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A Comparative Review of the Making of Urban Transport Policies in Metropolitan Areas in Southeast Asia

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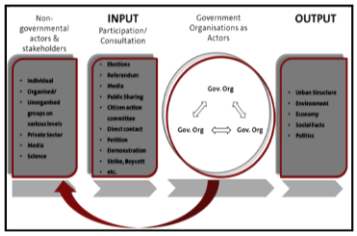

Abstract

The urban transport systems are primarily the result of political decision-making processes, and only secondarily a matter of technical necessity or technical possibility, because every individual or group does have vested interests in transport policies, which are often conflicting if not inherently incompatible. What constitutes the so-called "common good" is not a technical question but ultimately a political one – while its implementation requires the suitable technical solution. This "comparative review of the making of urban transport policies in metropolitan areas of Singapore and Bangkok" analyses (1) the "input" of different actors into the political decision-making process, (2) how this input is processed by the various actors in government and administration, including the interaction of all participatory actors, and (3) finally how the results of these processes influence the form of the actual transport systems. The results are based on the research of the different polities influencing transport-related decisions in cities of Singapore and Bangkok. The process of decision-making is analysed using seven illustrative examples from these cities and the assessment of the transport systems is made according to pre-defined quantitative and qualitative data. This adopted approach is along the lines of classical policy-field analysis: In this study it examines the policy field of urban transport and draws conclusions, which are specific to the chosen cities and general to the policy field.

Keywords: Urban transport; transport systems; transport policy; policy field analysis

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The urban design and appearance of some cities in SE-Asia, notably Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Bangkok, Hong Kong among others, has changed considerably over the last decades. Not less significant are the differences between the individual cities in the region. One field in which this statement has particularly great relevance is urban transport. This paper on "*a comparative review of the making of urban transport policies in metropolitan areas of Singapore and Bangkok*" is an attempt to analyse the reasons attributed to this phenomenon based on the findings from these two cities. The chosen approach is along the lines of classical policy-field analysis, examining the policy-making in sustainable urban transport. Such studies are necessary, because there is still a lack of knowledge about the political decision-making processes in this field, despite numerous studies on urban transport in Asian cities from different branches of research.

The fundamental hypothesis in this paper is that urban transport is primarily a political question and the result of political decision-making processes, and only secondarily a matter of technical necessity or technical feasibility. To many scholars, especially to those with a technical background, this statement may either be construed as general remark or challenging and sometimes provoking. This research attempts to clarify such misapprehension by citing the findings from research in political science for the cities of Singapore and Bangkok.

The evolution of urban transport systems in Southeast Asia has been analysed and explained in most cases with diverse technical and economic approaches. Many of them were written by engineers and economists, who worked for multilateral development banks such as World Bank or Asian Development Bank, bilateral development agencies like Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) or Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ now GIZ), or for local and international consultancies (Dorsch Consult, Louis Berger International etc.), who did not focus primarily on the political processes that determined the different developments in the individual urban regions [2, 14-15, 21]. Therefore, many of these analyses did not raise fundamental questions about the urban and transport policy in general and rather focussed on analysing or solving pre-defined problems with a "limited" agenda. Therewith, the inquisition failed to question particularly the given transport planning and broadly urban planning policies and paradigms.

Traditional approaches delivered valuable findings by analysing urban transport systems with respect to geography, technology and increasingly more on planning, urban structure

and density. Many studies in the past dwelled upon transport and development of land uses promoting economic growth. Such perspectives implicitly follow the paradigm of personalised transport as the main transport in line with many cities in North America and Australia. Such approaches seem to automatically deliver the solutions to the congestion problem by building more roads. However, for over two decades now the findings of the *Standing Advisory Committee on Trunk Road Assessment* (SACTRA) are public knowledge [29]. SACTRA was a committee in London with the assigned task to analyse the consequences of building of roads for the elimination of congestion. The committee found that the construction of new roads actually contributed to increasing traffic in the long run. Notwithstanding the above findings, the prime goal of reduction of congestion and for this purpose the construction of infrastructure for personalised transport continues to play the prominent role in the analysis and "solution" of current urban transport problems in metropolitan areas of Southeast Asia.

A correlation between *wealth and choice of transport mode* and consequently the development of transport systems has been researched and established by several authors. Referring to the history of North-American cities, many authors see an inevitable trend to individual motorisation as a result of increasing welfare [11, 16, and 20]. Barter [7], Kenworthy & Laube [18] and Minhans [23] opposed this assumption of inevitable motorisation as a result of increasing welfare, referring to the decisive role politics can play in determining a transport system.

