect negative outcomes. Secondly, it seems ironic that with greater globalisation, specialisation and niche areas of economic activities seem to be one outcome. Cities and countries, without many physical resources, end up specialising in trade, manufacturing or the service economy. Hence while Boston might be a strong brainpower centre, China and Vietnam are industrial powerhouses, and Singapore and Hong Kong are major trading and financial hubs. But even the specializations are dependent on how these cities and economies

compete on the global economic landscape. And thirdly, as discussed above, globalization and neoliberalism does seem to widen disparities of wealth. It has been argued that neoliberalism within global capitalism has been from its very inception a project to restore “class power to the richest strata in the population” (Harvey, 2006:148).

Over the years, Singapore has been reasonably successful in planning ahead for riding on the new winds of economic change. The city-state has diversified its trading economy to include industrialisation, banking and finance, oil refining base, urban tourism and convention activities, air and sea transportation hub, service node, hi-tech information base, global schoolhouse, arts and performing city, and bio-technology. In terms of living standards, the government has enhanced the welfare and living standards of its citizens through its planned 5-year public housing programmes. One of the hallmarks of Singapore’s planned city-state is its public housing success. Some 86 per cent of Singaporeans live in public housing and over 90 per cent of Singaporeans own their homes. These figures clearly show that Singaporeans enjoy a quality of life that is second to none in Asia.

In a nutshell, the relevance of planning in an age of global change could be summed up in four schools of thought:

- (a) that planning can help meet the needs of a society by addressing existing problems within the country, province or urban area
- (b) that planning can address future anticipated national or urban problems and scenarios
- (c) that planning could be a pro-active system that sets new benchmarks for a society by helping to uplift standards of living. Specifically, new benchmarks can be embedded in ‘forward planning’ programmes. In an internet world, there is no shortage of finding indicators for benchmarking development. There are an overwhelming 5.7 million websites ranging from the United Nations to local community projects devoted to “indicators” related to global development (Wong, 2006:1).
- (d) that planning is one way to ensure that cities and communities don’t lose sight of their traditions, heritage and cultural landscapes in the world rapidly changing to the tune of the global cultural drum beat.

## **PLANNING METHODS IN A GLOBALISING WORLD**

With globalization, politics is being redefined. Civil society transcending the state, if only in an incipient manner, is emerging as a major site of contestation where diverse groups seek to restructure politics, including its time-space dimensions. In a Braudelian sense of time, shared mental frameworks, including paradigms, are shifting, and borders are being redrawn not only in information, knowledge, technology and other products (Mittelman, 1999:77).

In my view, planning has to be the synergy of three major stake holders. First, one needs non-corrupt politicians who must have the vision and political will to ensure that the state planning tradition is put into place. Such politicians should have a burning sense of nationalism. They need to place the interest of citizens above their personal interests. Most important, you need politicians who have leadership, focused visions, and pragmatic ideas.

Secondly, we need a body of professionals with relevant expertise to advise, plan and execute state plans. Without a body of planners, architects, engineers, sociologists, geographers, social scientists and landscape architects it is difficult to implement plans that will meet the targets. Expertise clearly is lacking in many developing countries. But such expertise is important to ensure that the state planning process is professional, objective and efficient.

The third factor in this triangle of the planning process lies with the citizens of the country. Planning is always for society and people. It is a crying shame if citizen groups, interest groups, and non-government organisations are not brought in the planning process. It is important that grassroots organisations and civic society provide the inputs to politicians and professional planners so that the planning process is tailored to fit the needs and requirements of local residents, farmers, economic contributors and social communities.

Any government planning authority requires a comprehensive review of the objectives, processes, implementation and outcomes of a plan. Some of the most basic questions often are overlooked when politicians and bureaucrats propose state plans. Before any plan can be set in motion, a great deal of homework is needed to ascertain data on the subject matter that the plan intends to address. Given a rapidly changing global environment, the government planning agency must be open to many viewpoints and feedback. A plan needs to have a *targeted population* (we need to know the size and other characteristics of the population), a focused, targeted problem or benchmark (is the plan going to solve a transport, housing, health problem or set new benchmarks), and clear policies that are required for the plan to be successfully implemented.

