



Characterizing situations in ASEAN cities: Using the Human Security Index



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ABSTRACT

The Human Security Index discussed in Hastings (2013a, this issue) can help assess situations and strategize (1) improved and fair competitiveness, (2) benefits from regional cooperation, and (3) improved individual and community well-being. ASEAN countries are compared here with global peers, and with each other – with respect to well-being situations in their cities and other communities. ASEAN leaders tend to lag some of their global peers in delivery of Human Security and well-being – where lower-income ASEAN countries tend to slightly lead their global peers in such outcomes. Further, a prototype HSI for Thailand is presented and discussed for situations in its cities and their surrounding territories. City-provincial situations are seen to be highly diverse, with some relatively poor (in monetary income) provinces leading in home ownership and other factors in Human Security. Formulation of HSIs for additional ASEAN countries, preferably at district-town levels, will likely increase our understandings of the concept and situations of well-being versus vulnerability in cities of such countries. Such exercises could lead to evolving better strategies for national – including urban – development planning and also help monitoring impacts of sustainable development initiatives.

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Introduction

How to characterize the well-being, quality-of-life, and resilience potential versus vulnerability of cities, in the context of other communities such as countries, provinces surrounding – and dependent on – cities, and socio-economic groupings within cities? Considering the significant improvements in quantitative measurements and other indicators, on various aspects of the human condition at national and sub-national level, can we make progress in quantifying such issues? If so, we may be able to make progress in our understandings of causes, influences, and making progress on well-being – at national to local levels.

The Human Security Index was designed to help address such issues. The Global HSI (Hastings, 2008, 2009b, 2011a, 2013a) has been used to discuss the concept and measurement of Human Security, and as

a framework for assessing the well-being versus vulnerabilities of communities around the world. A prototype county-level HSI for the USA (Hastings, 2011b) is being used for similar purposes at a local level for a country generally considered to be highly developed, but which some have argued (and the global HSI appears to perceive) may not be so highly developed at present. The Global HSI and a prototype for Thailand have been used to explore scenarios for supporting communities against possible stresses as ASEAN pursues greater global integration (ASEAN, 2008, 2009). This paper builds on that effort – focusing more on the situation of communities in ASEAN and Thailand, than on ASEAN integration. Community situations can better be detected, thanks to improving diversity and perceptiveness of data and indicators at national and local resolutions, and also benefiting from advances in spatial and thematic analytical tools.

Besides a R&D effort in indicator formulation (see Hastings, 2013a – this issue), the HSI is an ongoing engagement in design, formulation, refinement, awareness, and use of such a development indicator.

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Engagements have included individuals, video-workshops, conferences, publications and Web modalities (HumanSecurityIndex.org, ResilienceSystem.org and elsewhere). Evolving issues include:

- How to be more perceptive, yet more geographically comprehensive than many legacy indicators?
- How to benefit from – and support – data, indicators, and other contributions made by intergovernmental, civil society, and academic-governmental-private organizations – while mitigating sensitivity to imperfections in data or process?
- How to successfully harmonize left–right, east–west and north–south political-social-cultural sensitivities – to focus on societal and governance deliveries & tangible outcomes?
- How to make the indicator perceptive and comprehensive, but also understandable and used?
- How to structure data management, results, and documentation to facilitate adding more data, selective deletion of components, rescaling and re-weighting inputs to create localized HSI?
- How to use differing sub-national and global data types to, nevertheless, perceive economic, environmental, and social situations among communities?
- How to strengthen such processes by incorporating contemporary methodologies such as video conferencing, thematic analysis tools (spreadsheets, etc.), spatial analysis tools (geographical information systems, etc.), Web design and tools? How to optimize use of open-source tools, to facilitate adoption and use by anyone?

The HSI has received diverse engagements, including on its use as a tool for improving assessments of socio-economic and environmental situations, enhancing development strategies and programmes, and strengthening the monitoring of same. One example inadequately detailed in published media, Exercise24 ([Giasson, 2010](#); [Wired; 2010](#)) prototyped responses to a simulated earthquake near San Diego, integrating a dashboard including HSI indicators for Mexico and southern Californian counties, crowdsourcing, and other knowledge management approaches. In another ([Salinas, Shah, Abdelbary, Gay, and Saxton, 2012](#)) the HSI has been used to assess the cumulative health risk burden in the USA State of Texas, at the county level. That study considered that application of the HSI to the assessment “provides a fuller and more nuanced understanding of socioeconomic and environmental conditions, and increases awareness of the role played by environmental, economic, and social factors in observed health disparities by race/ethnicity and geographic region” ([Salinas et al., 2012, p.1831](#)).

Human Security situations are thought to result from any combination of:

- Innate resources and environment,
- Outcomes inherited from past social situations and governance,
- Outcomes resulting from current social situations and governance, and/or
- Outcomes resulting from thoughts, (in)actions and uncertainties about the future.

Combining these with current social situations, policies and programmes, one may prudently use the HSI to help forecast future situations, as has been prototyped by [Hastings \(2013b, 2013c\)](#). In that assessment, countries/economies/societies have tentatively been grouped into six clusters, each with somewhat similar situations which might influence their futures. Those clusters are:

1. Advancing, relatively wealthy countries: including Norway, Australia, and Canada.
2. Advancing, moderate income countries: including Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and Viet Nam.
3. Advancing, lower income countries: including Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Philippines.
4. High trade surplus or sovereign wealth funds: including Brunei Darussalam and Singapore.
5. Countries with trade, competitiveness or debt vulnerabilities: including Greece and the USA.
6. Countries which have not been progressing as others: including DPRK, Haiti and Sudan.

Countries in groups 1–3 appear to have relatively bright futures, especially if they strengthen national and regional partnering toward improved global competitiveness befitting optimal situations for all their peoples. Countries in group 4 may have even more upbeat potentials, but also possible vulnerabilities depending on how they use, and where they place, their sovereign wealth funds. Countries in group 5 are highly vulnerable, as is currently being demonstrated by some Eurozone laggards, and has been demonstrated by several decades of currency slides, the prolongation of the “great recession” and the (oft-discussed) relative decline the USA (e.g. [NIC, 2012](#)). Residents in group 6 countries tend to be vulnerable to a great diversity of socio-economic challenges.

Situations of ASEAN members within the global community

UNDP spawned sub-national, national and regional Human Development Reports (HDRs), for which it facilitated groups of experts to research and write the reports. Regional reports include the Arab Region, Southeast Asia ([UNDP, 2005](#)), and Asia and the Pacific ([UNDP, 2012](#)). Six ASEAN members (Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Philippines, Thailand, and Viet Nam)

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