In striking contrast to the earlier explained phenomenon, Ingram & Zhi [14] assessed the same set of data (like Kenworthy & Laube) [18] on behalf of the World Bank, and came to the conclusion that motorisation of cities increased proportionally with incomes, but the growth of urban streets was significantly slower. Such an assessment obviously implies a supposed solution.

The basic assumption that economic growth would necessarily require increasing individual mobility, which is to be fulfilled by personalised transport, has been empirically refuted by Newman & Kenworthy [27] for a global sample of cities and by Paul Barter [7-9] for several metropolitan areas in Southeast Asia.

Ground-breaking were the holistic approaches of analysing cities, societies, urban structures and transport by Newman & Kenworthy [26], Kenworthy & Laube [18-19] and Barter [7]. They systematically collected, standardised, and studied urban densities for a number of cities worldwide. They see urban density as the single most important determining factor for the trend of motorisation in cities and consequently for the development of transport systems. This perspective has tremendously improved the understanding of urban systems. However, urban densities alone are not sufficient to explain transport systems and the interdependency between densities and transport systems, since both can be influenced by politics [10].

Paul Barter in the closing remarks of his dissertation titled "*An international comparative perspective on urban transport and urban form in Pacific Asia*" made the following postulation: *"The findings of this study address a number of policy debates that are essentially political. However, the politics of policy making were largely beyond the scope of the study. In the context of increasing democracy in Asia, there is a great need for a better understanding of how to foster the conditions in which public policy debates on urban transport issues and civil-society involvement in these debates can be as constructive and well-informed as possible. A relevant aim here is to maximise the chances that such debate can generate policies that are truly in the public interest and which take account of realistic long-term visions, of sustainability and of social justice and the needs of disadvantaged groups."*[7].

To put it in others words, further research is needed in the policy field of urban transport to understand and optimise political decision-making with sensible as well as sustainable participatory processes of relevant stakeholders in different political systems. This also requires a better understanding of how the "*input*" (e.g. participation and consultation) as well as the "*process*" itself (the decision-making) actually function, and what these diverse forms of input in the various political systems are able to achieve. Obviously, this is not the only factor shaping the different urban transport systems in Southeast Asia, but certainly not less important than geography, history, technical availabilities, welfare, structure or other factors–all of which are interrelated with one another, adding to complexities.

2.0 RESEARCH BACKGROUND

As stated earlier, this paper argues that urban transport is primarily a political question and the result of political decision-making processes, and only secondarily a matter of technical necessity. The assumption of this line of argument is that every individual and every single group or organisation must have vested interests in transport policies. At times such vested interests are conflicting if not inherently incompatible. Some simple examples to illustrate such conflicts are pedestrians favouring infrastructure for non-motorised transport, while motorists want more roads to be built for their travel. Users of public transport constantly demand their mode of transport to be prioritised and subsidised (e.g. demand for exclusive bus lanes and lower transit fares). Such expectations are focused to make public transport as a competitive mode, competing with highly patronised personalised transport for road space. Concurrently, these users expect their mode being a priority and a social-welfare mode, compensatory of their unrequited individual mobility expectations. Other vested interests may be for instance mobility-deprived groups who need accessibility, mobility and safety of their travel. Environmentalists lobby for the reduction of traffic-speed, traffic calming, re-naturation and even go as far as re-cultivation of the land. The poor may fear being evicted for infrastructure constructions, which are lobbied for by trade associations or the industry. Any decision on transport or urban planning will accommodate these vested interests, which are at times competing, to a better or worse extent, thus create winners and losers. What constitutes the so-called "*common good*" is not a technical question but ultimately a political one–while the means to achieve or implement the common good will most likely require the suitable technical solution.

In the field of urban transport there are many different stakeholders with considerably competing interests. Originally the assumption for this research was that the different groups including affected individuals would be able to articulate their vested interests and lobby for their cause. This is the prominent case for instance in central Europe, where transport-issues are the cause for the constitution of most citizens' action committees. However, the research findings actually reveal, that in Southeast-Asian polities, at the time of research, transport-issues were often conceived as merely *technical* challenges, rather than political conflicts, so that fewer actors than expected engage in actively influencing them.