Despite the fact that we live in an age of information, many societies still are marginalized and unaccounted for because there is a lack of information about them. Certainly without information based on periodic population censuses, land surveys, social surveys, national statistical reports, and environmental impact assessments, there can be no effective and efficient planning. Accurate statistical information provides governments and international agencies with the basis for assessing issues, planning policy initiatives and addressing problems. I would argue that the level of statistical and data gathering is one measure of development. Hence, it is also not surprising that more developed countries, have more accurate, comprehensive, current and transparent statistics on many national and local issues and trends. For Southeast Asian countries, we are reminded by Benedict Anderson (1991) that one ingredient of the colonial creation of the 'imagined communities' was the gathering of national statistics. Unfortunately, the perfection of this data gathering system of the colonial state has not been followed through after independence. Many countries in the region such as Laos, Myanmar, Cambodia, Vietnam and Indonesia have poor, inaccurate, and selective data, statistics and information about their states and provinces. Without 'accurate' and comprehensive data, it seems impossible for these states to plan ahead and address national challenges. At the height of the 1997-98 haze problem for example, Indonesia had to rely on Singapore's satellite data to identify its major locations of forest fires in Kalimantan.

Besides national statistical and data gathering, there is also a need to gather data that is tailored to specific issues or local environments. In short, before plans can be set in motion, there is a need to identify the problems and needs of people that the plan hopes to address. This problem and need identification can only be done with a comprehensive and professional method of data gathering based on social surveys, in-depth interviews, on-site field work, environmental impact assessment studies and landscape evaluations. It is this initial data gathering that is critical to the formulation of a balanced, comprehensive and effective plan. While behavioural geography like behavioural economics might be out of vogue, the use of spatial and environmental mental models (mental maps, images, cognitive maps, place awareness) (Golledge and Rushton, 1976; Saarinen, Seamon and Sell, 1984) are still pertinent methods of gauging spatial behaviour and place sentiments for effective planning. Similarly behavioural economics likewise will seek to evaluate the cost-benefit options that communities and companies will be willing to pay for residential areas or office locations. One needs to identify the spatial and economic choices and behaviour of people to be able to ensure that urban plans are place-specific in meeting the

needs of communities of varied ages, cultural orientations, economic endowments and personal interests.

Planning in Singapore is the archetype government and political leadership's expression of environmental possibilism; the idea that nature does not 'control' human activities, culture and behaviour because human beings take control of their own destinies by making their own decisions, taking initiatives, and creating innovations (Savage, 2004:213). Hence, despite the shortage of land and space, Singapore has used possibilistic options to enhance her limited space. There are three ways that Singapore has been able to expand its space for its various land uses. The city-state has expanded space by land reclamation projects that have increased the total land use by 15 to 20 per cent. Secondly, through the building of high rise flats, office buildings, car parks, industrial space, shopping complexes and multi-dimensional entertainment areas has increased its functional space. Finally, space has expanded through building facilities underground like the costly defense storage systems, sewerage systems, car parks, shopping areas and transportation lines both for roads and the Mass Rapid Transport (MRT).

Despite these three ways of expanding space, Singapore basically has a limited land area. Without planning it will be difficult to house its growing population and the various competing land uses. Singapore has to decide what its optimum population would be and we have seen over time that the optimal population has changed. Two decades ago, we were looking at a population of maximum four million. In the 1991 Concept Plan, the city's planned population was set at four million but in the 2001 Concept Plan, the population was increased to 5.5 million. There already is discussion in some circles that the city-state might be able to plan for eight million people. Such projections necessitate prudent plans if we are going to maintain a healthy and livable environment. Nobody would want to live in a city that cannot offer a quality environment for homemakers, for children and for workers. At current population rates, Singapore (6,300 persons per sq km) has a high population density, though it is lower than Hong Kong (6,366 persons per sq km) and Macau (24,111 pp sq km) (Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources, 2005:45). This high population to land ratios put Singapore in a different context from other countries. Like it or not, the Singapore authorities have got to put their faith in planning if they are going to realize the future challenges that Singapore faces.

But the issue of Singapore's ruling party also is underscored by their ability to realize their planning targets. One of the most notable planning traditions that often is cited as a model for other countries is Singapore's public housing scheme. Over the last forty years, the Housing and Development Board (HDB), Singapore's public housing agency successfully has built flats that currently house 86 per cent of Singapore's population. HDB housing programmes have been based on five-year planning targets and over the last few decades they have always more than realized their housing targets. In a city-state, housing is instrumental in providing a quality lifestyle for all citizens. It provides clean water, modern sanitation, sewerage and garbage disposal systems, electricity, and most of all healthy living environments. Unfortunately, in many developing countries public housing often is ignored or neglected. As such, you find squatter and slum colonies that choke the city. The slum and squatter colonies create a breakdown of sewerage and sanitation, provide conditions for garbage pile ups and offer little help in providing clean drinking water. In the process, you have environments that are filthy, unclean and that pose public health problems.

At the national state level, globalisation seems to be changing the definitions of rural and urban areas, and the configurations of the rural and urban are becoming increasingly blurred (Rigg, 2001). In the past, many countries in the region have put their faith in the growth pole theory for rural development (Friedmann, 1966). In Malaysia, the growth pole theory was used as the major rationalisation for the Federal Land Development

Authority (FELDA) programmes. Such agrarian schemes to boost rural development have had mixed reviews. In Indonesia and the Philippines, the growth pole theory was the underlying motive behind the migration schemes within these countries. In Indonesia, the transmigration scheme over the last 60 years was aimed at moving the population from the overcrowded islands of Java and Madura to the Outer Islands (Sumatra, Kalimantan Borneo, Sulawesi and Irian Jaya). This scheme was never seen as culturally sensitive and politically correct by people in the Outer Islands. The outer islanders saw the transmigration scheme as the Javanisation of the Outer Islands; and this was met with bloody feedback in 2003-04 when the Ibans in Kalimantan Borneo beheaded Madurese transmigrants and led to a mass exodus of Madurese back to Java and Madura. In the Philippines, a similar migration scheme was initiated by the Spanish and continued by the Filipino government. In this case, Catholic rural dwellers from Luzon and the Visayan islands were sent to the southern island of Mindanao which is predominantly a Muslim area. This movement of Catholics usurping the lands of Muslim dwellers (who owned the land by customary law - *adat*) created land tenure problems that escalated into a religious war between Catholics and Muslims (see Majul, 1973).

Given the multiplicity of ethnic and religious groups in the region, any planned resettlement schemes are likely to incur ethnic tensions and cultural conflicts. Will continuing globalisation reduce or exacerbate ethnic and religious tensions in the region? This is a difficult question to forecast. But certainly if governments choose to ignore this racial arithmetic in their national politics, then development processes are likely to be jeopardised.

Are such ethnic sensitivities and tensions going to be overridden by the new economic restructuring of the rural-urban landscape? Jonathan Rigg (2001) argues that the growing capitalisation and globally-determined processes of the countryside in the region are leading to “de-peasantisation”, the transformation of “social classes”, “rural industrialisation”, “counterurbanisation”, the “intensive commodification of production”, the transition to “agro-industrial enterprises” and where “rural households remain torn between rural and urban, and between agriculture and industry” (Rigg, 2001:145). With the inroads of capitalism and globalisation, Rigg (2001:156) observes that the rural landscape is “neither residual and marginal”; that the agrarian focus should “neither be viewed as bounded and self-contained, nor as unimportant” and; there needs to be new ways of “deconstructing the boundaries between rural and urban, and agriculture and industry”. Clearly these macro processes taking place in the rural landscape, cannot be left to the dictates of provincial governments or market forces, they require clear national planning directives to ensure the transformations will bear economic fruits with the minimum of social and cultural tensions and conflicts. Spatial planning is particularly important when “locality remains important because outcomes under global change are predicated on local specificities, including those of a historical nature” (Rigg, 2001:23).

## **OTHER REQUIREMENTS NEEDED FOR PLANNING**

Globalisation of the marketplace does not guarantee that the quality of the environment will improve. Other factors must be present. The most important are good governance, implying a stable government devoid of corruption with realistic legislation, and a regulatory infrastructure and resources to enforce the law (Cloghesy, 2006:362).

It takes a combination of many factors and stakeholders to ensure that planning is not a mere academic exercise based on theoretical propositions, but a realistic endeavour that is focused on practical initiatives that can be implemented over time. Given the speed at which events are taking place in a globalising world, planning agendas have to be a mix of

meeting national and local objectives and benchmarks while taking into consideration globalising forces and processes.

One reason why national planning has greater effectiveness in communist and socialist states lies in the longevity of their governments in power. China, North Vietnam, North Korea and Cuba are likely to plan ahead, because their political systems remain stable and unchanged for years, if not decades. For a democratically run state, the Singapore government is unique in the sense that it has been in power since self independence (since 1959) and independence (since 1965) – over 40 years, a rare feat by any international standard. In similar fashion, one also can say that in Malaysia, the ruling power, or *Barisan Nasional* (a cooperative relationship of several political parties) also has had long staying power in Malaysia's political landscape. Indeed, since its independence in 1957, the ruling political regime (the United Malay National Organisation and its partners) has formed the national government now for about 50 years; the opposition parties have managed to wrestle political clout in currently only one state (*Parti Islam SeMalaysia* in Kelantan).