Nevertheless, urban transport is a perfect policy field to study how political decision-making works in various polities [22], and how political decision-making can either be influenced successfully or unsuccessfully by different groups and

individuals. The underlined objectives of this study are given below:

— To analyse what forms of participation or consultation have which particular kind of effect in different political systems in SE-Asia,
— To investigate what preconditions are needed for effectively processing such information,
— To detect who are the winners and the losers, in cases where the interests are mutually conflicting.

The Figure 1 is a graphical abstract of the policy field in urban transport which schematically depicts the necessary inputs, processes and output. The following provides the description of the Figure 1:

— the first area shows an example of various stakeholders and non-governmental actors in the field of urban transport, among others from civil society and the economy
— the second area under the heading "input" shows some examples for their methods and tactics to influence political decision-making by e.g. participation and consultation
— the third area is a general indication of various governmental organisations and decision makers (on different levels, like national and local level, where appropriate) who are responsible for harnessing information, processing information, developing policies and deciding on them
— the fourth and last area reveals the output of these policies and the results of previous inputs and processes in different areas such as urban structure, environment, economy, societal impacts, transport safety or politics

Research found that the description and analysis of governmental organisations that are responsible for transport policies of cities in Southeast Asia is still insufficient. Most studies of governmental organisations with respect to urban transport in this region focus on Singapore and Hong Kong [4, 28, 31-33, 35-36]. The transport systems of both of these cities differ noticeably from other cities in the region. Many authors explain the stark contrast to other urban regions with the one single political level in Singapore and Hong Kong which facilitate a clearer allocation of responsibilities and accountabilities [4, 28]. While in other cities, vertical distribution of powers (e.g. local versus national level) adds to the horizontal rivalries and conflicts of competencies.

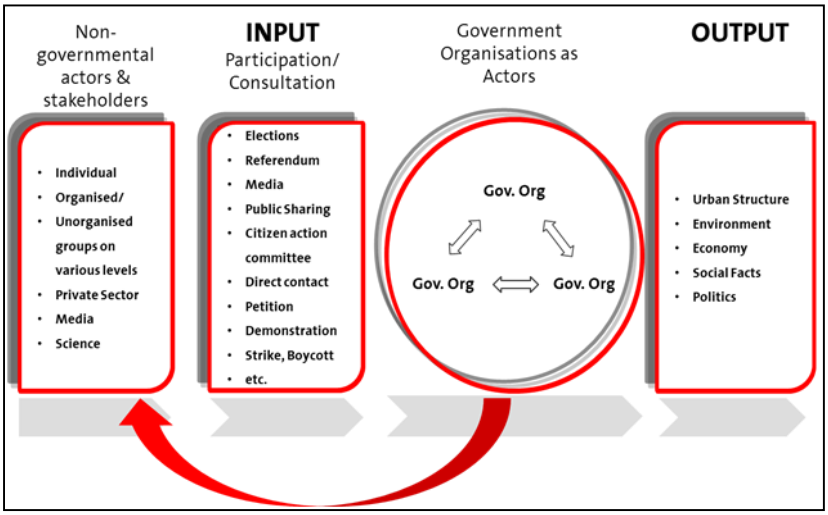

Figure 1 A graphical abstract of policy field in transport

3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

The subject was researched in both cities, Singapore and Bangkok, seven and ten months respectively. These field-studies enabled the author to conduct literature research including "grey", i.e. unpublished literature in libraries and archive of regional universities and organisations–among others–the Land Transport Authority (LTA) in Singapore or the Office of the Commission for the Management of Land Transport (OCMLT) in Bangkok. During the field-studies the author also attended six parliamentary debates. In-depth expert-interviews were conducted with specialists, activists, politicians, academics from all relevant fields and organisations (governmental organisations, non-governmental organisations, government-organised non-governmental organisations, academia etc.). Furthermore, site visits and participatory observation contributed to the findings. In the course of the field study in Singapore and Bangkok a total of 116 interviews were conducted, extracting expertise of 111 experts with a total duration of 191 hours (i.e., the interviews had an arithmetic average of 100 minutes). All interviews were prepared with customised half-standardised questionnaires, and (afterwards) documented in minutes of meetings.