Hence both Malaysia and Singapore's planning tradition has thus been predicted on the long term staying power of their current ruling parties. There are few countries in the world where the ruling party has stayed in power for over forty years. Without this long term ruling tradition, it will be almost impossible to talk about an effective planning tradition. In some ways, the fulfillment of their national plans, serve as a mandate for their re-election and staying power of their ruling parties. Plans take time to be formulated and to be executed. This is one of the reasons why in many western democracies, long term planning objectives often give way to short term planning execution. No ruling government that has to be re-elected every four to five years can delve in the luxury of long term plans. But long political staying power alone is not the panacea for good planning. The governments of Vietnam and Myanmar also have governments in power for a long time, but their national planning processes have not met with much success.

For developing countries in Southeast Asia, planning is a difficult exercise because it involves two different kinds of plans. I call them the hard and soft plans. What I have been dealing with above are the hard plans, the traditional turf of planners, landscape planners and architects. Hard plans deal with spatial organisation, heritage conservation, housing developments, industrial estate locations, construction of buildings, transportation routes, open spaces, gardens and parks, rural development, urban layouts, and other material manifestations of development and creature comforts. These in reality, are relatively easy to achieve and easy to benchmark in terms of deadlines and development targets. The soft planning is a lot more difficult to achieve and to plan. Soft planning deals with the cultural and social DNA of communities and societies. These involve the changing mindset of communities, their values, customs, beliefs, world views and ethos. The success of plans requires a dove tailing of both hard and soft plans. Critics might scoff at soft planning as social engineering and cultural brainwashing. But planning in general is all about releasing the creative potential of communities so they enjoy a better life. You cannot implement rural development plans and schemes, if peasants and farmers are not given new skills, new ideas, alternative mindsets and the empowerment to make and implement changes.

Education, capacity building and training are central to soft planning. In a globalising economy, the software of people needs to be developed. For example, in Less Developed Countries (LDCs) education should be a national priority, but little finance goes into this area. Hence countries stunt their growth and development because investments in their 'software', their populations are perpetually wanting. In Singapore, the government has over the last 25 years invested heavily in education and continues to do so. In 1999, the government embarked on a 'Programme for Rebuilding and Improving Existing Schools' (Prime) at the cost of S\$4.5 billion. Up to May 2002, 166 schools have been upgraded or



rebuilt (with computer laboratories, media resource libraries, fitness rooms, pastoral care rooms, IT learning resource rooms) (Ariff, 2002:H10).

Given the complexity of globalisation processes, an effective and comprehensive planning system for either state or urban areas has got to have a sense of coordination and synergy between the various government agencies and ministries that are involved either directly or indirectly in the planning process. In many countries, there often is intense competition between ministries and government agencies and hence plans cannot be effectively and efficiently implemented. Often, the minister that has the most power calls the shots and hence other junior or less powerful ministers might not be able to have a say in the overall planning process. In order for master plans to be effectively conceived and implemented, I would advocate that the state planning agency/department should fall under the Prime Minister's or President's Office. This will ensure that the head of the planning unit has sufficient power to orchestrate a planning process that requires the participation, inputs and cooperation of the other government ministries, NGOs and private sector bodies.

Globalisation is a continuing process and hence planning has to be a sustainable initiative or system requiring an efficient and effective administration and government bureaucracy. In many developing countries, however, the civil service often is bloated and ineffective. In countries like India and Indonesia with vast populations, the government bureaucracy or civil service suffers from 'bureaucratic involution'. In order to absorb the huge labour supply, the government sector keeps taking in new staff to the point that many administrators are underemployed and hence we have the horrors of massive administrative red tape. A civil service that is professional, innovative and efficient will ensure that the whole planning process is undertaken in a professional and effective manner. On the other hand, in labour scarce Singapore, the government is trying to use technology to provide a more efficient work environment. The Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA), which is involved in national planning, is currently testing a filing system (Kris Intelligent Filer) that will file 100,000 documents annually through an intelligent and efficient e-filing program (Tan, 2006:H6).