Wherever possible, hard quantitative data has been used as indicators for the assessment of the transport systems in Bangkok and Singapore in the respective aspects. However, the complexity, interrelationship and uniqueness of the cities often required qualitative assessments, which are hardly ever completely free from subjective elements. Also, due to the manifold impact-factors and their multiple interdependencies, it was not always possible to clearly identify and distinguish the causes and effects. Therefore, the identification of development trends became even more important.

Assessing environmental aspects was relatively easy. Meaningful data is air pollution caused by transport-emissions (per person and urban hectare), transport-related consumption regarding energy and urban space (per person), etc.

Economic indicators in connection with the transport system refer first of all, but are not limited to, the percentage of gross regional product spent on private as well as public transport.

The assessment of transport systems in social terms is far more difficult. Most important here is the ability of the transport systems to ensure "accessibility" in contrast to increasing "mobility", according to the differentiation first made by the Independent Commission on Transport: "Changing Directions" [13]. The prioritisation of non-motorised transport versus motorised transport, and mass transport over personalised transport are further aspects impacting the social sustainability of the transport system. Furthermore, the degree to which the needs of mobility-deprived groups (children, the elderly, women, people with disabilities, and the poor) are met, is to be considered here. Furthermore, the expulsion and compensation of underprivileged groups for infrastructure construction are a factor in this category. Improvements of the overall safety of the transport system per inhabitant instead of per mileage travelled are needed to be evaluated here.

Political indicators are forms and intensity of engagement and participation as well as public spending and public revenues from the transport sector. Party-politics including political instrumentalism and exploitation of transport matters by political parties are playing a role here as well. It is evident through the intimidation efforts of the opposition as well as electorate in one place or populist election promises in another.

The "shadows" depicted in the figure above, illustrate that such processes have happened in the past and have created many of today's structures, which now constitute determining frameworks in the different cities of Southeast Asia.

In political science research on political systems typically examines exclusively the input-side. According to forms and intensity of participatory activities by civil society, the democratic development of a polity is analysed and evaluated. On the other hand there are the classical *policy-field analyses* in political science, focussing strongly on the output-side of political systems and what they are able to deliver. A wide body of research covering input, process and output of political systems in different policy fields is however inexistent. It is desirable to have further research that relates input, process and output. Such integration involves the pluralistic-democratic activities on the input-side with the political decision-making process involving diverse governmental and non-governmental organisations on the other. These processes can be linked with the output in terms of deliverables. Ideally, the output of the processes could be evaluated by using quantitative indicators wherever possible as was attempted in this research and explained above.

A wide sample of such studies covering input, process and output of different policy fields would significantly enhance the understanding of the different political systems, their effectiveness and performance. The policy field of urban transport with its manifold stakeholders and their competing vested interests is ideal for this endeavour.

■4.0 ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLES OF SOUTH-ASIAN CITIES: SINGAPORE AND BANGKOK

Obviously, Singapore and Bangkok are quite dissimilar cities with fundamental differences in their determining frameworks (physical, historical, political and socio-economic). Just to mention a few differences, one city is renowned for its highly effective and efficient government, and is not only a city state, but actually an island, while the other is renowned as a rapidly growing mega-city, and is not a city-state, but the capital of a territorial state with several levels of government, and a pluralistic open society at the time of research. Despite the explained dissimilarities, comparing and analysing delivered valuable findings and the selection of both cities was never made to equate.

Against this conscious background, seven illustrating argumentative examples are chosen for in-depth analysis and findings are made. These examples are:

- The construction of the **first metro systems in Singapore and Bangkok**
- Comprehensive and institutionalised **consultation in Singapore**
- **Bottom-up** approaches of **participation in Rattanakosin in Bangkok**
- Prohibition of **chewing gum in Singapore**
- **"Empowered Participation"** of the Muslim Ban Krua Community **in Bangkok**
- The activities of **environmental groups in Singapore and Bangkok**
- The battle of **disabled groups** for access to the metro-systems **in Singapore and Bangkok**

4.1 The Construction of the First Metro Systems in Singapore and Bangkok

The historic development of the transport systems in Singapore and Bangkok show some few interesting similarities. In the 1970s both cities faced rapid motorisation and congestion-problems became challenging. Both cities received technical assistance in analysing and solving their transport-problems. Experts from UNDP (in the year 1971) and World Bank (in 1974) supported Singapore, while Lichfield office from New York (in the year 1960) and Germany's GTZ (in 1975) worked in Bangkok. The advice for both cities was to limit private transport because otherwise automobile centric transport patterns would increasingly grow stronger. Lessons from previously studied cities of America, Australia and some cities of Europe, warned that the longer the trend for motorisation continues, the more difficult it would get to reverse this development.

This means that in both cities the knowledge about the urgency of the problem as well as about effective solutions for it were available as early as 1970s. Therefore, Singapore started implementing appropriate measures in the following years such as Area Licensing Scheme (ALS), increasing parking fees etc. However, Bangkok did not realise any similar effective actions following the respective studies on the two cities by GTZ, World Bank, Lichfield, GTZ and other organisations.

Both cities took a long time to finally come up with a decision to build a rail-bound mass transport system [34]. In fact in Singapore, the reason was that the members of cabinet were seemingly divided in their assessment of the pros and cons of such a major infrastructure construction, and no side was convincingly enough to make a critical decision. Supporters and opponents of a metro system contracted different expert-teams to conduct studies. As the general points of views of the hired experts were well known, the findings and recommendations of their studies came to no surprise. On behalf of the members of the cabinet, the authors of the competing studies publicly debated the pros and cons of building a metro. Although untypical and unprecedented for Singapore, such a debate was screened on TV. However, crucial details of the studies were revealed to the public only at a later time. The public debate of the study-teams of this matter on behalf of the members of the cabinet was interpreted as displaying the insecurity of the politicians in this matter. The Singaporean government derives a

good deal of its legitimacy from its effectiveness and from increasing material output. Now the government had to take an enormous investment decision and was well aware of the financial, economic and ultimately political risks for making a decision. Even more so, because in the preceding years a couple of cities had run into severe financial difficulties because of large scale infrastructure investments, and in view of that the World Bank had changed its policy towards building metros. The transparency around the opportunities and challenges in building metros can be interpreted as an attempt of the Singaporean government to prevent an erosion of its power in case the decision to build a metro would turn out as a mistake. Hence, it took the government quite a while to take that major decision to build, but once the decision had been taken, a comprehensive planning accompanied by rigid laws were in place for the expropriation of land needed for tracks and stations, all ensuring the metro's rapid construction and implementation. It has to be noted that in Singapore the planning for the metro was well integrated with the urban planning from the very beginning.

Similarly in Bangkok, plans for construction of rail-bound mass transit systems were detailed at an early stage. The reasons for decades' long delays of building the first systems were conflicts of competencies among political parties and governmental institutions as well as unsolved questions for financing the project(s). Other reasons were the division of responsibilities among multiple ministries run by parliamentary coalition governments with unstable parties and coalitions. Additionally, the vertical competition for influence between national and local level, led to deadlock and stand-still of the decision to build a metro system. This blockade on action was broken up only when on local level the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration managed to find a way of financing such a project by a build-operate-transfer (BOT) concept with Tanayong, a seemingly powerful financial partner. Despite the fact that several unforeseen problems delayed the finalisation of the construction, with respect to the large size of the project its implementation was rather quick, once the decision had been taken and the implementation was expedited. In contrast to Singapore, in Bangkok it was not comprehensive planning or the integration of transport, development and urban planning, which formed the basis for the realisation of the first rail-bound mass transport system.

4.2 Comprehensive and Institutionalised Consultation in Singapore

Comprehensive consultation processes of the citizenry combined with highly effective processing of harnessed information by sophisticated governmental organisations could be examined in Singapore. Feedback-Units and Parliamentary Select Committees among many others functioned effectively for an institutionalised assessment of the needs and aspirations of citizens and groups. Interestingly, there was never one channel or organisation alone, collecting and digesting the information, but there were always parallel ways for the Singaporean (top) government to stay informed, and it was ensured that not even individual government organisations had a monopoly over relevant information. Power remained centralised, governmental organisations were effective, competent and free of corruption. The government's legitimacy derived to a high degree from effective policies enhancing the material well-being of the citizens.

Broad Consultation in combination with Singapore's competent, effective and corruption-free government organisations enabled to produce comprehensive and long-term sustainable visions. However, a lack of countervailing powers implies that there could be no effective correctives outside highly centralised government institutions, which could for instance foreclose potential irrational decisions of powerful decision makers.