In order for a planning agency to be effective requires a spread of different professionals with various expertise and administrative capabilities. Effective planning is a multi-functional and multi-disciplinary process. Hence a planning agency requires a whole spread of different expertise to ensure that the planning process can represent the realities extant in any given society. A planning agency thus would require architects, urban and regional planners, landscape architects, real estate professionals, civil engineers, transportation system engineers, sociologists and geographers. If planning is purely an exercise of architects and engineers, state plans might be long on infrastructural and landscape modifications. But what often is forgotten is that planning is not merely an end product to enhance the career paths of government officials, architects and other professionals. Successful plans must face the critical test of being relevant to citizens that are going to be affected by government plans. If the quality of life (livelihoods) cannot be improved with all the arsenal of state planning, then the planning process cannot be deemed to be successful. In short, state planning departments always should bear in mind that their customers are not only political leaders or administrative elites but the citizens that are subject to the planning process. Planning unashamedly must be 'people driven' and 'people orientated' no matter what the global winds of change are.

By definition, planning tends to be a spatially landuse driven activity that is concerned with infrastructure issues. These issues often are easily dealt with because they involve capital outlays by government. Governments are ready to engage in infrastructural issues because building projects involves lots of money and hence a lot of corruption is possible for bureaucrats and politicians and their patrons. In Uganda, bribes are said to increase

company costs by eight per cent (*The Economist*, 2002:11). Closer to home, the Indonesian government has uncovered since the fall of President Suharto, 27,865 cases of identified corruption in 14 Ministries accounting for US\$1.3 billion (or S\$2.2 billion) (*The Straits Times*, 8 July 1999:2).

## RETRACING STEPS, RETHINKING THE FUTURE

The trend of the times towards materialism is certainly bad for human society. But any attempt to curb this trend by calling for 100 per cent practice of spiritual values and total rejection of material ones would not only be unsuccessful but un conducive to human happiness. Therefore the learned and the enlightened should, through exhortation and example, show that the present- day worship of material values is best reduced not by substituting extremist spiritual values but by finding a balance between the material and the spiritual (Mahathir, 1995:14)

We cannot navigate the next 30 years on autopilot. In a rapidly changing world, we either adapt or become irrelevant (Lee Hsien Loong, 1998:2).

Change is today an accepted reality that cannot be traded or bartered for something else. Unlike a society that wants to be taken out of the global grid of human interactivity, change has to be embraced. In such a dynamic scenario, planning of any sort has got to factor in various adjustments to changing situations. In Singapore, 'economic flexibility' and 'nimbleness' are the buzzwords of government agencies (Savage & Pow, 2001:104). Singapore's relative advantage in the global economic landscape is its ability to ride economic trends quickly and abort others when they lose relevance. National plans for the future might be one way of defining the state's 'planned' adaptation to new trends and opportunities, economic challenges, socio-cultural changes and political transformations.

In conservative communities in Asia and the region, embracing change has been governed by mixed feelings. This is so especially when 'change' is tied up with the train of modernisation values and western influences that conservative communities find hard to accept. The above quote from Malaysia's former Prime Minister Dr Mahathir is indicative of the tensions between modern materialistic expectations and the traditional spiritual values in economic and cultural globalization. The conservative manifestations in Myanmar, Laos, Indonesia and parts of Malaysia are reminders that globalisation will continue to engage societies in heterogeneous ways and through dialectical processes that will "vary over space, through time, by social strata and across cultures" (Lee and Yeoh, 2006:3).

As cities become the norm of living in Asia and the region in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the rise of global cities will become the major centres of economic, political and cultural power that are likely to transcend the importance of states. The nesting of global cities will depend on the ability of each global city to establish itself vis-à-vis the competitiveness and comparative advantage of its location, economic attractiveness and creative software within a global context.

The challenges of urban planning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, are how national and urban governments are going to shape their cities competitiveness to ride Alvin Toffler's (1995) *Third Wave* of global civilisation - one determined by information technology and a tertiary service-driven economy. The planner of today and tomorrow has got to have forward thinking and yet imbibe a sense of historical continuity; he or she must be politically correct in vision and culturally sensitive in execution; but most of all, planners must be committed to improving the livelihoods of people. Geography's concern with ecoscape or "the geographicity of the ecosystem" (Backhaus, 2006:xvii) makes the discipline a natural ally in the planning process.

Globalization has not changed any of the fundamental objectives that planners and governments should be seeking to achieve for their countries, communities, and cities. In the Southeast Asian region, there are five issues that define the development process of states: eradicating poverty, closing the inequality gap between the rich and poor, attracting economic investments to boost the economy and reduce unemployment, improving the quality of living conditions, and enhancing national identity and resilience. In the global flows of finance, people, goods, knowledge and services, governments need to proactively tap into these global flows for their own developmental and national trajectories.

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