4.3 Bottom-up Approaches of Participation in Rattanakosin in Bangkok

"Sustainable Traffic and Transport Development in Rattanakosin" was the name of a project in Rattanakosin, the old part of Bangkok, which was jointly conducted by *United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific* (UN-ESCAP), a regional organisation of the *UN Economic and Social Council* in Bangkok, together with the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA) and governmental support from the Netherlands. This project is of particular interest, because it is a rare example in the field of urban transport for an approach that can truly be labelled as grassroots democracy, in which the fundamental systemic question was raised: "*What kind of society and quarter of city do you want to live in?"* Based on the outcome of that real bottom-up survey the consecutive question centred on how transport issues could support this vision and how strategies could be developed for this purpose. The whole process was guided and facilitated by effective organisations, mastering this interdisciplinary approach. The participatory exercise achieved comprehensive planning but in the end it failed implementation because the outcome was not binding.

Nonetheless, the project demonstrated again that the combination of comprehensive consultation with effective government organisations can produce sustainable visions based on an authentic bottom-up approach. The vision was an inclusive and sustainable concept for the development of the whole quarter of town, in which transport issues played an important part for most stakeholders. It also demonstrated how visions could be the basis for guiding strategies and pro-active politics and planning by government organisations.

4.4 Prohibition of Chewing Gum in Singapore

Twice, in July and August 1991, chewing gum was deliberately placed in the doors of Singapore's metro-system (MRT), so that the automatic doors could not close and the metro-operations were severely hampered. In the end of the same year, Singaporeans were surprised by a brief notice from Singapore's Ministry of the Environment, informing them that due to these incidences the government had decided to ban production, import and sale of chewing gum in Singapore starting 03.01.1992. The catalogue of fines punished sale of chewing gum with up to S$ 2,000. For importing chewing gum the fine was S$ 10.000 or maximum one year in prison or both for first offenders. For repeaters the fine was up to S$ 20.000 or two years in prison or both (based on Straits Times 31.12.1991).

Not only Western liberals questioned the proportionality of these fines with such offences and the need to outright ban chewing gum for achieving cost-savings and stable operations of metro-systems. In fact, the breakdown of the metro-system was not caused by the *consumption* but by the *deliberate misuse* of chewing gum.

Seemingly, there were no countervailing powers stopping disproportionately harsh decisions and protecting small liberties or personal affairs.

4.5 "Empowered Participation" of the Muslim Ban Krua Community in Bangkok

In Bangkok, for many years the Muslim Ban Krua community fought with different means (legal as well as illegal) against the destruction of their quarter of town for building a slip-road for an elevated highway. Over a long time-span they mobilised considerable resources and built strategic alliances both local as well as international. Their activities, which were sometimes even violent, could be described as "empowered participation", because they implied aspects of "power" in the sense of Max Weber: "to make happen what one wants to happen in spite of obstacles, resistance, or opposition" [37]. Insofar the activities of the Ban Krua Community clearly contrasted to mere "consultation".In the end, the Ban Krua community managed to build up countervailing power and stop the destructive policies. The action of the Ban Krua community served a limited agenda, i.e. stopping the construction of the ramp through their quarter, and was rather reactive.

4.6 The Activities of Environmental Groups in Singapore and Bangkok

There is extensive literature on environmental aspects of transport and the effects of traffic on the health of citizens [1, 3, 6, 12, and 23]. In many countries world-wide a large number of environmental groups focus on transport effects on the environment and human health. However, this focus was less observed in Singapore or Bangkok at the time when this research was conducted.

In Singapore no trans-national environmental groups were active, such as Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace or Worldwide Fund for Nature. The Singapore Environmental Council acted as an umbrella organisation but was not a "pure" non-governmental organisation (NGO) but rather a "Government Initiated NGO". A "real NGO" active for protecting the environment was at the time of research the "*Nature Society*". The representatives of Nature Society could name neither activities of their organisation with regard to transport nor had they any policy issues in this respect. Interestingly, all interviewees repeatedly stressed the loyalty of their organisations to the system.

Not many "real" activities by environmental NGOs with respect to transportation could be found in Bangkok either at time of research. A curiosity was the "*Thai Environmental and Community Development Association*", better known as "*Magic Eyes*" at that time. This self-proclaimed environmental group fought against the construction of the "Skytrain" but interestingly never opposed any highway-construction in Bangkok. The driving force behind these activities in the field of transport were Magic Eyes' president and an influential team of people apparently using the "environmental NGO" as a disguise for pursuing personal interests.

4.7 The Battle of Disabled Groups for Access to the Metro-systems in Singapore and Bangkok

In both cities, Singapore and Bangkok, disabled groups lobbied for access to rail bound mass transport systems during and before the time of research. Due to the comprehensive consultation process in Singapore, the decision makers were well informed about the wish of wheelchair-bound citizens to have access to the metro system. Due to high costs they refused to guarantee universal access at that time. In order to pursue their interests and lobby for the implementation of universal design standards the disabled groups used the Forum Page of the Straits Times Newspaper. They were supported by a prominent person, Mr. Tommy Koh, who backed their claim. The reaction of the Chief Executive of the Land Transport Authority, Mr Han Eng Juan in response to the public criticism backed by Mr. Tommy Koh was rather harsh, so that the citizenry felt insecure about the real limits of consultation and engagement, which the government had claimed to intensify. In the following years the government further developed their design standards and made them more inclusive.

In the beginning disabled groups in Bangkok were promised access to the first rail-bound mass transit system but had to find out, that these promises were not fulfilled. So they started lobbying forcefully for the construction of lifts, giving mobility-impaired people access to the BTS-system ("Skytrain"). In Bangkok they started organising "*marches of cripples*" with the public burning of their crutches and walking frames, always ensuring a wide media-coverage of these events. With such unconventional activities they managed to build up countervailing power and finally forced their cause to be fulfilled.

The case-studies in Bangkok with the Muslim Ban Krua Community as well as disabled groups fighting for access to the "Skytrain" demonstrated forms of "*empowered participation*" that could constitute effective tactics for successfully pursuing goals or building up countervailing powers, in order to stop misguided decisions. However, it became obvious, that "*empowered participation*" was mostly successful and meaningful on issues with a limited agenda, often reactive and seldom pro-active. "*Empowered participation*" successfully functioned as a sort of "*emergency-breaks*" against misguided policies and could be called forms of "*checks and balances*" applied by emancipated citizenry outside parliament or governmental organisations.

5.0 CONCLUSIONS

5.1 The Transport Systems of Singapore and Bangkok

Major challenges faced in urban transport systems are inherently political.[24-25] The development of urban transport systems is subject to political steering and management. Decisions with regard to urban transport are accommodating the competing interests of individuals and groups to different degrees, thus creating "winners" and "losers". Not all such individuals and groups are able and powerful to lobby for their interests. Some interests are unspecific (like protection of the environment) and need advocates to lobby their cause.

Pre-orientation and planning, laws and regulations, economic (dis)incentives, sanctions, and the construction of infrastructure are some examples of political activities that steer the development of a transport system in a certain direction in a short, medium and long term.

Singapore and Bangkok are quite dissimilar cities in many respects, among others topography, history, socio-economic or political determining frameworks. Quite dissimilar are also their urban transport systems. The comparison of the cities did not serve the objective to equate them. However, a comparison is necessary to draw conclusions against the background of different models and adopted approaches.

In the city state Singapore governmental organisations were lean and had clearly defined responsibilities. They functioned effectively, efficiently, and corruption free. Government and administration were privileged according to the existing laws. Their legitimacy derived to a high degree from their effectiveness and their ability to increase material well-

being. In so far their specific interests were well related to those of the citizenry. Well informed, competent and output-oriented government and administration developed visions, which guided comprehensive planning in different interrelated policy-fields for this purpose.

In contrast to the city state and island of Singapore, Bangkok is the capital of a state with a large hinterland, combining urban and rural areas, which complicates overall transport policies significantly. A large number of governmental organisations at different levels made it difficult to understand and differentiate structures, (competing) responsibilities, (division of) powers, and forms of collaboration, negatively impacting on the effectiveness and efficiency of governmental organisations. Populism, money politics, political hygiene impacted negatively on meritocracy and the effectiveness of politics and administration. Specific interests of politicians or the administration did not necessarily correspond with those of the citizenry. At times, planning rather served justifying government action than providing orientation and adjusting several policy fields.

Neither in Singapore nor in Bangkok any form of *formally binding participation* (e.g. referenda on transport issues) was found, which would have obliged political decision makers to implement the outcome of any such vote.

According to a set of assessment-criteria consisting of hard and soft facts, Singapore's transport system was assessed to be very positive with regard to urban form, the environment, economy and social aspects. [25] Some political aspects scored less favourable. Societal actors in Singapore, identified as "*winners*" were politicians, public servants, but also financially strong national and foreign people including the strongly courted foreign human capacities (able to pay a higher monetary price for a high degree of mobility). At the same time the majority of citizens and residents in Singapore could be counted as belonging to the "winner" side as well, because the transport policies in combination with other policy-fields (especially urban planning) ensured a high degree of overall *accessibility* in Singapore, despite room for improvement regarding non-motorised transport and bus-based public transport. Most problematic: *Relative losers* of Singapore's transport policies were at the time of research non-motorised transport and some groups of people with reduced mobility. It has to be noted here that some of these deficits were tackled later by the actual land transport master plan.

The appraisal of Bangkok's transport system was rather unequal in the assessed fields and included unsatisfactory aspects (like emissions of pollutants or effects on public health and safety). Identified winners in Bangkok were individual actors in high level politics, administration, and economy. The broad majority of transport users and some actors in politics, administration, and economy were found to be on the losing side. Children and youngsters had no advocates and were most at risk from accidents and pollutions. Additionally, among the losers were also those citizens depending on non-motorised forms of transport including many groups of people with compromised mobility.

In both cities, Singapore and Bangkok, transport policies centred far too much on problems of personal motorised transport. Both cities focussed too much on congestion at the expense of non-motorised transport and public transport. This undue focus on the automobile was even worse in Bangkok compared to Singapore. Good conditions for and a high share of non-motorised transport including the facilitating urban structures can serve *all* urban dwellers including the mobility deprived, who are most dependent on it.

5.2 Lessons Learned

The illustrating examples show in essence, that "*comprehensive consultation*" as analysed in Singapore comprised an effective and institutionalised assessment of the needs and aspirations on citizens and groups. In the examples of Singapore the power remained clearly centralised. The governmental organisations harnessing and "digesting" the information were effective, competent and corruption free. The Government's legitimacy derived to a high degree from its effective policies and the increase of material well-being of the citizenry.

In contrast to "*comprehensive consultation*" in Singapore, examples of "*empowered participation*" were found in Bangkok. The conflicts of the disabled groups for a wheelchair-accessible "Skytrain" and the conflict of the Ban Krua Muslim Community against the construction of a highway-ramp, threatening their quarter were studied. The "*empowered participation*" had an element of "power" in the sense of Max Weber.

It was found, that "*comprehensive consultation*" in combination with competent government organisations enables to produce comprehensive and long term sustainable visions. However, "*comprehensive consultation*" alone will obviously not be effective as a corrective (i.e. will not create countervailing powers) against irrational or disproportionately made decisions by powerful decision makers.

"*Empowered participation*" on the other hand can be effective as tactics for pursuing goals with a limited agenda. In the examples it was often reactive and seldom pro-active, but could function as "emergency-breaks" against misguided policies, i.e. form of checks and balances applied by an emancipated citizenry as the disables groups or the Ban Krua Community.

The example of Rattanakosin demonstrates how a combination of "comprehensive consultation" with effective (governmental) organisation(s) can produce sustainable visions. These visions must be the guiding principle for policies and planning by (governmental) organisations, and are in effect pro-active.

A crucial difference between Singapore and Bangkok was the effective functioning of governmental organisations in harnessing information, in digesting information, in developing well-informed policies, and in implementing policies among many others.

As quoted in the beginning, Paul Barter stated: *"…there is a great need for a better understanding of how to foster the conditions in which public policy debates on urban transport issues and civil-society involvement in these debates can be as constructive and well-informed as possible. A relevant aim here is to maximise the chances that such debate can generate policies that are truly in the public interest and which take account of realistic long-term visions, of sustainability and of social justice and the needs of disadvantaged groups"* [7]. To answer this research question adequately, many more case-studies need to be conducted. Some lessons learned from the illustrating examples above may be summarised as follows: Processes in Singapore as well as the UN-ESCAP&BMA project in Rattanakosin demonstrate, that a combination of "comprehensive consultation" processes plus effective information processing by well-functioning professional (government) organisations can achieve sustainable visions, providing comprehensive, pro-active and long term guidance for policies and planning that is for balancing and reconcilement of (sometimes conflicting) interests. "Comprehensive consultation" may be accompanied by "empowered participation" as a sort of "emergency breaks" in order to build

up countervailing power to stop misguided policies. Insofar, "comprehensive consultation" and "empowered participation" are not exclusive but actually very well compatible and complementary.

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